



REDISCOVERING THE HIDDEN COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES CEMETERY IN THE BUNDELKHAND REGION

Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Jhansi

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ABSTRACT

Cemeteries, akin to historic edifices and landscapes, serve as vital links bridging our past with our future. Preservation efforts for cemeteries extend beyond the physical upkeep of grave markers, monuments, and structures; they also foster community unity by paying homage to the departed and the families associated with these sacred sites.

The inscriptions on memorials, the intricate designs of monuments, the selection of stones, and the architectural elements of both buildings and landscapes collectively unveil insights into past social customs and events, rendering cemeteries invaluable historical assets. These sites are cherished for their capacity to provide serene contemplation, green spaces, and wildlife habitats. However, the clarity of their designed landscapes has diminished over time. My research endeavors in this domain aim to restore their identities and recognize their historical, cultural, and influential significance. A primary objective is to raise awareness among citizens of our country and educate them on the importance of conserving these architectural treasures interred within Indian soil.

KEYWORDS- *Inscriptions, Memorials, Plateau, Ravine-Fringed, Commonwealth*

INTRODUCTION

Bundelkhand is the cultural and geographical region of the central province of India, Bundelkhand plateau¹ is a part of the greater Vindhyaachal plateau at present it includes northern Madhya Pradesh state, and also comprises the hilly Vindhyan region, it is cut down by ravines, and the north-eastern plain, The region has following water bodies in forming ravines. The region is drained by Dhasan, Ken, Betwa rivers, and Sindh² rivers. In deep, ravine-fringed channels, are of little use for irrigation, and the average rainfall is between 750-1130 mm. Temperature varies from 43 degrees to 7.5 degrees Celsius. This part also consists of a series of Chandel lakes in the Chhatarpur and Tikamgarh districts.

The Bundelkhand Agency was a political agency of the British Raj, managing the relations of the British government with the protected princely states of the Bundelkhand region.

Bundelkhand is a semi-arid region of India that incorporated six districts³ (Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Damoh, and Sagar) of Madhya Pradesh and seven districts of Uttar Pradesh (Jhansi, Jalaun, Lalitpur, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Banda, and Chitrakoot)





The cemetery at Jhansi⁴ is located near the Sadar Bazaar cantonment⁵ area, next to Kali Mandir Road in the Cantonment compound. This cemetery is also known as Jhansi cantonment cemetery⁶. cemeteries come under the authority of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission an organization of six member states whose main agenda is to mark, record, and maintain graves and places of commemoration of the Commonwealth of Nations military members service who died in two World Wars and India the member nation of this organization.

The graveyard has a diversification of graves and comprehends exceptional engineering of graves, tombs of soldiers, and other members of their families. As regards the visit is concerned obtainable grave headstones of 2-3 lanes portray the soldiers who died in the First World War⁷. The confounding feature of

this particular is that it has approximately 400 graves of contrasting artistic impressions. At the center of this locale is the huge heightened stone landmark constructed in remembrance of soldiers who died in wars, engraving their names, and the regiment number of the soldier. At the top of it is an upright stone shaped in a cross pattern.

Findings-

Grave Companies

The multitude of sepulchers is contrived by stone, but few are made of marble also. At this place, the exclusive aspect is that most of the graves bear the pattern of a crossed shape either on a headstone or on the mass design of the grave. The names of the companies involved in the manufacturing of graves are Suntoke & co. Agra, Purshadee, and Martin Sculp Company of Lucknow, etc.



Following are the names of the companies that manufactured graves at Jhansi.

Grave-lane of soldier who died in World War



This cemetery holds the graves of hundreds of British citizens for better or worse played a role in India's colonial past and those who mainly participated in World War I. Soldier, officials, and their families rest here. The cracked tombstone gives hints related to their lives. This graveyard of more than

1,20,000 square yards⁸. The construction work was carried out by the public work department⁹. The graveyard is a testimony to the history of violence, comfortably located in the central part of the Jhansi cantonment¹⁰ area.

Stone Landmark at the center of Commonwealth War graveyard Jhansi



This stone landmark stands upright at the center of the military cantonment¹¹ graveyard and resembles the divider of the area into four equal parts. The height of the pillar measures around 12 feet app approximately the entire structure stands on a squared step shape platform of dissimilar shape. The length and breadth of the bottom square shape step are 3'1" respectively. To study of pillar architecture can be divided into three parts.

1- Capital- The capital is the uppermost part of this pillar which exhibits a cross with a circle around it. It is an ancient symbol of eternity. The circle has no beginning and end but it simply represents the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It also bears a flowery design on all corners of the cross.

- 2- Shaft- The shaft is referred to as the main body of the pillar having a different geometric pattern.
- 3- Bottom- The bottom part of the stone landmark is a simple squared-shaped block attached with two steps that too of the same shape.

On the right side of the pillar engraved information that this particular was erected by the non-commissioned officers belonging to the following regiments-

- 24th Field battery R.A
- 23rd C-OE division R.A
- 2nd BN Wilts Regiment Band

It was constructed in memory of their war comrades so as it was named war graves cemetery¹² who died at Jhansi



The left side of the pillar displays the names of soldiers belonging to the above-mentioned regiments.

Findings about Different Architecture.

On survey most distinctive finding was that every grave has different architecture, The colonial legacy on the one hand gives details about the deceased person on the other hand it shows the magnificent artistic work of the Indian mansion of that time. Some graves are so strong that there are no single cracks on their principal body while others are on the threshold of deterioration.

Some graves were made of stone and some are of marble. They possess different headstones that give details about the deceased. Certain graves are of soldiers of different regiments and their families. Generally, the graves of children are compact and some are so massive with the boundaries occupying the area. But at present the condition of a maximum number of graves is on the verge of deterioration but still shows its strength and architectonics uniquely.

Need for Restoration

The colonial-era cemeteries are really in the stage of desolation. It's painful to see how this architectural heritage is being devastated and allowed to ruin. There is trespass inside heritage premises and confine, Headstones stolen, graves exposed to filth and dirt, and far and wide weeds growing all around and all over the places being dug up or covered over.

CONCLUSION

Hence, it can be inferred that these architectural wonders represent the rich cultural heritage of our nation. Therefore, prioritizing their preservation and restoration should always be the foremost consideration before contemplating any demolition, as once lost, they can never be replicated in their original form. Much of this heritage is currently in a state of severe decay.

India's conservation movement has been significantly driven by these architectural treasures and a few grassroots initiatives. However, the recognition of the immense value of these colonial-era structures in India's cultural heritage is still not fully appreciated. While India's cultural heritage may be among the richest globally, particularly in terms of this remarkable architecture, the need for comprehensive management of these assets is yet to be fully acknowledged.

Moreover, these significant heritage sites also serve to strengthen the historical ties between Britain and India through conservation efforts, as many British citizens continue to visit the graves of their ancestors in India.

In conclusion, there is a pressing need to take significant action to honor the memory of the thousands who rest in these sacred sites, ensuring they are "gone but not forgotten."

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