Garrison Churches in South India – A Deleuzian Perspective
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Abstract
The victories of British in the Battle of Plassey, 1757, and the Fourth Anglo Mysore War, 1799, were decisive in establishing the military supremacy of British forces in a major way in Northern and Southern India, respectively. Gaining control over majority of provinces through war, treaty and annexation, the British raised many cantonments to permanently station its military.

Key Words: Churches, South India, Garrison Church, Deleuze, Deterritorialsation, St. Mark’s Cathedral

Introduction
The victories of British in the Battle of Plassey, 1757, and the Fourth Anglo Mysore War, 1799, were decisive in establishing the military supremacy of British forces in a major way in Northern and Southern India, respectively. Gaining control over majority of provinces through war, treaty and annexation, the British raised many cantonments to permanently station its military.

As the size of the garrison increased, in many cantonments, there were demands from the rank and file of the military for a place of worship within the settlements. The East India Company, in its early period, had no precedents of building churches or promoting missionary activities in order to avoid conflict with the natives in trade. However, in later stages, they began making grants-in-aid for churches, which too ended in 1807. It is only after the fall of Seringapatam, the company had to commit itself to pay for building churches in military stations. As Frank Penny (Penny, 1912) notes:

“The fall of Seringapatam was the cause of the change. By the breaking up of the power of Mysore nearly the whole of the south of India came under the jurisdiction of the Company. Before that conquest took place British territory in the south was small in extent. The Nawab of the Carnatic was the nominal owner and ruler. The Company upheld his power by placing garrisons in various forts in his dominions. But they did not feel themselves called upon to build Churches for the different garrisons.” (pp. 53)

However, as the demands and agitations for churches from soldiers increased, Penny (1912) records, the Commander-in-Chief, General Hay MacDowall, recommended that ‘chapels should be erected at all military stations where European troops are quartered, whatever may be urged to the contrary,’ and reminded the Government that this policy had been pursued in Bengal since 1798…. From this time the Government embarked on the new policy of taking the initiative in military stations and paying the cost of building. (pp. 44).

In England, the Vellore Mutiny of 1806, raised many debates, alongside, enormous discussions on the role of East India Company in financing the construction and maintenance of church in India, which finally ended with the Charter of 1813 that made the company responsible to meet these expenses as well as provide the chaplains.

Hence, many garrison churches were constructed with complete funding from the company. Such garrison churches were purpose built for the exclusive service of British military garrisons and the European civil populations in permanent military stations. Thus St. Mark’s Cathedral, Bengaluru and St. Thomas Garrison Church, Chennai were constructed in 1812 and 1826 respectively and consecrated four years later.

Deleuzian Analysis of Garrison Churches
The cantonment itself is an assemblage of several imperial elements, including the military offices, barracks, magazines, bungalows, church spires, grounds, clubhouses, the English population, the spatial or-
The cantonment is the antithesis of the native quarter of the town. While the troops lived in barracks, the officers had larger houses within the cantonment. The cantonment was an English space carved out within the colony, originally a temporary residence of troops on the move. The cantonment, like public buildings, was a marker of imperial dominion, a space that was sovereign, despite being within an Indian town. This geography of exclusion was discursively constructed in various ways, many of which gesture at the power relations in place after the 1760s. (pp. 5) Nayar also points out, ‘spectacularizing imperial power through the ordering of space’ and constructing ‘triumphant geography’ was at the heart of these imaginations of Cant. For Deleuze (Deleuze, 1987), the signifying regime is not simply faced with the task of organising into circles signs emitted from every direction; it must constantly assure the expansion of the circles or spiral, it must provide the center with more signifier to overcome the entropy inherent in the system and to make new circles blossom or replenish the old. (pp. 114)

In the context of British imperialism in 19th century, both Cant and the garrison churches were effectuated by the British in order to reign supremacy over the natives. The duo can be interpreted as ‘cultural paradigms alongside military conquest and commercial dominance and exploitation’ (Collins, 2006). The structures of most of these garrison churches were generally modelled after the churches in England, including the two churches this paper discusses - St. Mark’s Cathedral modelled after St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, and St. Thomas Garrison Church, modelled after St. Clement Danes in Strand, London. Evidently, as Collins (2006) remarks, the combined effect of western colonialism and western missionary activity is to be seen in Christian art, architecture, worship styles, mission styles, and church organization. These choices of European designs cannot to be read so much from the premise of nostalgic longings of the British for their homeland as much as the expression of imperial power. In this connection, Bindia Thapar (Thapar, 2012) notes:

Although at the time of Britain’s colonising activities in the subcontinent there was a move in England and Europe to incorporate “exotic oriental elements into the prevalent neoclassical style to create the Ecclesiastic movement, the British in India departed from this norm. One of the salient features of colonial or imperial architecture was that it enthusiastically espoused the moral and aesthetic values of a Christian civilisation, synonymous in British eyes with “civilised” society, and rejected any local element as reflective of a native “barbarism”. (pp. 144)

In pursuance of this tradition, most of the essentials of the church were imported from England. In such a context, the usage of discarded weapons of Tippu Sultan as railings for the compound of St. Thomas Garrison Church could be read as another sign of the triumphant geography. At the same time, the bomb proof roofing - a distinguishing feature of most of the garrison churches, also points to the church as a military preserve. In fact, Penny (1912) writes, that from 1811 to 1827, the work of Chaplain of St. Marks was almost entirely military. This was true of all of the garrison churches in most periods of their existence before India gained independence in 1947.

Garrison churches conducted parade services on Sunday in which the soldiers marched in full uniform and the officers on horseback in the order of hierarchy to the church, seated in the same order and dispersed as per the military discipline. Further, the colors of various regiments were consecrated or received in the garrison churches. At times of need, the church was even converted into an armoury. In addition, the church, located within the Cant, was geographically excluded from the native sector, and practised racial discrimination by denying entry for the natives until Independence.

A rigid hierarchy of the military enterprise echoed in the altars of the church, with the protocol of allotment of front row seats to British officials in the order of ranking. Soldiers were made to sit in pews or seats with no backs. In St. Mark’s Cathedral, the seat allotment system was followed for half a century and the soldiers’ seats had no backs for nearly 45 years.
Therefore, the function of these churches was not limited to spirituality. They did not aspire for religious proselytization either. The garrison as an imperial assemblage had purposes beyond the missionary exercises, to sacralise war, military actions and colonisation as well as the hierarchy within the British military establishment. The erection of memorial tablets in the premises of the church and other public spaces for the military officers deceased in the war or due to disease or at sea plays the specific function of providing imperial narratives of the dedication and sacrifice of British officials to the British soldiers. The very precincts of church in which these tablets are enclosed, and the inscription ‘sacred to the memory of’ in them assign sanctity to the personages, their actions and their final departure. Overall, church as an institution / Christianity as a religion became, in Deleuzian terms, an element in a war machine and a piece in the State apparatus.

In his discussion on semiotic systems, Deleuze (1987) conceptualises:

Semiotic systems depend on assemblages, and it is the assemblages that determine that a given people, period, or language, and even a given style, period, fashion, pathology, or miniscule event in a limited situation, can assure the predominance of one semiotic or another (emphasis mine). We are trying to make maps of regimes of signs; we can turn them around or retain selected coordinates or dimensions, and depending on the case we will be dealing with a pathological delusion (délire), historical event, etc. (pp. 115)

The garrison church provided the physical and spiritual territory for the semiotics of war and colonisation in which the monuments and tablets form assemblages, mapping certain regimes of signs.

**Imperial Constellation in Church**

The constellation of tablets in the garrison churches constructs the identity of the British as saviours of the natives and their history as one of great martyrdom in protecting the natives through colonisation. For the lower ranks of the military, who did not experience power, fame or fortune, these tablets instilled a false sense of pride and brotherhood in the British mission of colonisation.

Describing the oldest Anglican church in India, St. Mary’s Church, built in 1680 with bomb proofing, just 40 years after Madras was founded, which later became the garrison church of St. Fort George, Madras Historian S Muthiah (Muthiah, 1999), writes:

> Whenever the bells of St Mary’s toll, they ring in a historic church from where time and time again in centuries past, there had gone forth humble worshippers to perform deeds of derring-do and to achieve fame, fortune – and, in some cases, notoriety.... Whether the contemporary view of imperialism assigns these early parishioners of St. Mary’s niches of fame or notoriety, there is no denying them their place in history (emphasis mine) – even if, in the case of some, it is only the history of Madras – and the first steps they took from here to achieve it.” (pp. 30)

What is their place in history is a crucial question, not as simple as assigning fame or notoriety to individual parishioners, rather their place in the complex machinations of British colonialism in subjugating the native Indians. The major proportion of monuments and tablets that adorn the pillars and walls of these churches narrate the martyrdom of the British officials, their valour and exemplary commitment in several battles waged against Indian rulers, on the one hand, and on the other, the vulnerable English body as ‘the site of imperial contest, where native condition, weaponry, climate and disease play havoc’ (Nayar, 2012). Besides, there are some patronizing narratives of English protecting the native Indians.

About 437 inscriptions are found in St. Mary’s Church, its compound and the cemetery. This historic church has memorial tablets of the officials of the highest order in Madras Presidency. One of the inscriptions in a larger monument reads: This monument was erected by the Honourable East India Company to the memory of Major-General SIR BARRY CLOSE, Bart, in testimony of their gratitude for his ardent zeal and entire devotion to their service, equally manifested in the application of high Military attainments, and of profound political knowledge. His character derived its brightest honors from that union of conciliation and firmness, which are after contributing to terminating a successful war, was eminently displayed in diffusing the blessings of peace over a numerous native population, who without being subject to British rule, felt the protecting influence of British counsels in the mild administration of authority which succeeded the usurpation of Mysore. He departed this life April the 18th 1813, aged 56 years.

The sculpture in it depicts a British and an Indian soldier standing on either side to protect a Hindu and a Muslim, who are seated in the middle. Here “terminating the successful war” refers to the fourth Anglo-Mysore war in which Close, as an Adjutant General to Gen. Harris, played a vital role in defeating Tippu...
The description “diffused the blessings of peace over a numerous native population, who without being subject to British rule, felt the protecting influence of British counsels in the mild administration of authority which succeeded the usurpation of Mysore” along with the sculpture gives an impression that Tipu Sultan was communal and the British brought peace and protected the Hindus and Muslims.

The inscription begins with “This monument was erected by the Honourable East India Company to the memory of.” Such other inscriptions “By order of the Court of Directors of the East India Company” with direct acknowledgment of East India Company as responsible for the erection of tablets were seen in the beginnings of the 19th century in St. Mary’s Church. Around 1845 onwards, the length of the inscriptions decreased and the brother officers of regiments raised these tablets. The in between period had no indications of who erected these tablets.

Similarly, another monument at St. Mary’s Church in memory of Josiah Webbe, Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, who died in 1804, depicts an officer, a civil servant, a Muslim and a Hindu mourning over a portrait medallion of the deceased.

One of the tablets at St. Mark’s Cathedral, reads:

Sacred to the memory of
Captain NBE Dower RE
Who, on the 30th of July 1809, while employed as
Officiating Chief Engineer Mysore P.W.D
in repairing the Krishnarajakatte Anicut,
was upset from a boat in the flooded Cauvery
And, after himself reaching safety,
swam back to help an Indian workman
and was drowned in his gallant attempt at rescue.

The idea of the kind and sacrificing British saving the native is so apparent in this tablet. This imperial constellation includes memorials for officials who died at several Indian revolts against British, including the Coorg rebellion 1837, Sepoy Mutiny 1857 and Moplah Rebellion 1919-1921 to uprisings in the South Asian subcontinent – Kandahar siege in Afghanistan, Burma War, Expedition to China and many more.

There are three categories of tablets in these churches – a vast majority of marble monuments (and a few brass) dedicated to higher military authorities like Lt. Colonels, Captains, Majors, a few dedicated to the lower rungs of the regiment that are made of brass, plain-looking and provides a list of persons, army numbers, designation, place of death and the battle and lastly, a few of Bishops, presbyters and individuals.

These tablets are stratified with the most significant officials occupying the prominent spaces of the church, for instance, the Obelisk for Major General William Syndenham, Commandant of the Artillery of the Presidency in the churchyard of St. Thomas Garrison Church, the marble bust and inscription of Lt. Colonel Noble of Madras Horse Artillery and Colonel Fredrick Derville of Madras Artillery on either sides of altar. On the contrary, the list-like brass inscriptions of the privates, gunners, drivers etc are long, plain and unattractive, and are displayed on the sides of walls or pillars that are free.

**Territorialisation and Reterritorialisation of Garrison Church**

Discussing religion, Deleuze (1987), recognises that territorialisation is a necessary factor for religion. Territorializing marks simultaneously develop into motifs and counterpoints, and reorganize functions and regroup forces.

Garrison church as an institution of religion is territorialised as an imperial entity with services only for the British military and civilians. Its marks included the parade service, the consecration of colors, the hierarchical seating arrangements, the tablets and memorial monuments. At times, they were deterritorialised into armoury and later reterritorialised to its earlier constituency.

According to Deleuze (1987):

A portion of signified is made to correspond to a sign or group of signs for which that signified has been deemed suitable, thus making it knowable. To the syntagmatic axis of the sign referring to other signs is added a paradigmatic axis on which the sign, thus formalized fashions for itself a suitable signified. The ultimate signified is therefore the signifier itself, in its redundancy or “excess” (pp. 114)

The death of male British military officers in the syntagm cuts across the paradigm of different geographies, historic events and times of imperial period. In the post independent period, when the British military quit India, these churches had to deterritorialise with its British parishioners return to homeland, and
reterritorialise it by reorganising its function and regrouping forces – Spiritual function and Indian Christians. The quintessential territorial boundary that kept the Blacks / natives out has been transcended.

These garrison churches were generally handed over to the defence, except few that changed into regular church. St. Marks Cathedral transformed into a regular church, while St. Thomas fell under defence. St. Thomas still has Sunday services only. The cultural code of the parade service doesn’t exist anymore. Hardly new tablets have been added, only of spiritual personalities. The tablets that had the function of obituary, tribute and documentation, have the last purpose only.

There have been conscious attempts to deterritorialise or reterritorialise imperial vestiges. Some of the public memorials have been removed or destroyed. For instance, the Cenotaph in Bengaluru that was erected to commemorate the six week siege of Bangalore during third Anglo-Mysore war, 1791, in memory of Lt Col Moorhouse, Capt Delany and 50 other British soldiers who lost their lives fighting against the forces of Tipu in the II Anglo Mysore War was razed in 1964 and statue raised for the local chieftain Kempegowda, who founded the city. A few symbols of imperial culture like the names of the streets and towns have been rechristened or new memorials have been erected to honour the natives who martyred in the fight against the British as attempts to reterritorialise and dethrow the colonial legacy of the British in India.

Conclusion

Garrison churches as imperial assemblages have lost their organic meanings after Independence and are getting reterritorialised as monuments of historical significance and reminders of the black days of the British hegemony. The significance of these memorials in terms of British identity and history has gone against its original spirit and its function no more of salutation or condolence.

References