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# Museum Transformations

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# 2 GHOSTS OF FUTURE NATIONS, OR THE USES OF THE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM PARADIGM IN INDIA

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The past 20 years have contributed one entirely new term to the lexicon of museums, the "holocaust museum." Originating in a cluster of institutions that were built to memorialize the Jewish Holocaust, the holocaust museum has, in a few short decades, become an object of desire for many groups who seek public acknowledgment of their own historical traumas. Today, in places as far apart as Armenia, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Cambodia, Chile, China, Hungary, South Africa, Russia, and Rwanda, there are museums dedicated to traumatic histories that follow the paradigm established by Holocaust museums.[1]

The proliferation of holocaust museums across the globe in the late twentieth century has been so prominent that it has itself become the subject of study. The phenomenon has been described as part of a "global rush to build memorials" (Williams 2007) in an "international difficult histories boom" (Attwood in Chapter 3, this volume, citing Macdonald). Several scholars perceive the growth of holocaust museums as part of the millennial "explosion of memory discourses" (Huyssen 2003, 4) that has followed the postmodern fall of official narratives. Now, as formerly marginalized groups bring their reckonings of the past into the public fold, they find that they lack the resources of officially recorded histories. As a consequence, their versions are couched as *memory* – personal, embodied, and tragically avoidable – as opposed to the impersonality and inevitability of official *history*.

Since most of these museums focus on the attempts by criminal regimes to obliterate or suppress populations, they must resurrect memory in the face of erasure and concealment. The making of these museums has thus involved

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prodigious effort and imaginative agility, as their proponents have had to assemble archives in the face of official silence, or find objects in the rubble of destruction. In contrast to the difficulties faced by the pioneering projects of this sort, however, attempts to make holocaust museums or museums of trauma today are at least facilitated by the support of international networks of specialists, consultants, and professional associations, who have helped develop a useful blueprint for future holocaust museums. With narrative techniques that switch between honoring individual victims and conveying the mass scale of destruction, with an increasing consensus about the kinds of objects acceptable for display, with a somber, monochromatic design language, and with emotive architectural forms that use hard materials, sharp edges, and acute angles to evoke a sense of discomfort and disorientation, the holocaust museum has become crystallized as a museum *genre*.[2]

As scholars discuss the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of the many forms taken by the phenomenon, an important strand in the debate centers on the legitimate ownership of memory in such museums.[3] Thus, the memory inscribed within Holocaust museums dedicated to the Shoah may be contested between Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime. In turn, the visibility of this Holocaust may make groups such as Armenians and Kurds rue that they are victims of earlier, forgotten genocides.

The competitive jostling of different groups for acknowledgment and visibility of their historical traumas is best demonstrated by the controversies that have beset the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, currently under construction in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The museum was the brainchild of Israel "Izzy" Asper, a Jewish Canadian media magnate of Ukrainian origin who felt that Canada needed an institution like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (Steiman 2007). As the project gained federal support and became a Canadian national institution, its proposed foregrounding of the Shoah as its central theme came under attack. Other groups too demanded representation within the museum, including the aboriginal peoples of Canada and Ukrainian migrants, whose forebears had suffered under Stalin. These groups reportedly asked for floor-area shares proportionate to the losses suffered by their communities (Stephen Inglis, pers. comm. 2010). In a morbid extension of Canadian multiculturalism, a public poll showed that Canadians believed the museum needed to be "fair," "inclusive," and "equitable" and "should not elevate the suffering of one community over another" (Adams 2011).

The construction of new museums about traumatic pasts is usually justified as a way of addressing a society's need to bear witness, to mourn, to bring about reconciliation, and thus to repair old wounds. The suggestion is that these museums offer a "talking cure" for societies: just as an individual can be healed through a retelling of the story of her trauma, the social body too will be able to repair itself through a cathartic recollection of traumatic historical events. In truth, however, the greatest value of such memorialization lies not in its relationship with the past, but in its instrumentalization of the past to intervene in the present and shape the future.

The evocation of yesterday's injustice inevitably makes a case for reparation today; the memorialization of past trauma can be mobilized to press for tangible gains in the here and now. Many observers have noted how Holocaust memorialization serves as a charter myth for Israel; the sheer scale and horror of Jewish suffering testify to the necessity of a Jewish homeland – while also making the Palestinian issue shrink in comparison. More cynically, the making of such museums can become part of a political ritual that masks the lack of real change. Since the very act of memorializing suggests the pastness of the things memorialized, a museum project of this type can be used to suggest historical distance from a system which in fact endures into the present. In Cambodia, for instance, memorial sites came up at many sites of internment and mass killings even as former Khmer Rouge officials remained powerful in the new Cambodian regime.

The power held by holocaust museums to affect current political equilibriums thus makes them projects with *prospective* consequences rather than merely *retrospective* institutions.[4] Thus, when the paradigm of the holocaust museum is newly harnessed to tell the history of a community, we should ask: What sort of intervention is this museum expected to make? What forces initiate the project and carry it through to completion? And under what circumstances is a community able to make a trauma museum for itself, and under what circumstances is this a desire that must be thwarted?

In this chapter, I ask these questions of two institutions that have arisen in India which are inspired by Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust Memorial complex in Jerusalem. The first institution that I consider is the Khalsa Heritage Complex, built in the Sikh pilgrimage center of Anandpur Sahib in Punjab. This spectacular museum was intended as a memorial to a history of Sikh suffering. But, as we shall see, when the institution finally came into being, it delivered a message that was the exact opposite of the one that was originally intended. The second institution I shall consider here is the Tibet Museum, constructed by the Tibetan government-in-exile in the small Himalayan town of Dharamsala. In scale, budget, appearance, and ambition, this museum could hardly be more different from the Khalsa Heritage Complex. Yet, through very different circuits and circumstances, this museum too is umbilically connected to Yad Vashem. As we follow the different trajectories taken by these two museums, we will see the circumstances in which a difficult memory is possible, or in which a difficult amnesia becomes a necessity.

## Punjab

### Badal's tears

Parkash Singh Badal wept. Surrounded by hundreds of flickering flames of candles, listening to a soft voice intoning the names of the children murdered in the Holocaust, seeing their faces in blown-up photographs that loomed out of the

darkness, Parkash Singh Badal, chief minister of the north Indian state of Punjab, wept as he stood in the gallery of the Children's Holocaust Memorial in Yad Vashem.

The year was 1998. Badal and his retinue were visiting Jerusalem on the world tour they had undertaken to seek inspiration for a monument they needed to build in Punjab the following year: 1999 would be the tercentenary of an important event in Sikh history. On April 13, 1699, the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind, had instituted a baptism ritual through which his followers became the Khalsa (Pure) ones. From then on, they were to bear the five distinctive signs of Sikhism on their bodies, including their turbans and unshorn hair; they were also to follow a regimen of prayer and a prescribed code of conduct. With the institution of this rite, Sikhism ceased to be a Hindu sect and emerged as a distinct religion. In many ways then, 1699 was the foundational moment for Sikhism, and its tercentenary called for a special celebration in the religion's epicenter in Punjab.

Among other projects to mark the anniversary, Parkash Singh Badal announced that he would build an *ajooba* (literally, a wonder or a spectacle) in Anandpur Sahib, the town in which the Khalsa was founded, and which was now a major Sikh pilgrimage site. To understand what such a monument could be, Badal and his entourage embarked on an extensive tour of museums and monuments dedicated to the histories of various communities. Now in Jerusalem Mr. Badal had found what he sought. Emerging from the emotionally charged display in the subterranean chamber of the Children's Holocaust Memorial, Mr. Badal is reported to have asked: "Who made this? Just as the Jews have suffered, so have the Sikhs. We need a memorial like this for our community" (MacFarquhar 2003, 44) Within two days of his visit to Yad Vashem, Mr. Badal had met the architect of the Children's Memorial and tasked him with constructing a similar memorial complex in India for the Sikhs (Dvir 2012).

## Moshe Safdie and the architecture of emotion

The creator of the Children's Holocaust Memorial whom Badal met in Jerusalem was the famous Israeli Canadian architect, Moshe Safdie. Hailed as a prodigy at the age of 26 for his revolutionary Montreal housing complex Habitat 67, in the years since, Safdie's stature has only grown and he has designed dozens of museums, libraries, opera houses, national monuments, and seats of government across three continents. His major public commissions in Canada make him something of a national architect for his adoptive country, but he may equally be regarded as the national architect of Israel, the country of his birth. There, Safdie was entrusted with the design for the Ben Gurion International Airport and the Yitzhak Rabin Center in Tel Aviv, as well as an entire planned city called Modi'in. He was asked to draw up a controversial, and now discarded, "Safdie plan" for the future expansion of Jerusalem; when the former no man's land between the Israeli and Jordanian sectors of the Holy City became available, it was Safdie who designed the luxury

residential complex that was built upon it. However, Safdie's definitive work in Israel, and perhaps in his career, was the clutch of projects he undertook for the Yad Vashem Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Israel's official Holocaust Memorial complex in Jerusalem.

Yad Vashem, which was founded almost immediately after the founding of Israel, occupies an entire hillside in Jerusalem. The complex includes a synagogue, a hall of remembrance, archives, museums, and memorial groves. The multiplicity of buildings accommodate diverse memories, honoring the heroes of the Warsaw uprising as much as the victims of Bergen-Belsen; Jewish combatants as much as the "Righteous among Gentiles" who aided Jews during the years of the Reich. Today, however, the many memorials of Yad Vashem are dominated by a bravura museum building by Moshe Safdie that ranks among the most spectacular late-twentieth-century museum buildings alongside Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin.

Safdie's Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum, which opened in 2005, tunnels into the earth to excavate a series of galleries that are linked by a 650-foot long central corridor or "spine." Only this spine thrusts out of the ground, appearing like a "knife edge across the landscape" (Safdie 2006, 94). Inside the building, this spine is experienced as a sky-lit passage of soaring height which visitors cross and recross in their progress through the dark and subterranean galleries of the museum. The last of these galleries is the dramatic Hall of Names – a circular gallery whose walls are lined with cabinets that hold Yad Vashem's archive of information dedicated to the six million victims of the Holocaust. In this gallery the ceiling shoots up to the sky in a 30-foot-high cone lined with photographs of the dead; below, a reciprocal cone, deep and inky-black, burrows into the bedrock, in honor of the victims whose names will never be known. Then visitors re-enter the central spine and take in its final flourish as it broadens into a terrace that is dramatically cantilevered over a magnificent view of the hills of Jerusalem. After the long, deep, and dark path through the galleries that recount the grim history of the Holocaust, the emergence into this preternatural degree of brightness and elevation is like an out-of-body experience. Spread at the visitors' feet, the land of Israel is offered not as a place but as a vision, one that fulfills the epigraph from the Book of Ezekiel engraved onto the museum's entryway: "I will put my breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil" (Ezekiel 37:14).

It is hard to miss the symbolism of the museum's pathway that takes us through the horrors of the Holocaust, and delivers us unto Jerusalem. That a Holocaust museum should conclude by presenting Israel as a necessary refuge for the Jewish community is not unusual (indeed it is routine); what is extraordinary here is Safdie's capacity to restate this trope so eloquently through purely architectural elements of space, height, darkness, light, and siting. The Holocaust History Museum underlines Safdie's great ability to turn architecture into narrative.

This is a quality that is present in all of Safdie's Yad Vashem work. Earlier, when the Polish government had given Israel one of the box cars that had transported

prisoners to Auschwitz, Safdie embedded it in an installation – the Memorial to the Deportees (1995) – that suspended the box car on a broken track that hovered over the edge of a cliff. And even earlier, in 1985, Safdie had completed the Children's Holocaust Memorial, his first Yad Vashem project and possibly the most intensely affective of this triad of his emotive architectural forms.

In 1976 the Yad Vashem authorities had first approached Safdie to design a museum that would narrate the fate of the children who had perished in the Holocaust. Safdie had a counterproposal: visitors who had already been through the main history museum, he felt, would not want to read more documentary facts. Instead, he proposed a space that would create an emotional experience. He would burrow into the ground to make a darkened chamber which would be lined with dark mirrors. Five memorial candles would burn in honor of the dead children, but reflections in the mirrors would make an infinity of flames. In the darkness, photographs of a few of the child victims would stand for the 1.5 million murdered; and a recorded voice would name each child, as well as the place and the age at which he or she had died. Today, this kind of assemblage is immediately identifiable as an installation, with strong resemblances to Christian Boltanski's work, but when it was proposed it was too far ahead of its time. The authorities feared the dark mirrors and pinpricks of light would look like a discotheque, and the project was shelved for 10 years until a donor couple who had lost a child at Auschwitz underwrote its construction.

Once it was built, the Children's Holocaust Memorial became one of the most highly visited displays in Yad Vashem. Its appeal to visitors' emotions has been appreciated by many, but it has also been criticized by some. The Hebrew University professor of philosophy Avishai Margalit's criticism is trenchant. His essay "The Kitsch of Israel" is a broad-ranging discussion of emotional manipulation in popular cultural representations of Israeli statehood. For Margalit, this phenomenon reaches its apogee in the Children's Holocaust Memorial. Describing the darkened chamber and the flickering flames, he says:

> The real significance of this room is not its commemoration of the single most horrible event in the history of mankind – the systematic murder of two million children, Jewish and Gypsies, for being what they were and not for anything they had done. The children's room, rather, is meant to deliver a message to the visiting foreign statesman, who is rushed to Yad Vashem even before he has had time to leave off his luggage at his hotel, that all of us here in Israel are these children and that Hitler–Arafat is after us … Against the weapon of the Holocaust, the Palestinians are amateurs. (Margalit 1988, 23)

For Margalit the Children's Holocaust Memorial is kitsch because it encourages "a vicarious sentiment: it comes not out of the person's direct involvement with the object of feeling but rather out of a derivative excitement" (1988, 20), born of the desire to be included in *someone else's* emotion. But what Margalit criticizes others

may admire. Surely it was precisely this quality of Safdie's architecture – its ability to deliver a heightened experience of an aestheticized emotion, by sweeping the viewer into a sentimental identification with the represented subject – that made Badal weep, and then ask for one "just like this" for his own community.

But what made Badal want a monument "just like this" for the Sikhs? What made him want to mark the tercentenary of the Khalsa in an elegiac rather than celebratory tone? And what was this suffering of the Sikhs that Badal was equating with the suffering of the Jews? To understand this, we need to turn now to a brief overview of the turbulent history of the Sikhs.

## "The Sikhs too have suffered"

As a faith, Sikhism derives from a lineage of 10 gurus who lived and preached in south Asia between 1469 and 1708. Its founder, Guru Nanak, was a visionary who stressed the common humanity of man and built bridges between the Hindu populace and their Muslim rulers. The four gurus who succeeded him led relatively peaceable lives and preached a syncretic faith to a diverse congregation. But the fifth guru, Guru Arjan, offered shelter to the reigning Mughal emperor's rebel son and was executed as a result. This event set the Sikhs on a course of conflict with imperial authorities. Guru Arjan's son took up arms against the Mughals and was imprisoned by them; the ninth guru was arrested and executed by the Mughal emperor, and the tenth and last guru Gobind Singh embarked on full-scale military conflict with the Mughals and was assassinated by Mughal agents shortly after he had learned of the deaths of all four of his sons at Mughal hands. It is the period immediately after Guru Gobind's death that is remembered as a time of most violent repression, when Sikhs were hunted down like vermin on the orders of Mughal governors. Tales are told of living Sikh captives who were hacked to pieces and left to bleed to death; of Sikh prisoners who refused to cut their unshorn hair (an emblem of Sikhism) and had their scalps peeled off instead; and of Sikh mothers who were forced to wear garlands made from the body parts of their slaughtered babies.

Today the history of this eighteenth-century persecution is reiterated daily by pious Sikhs in their standardized prayer, or *ardas*, which enjoins the community to remember those "who were torn from limb to limb, scalped, broken on the wheel and sawn asunder" (Fenech 2000, 43). These tortures are also common themes in Sikh popular visual culture, in which the followers of Guru Gobind Singh are depicted in an iconography borrowed from Catholic martyr imagery. These tales and images are reproduced in every catechism given to Sikh children to teach them about their faith.

Curiously, tales of this eighteenth-century persecution and resistance did not circulate among the Sikh community until more than a hundred years after the events had occurred. In his study of martyrdom in the Sikh tradition, Louis E. Fenech shows that the memorialization of Sikh suffering intensified in the early twentieth century through the influence of the Singh Sabha movement, a powerful

reform movement which strove to produce a purified Sikhism that would be visibly distinct from Hinduism as well as from the multitude of Sikh subsects.[5] In Singh Sabha discourse, Sikhs who lost their lives – whether in battles defending their gurus, in clashes with rival sects, as the hapless prisoners of cruel rulers, as professional soldiers fighting in modern armies, as participants in the Indian freedom struggle, or as victims of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan – were all configured as martyrs.[6] Martyrs die for a cause. In Singh Sabha rhetoric, the cause for which *all* of these "martyrs" died was "the protection of their faith": any other kind of motivation was swept aside (Fenech 2000, 19). As Joyce Pettigrew observes, this retrospective interpretation in which all Sikh martyrs "died for the faith" actually did the crucially important work of *producing* a faith worth dying for. Narratives of a long history of martyrdom provided evidence for the prior existence of a form of community that was in fact under construction at the time (Pettigrew 1991, 37).

At about the same time, Sikhs began to speak of themselves as a *qaum* – a Persian word that can connote both "community" and "nation." A few decades later, as British colonial rule drew to an end in India and plans for Partition were drawn up, there was talk for a brief while of dividing the territory into not just Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan but also a Sikh-majority state called Sikhistan or Khalistan. However, this plan was only briefly considered by the British authorities and, faced with vociferous opposition from Indian politicians, it was discarded. Some years later, when Partition riots broke out and Sikhs were a large proportion of the millions killed or displaced, the lost opportunity for an independent Sikh homeland became one more chapter in the long history of Sikh suffering.

In the twentieth century, stories of Sikh martyrdom became the cornerstone of the community's identity. They became a major theme of pedagogical books, pamphlets, Sikh newspapers, visual culture, as well as balladeering and storytelling traditions catering to Sikh audiences. By the middle of the twentieth century, this rhetoric of suffering and martyrdom had even become routinized; it was recalled in daily prayer but was removed from the everyday experience of the community which prospered in independent India. But in the late twentieth century, the tradition of "Sikh martyrdom" was reinfused with new meaning when the Khalistan movement erupted in Punjab.

In its time, the Khalistan movement – a violent movement for a separate Sikh state that gripped northern India through the 1980s and early 1990s – posed the "most serious crisis of political legitimacy" experienced by India after Independence (Jodhka 2001, 1311). In a pattern that was soon to become familiar, charismatic religious leaders stirred up their followers to avenge the community against real and imagined slights. Militants who started with a program of targeted assassinations soon graduated to random acts of terror. As violence escalated in Punjab, many innocent people were caught in its net, suffering from the actions of the terrorists and reactions of the Indian state. Eventually, in the summer of 1984, India's prime minister Indira Gandhi ordered a military offensive against the

militants headquartered in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Sikhism's most revered shrine. The army's violent assault killed many militants, but it also killed hundreds of innocent pilgrims, and damaged sacred structures and precious relics. The attack on the Golden Temple traumatized the Sikh community and five months later it became the motivation for two of Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards to assassinate her. The assassination was followed by widespread reprisal riots: for five days, mobs abetted by politicians from Mrs. Gandhi's Congress party, in collusion with the police, looted and killed thousands of Sikhs. These events prompted a second and more severe wave of militant reaction which persisted until the early 1990s, when firm policing finally brought the movement to an end.

The Khalistan movement was sustained by the idea of the present as a repetition of a fabled past. The Sikh militants who roved Punjab through the 1980s saw themselves as martyrs reliving the persecutions suffered by their forebears in the eighteenth century.[7] Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the preacher who was the force behind the first phase of the movement, would exhort his young followers to be ready to "be scalped, be broken on the wheel," equating current police action with the historic tortures memorialized in Sikh prayer. And as Cynthia Mahmood) records, a former militant felt his sufferings united him with his heroes:

> In our daily prayers we remember all our Sikh martyrs during the Mughal period, those who went through terrible hardships. They were cut to pieces, made to survive on a small loaf of bread, and they withstood all those tortures. I used to think … if the time came, would I be able to behave as those brave Sikhs, my ancestors, did? But finally when I went through it, it was not me but those other Sikhs who were sustaining that. It seemed they were taking the pain with me. (Mahmood 1996, 37)

When Badal, standing in Jerusalem, said, "The Sikhs too have suffered," he may have had the longer history of Sikh martyrdom in mind. But given the Sikh martyrological imaginary, historical narratives of Mughal oppression would revive contemporary memories of the acts of the Indian state. Perhaps for this reason the project was controversial as soon as it was announced. If there were factions within Punjab who feared that a memorial to Sikh suffering would prevent the healing of wounds that were still raw, there were others who *wanted* the memorial to reignite passions that had just been tamped down. Yet others questioned the right of a government, constitutionally obliged to be secular, to spend enormous resources on a complex celebrating the history of the Sikh community, which after all constituted only 60 percent of the population of Punjab where there were also sizable numbers of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.

The many pushes and pulls eventually meant that the complex, initiated in 1999, did not open to the public until 2011. The long years of the project's unfolding were to be tortuous, with waxing and waning political support, escalating costs,

and perpetual lack of funds. But all this lay far ahead in the future, and in 1998 the project seemed to get off to a very brisk start.

## A boat, a crescent, and a flower

A few months after Safdie and Badal met in Jerusalem, the architect visited Punjab. Touring the environs of Anandpur Sahib in a helicopter, Safdie rejected the plain ground that had been set aside for the museum, choosing instead a dramatic location on nearby sand cliffs. The museum would overlook the historic gurudwara where Guru Gobind Singh had baptized his followers, and its forms would both echo and play with the architecture of Sikh sacred structures. The designs that Safdie developed included a temporary exhibition hall, offices, and a seven-acre cascading water garden on the near side of the site. From the entrance plaza, a 540-foot long bridge would spring across a ravine to the museum proper, which would be housed in a cluster of structures ranged along the crest of the hill. These included an ellipsoid building shaped like a boat; a second building whose five towers joined to make a five-petalled flower-like roof (five being an auspicious number in Sikhism); and a third building whose sequence of square and triangular elements were arranged in a crescent (Figure 2.1). In profile, the buildings would recall the small forts built during Sikhism's martial past; but the steel-clad roofs would be concave, as though revealing the inside of the domes that crown Sikh temples. According to Safdie, the complex's buildings would express "the symbolic themes of earth and sky, mass and lightness, and depth and ascension (through the) … sandstone towers and reflective silver roofs" (Safdie Architects 2011).

Within months of the presentation of his design, Safdie was accused by the chief architect of the Punjab government of simply repeating the plans he had made for a museum in Wichita, Kansas. There, too, buildings with a similar thrusting skyline are arranged in a crescent, in a water body spanned by a bridge. Describing this accusation as "naive," Safdie pointed out that he had used similar roof geometry not just in Anandpur Sahib and Wichita but also in Shenzhen and Singapore. This, he explained, was part of his personal architectural language.[8]

However, this accusation was not the only challenge Safdie was to face from architects in Punjab. Soon a prominent local architect persuaded the committee to insert his own memorial structure within Safdie's complex. Intended as a quickly assembled feature that would be ready in time for the tercentenary celebrations the next year, this was to be a 300-foot tall steel alloy model of a Sikh ceremonial dagger that would be erected on a hill at the heart of the complex. Safdie reacted with dismay to this addition, which threatened to overwhelm his buildings. He reduced its size and shifted its location to the water gardens below. The local architect complained that Safdie had "buried" his feature, while Safdie countered that it now better harmonized with the complex and appeared to be "emerging out of the landscape."[9]

**FIGURE 2.1** Khalsa Heritage Complex, Anandpur Sahib. Khalsa Heritage Complex. Architect Moshe Safdie. View of complex showing bridge, boat, and petal and crescent buildings from the water garden.
Photo: Shailan Parkers.

We may interpret these controversies as expressions of the rivalries and resentments that can arise in any place when a prominent project is given to an outsider architect. But we may also see them as the manifestation of the irritations that arise between a global cultural form and its local context of reception. Since Badal had initiated the project by asking for a museum "just like this," Safdie could justifiably assume that Punjab desired a "signature" building by him. As "starchitecture," an important function of the building would be its ability to signal that it had indeed been designed by a famous starchitect. But in poorer countries which have long been exploited by wealthy ones, suspicion is a habit. This might explain the objections of the first architect, who felt that Safdie was only recycling a previous project for India, much as charities distribute secondhand clothes in the "third world." The second architect's attempted introjection into Safdie's complex could be seen as a refusal to accept starchitecture as privileged authorial form, immune to local interventions. Indeed, when arguing his case, the architect of the monumental dagger insisted on the value of local knowledge which alone could produce structures that would speak to the Sikh community.

Despite the occasional contention about the nature of the architecture, however, and despite erratic funding which resulted in tremendous delays, the building project was doggedly pursued. As the years went by, and the project fell nearly a

decade behind schedule, the slowly rising buildings remained the only visible sign of the ambitious plans announced so long ago by the government to mark the tercentenary. Featured in newspaper articles (which mostly reported controversies, including many financial scandals and staff appointments and resignations) and on countless blogs (which mostly looked forward to the project's completion), the architecture of the Khalsa Heritage Complex was always visible in the public domain. But the debates about its content were conducted in the privacy of committee rooms, studios, and offices, and remained hidden from view.

## Inside: A tale of two Sikhisms

Since the Khalsa Heritage Complex was a brand new project, and existing museums would be unlikely to part with historic objects from their collections for its sake, assembling the museum's display presented a challenge. For this reason the Khalsa Heritage Complex was conceived as a storytelling museum which would use reproductions and audiovisual technology to deliver a message, rather than as a history or art museum that would need to display valuable original relics or artifacts.

At its inception, Safdie recommended that exhibit development be overseen by Jeshajahu Weinberg, the founding director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. As Safdie explained, Weinberg's experience of working with cutting-edge displays in multiple media would "be helpful in pulling together the program, briefs, and story lines into an exhibit script."[10] With architecture designed by Safdie, and storylines to be developed by Weinberg, the project seemed poised to take advantage of Holocaust museum expertise to develop a similar narration of the Sikh experience. The elegiac mode of the planned museum was also signaled by the name chosen for it: Khalsa Heritage Memorial Museum.

Although Weinberg was appointed as a consultant, the Punjab government also set up a committee of local scholars, religious advisers, and museologists to work out a broad plan for the museum. And this is where the blueprint of the Holocaust museum began to fray at the edges. The committee began by questioning the very name of the complex. Memorials were made for things that belonged in the past. The Khalsa was a flourishing community, so what sense did it make to call this a memorial, they asked. Accordingly, the project was renamed the Khalsa Heritage Complex, immediately suggesting a celebration of culture rather than the memorialization of a vexed history.

The premise on which the narrative was to be developed was also called into question. B. N. Goswamy, an eminent art historian who was part of the committee, recalled a preliminary briefing in which he was told that the museum would relate the unique story of Sikh suffering. "Every community has suffered," he observed: "This is not the special prerogative of the Sikhs" (pers. comm. 2000). Indeed, through the years of Sikh militancy in Punjab, Hindus were often the targets of its violence; as a prominent Hindu figure in Panjab University, Goswamy

himself had received death threats from Sikh terrorists. A one-sided victimology of Sikhs could hardly pass muster in a content committee whose members represented a wide range of backgrounds and interests. This committee soon produced a document that spelled out the major themes and principles to be followed in the museum. The 13 topics were universality; equality; freedom of conscience; social justice; heroism and martyrdom; high spirits; love; service and sacrifice; goal of life; harmony with nature; man as custodian of life on the planet; dignity, self-respect and honor; and ecumenism. The martial history of the Sikhs and their record of martyrdom were reduced to a single topic among many others.

The exhibition design was awarded to the National Institute of Design's Department for Exhibition Design rather than being handed over to a foreign consultant. Even after the attenuation of the theme of Sikh suffering in the project brief, however, the exhibition designers whom I interviewed recalled that the emphasis on martyrdom persisted in the institutional plans. On seeing the allocation of floor space to the various galleries, Ambrish Arora, a designer who worked on the project, recalled: "There was a section for the gurus, but the section on martyrdom was huge" (interview, 2011). The head of the design team, Amar Behl, noted that a very large proportion of the galleries on the Gurus was devoted to the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, whose bloody clashes with the imperial authorities led to the deaths of countless followers and all his sons. In comparison, very little space was set aside for Guru Nanak, the peaceable founder of the faith. "Where is my Baba Nanak, I asked? What happens to his message? I reversed the ratio of the galleries," Behl says; "I reduced the space for Guru Gobind and I increased the space for Guru Nanak" (interview, 2006).

Clearly, through the long processes of consultation, research, and design, the narrative of the Khalsa Heritage Complex moved away from the martyrological mode. Rather than focusing on the history of martial valor and narratives of suffering and martyrdom – associated with the latter phase of the guru period – it came to stress the values of peace, tolerance, and egalitarianism that were the hallmarks of Sikhism's earlier phase.

Thirteen years after Badal and Safdie had met in Jerusalem, the results of this process became apparent when the first phase of the museum opened to the public in November 2011. The galleries that have thus far opened occupy the Boat Building and the Flower Building, and tell the story of the lives of the 10 Sikh gurus. Visitors enter the museum at the upper level of the Boat Building and find themselves on a ramp that gently leads them down through the building to the ground level. As they descend, they pass by triple-height walls that are covered by an enormous hand-painted mural that is 75 feet high and 240 feet wide. Designed by a well-known graphic novelist, the mural's interwoven scenes delineate a densely peopled Punjab landscape in affectionate and humorous detail. The mural's scenes bring together medieval saints and modern migrants, trucks on roadways and cows in pasture, in a series of vignettes that borrow the language of Indian miniature painting. The timed walk through this gallery is animated by

light and sound effects. As visitors enter, the gallery is suffused by deep blue light that gradually turns rosy pink, and then brilliantly bright, eventually fading into darkness once more. The changing illumination suggests both the diurnal cycle from dawn to night as well as the annual cycle of the seasons of spring, summer, monsoon, and winter. The accompanying soundscape uses sounds of nature, instrumental music, and rousing folk songs. Together, sound and image in the gallery celebrate the landscape and lifeways of Punjab. Although there are specifically Sikh elements in the mural – scenes of village gurudwaras, Amritsar's Golden Temple, and even the Khalsa Heritage Complex itself – the introductory gallery does not present Sikhism per se, but the culture of Punjab at large: as we see men and women laboring in fields and marketplaces, caring for families and celebrating festivals; we witness an inclusive narrative that embeds the Sikh community in a universal story of human beings living out their lives.

In the galleries that follow, this broadening of the museum's message continues, I believe, in a subliminal way, through the choices made in the visual idiom of the display. The lives and teachings of the Sikh gurus are described by an audio guide while visitors move through installations of hand-painted and digitally printed murals, textile hangings, sculptures, fiber optics, animation videos, multiscreen video projections, and immersive architectural environments. These exhibits weave the warp of their narratives with the weft of an exquisite aesthetic that derives its motifs primarily from Indian miniature paintings and Mughal architecture, and occasionally from modern and contemporary art (Figure 2.2).

The visual language of the exhibits embeds the Khalsa Heritage Complex's story of Sikhism within traditions that have been canonized as "mainstream" Indian civilization; the lyrical aesthetic of the exhibits makes them celebratory in their mode. Instead of the highly charged and ultimately divisive message that one might have expected of a Sikh history museum that was initially inspired by a museum dedicated to the Holocaust, we have here a narrative that places Sikh history within a celebration of Indian civilization; one that meshes with the "authorized heritage discourse" (Smith 2006) and the "official culture" of the Indian state.

## The first museum of Sikh history

The full expression of Sikh suffering can be found instead in the Central Sikh Museum, the first museum of Sikh history to be established in India after Independence. This museum was opened in 1958 within the precincts of Sikhism's most holy center, the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar. It is run by the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), a powerful religious trust that regulates the practice of Sikhism within India. Belonging to a religious trust and located within a shrine, the SGPC's Central Sikh Museum is a private Sikh organization, and is able to function very differently from a public museum sponsored by the state.

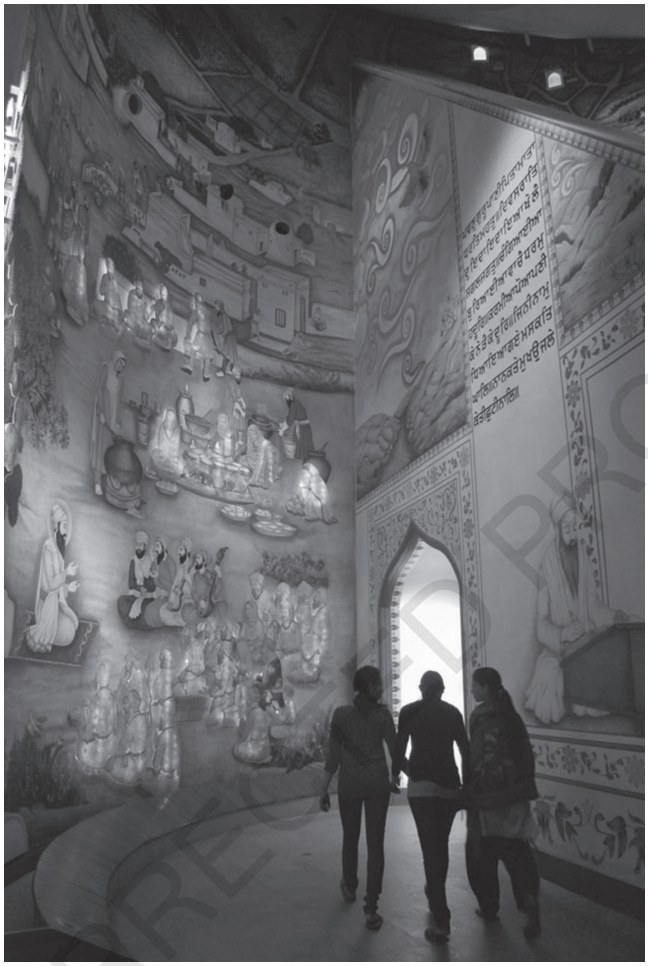

**FIGURE 2.2** Khalsa Heritage Complex, interior. Photograph showing galleries dedicated to Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.
Photo courtesy of A B Design Habit, New Delhi.

The Central Sikh Museum was initially established to preserve and display the SGPC's collection of rare relics, such as autograph texts by the Sikh gurus, and weapons, garments, and other articles of their use. In the 1960s the SGPC hired Sikh artists to produce a cycle of history paintings for the museum.[11] These large canvases depicted events from the gurus' lives and elaborate battle scenes as well the horrendous punishments borne by the eighteenth-century Sikh martyrs. We see Baba Dip Singh's head being sliced off by a sword and a fountain of blood spurting from his neck; Bhai Mati Das being sawn down the middle; Sikh mothers witnessing their babies slaughtered in a Herodian massacre. In turn, this cycle of paintings provides the visual vocabulary that now circulates in popular prints and books on the theme of Sikh martyrdom.

**FIGURE 2.3** Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar. Visitors view paintings showing eighteenth-century martyrs.
Photo: Brinda Kumar © Kavita Singh and Saloni Mathur.

Over the years, hundreds of other images of Sikh heroes and martyrs have accumulated in the Central Sikh Museum. The individuals memorialized on the museum's walls include prominent religious figures, social workers and reformers, scholars and litterateurs, sportsmen and soldiers. They also include victims of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, Khalistani terrorists from the 1980s and 1990s, and the controversial preacher Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.[12] Portraits of the two assassins of Indira Gandhi also find a place on these walls. Honoring men who are condemned elsewhere, since the end of the troubled 1980s, this museum has become a shrine to the memory of Khalistan (Figure 2.3).

## Sikh martyrs, Sikh victims

In the Central Sikh Museum we see perhaps the alter ego of the Khalsa Heritage Complex: as the ur-museum of Sikh suffering, it could have served as the template for the latter museum, but was explicitly rejected by it. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that the Khalsa Heritage Complex would take the path it did, veering away from the moorings of the holocaust paradigm, and toward the pronouncements of interfaith harmony. While the Central Sikh Museum is a private institution, the

Khalsa Heritage Complex is a public institution funded by the state. And when the state invests in an institution dedicated to one religious community in a complex multicultural democracy like India, it cannot afford to tell a story of anything but harmony – whatever the facts may be.

But the differences in the narratives of the two museums are not simply a result of the limits and possibilities of private versus public institutions; I believe it is also a question of displays in sacred spaces versus those in secular ones. The Central Sikh Museum tells its tale within a temple, a place of pilgrimage. The Khalsa Heritage Complex was always intended as a state institution, situated near but not in a temple. What happens when a tale of suffering is retold not in a temple but in a museum? Perhaps the story takes on a different meaning, and a more dangerous one. Without the aura of a religious setting, the dead are reduced: from martyrs, they become merely victims. What is the difference between a martyr and a victim? And what are the consequences of narrating the same violent history as a martyrology and as a victimology? However highly charged the story of a martyr may be, it is a narrative that is complete. Martyrs are glorious: for all their sufferings on earth, they have claimed their reward in heaven. But what of the other dead who are only victims, only men who died on earth? Their stories end abruptly, and they call on us to complete their tales by avenging them in the here and now. It is through this difference that the memory of martyrs is neutral but the remembrance of victims is not: through them the present can be ruptured by the past.

## Exile Tibet

### The museum of the museum on the Roof of the World

Your bus to Dharamsala races along State Highway 22 when suddenly on your right you see some striking architectural forms: you are driving past the Khalsa Heritage Complex. In a flash the buildings are gone, and you have another hour of travel across Punjab's featureless plain. Then the climb into the Himalayas begins. Soon the air cools, and neem and peepul trees give way to pine forests. You are winding your way up to "Little Lhasa," the small Himalayan town of Dharamsala that is the spiritual and political center of the Tibetan exile population in India. Here, among the many museums, cultural centers, and monasteries dedicated to preserving Tibet's traditions lies a second museum in India that has been inspired by Yad Vashem. What an odd coincidence that these two institutions, genealogically connected to each other by their common ancestor in Jerusalem, yet utterly dissimilar from each other in every respect, should lie 100 miles apart on the same highway, as though threaded together like two beads on a string.

In Hindi "Dharamsala" literally means "refuge," and since 1960 this little Himalayan town has been a home to a nation of refugees. After a failed

uprising in Lhasa in 1959, the Dalai Lama and 100,000 of his followers fled from Chinese-occupied Tibet to India. Dharamsala and its suburb, McLeodganj, eventually became the nerve center of the Tibetan exile community. The Central Tibetan Administration (the Tibetan government-in-exile) built its headquarters here, through which it cares for Tibetan refugees and disseminates information in support of the Tibetan cause. This has made Dharamsala the political hub of the Tibetan exile community. Over the years, this town and its surrounding hills and valleys have come to house scores of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries; schools teaching Tibetan language, literature, and religion; orphanages for children who have been smuggled out of Chinese-occupied Tibet by their parents so that they can grow up within the fold of the Buddhist faith and Tibetan traditions; as well as numerous institutions dedicated to the documentation, study, and transmission of Tibetan cultural forms. This is also the place that the Dalai Lama has made his home. Dharamsala, then, has also become a place of pilgrimage for Tibetans, for sympathizers of the Tibetan cause, and for a global community of New Age and other Buddhists who come here seeking the salvaged remnants of the "authentic" Buddhist culture of old Tibet.

Many places in Dharamsala are proffered as substitutes for irrecoverable originals left behind in the motherland. Businesses are named "Shangri-La Hotel," "Yeti Cafe," "Stitches of Tibet Clothing Store," invoking a real or imagined Tibet for the tourist or the exile. A nearby cultural complex in which apprentices learn the arts of thangka painting and icon-making is named Norbulingka, after the Dalai Lama's looted summer palace just outside Lhasa.[13] And the monasteries here are monasteries-in-exile, founded by refugee monks to continue the rituals and practices that were once performed at parent monasteries in Tibet destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In Dharamsala, thus, there is the Namgyal monastery which replaces the one that used to be outside the Potala in Lhasa; the Tibetan State Oracle who once advised the Dalai Lama from the Nechung monastery in eastern Tibet now lives in the New Nechung monastery here; the Kirti monastery of Kham has been rebuilt in Dharamsala, and the Tse-Chokling monastery, which was formerly near Lhasa, preserves its traditions and teachings in a village nearby. These are but a few of the approximately 200 monasteries-in-exile situated in south Asia – in India, Nepal, and Bhutan – many of which are named after the lost originals in Tibet.

In this geography that is haunted by loss, a thing is not simply itself but represents the salvaged fragment of something that used to be whole in an earlier time, in another place. If, in Clare Harris's words, Tibet is the "museum on the roof of the world" – a place that has for so long been presented as a remote and isolated "domain of undisturbed traditionalism" – that it appears like a museumized relic (2012, 6), then Dharamsala presents itself as the "museum of the museum" – the place that salvages the cultural essence of Tibet-in-exile, even as the land called Tibet is leached of its "Tibetanness."

## "A long look homeward"

In its temples and monasteries, its cultural complexes, and its architectural ambience, the Dharamsala memoryscape seems dedicated to forms of cultural revivalism. Museums and archives supported by the Tibetan government-in-exile preserve sacred relics, icons, and manuscripts smuggled out of Tibet. A performing arts center revives music, dance, and opera. Religious institutions train young monks in philosophy and ritual. The central project of exilic Tibet seems to be the recovery and revival of traditional knowledge and practices. Lately, the Dalai Lama has even said that achieving political independence for Tibet is not as important as this task of preserving Tibetan Buddhist culture (Norbu 2001, 377).[14] The virtual survival of Tibetanness in the diaspora has taken priority over the political sovereignty in the place called Tibet.

This focus on Tibetan cultural revivalism gathered force after 1985, following the breakdown of important negotiations between a Tibetan exile delegation and the Chinese government. After this point, scholars observe, the Dharamsala leadership reconsidered its strategy (Barnett 2001, 273). Instead of pursuing a political settlement with China, the leadership decided to focus on gaining sympathy from a larger international community. Representatives of the government-in-exile programmatically began to participate in global networks devoted to peace, environmentalism, and interfaith harmony, representing Tibet as an essentially spiritual, unmaterialistic, and nonviolent nation overrun by an implacable materialistic foe. In this process, Toni Huber (2001, 360) observes, "customs, practices, habits, and laws long taken for granted became selected and then eloquently objectified as (the Tibetans') unique culture." Many aspects of the exile Tibetan condition receded from view and "Buddhism (became) the newly erected central pillar of contemporary Tibetan nationalism (and took) center stage, as though this religion were the mainspring of the claimed identity" (Huber 2001, 360).

For some critics, this process eventually turned exile Tibetans into "prisoners of Shangri-la" (Lopez 1998), trapping them in an identity that was exclusively religious and spiritual, and barring them from partaking of modernity or assuming full political agency. More sympathetic observers saw the Shangri-la image as the result of a sophisticated process in which the Tibetan exile community intelligently instrumentalized a Western myth of Tibet to garner sympathy and support for their cause. After all, in Robert Thurman's memorable words, the image of Tibetans as essentially spiritual people has made them "the baby seals of the international human rights movement," innocent victims unquestionably deserving of support (quoted in Dodin and Räther 2001, 410). If the construction of an exclusively religious identity for Tibetans has been a form of self-Orientalization, at least it is one that has brought the community significant gains.

In contrast to the many Tibetan organizations that seem dedicated to the etherealization of Tibet, however, there is one museum in Dharamsala that directly addresses issues of history and politics. This is The Tibet Museum (Figure 2.4).


**FIGURE 2.4** The Tibet Museum, McLeodganj (upper Dharamsala). Gallery view showing panels from the section on "Sinicization."
Photo: Hope Childers © Kavita Singh and Saloni Mathur.

Opened in the year 2000, it is Dharamsala's newest museum and was set up by the Department of Information and International Relations of the Tibetan government-in-exile. The DIIR has played a key role in sponsoring research and gathering data that support the Tibetan exile position in international arenas. Concerned as it is with empirical information and verifiable facts, it is only natural that a museum sponsored by the DIIR would be very different in its approach from the monasteries and other institutions that are overseen by the exile government's Department of Religion and Culture. Secular, and dedicated to recounting the facts of recent history rather than invoking a timeless tradition, this museum brings a different kind of memorialization to the fore.

The Tibet Museum is housed in a modest-sized, elegant building on the street that leads to the main temple complex and the Dalai Lama's home, the chief visitor attractions in Dharamsala. Displayed inside this museum is *A Long Look Homeward*, an exhibition that recounts the history of Tibet and Tibetans since 1949. Beginning with an account of Tibet as it was immediately before the Chinese occupation, it describes the invasion, as well as Tibetan attempts at resistance, before relating the terrible consequences of occupation for the Tibetan people and their way of life. Sections on the refugee experience speak of the difficulties of

escape and look back on the achievements of the community in exile. This is contrasted with the continuing oppression of Tibetans under Chinese rule in Tibet. A final section articulates the hope for a better future for all Tibetans, both within and outside Tibet. It includes a statement from the Dalai Lama which describes Tibet as a "blessed, pure land" that has endured many hardships in the past, but that he hopes will be a "peace sanctuary" in the future.

While the broad lineaments of this history are well known, the version narrated by the Tibet Museum has elements that are far removed from the popular presentation of Tibet as a Shangri-la of timeless spirituality. For instance, the section on "Resistance" describes the Tibetan guerrilla bands that fought more than a hundred battles against the Chinese in the first years of Occupation, secured the Dalai Lama's escape route when he fled to India, and continued to skirmish with the Chinese army into the 1970s. Nowadays this aspect of Tibetan history is often brushed under the carpet by the Dharamsala leadership, as it contradicts the representation of Tibetans as being purely spiritual and nonviolent. In the Tibet Museum it is given an unusual degree of official acknowledgment and respect.[15] Similarly, when the section on "The Tibetan Community in Exile" lists the major achievements of the exile community, it foregrounds the establishment of the parliament-in-exile, the drafting of a democratic constitution ("for the first time in our history"), and "the fact that every child has the opportunity to attend school" (Tibet Museum 2000, 45) instead of focusing solely on the construction of monasteries or the preservation of Buddhism. The story that is told in this museum describes a multifaceted community that inhabits the modern world.

The display of the exhibition is marked by an understated elegance and a polished use of graphic design. The professionalism seen in the exhibition's design is also visible in the curatorial plan. The text of each section is presented as the first-person narration of an exiled Tibetan who has experienced the things he or she describes. The section on "Human Rights Violations in Tibet," for instance, is narrated by Rinzin Choenyi, a nun formerly from the Shungseb Nunnery in Tibet. After attending a peaceful demonstration in Lhasa, Choenyi was arrested. "We were hung from the ceiling, cigarettes were stubbed on our bodies," she says. "Some female prisoners had electric batons inserted in their private parts." Choenyi was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. She ran away to India after her release (Tibet Museum 2000, 33). Migmar Tsering, the monk from Dhargyeling monastery in central Tibet who narrates the section on "Escape," describes being caught in a snowstorm on the way to India. Nomads rescued him but he eventually lost his legs and some fingers to frostbite. "I was more worried about being reported to the Chinese than about my health," he says: "When we reached Dharamsala we were taken for an audience with His Holiness. I cannot remember anything that happened there. I just cried" (Tibet Museum 2000, 41).

Relying on memories, building its story out of fragments uttered by multiple voices, the museum allies itself with postmodern forms of narration. Unlike conventional histories whose facts can be disputed, these personal and moving

narratives are also incontrovertible, for they are the lived experiences of individuals. The few objects in the exhibition support these stories of terrible suffering. They include the blood-spattered shirt of a Tibetan prisoner and a case full of "implements of torture" used by Chinese soldiers (Figure 2.5). In one room, a TV monitor plays a video showing the 1989 Lhasa Uprising and interviews with escapees.

Each narrator who shared his or her memories for the exhibition was also asked to select photographs from the DIIR's archives that would visually represent their experiences, thus becoming responsible for the section as a whole. Thus the 11 Tibetans are not just the narrators but are described as the *curators* of the exhibition. Distributing authorship among the community, the Tibet Museum allies itself with the cutting edge of a new participative museology that makes members the subjects rather than the objects of the museum gaze. In fact, when the exhibit opened, it invited even more voices to join in the telling, for it had a Testimony

**FIGURE 2.5** The Tibet Museum, McLeodganj (upper Dharamsala). Gallery case showing the bloodstained shirt of an escapee from China, 2012.
Photo: Imogen Clark.

Corner where a desk with a tape recorder and writing materials encouraged community members to share their own experiences and their memories. Whether or not visitors used the Testimony Corner, its presence in the museum underlined the fact that Tibet's is a tragedy that continues.

There is no mistaking it: in the elegance of its design and execution, and in the sophistication of its forms of narration and its approach to history, the Tibet Museum is a museologically up-to-date establishment that combines lessons learned from holocaust museums and participatory community museums across the world. What accounts for the presence of this theoretically sophisticated institution in Dharamsala, where the other museums that house historic artifacts are conventional and even conservative in their approach?[16]

## Two thousand years of exile

"The idea of Tibet Museum is influenced by the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC," Thubten Samphel told me. Samphel is the secretary of the Department of Information and International Relations of the Tibetan government-in-exile. "In 1984 the Tibetan government-in-exile conducted a survey," he continued: "The survey estimated that 1.2 million Tibetans had died since 1959 through direct and indirect consequences of Chinese Occupation." But a new generation of Tibetan exiles was growing up in India with no knowledge of their homeland, and no understanding of the perils and misery that the previous generation had faced. The Tibet Museum, then, was "our attempt to pass on to the new generation of Tibetans the suffering of their parents and grandparents" (interview with Thubten Samphel, 2007).

Though the Tibet Museum may claim as its model the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, the impulse to make a Tibetan museum of trauma came when the Dalai Lama visited Yad Vashem in 1994. On seeing its displays, he too expressed the desire to have a similar museum that would relate the tragedy of Tibet. But, as the coordinator of the museum project recalls, the Tibetan leaders who hired him had said, "We want a Holocaust Museum. Not a Yad Vashem." T. C. Tethong, the DIIR minister who initiated the project, felt that Yad Vashem was too strident in its message leaving the viewer with feelings of anger and despair. Instead, Tethong asked for a museum that would communicate the Tibetan tragedy, but "since the Tibetan story did not yet have an ending, he also wanted room for hope" (interview with Michael Ginguld, 2007).

On traveling to see a number of such trauma museums, Tethong and his small committee found a suitable model in the Holocaust museum in Washington, DC. And despite the great disparities in the scale of the two museums, one is able to see how the Tibet Museum echoes the narrative form of the American institution, since both museums lead viewers through tales of terrible trauma but end on a note of hope. In fact, in the brief developed for the Tibet Museum, the affective

spectrum was even calibrated by its planners, with 20 percent of the narrative set aside for joy, 60 percent for pain and angst, and 20 percent for hope for the future.

Although the DIIR may have chosen the Holocaust museum in Washington as its model, the highly skilled individuals who brought new curatorial models and a refined sense of design to this museum mostly came not from the United States but from Israel, and they impressed on it the lessons they had learned from the making of Yad Vashem. The key figure connecting these two circles was Michael Ginguld, an Israeli agronomist now resident in Dharamsala. As a student, Ginguld had been backpacking through Tibet when he witnessed the 1989 Lhasa Uprising and the harsh Chinese reprisals that followed. He was invited to Dharamsala to brief the Dalai Lama on what he had seen. This encounter led to a sustained involvement with the Tibetan exile community and, for much of the time since then, Ginguld has made Dharamsala his home and has led several development projects in the area.[17]

In about 1998 Ginguld was asked by the DIIR to help it set up a museum about the traumas faced by Tibet in the recent past. He plunged into the project, and was its coordinator over the next two years. Growing up in Israel, Ginguld was conversant with its many public memory projects, and had even worked in Yad Vashem as a volunteer. But now he prepared himself for this task by consulting "a stack of recent publications sent by a friend at the Smithsonian Institution … and became well-versed in issues of cultural property, access, accountability, and giving a voice to those who had been excluded in the past" (Harris 2012, 170). Ginguld set about identifying the site and the architect and developing a storyline and an aesthetic vision for the project.

As it was to be a museum dealing with somber memories, Ginguld felt it needed to be sparse and uncluttered with a limited chromatic range – so different from the vivid colors usually seen in Tibetan-themed interiors. To develop an appropriate form for the museum, he pulled together an international team of museum consultants and designers. Among them were Debby Hershman, a curator from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem; Galit Gaon, a celebrated Israeli exhibition designer and now director of the Design Museum in Holon, Israel; Yael Amit, a young Israeli curator; Markus Strumpel, a German graphic designer; and Jordhen Chazotsang, a Tibetan-origin graphic designer from Toronto. The Israeli specialists in this group had all, in one way or another, been involved with the central memorial project in Israel, Yad Vashem, and they brought with them a deeply ingrained understanding of the methods and modes of Holocaust memorialization. Drawing on their prior experience and responding to the DIIR's needs, this group should be credited with the sophisticated display that we see in the Tibet Museum. However, Ginguld and the team of experts saw themselves only as facilitators, and the voices leading the exhibit had to come from the within the Tibetan community. Thus the 11 "speakers" of the exhibition's sections were also asked to shape its visual narrative and become its curators (interview with Ginguld, 2007).

The prominent role played by Israeli volunteers in the setting up of the Tibet Museum is not a coincidence. Although the two communities seem to be far

removed from each other, there is a special connection between Tibetan and Jewish peoples on several levels. Indeed, of Tibetan Buddhism's many Western adherents, a disproportionately large number are Jews, both inside and outside of Israel. This phenomenon is large enough to constitute a community within a community, who have been dubbed JuBus or Jewish Buddhists by those in the know. To many intellectually curious and spiritually restless young Jews – most particularly Israeli Jews who live in a tense and aggressive environment – Buddhism offers an alternative to a Judaism that seems to them too conservative, too combative, or too spiritually depleted today. But to some Tibetans in exile, it is Judaism that holds an important key. In our conversation, Thubten Samphel had remarked: "The people we identify ourselves most closely with is the Jews – and this is regardless of the tragedy in the Middle East." The long history of Jewish exile has obvious parallels for Tibetans, and the eventual establishment of Israel is an inspiration for their future. In the 1980s, after the breakdown of negotiations with the Chinese government, as the Dalai Lama confronted the likelihood of a very long exile for his community, he initiated a dialogue with Jewish religious authorities. One of the questions he asked them was: How do you keep your culture, your tradition, and your sense of self, alive in exile? How do you sustain a memory for 2000 years of diaspora?

## Collecting and recollecting

In 1990 the Dalai Lama invited a delegation of rabbis to visit Dharamsala.[18] In the course of their week-long dialogue, a rabbi described the first-century capture of Jerusalem by the Romans and the subsequent destruction of the Temple and exile of the Jews. Unable to sacrifice at their Temple any more, the religious leaders chose not to build a substitute shrine where sacrifices could take place. Instead they reinvented their rituals in ways that would remind the community of its loss. As a member of the delegation observed, "The memory of the Temple was never lost … but it was turned into literature … The rabbis declared that reading about Temple laws was now the equivalent of Temple service" (Kamenetz 1994, 96).

The Tibetan response to exile has been different. As Lydia Aran observes in her study of Tibetan exilic representations of the past, the Tibetans "went into exile *with* their high priest, and under his leadership, have channelled their energy not into inventing the means to make their religion viable under the new circumstances, but into replicating in the Diaspora their ancient religious infrastructure, rituals, and institutions" (2005, 210). By rebuilding their Temple in exile, as it were, the Tibetan community has focused on being "the custodian of the Tibetan cultural identity, not a carrier of the memory of its destruction" (198). This has oriented the community toward the future – rebuilding monasteries, reconstructing traditions for tomorrow. As Jews, impelled by their own tradition of aniconism, eschew material relics to focus on the power of *recollection*, Tibetans attempt to make *collections* of the physical fragments of their past, and use them to somehow piece together a whole. Material remnants are overwhelmingly important in this effort, and any

quarter that helps preserve them is seen as an ally. This would explain why the Dalai Lama so often blesses Western museums that have collections of Tibetan art.

In her essay, Aran carefully analyzes the Dalai Lama's speeches and writings and finds that his most vivid description of the suffering of Tibetan people occurred in the very first book that he wrote shortly after fleeing from Tibet.[19] In later utterances, the Dalai Lama dwells not on the tortures or deaths of the Tibetan people, but on the destruction of Tibetan religion and culture. Why is the Dalai Lama reticent about recounting human suffering, and why does he foreground the destruction of monasteries and icons instead? According to Aran, this choice is oriented precisely to counter the Chinese project. Despite the massive loss of life in Tibet since the Occupation, she asserts that the Chinese did not intend the genocide of the Tibetan people. Rather, China's desire has been to rob Tibet of its identity, first through violent means, and now through the Sinicization of the populace. The Dalai Lama is countering the Chinese erasure of Tibetan uniqueness by preserving Tibetan culture in exile.

But Aran offers a more important explanation for the Dalai Lama's reluctance to dwell on the suffering of Tibetans. As a Buddhist monk, and as one who is traditionally held to be the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the Dalai Lama's spiritual commitment is toward all human beings – even the Chinese.[20] To memorialize the Tibetan tragedy in ways that would keep alive a sense of anger and injustice would run counter to this ethical imperative. Inevitably, the Dalai Lama directs attention toward a positive project of a possible reconstruction, rather than a more fraught remembrance of lives that have been irrevocably lost.

In this context, a project like the Tibet Museum, with its focus on human suffering and loss, appears anomalous. Indeed in the memory projects of the Tibetan government-in-exile it will likely remain a singular instance, a reminder of a road ventured on, but eventually not taken by the official establishment of Dharamsala.

## A road not taken, and taking to the streets

Since 2008, when Beijing prepared to host the Summer Olympics and pro-Tibet groups seized the moment to mount protests, a wave of resistance has been surging among Tibetans within and outside China's Tibetan lands. Within China, resistance has met with severe repression, which has led to more desperate and extreme forms of protest. As the months pass, a terrible toll rises: of protestors who drench themselves with kerosene, drink the fuel, and burn themselves to death. At the time of writing, there have been 112 self-immolations. Most self-immolators are young – in their teens or twenties – and many of them are monks or nuns. Even as the Chinese government attempts to control reportage of these self-immolations, news about them spreads via social media, occupies the international press, and evokes a horrified response that brings renewed visibility to the Tibetan cause. While many commentators characterize the immolations as violent or wasteful, the immolators' own statements depict their act as an offering made for the greater good. Before he burned himself, Lama Sobha spoke of

himself as a lamp: "I am giving away my body as an offering of light to chase away the darkness" (quoted in Sonam 2013, 96).

In response to the self-immolations, the Dalai Lama seems to be searching for a middle path, between honoring the martyrs and regretting the loss of lives in acts that he believes will have no effect on Beijing. Yet in the past few years, as the situation in Tibet has escalated, several Tibetan exile groups have expressed disappointment with the Dalai Lama's Middle Way policy which accepts Chinese rule and only asks for greater Tibetan rights. Protestors also disagree with the government-in-exile's focus on the future and the past rather than the present, on religion and culture rather than political realities. Where should these protestors go, when they seek a place for themselves that will serve not just as a place to meet but as a symbolic center that can articulate their frustration and their grief? In Dharamsala, when mourners gather to mark yet another immolation, they assemble in the street that leads to the Tibet Museum. This street now has an accretion of memorial sculptures wrought by many hands: a black obelisk erected by the Tibetan Youth Congress, a wall covered with a relief sculpture of protestors occupying a Tibetan map. The museum has become the pre*text* for a thickening memoryscape dense with monuments to the tragedy of Tibet. A road not taken is now spilling into the street (Figure 2.6).


**FIGURE 2.6** Street leading to Demton Khang and Tsuglugkhang Complex, McLeodganj (upper Dharamsala). The black obelisk is the Tibetan National Martyrs' Memorial. The relief on the wall, showing protestors filling a map of Tibet, is by Lobsang Dhoyou, a former monk from Kham. (For a color version of this figure, please see the color plate section) Photo courtesy of Latika Gupta.

## Conclusion: Ghosts of future nations

In the course of this chapter, we have examined two museums in India that were inspired by Yad Vashem, though the Holocaust museum paradigm traveled to Anandpur Sahib and to Dharamsala along very different routes. That both Sikhs and Tibetans would wish to model their museums on Yad Vashem shows how Jewish memorial practices offer a template for other groups to commemorate historical suffering of their own. But a template cannot be mechanically applied to simply reproduce the original in a new place. As each community set about making its own museum for its own holocaust, it has had to reckon with local histories and local politics that have weighed on the consequences of remembering.

When we compare the trajectories taken by the Tibetan and Sikh projects, an irony comes to the fore. The Sikh community has made martyrdom the cornerstone of its identity, but the museum that set out to commemorate *their* trauma was turned into a joyous celebration of Sikh integration with India instead of recounting Sikh suffering at Indian hands. On the other hand, the Tibetan exile community which has suffered terrible persecution and homelessness in the past six decades has chosen *not* to make the memorialization of its sad history central to its self-representation. Yet it is the Tibetans who have been able to make a trauma museum for themselves. Why was the Tibetan project possible to achieve, and why did the Sikh claim to traumatic history have to be transmogrified?

Part of the answer may lie in the way these two communities present their relationship to the otherworldly and the this-worldly, to religion and realpolitik. The Tibetan self-presentation as an otherworldly, spiritual people makes them appear unthreatening; as long as this aspect predominates they are allowed a small enclave of political memory that will hardly affect the fragile balance between India and China. But the Sikh community, although defined by faith, is robustly political in its demands. Claiming victimhood rather than martyrdom, the consequences of *their* memorialization are too dangerous for India to bear. Tibetan dreams of freedom do not disturb the contours of the Indian map, while the Sikhs' demand for Khalistan threatened to tear it apart.

There is a lesson to be learned here about the relationship between memorialization and national self-definition. Fifty or sixty years ago, we used art museums to consolidate national identity by inviting the citizenry to collectively "own" the great cultural tradition that had been put on display. More recently, the museum of trauma has emerged as a new kind of national museum. The suffering that the people have endured becomes another kind of heritage: a shared experience that binds members of the populace to each other, even as it augurs their transition into a new phase that will be more just, and more safe, than the one that has gone before. Thus the many museums of trauma that are also sites for the foundational narratives of new nations or reinvented ones: in postapartheid South Africa, in postcommunist eastern Europe, in post-Liberation Bangladesh.

Both the Khalsa Heritage Complex and the Tibet Museum are also dedicated to nations; but the nations they gesture toward, Khalistan and Tibet, are political aspirations that have not become political facts. One museum memorializes a separatist movement that failed; the other mourns for a land that is occupied. Both institutions are haunted by the ghosts of nations whose existence – if it ever comes about – lies far in the future.

## Notes

1 In this chapter, I use "Holocaust museum" to signify institutions that memorialize the Jewish genocide under the Nazi regime, and "holocaust museum" to signify similar museums that narrate genocides and massacres of diverse communities.

2 Prominent professional associations for such museums include the International Coalition for the Sites of Conscience and the ICOM Committee for Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes. Many museum design consultants who worked on the pioneering Holocaust museums in the United States and Israel have had subsequent careers designing such museums for other communities. Prominent among these are Ralph Appelbaum Associates, the largest museum design firm in the world, whose projects include the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, the Holocaust Museum in Houston, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, and the Vietnam Era Education Center in Washington, DC. Michael Berenbaum, who was director of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, has been involved in the Holocaust Center in Skopje, Macedonia; the Holocaust Museum in Illinois; and Memoria y Tolerencia, Mexico. Jeshajahu Weinberg, whose museum work in Israel led to his appointment as Director of the United States Holocaust Museum, was also involved in Jewish museum projects in Warsaw and Berlin and was a consultant on the Khalsa Heritage project discussed in this chapter. Professional networks and prominent designers, architects, and museum content creators who work internationally have given the holocaust museum a recognizable appearance and narrative structure as it spreads across the globe.

3 An instructive study of this in relation to the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC is presented in Linenthal (1995). See also Young (1993)'s study of Holocaust memorials across Europe, Israel, and North America.

4 Even more cynically, one might say that the establishment of memorial museums has become a useful political ritual for regimes which need to signal the end of one era (an era of oppression) and the arrival of another era (an era of recuperation) through the making of such a museum. Since the very act of memorializing suggests the pastness of the things memorialized, a museum project of this type can even be used to suggest the historical distance from an era or power structure which in fact continues to endure in the present day. In Cambodia, for instance, memorials went up at many sites of internment and mass killings, even as former Khmer Rouge officials remained powerful in the new Cambodian government. Closer to home, in India victims of the toxic gas leak from the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal – said to be the worst industrial

disaster in history – received pitifully inadequate compensation while Union Carbide's managers went free; in an ill-advised gesture of "closure," Union Carbide offered to fund a memorial. As Bhopal's survivors continue to struggle against unfeeling authorities and their own compromised health, they have rejected the offer of this memorial from above in favor of a more modest exhibition of their own devising which will be part of their advocacy for justice (see Lakshmi 2012).

5 Fenech (2000). For a fuller history of the Singh Sabha movement, see Oberoi (1994, chs. 4–6).

6 Indeed, the Singh Sabha even constituted a category of "living martyrs" for people who "gave" their lives not by dying but by selflessly devoting themselves to community service. See Fenech (2000, 14–15) for a discussion of the *zinda shahid*, or living martyr who faces persecution as he pursues his goal. As an example of such a *shahid*, Fenech discusses the life of Bhai Takht Singh (1860–1933) who pioneered the cause of Sikh female education.

7 For an analysis of Sikh militant discourse which produced parallelisms between the political present and the historical past, see Das (1992).

8 Letter to Vini Mahajan, Chief Executive Officer, Anandpur Sahib Foundation, January 26, 1999.

9 Minutes of the Meeting held under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister of Punjab in regard to Presentation of the Model of KHMC, August 7, 1998.

10 Moshe Safdie, fax to D. S. Jaspal, November 14, 1997, Anandpur Sahib Foundation, File: Correspondence with Moshe Safdie.

11 For brief account of the most prolific of these artists, Kripal Singh, see Randhawa (1978–1979).

12 For a discussion of some of the controversial additions to the Central Sikh Museum, see Chopra (2013).

13 For a brief history of the establishment of the Norbulingka Institute, see Yeshi (2006).

14 A section of the Tibetan exile intelligentsia is critical of what they call a "New Age" makeover of Tibet. Prominent among these critics is Jamyang Norbu; see Norbu (2004) for several essays expressing this viewpoint.

15 See Jamyang Norbu (2004) for a trenchant criticism of the impulses that marginalize the resistance movement in the history of Tibet.

16 For descriptions of the other museums in Dharamsala, see Harris (1999; 2012) and Singh (2010).

17 Ginguld was one of the founders of a nonprofit organization called the Israeli Friends of the Tibetan People, which fostered capacity building for Tibetan exiles through educational exchange and training in agricultural technology. Ginguld is currently the CEO of Airjaldi, a social enterprise that brings wireless Internet connectivity to the Dharamsala region.

18 For a lively account of this meeting, see Kamenetz (1994).

19 Aran (2005, 202) cites passages from *My Land and My People*, published by the Dalai Lama in 1962 (Ngawang Lobsang Yishey Tenzing Gyatso 1962).

20 While the Dalai Lama may have been inspired by Yad Vashem, on his visit there he had angered Israelis by saying that it was his belief that "Even in such people (Nazis) deep down there is a seed of human compassion" (*Freelance Star*, March 22, 1994).

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