

Violent Memories: Nationalism and Indian Spaces of Postcolonial Recollections

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The ambiguous phrase “violent memories” strikes at two of the key conceptual moments that have been theorised by scholars of India: memories of violent acts; and the violence the recollection can do to those who are remembering, those who are remembered, and those who are forgotten. This paper seeks to provide an overview of the memory politics that has accompanied India’s struggle for freedom from colonialism, both during the Raj and in the period since independence. This will entail an expanded understanding of the violence of colonialism and imperialism, but also of the spaces and means of remembrance that have accompanied them.

The main events and processes that postcolonial and subaltern studies scholars have dwelled in India will be reviewed. These include, at least, the memory politics of: the “Mutiny” of 1857; anti-colonial violence and non-violence; gendered and sexed politics and violence; the partition of 1947; communal riots; Indira Gandhi’s “Emergency”; and of natural disasters. These reviews will necessarily have to be situated within broader theoretical trends in postcolonial studies from which they have drawn and to which they have a great deal to contribute.