WAR ON THE HORIZON:
REGIMES OF STATE CONTROL IN BENGAL, 1939-45

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ISHAN MUKHERJEE

CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI 110067
INDIA

2011

Chairperson
Centre for Historical Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India

Date: 29.7.2011

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my own work. No part of this work has been published, or submitted to any other university.

Ishan Mukherjee
Ishan Mukherjee

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Kunal Chakrabarti
(Chairperson)

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067, INDIA

Prof. Neeladri Bhattacharya
(Supervisor)

Centre for Historical Studies,
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067, INDIA

Sangeeta Das Gupta
Dr. Sangeeta Dasgupta
(Supervisor)

Centre for Historical Studies,
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067, INDIA

CHS Office Phone : (011) 26704456, 26704457
E-mail : chsjnu@gmail.com

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Introduction:

This dissertation attempts to study certain regimes of state control during the Second World War with primary focus on colonial Bengal. It seeks to capture the concerns that drove the policy initiatives of the government at various levels during the extremely tumultuous years of the war and also examine some of the ways in which the war was experienced by the people of Bengal. This attempts to explore how policies formulated by the state were adapted and modified according to the actual historical circumstances when these were sought to be implemented. This would demand not only careful attention to the cracks that appeared or got accentuated in the administrative apparatus due to the pressures of war, but also reflect upon the nature of the late colonial state itself.

After the entry of Japan in the war from December 1941, followed by its rapid advance in South-East Asia, Bengal was seen as one of the most vulnerable provinces in the sub-continent. When the Japanese army finally occupied Burma, Bengal was converted into a 'front-line province', a bureaucratic jargon denoting the military importance of the zone as a frontier area where military operations had to be intensified both in order to protect it from further advance of the Japanese forces as well as organizing counter-offensive operations in the territory already occupied by the enemy. Bengal thus assumed a very crucial geo-strategic location to be protected and safe-guarded from enemy attacks. Thus, the experience of the War was qualitatively different, much more immediate and intense than the other provinces in the interiors of the British Indian Empire. The consequence of the intensive exploitation of the area for the war-effort was felt in the outbreak of a disastrous famine that engulfed the entire province. Though the famine subsequently spread to other parts of the sub-continent, Bengal remained the most severely affected province where about one-third of the total population lost their lives.

The Second World War was a time of crisis for the colonial state. And this crisis was faced in the context of a specific political milieu, when the nature of the

colonial state itself had undergone certain very important changes. A certain level of provincial autonomy, a limited democratization of political authority and a certain degree of political mobilization had changed the context within which the colonial state had to operate, negotiate and function. The sweeping executive control acquired through an intensive bureaucratization of state power had to confront these configurations of forces for rendering its authority effective and legitimate. At the same time, the Defence of India Ordinance, specifically formulated for strengthening executive power to deal with war-time exigencies had a definite centralizing push, empowering the centre with powers of formulating policies and implementing regimes of war-time control at par with, and often at the expense of, provincial authorities- bureaucratic, military or representative bodies. Moreover, contemporary evidence seems to suggest that many of the arbitrary powers acquired by the executive through war-time regulations were often not in perfect harmony with the idea of 'rule of law' that had served as the main instrument for the justification of imperial authority since its inception, leading to the emergence of formidable fault-lines within the two major wings of the government of British India- the executive and the judiciary. But this also meant that war-time regulations were far more flexible, responsive to administrative contingencies and porous, allowing it to accommodate multiple levels of pressures and pulls and amenable to a variety of interventions, compared to the far more rigid legal structures with which the judiciary had to operated.

The articulation of this specific form of state power in its multiple dimensions can be brought out quite productively by focusing on Bengal, considered to be one of the most vulnerable provinces during the war. But it also becomes necessary to locate the war-time networks of state power operating within the city in a wider context and explore the linkages with the wider structures of power and control regimes devised by the government at the centre.

In spite of the obvious significance of the Second World War in the reshaping of colonial power and its modes of control in British India, very little attention

was devoted to it in the historiography of late colonial India for a long time. Till the 1960s, there were only two major studies of the impact of the war on the Indian economy.[1] J.H. Voigt's study of war-time political and military high-policy was the only published work of some importance on the subject till the 1980s.[2] Indivar Kamtekar's thesis brought the impact of the Second World War on the colonial state in India to the centre-stage in 1989[3], but parts of it became available in the form of two published articles only about a decade back.[4]

This does not mean, however, that events occurring during the war years in India were completely left out by the historians. There were numerous studies, for instance, on the Quit India Movement and nationalist activities during the war-period.[5] By the 1980s, considerable attention was paid to the Bengal famine of 1943-44.[6] Nevertheless, most of these studies discussed these episodes with minimal reference to the Second World War itself and the way these events were shaped by it.

A significant contribution to the study of late colonial India was a collection of essays which contained several important articles that focused on the impact of

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[1] I am referring to H. Knight, *Food Administration in India, 1939-47*, Stanford, 1954; N.C. Sinha and P.N. Khera, *Indian War Economy [Supply, Industry and Finance]*, New Delhi, 1962.

[2] J.H. Voigt, *India in the Second World War*, New Delhi, 1987.

[3] Indivar Kamtekar, 'The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942-47', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989.

[4] Both the articles were published in 2002. Indivar Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942', *Studies in History*, 18(2), n.s., 2002; Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India, 1939-45', *Past & Present*, 176(1), August 2002, pp.187-221.

[5] For instance, F.G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement*, Manohar, Delhi, 1971; Gyanendra Pandey (ed), *The Indian Nation in 1942*, K.P. Bagchi & Co, Calcutta, 1988.

[6] Two of the most important works on the Bengal Famine are: Amartya K. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982; Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1982.

the war on state and society in India.[7] Also significant was the fact that many of the articles contained in the volume focused on the specificities of different regions. Two of these focused on Bengal and one on eastern India.[8]

Srimanjari's work in the above volume examines the turbulence created in Bengal because of the complexities of the political mobilization of the Indian National congress in the province and the crisis of the colonial bureaucracy under the shadows of the Second World War. The Bengal famine of 1943-44 was seen in the light of the inability of the colonial state to formulate a comprehensive plan for managing the disaster that facilitated massive hoarding and profiteering by the Indian businessmen, further complicating the situation. She brings into focus the impact of the war on the state and society in Bengal that finally precipitated a monstrous famine taking millions of lives.

Another very important contribution to the volume was that of Sanjoy Bhattacharya's work on the dynamics between the colonial state and the Communist Party of India. He shows that even though the CPI was legalized during the war years because of their support for the war effort, the lower rungs of the bureaucracy were extremely suspicious of the party's local activists and often voiced their disapproval of the Central Government's policy towards the communists. The local party activists, on the other hand, tried to rally support on the basis of local issues against the administration in the localities, often defying the party line. Bhattacharya directly engaged with debates around the nature of the late colonial state in India, and demonstrated the fractures and fissures within the administrative apparatus that got accentuated as the authorities at the centre were forced to intervene into local power structures due to the exigencies of the Second World War.

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[7] I am referring to Biswamoy Pati (ed), *Turbulent Times: India 1940-44*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1998.

[8] The two articles on Bengal are: Srimanjari, 'Denial, Dissent and Hunger: War-time Bengal, 1942-44', ibid; Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'An Extremely Troubled Relationship: The British Colonial State and the Communist Party of India, 1942-44', ibid.

It was in his monograph *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War* that Sanjoy Bhattacharya engaged more substantially with an analysis of the impact of the Second World War on the colonial state and its interactions with society at large.[9] Through a critical engagement with earlier works on the subject, especially with Indivar Kamtekar's unpublished thesis, he put forward his views on the nature of the late colonial state in India.

Bhattacharya argues that there is a widespread tendency in the historiography to treat the colonial state in India as a monolithic structure. Most works took the central government's capacity to implement its policies for granted. Moreover, in case of the late colonial state, many of them attempted to highlight the distinction between 'Indian' local self-government and a well-defined 'British' structure of central and provincial government. In the process, they denied the Indians a formal role within the structure of the state. He asserted that the administrative structure of colonial rule was far more complex. Though there were segments of the state apparatus over which the a British-dominated command structure kept tight control right till the end of colonial rule, in most civilian sectors there were numerous Indians at high positions of administrative power who participated in decision-making activities as well. Moreover, lower level officials were in constant interaction with their senior bureaucrats through a hierarchical structure of command, and they had the ability to adapt and modify orders from higher authorities in response to various local pressures.[10]

Bhattacharya observed that Kamtekar's work, drawing upon Theda Skocpol's conceptualization of the state, relied on the concept of the autonomous state. In Kamtekar's work, the government officials of various administrative ranks seemed to be united and driven by a set of policy concerns that were formulated at

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[9] Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War*, Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, 2001.

[10] Ibid, pp. 2-3.

the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy. On the other hand, Bhattacharya's work emphasized various fissures and fractures within the structure of the state, and questioned the assumptions that the entire administrative edifice of the colonial state was willing to implement all policies formulated at the higher levels. Moreover, he identified a closer link between the colonial state and colonial society and emphasized the social embeddedness of the officials that often determined the way they acted.[11]

This dissertation draws upon the insights of Sanjoy Bhattacharya, but differs from it on certain issues. The multi-layered structure of the colonial state is recognized, certain loopholes within the administrative structure is also admitted. Yet, this work attempts to recover, through a close reading of the archive, whether there was any logic to the way in which the administrative edifice of colonial rule, as a whole, functioned. The ability and willingness to adapt and modify policies formulated at the highest echelons of the bureaucracy were not only characteristic of the ways in which only the lower-level government officers functioned. The contention of the work is that the need to mould policies in order to suit the actual circumstances on the ground was recognized at all levels of the government, including those who were involved in formulating policies. The ways in which the war was experienced by the people, which are explored in some detail in the chapters, were qualitatively different from other times, making exceptional demands on the administrative machinery. Thus, even more so than in other times, the bureaucratic apparatus had to be flexible in order to accommodate various kinds of pressures in the practices of policy implementation.

The first chapter would seek to address some of the issues outlined above in a wider context. It would examine the centralizing drives in war-time decision-making, attempts at standardization of control regimes and defining its contours at an all-India level. This would involve a thorough discussion of an all-India conference of Home Secretaries and Adviser's to Governors held in the year 1940

[11] Ibid, pp. 4.

specifically on the request of the Government of Bengal, which became one of the major occasions for laying down the principles of wartime controls at an all-India level in the early years of the war. Specific attention would be paid to the minutes of the conference, the issues that it dealt with, the ways in which it attempted to arrive at a pan-India consensus with regard to certain aspects of war-time regulations, trying to eliminate inconsistencies and confusions in the understanding and implementation of policies and the ways in which the conference brought out some of the anxieties the government, both at the centre as well as the provinces, were confronted with.

From formulation of policies and principles of governance, the subsequent sections would examine the practices of war-time executive control. Two micro-stories of externments of two individuals, with past records of 'subversive activities' will be taken up, through which this section would explore the inter-play of power regimes at the level of the Central Government and the Government of Bengal.

The third chapter would move on to the years when Bengal and other parts of India were threatened with attacks from the Japanese forces. This chapter would focus very closely on Calcutta and explore the ways in which rumours floating in the city about a possible Japanese air-raid or invasion were sought to be controlled through practices of urban policing. What would also be of interest are the ways in which 'rumour' as a specific administrative category was defined and evolved out of practices of control. A close interrogation of sources would seem to point out that rumour as a phenomenon to be suppressed and controlled by the city administration emerged from the year 1940 out of various categories of textual and oral informations that were already in circulation, till then contained within the rubric of what was called 'anti-war propaganda'. However, there was hardly any consensus regarding the definition of rumour, which was constantly in flux, often shifting, and prompting debates within the administrative machinery. I would explore the multi-dimensional nature of what came to be called 'rumours'

and the ways it affected the lives of the city's inhabitants would be examined, the impact it had on the everyday life in the city, the fears and anxieties it generated, sometimes prompting people to leave the city altogether. Again, the control mechanism devised by the police would be explored. This would involve the way rumours were tracked down, responsibility for spreading rumours fixed on individuals and actions taken for preventing it from spreading.

The third chapter would focus on the ways in which newspapers were sought to be brought under control and how many of the newspapers functioned in active negotiations with the state apparatus.

Concerns over the need to exercise tight control on the newspapers were expressed right from the early years of the war. Newspapers did exercise certain degree of caution for the fear of various restrictive measures imposed by the government. Yet with the onset of famine conditions in Bengal, the Calcutta press became increasingly critical of the administration, regularly publishing articles and printing famine photographs, much to the chagrin of the government. The chapter would explore the control mechanisms that the government tried to impose in order to control the nature of reports and examine loop-holes that were discovered within the administrative apparatus. The subsequent sections would look at different narrative strategies adopted by the newspapers that made it difficult for the state to exercise control over them.

Chapter 1: The Spectre of a Mass Movement: Formulation and Implementation of War-Time Control Regimes

On 3 September 1939 — Britain declared war on Nazi Germany and formally joined the Second World War on the side of the Allied Powers. Without bothering to consult any popular opinion, India was also declared to be a participant in the war on the side of Britain. At the same time, a Defence of India Ordinance came into force with immediate effect, which gave the colonial bureaucracy enormous executive powers in order to mobilize resources in the colony for the war-effort.[1] The basic unpopular character of war-time legislations, of which the Defence of India Ordinance was of the most sweeping scope, bred discontent among a wide section of the Indian population. Important political forces, including the Indian National Congress, opposed the war-effort. From the very beginning, therefore, the government had anticipated a mass movement aimed at impeding the government's drive towards resource accumulation for the war. The Defence of India Ordinance, along with a few other executive orders, was geared up for the purpose of facing such a challenge from the anti-war forces within Indian politics.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the preparations that the government made in order to confront a possible revolutionary mass uprising. The problem would be addressed at two different levels. First, we would place the issue at the level of the framing of policies that were aimed at pre-empting and dealing with a future internal political movement for frustrating the war-effort. For this, a detailed examination of a conference of provincial authorities would be taken up for discussion. This conference, held on 29 and 30 August 1940 at Simla and attended by the Home Ministers and Secretaries of the provincial governments, was crucial for laying down principles of policy implementation that the provinces were expected to follow in the early years of the war. The conference was held under the auspices of the Central Government on the request of the Government of Bengal, the latter province being one of the major zones that was

[1] For details of the way in which India was made a party to the Second World War, see, for instance, Bipan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989, pp. 448; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983, pp. 375-377.

crucial for the mobilization of resources for the war effort. The aim of the conference was to define the regimes of war-time control at an all-India level and to eliminate confusions and inconsistencies in the practices of implementation of the policies by the different provincial governments. Second, I will explore some of the instances of the actual implementation of some of these policies when the state tried to prevent a future political movement by pursuing certain pre-emptive measures, as well as while dealing with actual 'offenders' during the Quit India Movement. A brief narrative of an accused in the Quit India Movement in Bengal would be used to demonstrate that the actual treatment of 'offenders' of a popular movement and the extent of discretionary powers exercised by local state officials went far beyond any standardized principles of control settled at an all-India level. This will be followed by a close investigation of two cases where two Bengal "terrorists" residing outside Bengal were directed to go back to their home province as a measure aimed at keeping close watch on their activities. The affairs around the two preventive externment orders would provide an occasion to interrogate some issues relating to the implementation of war-time policies, interactions between the centre and the provinces, and some of the flexibilities and contingencies on which the state had to rely in their actual functioning.

The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate that while formulation of policies sought to define, specify and standardize practices of control, implementations of policies were always more flexible, contextual and contingent, open to negotiations and responsive to a wide range of influences and interventions. For analysing some of the issues, the concept of 'governmentality' put forward by Michel Foucault[2] would be invoked. The attempt would be to show that the task of the government was not restricted to the mere implementation of laws, but that careful attention was directed at the ways and means of implementing the war-time regulations that would secure the objectives that the government wanted to achieve. There was no one particular goal before the government— the goal of making people obey a rigidly defined law. Rather, the aim was to secure the best possible solution in a particular situation by exercising a given set of choices, with

[2] Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality' in *Essantial Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, James D. Faubion (ed.), Vol. 3, (trans. Robert Hurley and others) London: Penguin Books, 2002 (first published in 1994).

the minimum of effort. This meant that the policies and regulations framed by the government had to accommodate a certain degree of flexibility, while implementation of regulations had to be contingent upon the reality of the situation on the ground. However, there were significant markers peculiar to the colonial situation both in the principles as well as in the modes of their implementation that prevents a straight forward application of the concept of 'governmentality' formulated in relation to the western modern form of government. This chapter tries to grapple with some of these issues.

Of uniforms, drills and rebellion:

It was the Government of Bengal that proposed an All-India Conference of Home Ministers and Advisors to the Governors in the Home Department of the Government of India for clarifying some of the orders issued by the centre to the provinces. The government at the centre did not see the need for any such conference in the beginning, but they subsequently agreed to the proposal. First, they found out that almost all provinces were keen to participate in the conference, and then the Home Department of the Government of India felt that this could give them an opportunity to arrive at a pan-Indian consensus regarding the implementation of policies without much discrepancy. As Richard Tottenham, the Additional Secretary to the Home Department of the Government of India explained:

> I do feel that we have been sending out a lot of papers to Provincial Govts. recently and that there are a number of matters on which personal discussion might be useful. In particular it might afford suitable opportunity for explaining the new conception of the relations between the Centre and the Provinces necessitated by the proclamation of emergency and the need for more centralized control of all important war activities.[3]

[3] Note from R. Tottemham, dated 7.8.40. Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, National Archives of India (Henceforth, NAI).

It becomes apparent that war-time preparations needed a much more centralized impetus and co-ordination. This meant that all policies needed to be carefully planned and fleshed out at a centralized level. Even those issues that needed to take into account considerable variations across provinces and the areas where discretion of local authorities were essential, the drive of war-time policy formulation necessitated a precise definition of the contours and limits within which such discretionary powers were to be exercised.

I

Once the conference was agreed upon, the Central Government circulated the memorandum that enlisted all the issues that needed to be discussed. This provided the guidelines for the discussions that followed. The first issue discussed at the conference dealt with the mushrooming of various organizations that participated in "volunteer activities". Essentially, such activity involved performance of physical drills, and many of them had their own uniforms. The Government aimed at regulating the performance of drills, which often imitated military physical exercises and the wearing of uniforms that often resembled that of the official military uniforms. The justification for imposing restrictions on such activities was explained in the memorandum:

> such activities can seldom, if ever, be of a harmless character and in nine out of ten they are intended to train people either for the use or display of force or to produce an impression of authority which will be damaging to the prestige of Government. If conducted on communal lines, as most of them are, volunteer movements are also bound to increase feelings of insecurity among the different communities.[4]

It is apparent from the discussion that followed that such organizations were spreading at a fast pace throughout the country and that the state was apprehensive that the volunteers trained by those organization could be used in a

[4] Memorandum on Volunteer Movement, ibid.

future movement against the war-effort. What was more, by imitating military drills and uniforms, many of these organizations were already throwing up a symbolic challenge to the sovereign authority of the colonial state and undermining the "prestige of Government." Thus, the Government of India tried to arrive at a consensus regarding the ways and means through which such activities could be brought under control.

The first issue to be settled was the basis for identifying the organizations upon which control needed to be exercised. It was pointed out that the existing orders against drilling and the wearing of uniforms penalized certain *activities* irrespective of the character of the organization that performed them. Neither did these orders take into account the *intention* behind the performance of such activities. The agenda of the conference was to decide whether it was better to make *intention* the "essence of the offence", and to "penalize any unofficial activities of a quasi-military character (including drills, wearing of uniforms etc.) which are designed, or are carried on in such a way as to create a reasonable apprehension that they are designed (a) for the use or display of force, or (b) or for usurping the functions of the army, police etc."[5]

What are of special interest are the implications outlined for each of the courses of actions that were to be articulated in course of deciding the choice. In defence of the first option, that is, of controlling certain *activities* irrespective of the character of the organizations or of the 'intention' behind the activities, the memorandum pointed out that the prime advantage lay in the fact that this was the easiest way of ensuring conviction of the violators of the order in a court of law. But it had important disadvantages as well. It said: "The disadvantage is that the activities in themselves may be innocent, if performed by certain people or with a certain object."[6] From this followed another major disadvantage. This course of action necessitated the making of exceptions and the granting of exemptions. This made uniformity of action across provinces more difficult to attain.

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[5] Ibid
[6] Ibid

As far as the proposal for making *intention* the criterion of imposing punitive action was concerned, the memorandum outlined three major advantages. First, under such a law there would be no need to exempt particular bodies or particular manifestations of the activities in question. Second, this would enable the governments of different provinces to avoid the difficulty of deciding what uniforms sufficiently resembled military or official uniforms that had to be brought within the ban. Third, the public would be left in no doubt as to the objectives of the order. However, the crucial disadvantages in this case were that it would have made it more difficult for the authorities to prove their case in a court of law, and that changing the law would give out the impression that the order previously issued were flawed.

The conference unanimously settled for the first course of action. The ease of securing conviction of the offenders in court out-weighed all considerations in arriving at the decision. This is significant, for the drive of all war-time policies was to enforce law and order through bureaucratic and executive means, without leaving its implementation to the paraphernalia of judicial procedures which often could not fulfil the requirements of immediate action that the state saw as vital in a war-time situation.[7] Yet the state needed to formulate regulations in such a way that they could be attested by a court of law, which was, after all, the repository and the ultimate expression of sovereignty, which alone could uphold the legality and legitimacy of colonial rule. What was also seen as a major draw-back of deciding state action on the basis of *intention* was that this would have necessitated a change in the existing order. This would have compromised the image of infallibility that the colonial state always tried to project and assert. If the state was already feeling threatened by the symbolic challenges that certain voluntary organizations were throwing up by adopting certain practices and appearances that were seen as its exclusive prerogative, it felt all the more impelled to assert its symbolic superiority.

Having settled the basis for the implementation of the policy, what the state needed to do was to eradicate any confusion in the understanding of the

[7] This is one of the major arguments that run through all the chapters. This would be subsequently be demonstrated further through other cases as well.

regulation, and thus arrive at a definition of precisely what was to be controlled. Since the drive of all policy-making activities was to standardize policy, ensure uniformity of action and erase multiple interpretations of law, the first question posed to the provincial representatives was whether there was a consensus over the definition of what constituted "drill etc. of a military nature" or the criteria for deciding whether any particular uniform resembled a military or official uniform. The problem with regard to the first, as the memorandum explained, was that "drill" was essentially a military conception and there was doubt whether there was any such thing as drill which was not of a military nature. Though one could imagine "physical drill" as drill of a non-military nature, but a "clear definition", the memorandum pointed out, "distinguishing "physical" from "military" drill would not be easy."[8] In the case of uniforms as well, the memorandum confessed that the criteria for deciding whether any uniform resembled military uniform was difficult to spell out, and invited the opinions of the provincial representatives on this matter.

The impulse of law making was to define and specify. Thus, even if a clear-cut undisputable definition was difficult to arrive at, the provincial representatives of the government tried to arrive at a 'workable definition', a definition that was verifiable through the observation of the 'circumstances on the ground' and assessing the 'ground reality'. In case of drills, it was pointed out that even if one could not define exactly what constituted "drill of a military nature", "there should be no doubt in concrete cases."[9] And thus, a suitable definition was arrived at: "It would certainly include marching and evolutions or movements of bodies of men carried out under words of command." Physical drill, in their opinion, could not be excluded by pronouncing it not to be drill of a military nature. But there were "circumstances in which physical drill might be exempted from the operation of the order." Thus the unanimous criteria for taking punitive actions by the provincial authorities were defined by arriving at what can be called a *negative* definition. This meant that without defining what non-military drill was

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[8] Memorandum on Volunteer Activities, Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, NAI.

[9] Minutes on the Volunteer Question, ibid.

supposed to be, attempt was made to define what it was *not* to be. Thus, the definition over which there was a certain degree of consensus was this:

> physical drill might be exempted when performed by bodies of persons acting together under discipline provided-
>
> (i) that it is not made a cloak for practising military evolutions... which are not essential to physical training;
>
> (ii) that it does not involve the use of weapons and articles capable of being used as weapons of offence;
>
> (iii) if it does involve the use of such articles, that they are not used in such a way as to give practice in handling them as weapons of offence or as dummies in substitution of such weapons; and
>
> (iv) that the drill takes place on private premises not open to the public view.[10]

Even after this, the provinces were divided on certain aspects of the definition, showing how difficult it was to secure the government objective of ensuring uniformity of action across provinces. For instance, the minutes of the meeting pointed out that certain provinces were prepared to allow physical drill to be practiced in public view, while others were not. Again, some provinces were ready to exempt "lathi play", in spite of the disagreements of the representatives of the other provinces.[11] Yet the effort at achieving uniformity was not to be given up at, least on principle, while the policy was being formulated, even if discrepancies occured in their implementation.

In case of uniforms, as has been pointed out, there was a feeling that it was difficult to define what the precise criteria would be for imposing a ban. But the explanation of the reasons for this is striking, and exemplified what Partha Chatterjee calls "the rule of colonial difference."[12] The uniform which may appear

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[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid

[12] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, reprinted in *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999 (first published by Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 14-34.

to "one class of persons" as resembling a military uniform may not appear to be so in the opinion of "another class." Ideally, the memorandum pointed out, the criterion should have been the opinion of the "average man". But, "in India that would mean the uneducated villager rather than the more sophisticated town dweller", and thus, public opinion in India, as opposed to public opinion in Britain, could not be the basis for defining the uniforms that were to be banned.[13] This mentality of the state officials (and one must remember that many officers who represented the provinces were Indians and not white Europeans) remained as an undercurrent in all decision-making activities of the colonial state. This, in my opinion, goes beyond the idea of the "rule of colonial difference", and underpins the basic undemocratic spirit if colonial decision making, even at a time when many of the top bureaucratic offices had been Indianized. Of course, the implication of race and civilizational levels remained, for what was applicable in the metropolitan nation of white Europeans was not applicable in the colony. But, even more than 'race', what was important was 'class'. It was the opinion of the "sophisticated town dweller" whose opinion should have ideally constituted public opinion. This is not surprising given the fact that most of even the Indian elected provincial representatives who were involved in policy formulation had a firm class basis. Even after the 1935 reforms that considerably expanded the franchise, popular representatives were still elected by a property-owning and relatively educated minority elite. Thus, bureaucrats and popular representatives of provincial governments, who were involved in decision-making, were suspicious of the opinion of the "average man" in India and were against making this the basis of state policy.

Economy of effort:

Another aspect of war-time decision-making need to be emphasized which is already apparent from the above discussion. Since the tendency was to define and standardize, the exceptions to the rule that needed to be allowed was also to be fixed. This also revealed certain important aspects of the way the colonial state

[13] Memorandum on Volunteer Activities, Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, NAI.

functioned. One important guiding principle in this regard was that of 'economy of effort'. Laws were to be framed in such a way that it needed to make the least numbers of exceptions. Moreover, the area where exemptions were to be granted and exceptions were to be recognized was to be such that the state could identity it with the minimum effort possible. For instance, it was deliberated upon whether it was desirable to ban all uniforms worn by volunteer associations instead of confining the ban to only those that resembled military uniforms. The major advantage of this was that violations to the order could be proved very easily. However, this proposal was abandoned on the ground that this would have made it necessary to make a very large number of exemptions. Moreover, "it would... involve the collection of the names and details of all volunteer associations"[14], which was a difficult task, and ran against the principle of economizing administrative effort in implementing rules.

It was settled that as far as volunteer associations were concerned, while the ban would be on *activities*, the exemptions would be decided on grounds of *intention*. However, the planning of implementation of the rule betrayed a sense of caution. What becomes evident is that in its implementation, the ultimate objective of the colonial state was not directed towards making everyone conform strictly to the rule in every letter and spirit. Rather, the provincial governments were instructed to abstain from action in certain cases, even if the rules were violated by certain individuals or organizations. First, it was decided that once certain organizations flouted the rules against military drills and the wearing of uniforms similar to the ones worn by military authorities, action against the members of such organizations should follow in stages. The Government of India opined, "...a common policy should be adopted which preferably would aim... at the selection and prosecution of only the leaders or commanders of bodies of men who defy the orders."[15] The conference came to a consensus that the desirable course of action should proceed in three stages:

(a) arrests of individuals, preferably leaders...

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[14] Ibid

[15] Methods of Implementing the Policy, Memorandum on Volunteer Activities, ibid.

(b) dispersal of bodies acting in clear defiance of the orders after the arrest of individuals...

(c) declaring an association to be an unlawful association.[16]

On the whole, there was a consensus "that every attempt should be made to stop the practices prohibited by the orders by taking action against individuals before proceeding against the whole assembly or association."[17]

However, there were occasions when the Government of India thought that the provincial governments should simply ignore breaches of the orders. It pointed out that the provinces could ignore "*technical breaches* of the orders of small bodies of no particular importance...", the argument being, "It is obviously undesirable that the jails should be crowded out with large numbers of *cheap heroes*."[18] The Government of India summed up its position with a statement that was not only ambiguous, but embodied contradictory spirits in the same sentence: "The Government of India consider that the orders must be enforced impartially, although they would agree that unimportant bodies might be ignored, unless their activities became too blatant to be disregarded."[19]

This again brings the idea of 'economy of effort" to the forefront. But what is also evident here, is that implementation of policy was always to be seen as contingent upon circumstances, and thus was to be far more flexible, amenable to modifications in a way that enabled the government to achieve what it saw as the most desirable outcome in certain concrete circumstances. This was to be so even at the cost of tolerating violations of its regulations. In other words, implementation of the regimes of control of the colonial state had to be in accordance with what Michel Foucault calls 'governmentality'[20], the art of governing populations by certain tactics and strategies that could yield the best

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[16] Minutes on the Volunteer Question, ibid.

[17] Ibid

[18] Methods of implementing the policy, Memorandum on Volunteer Activities, ibid. Emphases mine.

[19] Ibid

[20] Mitchel Foucault, 'Governmentality', *op. cit.*

possible result in a given situation, rather than making the observance of its laws the sole concern of state authority. However, at least in theory, sovereign authority of the state, manifested in its assertion of impartiality and the principle of rule of law, had to be asserted. This was important even in a situation when the state had to admit the necessity of tolerating violations of its own laws for ensuring the best interests of the administration. It is in this spirit that the apparently contradictory tendencies in the statement of the Government of India, quoted above, needs to be understood. This makes it intelligible, perhaps, why in a single statement, the Government of India had to assert the principle of impartiality, admitting, at the same time, the desirability of compromising this very principle in case of "unimportant bodies" that might violate the rules.

Another agenda of the conference was to clear doubts of the provincial governments regarding the newly drafted Revolutionary Movement Ordinance. This once again shows that the colonial state was preparing itself for a mass movement for a long time, much before any actual movement started. Certain tendencies of policy formulation examined in the analysis of the issue of volunteer organizations, discussed above, was also present as an undercurrent in the deliberations on the implementation of the Ordinance. For instance, just as in the discussion on the volunteer organizations, the first agenda was to explain the rationality behind attempting to control certain activities of these organizations, deliberations on the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance started with providing a rationale for having the ordinance in the first place.

The discussions on the above issue show another aspect of implementation of war-time policies. War-time regulations that were meant for facilitating the prosecution of war-effort of the colonial state and accumulation of resources for the defence of empire were sought to be treated as a separate domain. As far as possible, these regulations were not to be applied in case of issues that were seen to be an internal problem of British India. The participants in the conference raised doubt whether there was at all a need for the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance, since technically all movements and oppositions to the government during the war could be tackled by implementing the provisions of the Defence of India Rules, which could also be supplemented by the ordinary provisions of law.

In fact, the clauses of Revolutionary Movement Ordinance were softer in the issue of detention of people for participation in a 'revolutionary movement' as compared to certain provisions of the Defence of India rules. Under the former ordinance, detention was limited to a period of only six months while, in case of the latter, people could be detained for an unlimited period of time.[21]

Government of India explained to the provincial governments that the assumption that the Defence of India Rules could be used to deal satisfactorily with a 'revolutionary movement' was not entirely correct, since "in the opinion of the Government of India and with special reference to the views likely to be held by His Majesty's Government, it would be wrong to use War Legislation to deal with an internal political situation once a movement of a revolutionary nature had come into existence."[22] Moreover, the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance contained certain additional powers, such as those with regard to the provisions for special courts and judicial procedures, which were not included in the Defence of India Rules. It was explained to the provinces that the former ordinance, "if not absolutely necessary, would certainly be very useful..."[23] When the provincial representatives asked whether they could at least supplement the provision of the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance with those of the Defence of India Rules, the Government of India of India observed, "...such a provision would be improper."[24] Even at a time when arbitrary executive power was being sought to be normalized in order to combat the problems arising out of a war-time emergency situation, 'propriety', at least in theory, was still not beyond consideration. However, as would be demonstrated shortly, actual implementation of legal procedures during a mass movement had very little regard for propriety.

Some of the provincial representatives pointed out that under the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance, the accused could be detained for only a

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[21] Minutes on Treatment of Security Prisoners, Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year-1940, NAI.

[22] Questions Relating to the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance, ibid.

[23] Ibid

[24] Ibid

period of six months, whereas under the Defence of India Rules, it was possible to detain people for an unlimited period of time, and thus, the latter was far more equipped to handle a mass movement. The Government of India told the provincial representatives that it was hoped "...either that the movement would be defeated within six months, or that those detained at the outset without trial would render themselves liable to conviction for some substantive offence very soon after their release."[25]

The Government of India was not in any less panic, however. It assured the provincial representatives that arrangements were already being made for making more room in the jails by removing the ordinary convicts so that the governments would not have any difficulty in making arrests under the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance. One could perhaps explain this sense of panic by the fact that during the war, the governments of all provinces were severely short of man-power for implementing policies. In fact, the Government of India advised the provincial representatives that in case they did not have sufficient police force to take immediate action, such as breaking up meetings where anti-government sentiments were being preached, it was desirable that they refrained from taking any action, lest the weaknesses of the government were exposed.[26]

The politics of detention:

The above sub-section tried to outline certain features of war-time decision making. This one attempts to study another issue discussed in the conference-treatment of security prisoners, and then examines a narrative of actual conditions prevailing in the jail where prisoners accused of participation in the Quit India Movement were detained. Thus, this sub-section hopes to compare the discussions around detention in anticipation of an anti-government mass movement with that of a narrative of actual detention when such a mass-movement finally began.

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[25] Ibid
[26] Memorandum in Policy in Regard to Arrests etc., Ibid.

Certain tendencies and characteristics of war-time policy formulation and guide-lines for their implementation outlined in case of deliberations around other issues also holds good in case of the discussions around security prisoners. In this issue as well, we find resonances of the attempts by the administrative apparatus to avoid judicial procedures during the war-time 'emergency'. Talking about those who were to be detained on charges of anti-government activities during the war, Government of India observed:

> There is little doubt that they could be tried and convicted for substantive offences, but in the circumstances of the war a large number of such trials would be administratively undesirable and Government (sic) are fully entitled to use the powers with which they... have provided themselves during the national emergency to detain them without trial.[27]

In was with regard to the policy for treatment of security prisoners that the Government of India as well as the provincial governments desired uniformity of action. One of the major objectives behind the Government of Bengal urging the Government of India to hold the conference was to ensure that the treatment sanctioned by the Government of Bengal for the security prisoners should not be hasher than that implemented by the other provincial governments, so that a sense of parity could be retained.[28] It was in order to secure uniformity of action in the different provinces that the Government of India formulated the 'model rules' for the newly opened detention camp at Deoli in the province of Ajmer-Merwara, and desired that all provinces should abide by the guiding principles encoded for the Deoli Detention Camp. The Home Department of the Government of India explained:

> They [Government of India] are most anxious to obtain the maximum degree of uniformity. So much importance do they attach to this principle of uniformity that, in the absence of

[27] Memorandum on Treatment of Security Prisoners, Ibid.

[28] Notes of the Home Department, dated 7.8.40. Ibid.

> agreement, it may be necessary to require Provincial Governments to adopt and apply to their Security Prisoners all the main principles of the Deoli Order.[29]

However, securing uniformity of action was no easy matter. During the discussion on this issue, representatives of the Government of Bengal explained the difficulty "of introducing any radically new system of treatment for persons detained without trial, in view of the long history behind the treatment of such persons in Bengal."[30] Yet, the Central Government hoped that "all Provincial Governments will agree that a very embarrassing state of affairs would arise if the conditions imposed on persons detained at Deoli were considerably stricter than those imposed on similar persons detained in a province, or if there were considerable differences between the treatment accorded as between one province and another."[31] Thus, they urged the provincial representatives to follow the centralized code framed for Deoli as far as possible.

This did not mean, however, that the Government of India did not allow any discretionary powers to the provincial governments or local authorities. In fact, in case of detention of prisoners, the Central Government vested the Superintendent of the prisons with enormous discretionary powers. These included powers to regulate communications to and from the prisoners, their interviews with outsiders, censorship powers over the letters sent to and by the prisoners, deciding on the kind of labour that was to be assigned to the different prisoners, punitive powers in case of violations of prison regulations and undisciplined behaviour of the prisoners, and in many other important areas. But what the Central Government wished to do, at least while formulating their policies, were to define precisely the areas where such discretionary powers would be allowed to be exercised by the Superintendent. Moreover, the discretionary powers were not to be unlimited, and these were to be subjected to a strict hierarchy of command, extending from the Superintendent to the Commissioner of Police, the Provincial

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[29] Memorandum on Treatment of Security Prisoners, ibid.

[30] Minutes on Treatment of Security Prisoners, Ibid.

[31] Memorandum on Treatment of Security Prisoners, ibid.

Government and finally the Central Government. For instance, provisions for the granting of interviews with the security prisoners laid out that application for interviews were to be made to the government[32] and the permit, if granted, were to be communicated to both the applicant and the Superintendent. However, even if such a permit was granted by the government, the Superintendent had the power not to allow the interview to take place, "on any particular day or for such period as he considers fit", because of special reasons." But such discretionary powers of the superintendent was delimited by the clause: "Provided that if his refusal extends to a period exceeding one month from the date on which he receives the permit he shall report his refusal and the reasons therefor (sic) to Government or officer granting the permit."[33]

Thus, in certain cases, the Superintendent was given discretionary powers to over-rule the decisions of the government for a certain period of time. Yet, he was obliged to provide an explanation to the government for doing so in case he exceeded the stipulated time for which he was granted a particular discretionary power.

In the jail:

Let me now turn to a narrative of jail custody by Tapan Raychaudhuri, the famous historian, in his *Bangal Nama*, which came out in a serialized form in the popular Bengali journal, *Desh*, during 2006 and 2007.[34] In this memoir, Raychaudhuri recounts his experiences of his days in prison when he was arrested because of participation in the Quit India Movement in 1942. He was still a minor when he participated in the movement as a fund-raiser in his home district of Barisal in Bengal.

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[32] Here 'government' meant the government ordering the detention of a particular security prisoner at the Deoli Camp, or the government of the province in case of other jails in the different provinces where the security prisoners were to be detained.

[33] Draft notification on the Treatment of Security Prisoners, Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, NAI.

[34] The work is now available in the form of a book: Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bangal Nama*, Ananda Publishers, Kolkata, May 2007.

Raychaudhuri tells us that when he was arrested in November 1942 from his home, he was first taken to the office of the Intelligence Department, and from there to the office of the Superintendent of Police. His father and elder brother were already arrested by then. The British police officer offered to let him go after making him sign a statement of regret. When he refused the offer, he was taken to police custody where he was accused of two offences: first, for involvement in destroying a telegraph post in some village, and second, for theft of telegraph wires and selling them in the black-market. Raychaudhuri explains, "actually such cases, which were sometimes true and sometimes false, were kept recorded in the police diaries. When somebody was arrested, some of these offences were labelled against them arbitrarily."[35]

Before proceeding with the narrative, let me go back once again to the discussions on the conference of 1940 at Simla. The Government of India proposed that security prisoners were to be divided into three classes- A, B, and C. These classifications were meant to provide guidelines for the differential treatment of the prisoners required depending on "the different circumstances of different individuals." The Central Government further explained, "What they [the classifications] are mainly concerned about is that the treatment of persons detained in custody should vary according to their status and mode of living in ordinary life."[36]

We can get a glimpse of what such classifications meant for the prisoners when people were actually arrested for participation in anti-government movements from Raychaudhuri's narrative of prison life in 1942:

> As an accused in the offences of cutting telegraph wires and stealing them, I was brought to the jail. There I discovered that in the matter of punishment, the British Government had not given up their class-consciousness. Prisoners were mainly of two classes- B

[35] Ibid, pp 104.

[36] Memorandum on Treatment of Security Prisoners, Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, NAI.

> and C. The C-class prisoners had to sleep on the floor with bed-bug infested blankets and had to eat inedible food.[37]

Raychaudhuri says that there was another class of prisoners as well, who belonged to class A. However, whether someone was to be admitted as an A-class prisoner depended completely upon the whims of the Superintendent of the jail. But the Superintendent very rarely demonstrated this generosity for fear of falling out of the favour of the higher authorities. He goes on:

> But the real mystery was in the basis of classifications. A and B class prisoners were those who stayed in brick-built ["pukka"] houses. And those unfortunate souls who used to live in houses made of mud, tin or bamboo-frames, for them there was the C-class... But in Barisal, even the poor were not accustomed to cohabiting with bed-bugs... Now, the real mystery... If the police did not know whether a prisoner or detainee was a resident of a "pukka" or "kaccha" [mud houses etc, those not made of bricks] house, the police was supposed to find out and report within seven days... my father, I and my brother used to live in the same house. And that the fact was unknown to the police, there are no reasons to believe so. But, in spite of this, my father was made an A-class prisoner the very day he was brought to the jail. It took one month for the police to discover where I lived. And the police was trying to frame a case of terrorist act against my brother. As a result, the police took six months to find out where he lived.[38]

The Memorandum relating to the security prisoners in the conference of 1940 explained:

> persons of this kind are not entitled to any <u>special</u> consideration while under detention... There need be no suggestion of harsh

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[37] Raychaudhuri, *Bangal Nama*, op. cit., pp 104.
[38] Ibid, p. 104-105.

> treatment or Nazi methods, but equally there are no reasons why persons of this kind described should enjoy, under detention, amenities or concerns greater than, or even equal to, those to which they are accustomed in ordinary life.[39]

When some of the provincial representatives protested that owing to the long tradition of treatment of prisoners without trial, and thus they needed more discretionary powers, the Government of India agreed on the condition, "there must be nothing in the way of pampering."[40]

From Raychaudhuri's account, we get an idea of what this lack of "pampering" meant:

> pulses (that is, water) and rice were given during the day, vegetables used to be served along with the pulses at night. Not with the pulses, but inside it— one big slice of bottle gourd[41] or giant gourd[42] per head, measuring around one "powa" each. This substance would never get boiled adequately. Thus no one could eat them...The first night in the jail was unforgettable... I got the first shock when food brought with it a foul smell. I was told what the matter was. Instead of buying rice for the prisoners from the market, it was cheaper to buy paddy and make rice from it, thus, that the jail authorities would choose the cheaper option is not unreasonable. But there was a problem because if the process of making boiled rice from the paddy by half-boiling it was unknown, then the boiled rice would get fermented and give out a foul odour even before it could be prepared from the boiled paddy. The rice that the C class prisoners were fed on was made from this

[39] Memorandum on the Treatment of Security Prisoners, Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, NAI.

[40] Minutes on Treatment of Security Prisoners, ibid.

[41] The Bengali word in the text is "lau", scientific name- *Lageneria siceraria.*

[42] The Bengali word is "chal kumro", scientific name- *Cucurbita maxima.*

> fermented paddy, which was inappropriate for feeding even cows and buffaloes, not to speak of human beings. Then, on the excuse of rice being scarce in the market, the practice of giving hand-made bread of unrefined flour was started at night. In any case, people of East Bengal cannot eat bread. On top of that, the bread was incomparable. After being served, the two pieces of bread had to be rubbed against each other for some time. Dust, sand, mud, various other minerals, would collect on the plate as a result of rubbing. After the rubbing episode would get over, the bread had to be washed very well in water. But nobody knew the technique of extracting the inedible matter that had already gone into the bread while it was being made. As a result, very few people had the capacity to consume the bread. According to the liberal jail regulations, C class prisoners were allotted one "powa"[43] of vegetables daily. The only substance would be arum[44], but, because of it, the pulses would also turn unfit for eating, the face and neck of whoever consumed it would immediately get swollen. Because of eating such inedible food, the C class prisoners would always suffer from stomach problems.[45]

Raychaudhuri describes the horrifying treatment that was arranged for the prisoners who suffered from diseases:

> And for these unfortunates [the C class prisoners], there were two fixed treatments. Castor oil for all stomach related diseases. And the only treatment for skin diseases consisted of rubbing that part of the body very well with coconut fibres and pouring mugs and mugs of iodine on it. For the fear of this hellish treatment, the

[43] "Powa" is a unit of measurement.

[44] The Bengali word for arum, as it appears in the text, is "kochu", scientific name- Arum maculatum.

[45] Raychaudhuri, *Bangal Nama*, op. cit., pp. 105.

> prisoners did not want to go to the hospital. Perhaps that was the objective of the treatment. And the kind of screams that would come daily from the hospital, perhaps such cannot be heard anywhere except in hell. A day's scene I cannot remove from my memory. I was myself in the hospital. I saw a naked man lying flat on the ground. Two huge men were holding him firmly. His body was terribly distorted because of the disease. But I saw that even on him, the same treatment of coconut fibres and iodine were being applied. I would not have believed the scene if I would not have seen it with my own eyes.[46]

The above sub-section tried to examine some discussions on the policy regarding the treatment of security prisoners in the early years of the war by high-level government officials in anticipation of a popular mass movement against war-effort. A comparison of such discussions at the level of policy-making with that of a narrative of the experience of an actual prisoner accused of participation in an actual anti-war movement some two years later reveals some of the stark contrasts between policy-formulation and their actual implementation. The point is not just to show how a policy translates into implementation in a concrete situation. Needless to say, the two years between the conference of 1940 and the Quit India Movement of 1942, there must have been other instances of discussions and policy-formulations regarding a probable mass movement. Rather, the objective was to demonstrate that, first, the government was not just considering the possibility of a mass movement much before any actual movement took place, but were working out the modalities of policy implementation in fairly minute detail; second, there was nothing radically inconsistent, at least in theory, between the actual prison narrative of 1942 and the discussions in 1940, in spite of the contrasts between the matter-of-fact tone of the discussions and the horror of the jail narrative. This sub-section may be concluded with a statement from Tapan Raychaudhuri himself, which, in spite of its exaggeration and nationalist overtones, does seem quite apt: "That nothing illegal

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[46] Ibid, pp.105-106.

could happen during British rule is known to everyone. All scoundrel-like activities used to be carried out according to law."[47]

Externing Subversion:

This section shall turn to another aspect of the preparation made by the colonial state in the initial years of the war for fore-stalling future movements in opposition to the war-effort. This involved the relocation of people with a history of anti-state activities to specific places in order to keep a close watch on their activities. Mostly this involved passing of orders externing people with 'suspicious characters and activities' to the province they actually hailed from. Again, this was a preventive measure in preparation for a possible movement in the future, and not a punitive action for a crime they had actually committed. This is done by examining in detail the case of two such "terrorists" who were externed to the province of Bengal.

Taking action on individuals, rather than on organizations or groups was a part of a general war-time policy of the colonial state. The conference of provincial representatives referred to in the above sections, for example, laid out that in cases of violations of government orders, action should first be taken upon individuals before proceeding to deal with whole organizations.[48] It is no surprise, therefore, that preventive action involved picking up of specific individuals with a history of anti-state activities and taking action against them, instead of banning organizations or associations with histories of subversive tendencies. It is in this context that the specific cases of the two individuals under discussion in this section have to be located.

The justifications for taking up the two specific cases discussed in this section, among admittedly many such cases, are quite a few. First, both these cases involved extra-provincial migrations prompted by the externment orders. This

[47] Raychaudhuri, *Bangal Nama*, op. cit., pp. 109.

[48] For instance, the Memorandum on Volunteer Activities says, "...the even more important problem [is that] of the stage at which an association should be declared unlawful. Clearly, this step should not be taken until it becomes apparent that action against individuals is producing no effect." Home-Political (I), File No.- 159/40 Poll(I), Year- 1940, NAI.

meant that there was involvement of multiple levels of the state machinery in these cases- the Government of India, the government of the province from which they were being externed. This provides us with rich insights into the functioning of colonial state-power at various levels and brings to the fore certain important aspects of inter-provincial and centre-province relations during the Second World War. Second, Bengal was the destination province to which the two individuals were externed, and thus the Government of Bengal was a key player in both these cases. This is important since Bengal is the specific area of focus in the following chapters and in the entire dissertation, generally. Finally, in these two cases, the implementations of the externment orders undergo multiple twists and turns, that give the opportunity to study, in some detail, the different concerns and practices of governmental power.

The narrative in this section is relevant in another sense as well. The colonial state, like most state-forms, had always shown a preference for settled communities and sedentized subjects and had displayed a certain degree of suspicion for and anxiety over floating or mobile populations. The desire to 'settle' population groups was rather intrinsic to the very logic of governance, as the very process rendered the population more legible, and thus amenable to a greater degree of state control. However, the governmental imperative of enhancing the readability and legibility of population groups does seem to have a specific history, for Michel Foucault locates it in the rise of modern states in eighteenth century Europe, with the emergence of the phenomenon called 'governmentality', prompted by the state's encounter with the historical process that transformed 'subjects' into 'populations' as the targets for the exercise of the 'art of government'.[49]

In any case, the 'processes' of sedentization did never involve any singular 'tactic' of governance. Rather, the desired outcome had been actualised by diverse and often diametrically opposite means. If the state had prevented migrations of populations when the latter had exhibited a willingness to do so, it had, at other times, prompted populations to move and migrate to specific locations where it

[49] Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', op. cit., pp. 201-222.

was desirable for them to settle. It is not surprising, then, that in the very process of rendering populations immobile, the state had promoted the mobility of population groups on a large scale. It is this history of state-sponsored movements and migrations of individuals and communities, initiated by the state's desire to render its subjects more legible, which also form the context in which the following case-studies may be located.

The section would concern itself with the case of two individuals- Surendra Nath Sarkel and Bijoy Krishna Pal, linked together through the history of a migration orchestrated by a crisis-stricken late colonial state, as the Second World War loomed large in the horizon of British India. We would first hear the stories of their individual lives, and the circumstances under which they finally did or did not decide to migrate. Next, through a critical engagement with these two specific cases, we would look at the questions of the 'economies' and 'languages' involved in governmental practices, and how they reshaped and restructured government attitudes and policies. Finally, from the large gamut of governmental practices at play, we would try to delineate the precise points and nodes at which colonial governmentality showed up its limits, and also the locations at which sovereignty was represented, articulated and asserted through and beyond the spheres of governmental power.

As the previous sections have shown, from the early years of the war itself, the colonial state was apprehensive of a mass movement that could disrupt the war-effort. Thus, by early 1940, the government wanted to bring all individuals, involved in any kind of anti-state activities at any point of time, under strict governmental surveillance. In this context, the Intelligence Bureau officials in Bengal proposed to the Centre that all individuals living outside Bengal, who had associated themselves with any "terrorist" activity in the past, as well as those who continued to do so, should be sent back to the province. The reason for this, as summed up by an official of the Home Department, is instructive. He pointed out, "Bengal I.B. thought it wiser to get a certain number of these Bengal terrorists moving about in various provinces return to Bengal so as to break up inter-provincial connections which will seriously risk the establishment of a

number of sources for the supply of arms."[50] The Central Government agreed to the proposal, but for a somewhat different reason. Their logic was simple, and it followed from a well-established bureaucratic axiom: "It is in everybody's interest that Bengal terrorists should be under the surveillance of the CID that knows them best."[51] It thus became important to determine who had the authority to pass the externment orders— the Central Government, the Government of Bengal or the government of the province from where the "terrorists" were to be externed.

In the beginning, the Government of Bengal thought that the provincial governments should pass laws to ensure that these "terrorists" returned to Bengal. Of course, the Defence of India Rules empowered the provinces to pass orders of internment or externment against individuals or groups. However, such orders could only apply to the jurisdictional limits of the provinces themselves. The implication of this was that if the "terrorists" were to be sent back to Bengal, the best that any provincial government could do was to pass an order externing such individuals from that province. This in no way ensured that after being externed from a particular province, the targeted individuals would actually return to their native province of Bengal. They could take refuge in another province, or worse still, take shelter in a princely state where enacting another externment order similar to that of the provinces would result in considerable delays. Thus, after some discussion[52], it was settled that the best solution was to have an order passed by the Central Government which could not just extern individuals from specific provinces, but could direct them to actually resettle themselves within the territorial limits of the province of Bengal.

Having thus settled the policy towards these "terrorists" from Bengal, the Government of India went on to enumerate the individuals who would be made the target of the proposed action, initially identifying fourteen individuals residing

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[50] Note in the Home Department, Government of India. Home-Political(I), 1940, F. no. 45/1/40-Poll(I), NAI.
[51] Note in the Home Department, Government of India. Ibid.
[52] Discussions are to be seen in several notes in the Home Department. The discussions on the implications of terrorists taking shelter in the Princely States are also discussed. Ibid.

in various parts of British India. The Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, S.H. Zaheer, informed the Provincial Governments:

> the Government of India have received information that the Anushilan Samiti of Bengal is extending its organisation to other parts of India through the agency of Bengal terrorists who are temporarily residing in other Provinces. The order to check subversive activities of this organisation and to keep its agents under close surveillance the Government of India consider it essential to restrict the terrorists in question to the Province of Bengal, and consider that it can most effectively be done by the issue of orders by the Central Government under... the Defence of India Rules...[53]

Two out of the three individuals, who form the protagonists of my story in this section belonged to this list of "terrorists" to be externed to the Province of Bengal.

The Sarkel Story

Our first story is about the case of Surendra Nath Sarkel, one such "terrorist" from Bengal, residing in the Central Provinces at the time an order was passed externing him back to the Province of Bengal. The official version of his past activities reads as follows:

> Many convictions for political dacoities, carrying arms, etc. Troublesome convict (Prisons Act conviction).
>
> Repatriated from the Andamans in December 1935 on medical grounds. One of the worst behaved of the terrorist prisoners in Bengal.

[53]The list of these individuals did not just include those associated with the activities of the Anushilan Samiti, however, for it involved others who were, or had been, a part of organisations such as Jugantar as well as various other Communist outfits. Letter from S.H Zaheer, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, Bihar, the U.P.and the Chief Commissioner of Delhi. Ibid.

> In January 1940 brought some communist literature from Calcutta to Benares.
>
> Engaged in Anushilan activities in Benares.
>
> Attended secret terrorist meetings at Ramgarh in March 1940...
>
> Opened a gymnasium in Benares, where Bengali boys received instructions in dagger and lathi play.
>
> Was organising a terrorist party in Benares.
>
> An unconfirmed report stated that Sarkel would visit Calcutta in order to bring revolvers from there to Benares...[54]

The crux of the matter was that he was a "dangerous terrorist" who could now act "in a manner prejudicial to the effective prosecution of the war, to the Defence of British India or to the public order".[55]

Evidently, neither the provincial governments consulted in this case nor the Central Government had a clear idea of Sarkel's whereabouts when the order was passed. The last time that the Government of India seems to have noted his activities was when he was at Benares, and thus, the text of the order described him as "usually resident in the United Provinces".[56] As a result, the order, which directed him to leave for Bengal within fifteen days of its issue on the 15 May, 1940, took nearly two months to reach him. When it finally did, the Government of India realised that Sarkel had previously been ordered to leave the United Provinces by the Provincial Government in the same month when the Central Government issued its order, and that he was currently an inmate of the Gandhian Ashram at Sevagram in the district of Wardha, Central Provinces.

Incidentally, on the 12 July, the day after the Central Government order was served on Sarkel, Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary and the in-charge of the Ashram at Sevagram petitioned the Government to re-think their decision, assuring them that Gandhi himself would stand as a guarantee for Sarkel's "good

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[54] Note by the D.I.B., ibid.

[55] Order passed by the Government of India, Home Department, on 15 May 1940 against Surendra Nath Sarkel, ibid.

[56] Ibid.

behaviour", if he was allowed to stay back in the Ashram. This letter led to a flurry of discussions in high bureaucratic circle as to whether the concession was to be granted in the case of Sarkel.

First, it was the Intelligence Bureau that weighed Sarkel's case. On the one hand, it recognised that if he was allowed to remain at Wardha, he would have little opportunity to carry on his "terrorist activities". On the other hand, it emphasised the fact that his personal history showed that "...he has been in the past a most dangerous terrorist" and that "periods of incarceration in the Andamans and the other jails have not been effective in changing his outlook or inducing him to sever his connections with the terrorist organization." The Home Department came up with two additional reasons why the Government should not alter their stand on Sarkel's case. First, they pointed out that the withdrawal of the order at that stage could fuel the indignation of the Bengal IB, upon whose request the policy of externing Bengal terrorists to the province of Bengal was agreed to by the Government of India in the first place, and who had an interest in having the externment order carried out. Second, it was argued that any reconsideration would result in attesting to an exeptionalism that would be untenable on grounds of legality. Thus, in the beginning, Government opinion was largely against granting any concession on the merits of Sarkel's individual case.

Soon, however, the Government found out that granting of concessions to "terrorists" on the strength of Gandhi's assurance was not without legal precedence. In the case of one Prithvi Singh, "an ex-Communist and terrorist of Punjab", certain concessions, were given upon Gandhi's assurance. When this case came to light, the opinion of the Government of India began to change. On the 26 August, the Government of India formally replaced the earlier order with one that instructed him to "remain in the village of Sewagram (Wardha District, Central Provinces) until further orders.[57] The extent of concessions went further. When Mahadev Desai wrote to the Government again, requesting the latter to permit Sarkel to visit the town of Wardha from time to time for making purchases

[57] Order dated 26 August 1940 by Government of India, Home Department, signed by R. Tottenham. Ibid.

for the Ashram, the Government amended the order in accordance with Desai's request.[58]

For almost a whole year since the episode began, things seemed quite settled when suddenly on the 5 May 1941, Surendra Nath Sarkel himself wrote to the Government asking for the withdrawal of all Government regulations on his mobility. He pleaded, "I want only one chance and take an oath, that I do not join any political movement and I do not go against the state of India whether it will be violence or non-violence...I wish to live and make two ends meet peacefully." This petition, unlike the earlier ones made on his behalf by Mr. Desai, did not even generate a debate. The Government dismissed it without a second thought, with the statement, "He asks for the removal of the restriction orders against him on his own personal assurances of good behaviour, but without the backing of Mr. Gandhi... his request cannot be entertained."[59]

Sarkel's story does not end here, and we shall come back to it shortly. But now, the other case may be focussed upon.

The Case of Bijoy Krishna Pal

The other case was that of Bijoy Krishna Pal, another Bengal "terrorist" who was also identified as one of the targets of the Central Government order of externment to the Province of Bengal. An order similar to that of Sarkel's was passed against Pal on the same day the order against Sarkel was passed. Like Sarkel, he was described as "usually resident in the United Provinces" and asked to return to Bengal by 1 June 1940.[60]

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[58] Order of 20 September, 1940 , Government of India, Home Department.Signed by R. Tottenham. Ibid.

[59] Note in the Home Department, Government of India, dated 20.5.41. Ibid.

[60] Order against Bijoy Krishna Pal passed by the Government of India, Home Department, dated 15 May 1940. Ibid.

Unlike Sarkel, it took the Government nearly two years to track him down, and when they finally did, by March 1942, he was found to be working in a Calcutta based company, called Calcutta Pharmacy, in the city of Delhi. Thus, a fresh order of externment was passed on 26 March 1942, and served upon Pal on 4 April. However, within a week, the Central Government received a petition from Pal himself, addressed to the Home Department through the Superintendent of Police and forwarded by Nalini R. Sarkar, then a member of Council for Education, Health and Lands of the Government of India. Sarkar wrote to Maxwell, a high-ranking official in the Home Department, requesting him to reconsider the case against Pal, adding, "Young men from Bengal often come to me to relate to me their tales of woe. But I have no alternative but to trouble you in turn. I hope, however, you don't mind."[61] Sarker made it very clear that he had no personal knowledge of Bijoy Krishna Pal's activities; neither was he asking the Government of India to reconsider his case on his personal security. He was merely forwarding Pal's own petition to be considered by the government. Pal wrote in his petition:

> I beg to state that I was externed from several districts of Bengal on the 26th January 1938 and after long efforts I secured a job in Delhi and took service for earning a livelihood for myself and my poor dependent family. Now I am ordered to leave this place also which involves my giving off my job and thus deprives me of livelihood...It is impossible for me to go to any of the districts of Bengal where I am permitted to go and earn for supporting myself and dependents while I challenged the validity of the order passed against me. Request that a suitable allowance be granted to me for supporting myself and dependents...[62]

Pal's petition fell on deaf years. The Government of India did not even bother to examine whether his claim that he had externment orders passed against him in Bengal was valid. Moreover, the Central Government did not see any reason why their externment order cannot be obeyed by Pal, since he could go to those

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[61] Letter from Nalini. R Sarkar to Maxwell, dated April 10, 1942. Ibid.
[62] Letter of Bijoy Krishna Pal forwarded by Nalini R. Sarkar to Maxwell. Ibid.

districts of Bengal from where he was not externed. On 11 April, the day within which Pal was ordered to reach Bengal, the police found out that he was still in Delhi. He was immediately arrested, and on 23 April, brought before the Court of the Additional District Magistrate in Delhi. It is through the statements made by Pal that we get a glimpse of his past:

> I. That in 1930 I joined the Congress Civil Disobedience Movement at Howrah and was imprisoned several times as a Congress Worker. Since November, 1937 I have been externed from Bengal under the orders of the Bengal Government. Having been externed I went to Benares (U.P.), but in 1940 was externed from there also.
>
> II. During the last individual Civil Disobedience Movement I was not allowed to offer Satyagraha by Mahatmaji as I had financial obligations.
>
> III. In June 1941 I took up appointment as a representative of Messrs. B.K. Paul & Co., Delhi Branch and has been carrying on my ordinary occupation as a peaceful citizen; but the powers that be, could not leave me at that. On the 4th April 1942 I received an order from the Central Government which is now the subject of charge.[63]

Having thus outlined his past activities, Pal went on to make a few statements further, which eventually turned the table in his favour and put the Government on the back-foot. He told the Court:

> By the order of the Central Government... dated 26th March 1942 I have now been asked to remain within the Province of Bengal, a condition that is impossible to be fulfilled, because the moment I touch the boundary of the Bengal Province I am liable to be arrested and convicted for the disobedience of an order which has

[63] Written statement of Bijoy Krishna Pal in the court of the Additional District Magistrate, date of hearing 23 April 1942, Ibid.

> been served on me on the 26th January 1938. In fact I am liable to be arrested if I pass through any of the District of U.P.
> That the order of the Central Government is vague, ultra-vires and incapable of execution...[64]

The Court directed the Home Department of the Government of India to file their replies to certain specific question. The Court asked:

> Did you receive the original of this [Pal's] representation?...Did you acknowledge receipt or send any reply to Bijoy Krishna Pal direct or through the Supdt., C.I.D., Delhi? If so please produce a copy of your reply... Were you aware at the time that B.K. Pal had already been externed from Bengal and U.P. under the orders of the two Governments... Did it ever strike you that the order of the Central Government was incapable of execution unless the order of the two Provincial Governments were defied...[65]

The Government soon began to regret their decision of bringing Pal before the Court. Within official circles, the Government began to admit that the failure to take into account the orders of restriction already imposed upon Pal by the Provincial Governments of United Provinces and Bengal was a "bad omission", and that, "there seems remarkably little point in continuing with the prosecution."[66] Another official of the Home Department observed, "If an order is really in existence prohibiting Bijoy Krishna Pal from entering the United Provinces, he has been very sly, as... he made no reference to any such order in his representation of the 5th April."[67]

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Proceedings of the case in the Court of the Additional District Magistrate, Delhi. Ibid.

[66] Note in the Home Department by Olver, dated 6.5.42. Ibid.

[67] Letter to E. Conran Smith, dated 2 May 1942. Ibid.

The Government of India made enquiries from the Government of UP and Bengal, and found out that though Pal was externed from only a few districts of Bengal, an order was indeed in place that would have amounted to a criminal offence had he tried crossing the United Provinces. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi, while agreeing to the futility of proceeding with the case, wondered "whether it will not be letting him down too lightly, after his deliberate defiance of the Central Government order, if the criminal court proceedings are dropped and the restriction order withdrawn." But the Home Department thought that granting certain concessions was better than facing a legal embarrassment. Accordingly, with the permission of the Government of Bengal and the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, the Central Government finally cancelled the order of externment to Bengal by passing a fresh order directing Pal to remain within the jurisdictional limits of the Delhi Municipal Committee with the additional caveat that he was to report to the officer-in-charge of the Sadar Bazaar Police Station every Wednesday and Saturday "between the hours of sunrise and sunset."[68]

When the Government officials thought that they had put the matter to rest once and for all, they received another petition from Bijoy Krishna, this time filed through a lawyer by the name of Jugal Kishore Khanna. He began with the statement, "...on my release I found myself in a bigger jail, namely the limits of the Delhi Municipal Committee." The essence of the letter was that upon his release from jail he realised that the Company he was working for had dismissed him from service for the fear of attracting police attention, and thus he was presently without employment. He wrote:

> Your last order requires, among other things that I should reside and remain within the limits of the Delhi Municipal Committee. That means I cannot leave Delhi, but at the same time being unemployed I find unable to maintain myself. I am now in a dilemma what to do. May I know if the Central Government is prepared to pay for my maintainance [sic] till such times at least as

[68] Order passed by the Government of India, Home Department, dated 6 June 1942. Ibid.

> I find myself unable to keep my body and soul together, or allow me to leave to my home district.[69]

The Government of India was prompt in coming to a conclusion: "There is no question of the Government of India paying this man a maintenance allowance. We are inclined on the whole to think that the best solution will be for him to return, as he himself suggests, to his home in Bengal and we are prepared to put this matter to the Bengal Government."[70]

One problem still remained unresolved. The railway-line that connected Delhi to Calcutta passed, as it still does, through the United Provinces. If he was to go back to Bengal, Bijoy Krishna had to pass through a territory he was forbidden to enter. Hence, the Central Government asked the United Provinces to modify their order so that Pal could pass through the Province on his way home. The Government of the United Provinces agreed to let him pass through their territory "provided he does not leave the railway limits during the journey."[71] Finally the Central Government passed an order enabling Pal to leave for Bengal on 1 September 1942[72], and he eventually left for home on the 12th of the same month.[73]

Having narrated the two cases, it is important to examine what these reveal about the practices of state-control. In each of these cases, the aim of the policy proposed by the Bengal I.B. and agreed to by the Home Department of the Government of India, that is, the desire to extern the Bengal "terrorists" back to their own province, were mediated by certain specific interventions, that often led the Government to rethink strategies. Surendra Nath Sarkel, who was to be externed from the Central Provinces to Bengal, ultimately managed to influence Government policy in such a way that the colonial state ultimately relinquished their objective, rethought their strategy and finally allowed him to stay back at

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[69] Petition from Bijoy Krishna Pal, dated 18 June 1942. Ibid.
[70] Letter from V. Sahay to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi, dated 2 July 1942. Ibid.
[71] Letter from the Civil Secretariat, United Provinces to Vishnu Sahay, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India. Ibid.
[72] Order oassed by the Government of India, Home Department, on 1 September 1942. Ibid.
[73] Letter from A.V. Askwith, Chief Commissioner, Delhi to Vishnu Sahay, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India. Ibid.

Wardha. In case of Bijoy Krishna Pal, the Government agreed to let him stay back in Delhi in spite of the initial initiative of the Government to send him back to Bengal. Again later, when he wanted to go back to Bengal, the Government of India agreed to let him do so by inducing the Government of United Provinces to make certain concessions. Of course, this does not mean that the general policy of the Government to send back "terrorists" to their Province of their origin always met with failure. There were many others who were indeed compelled to obey the Government order.[74] However, if the Government decided otherwise in the case of the two individuals whose cases have been narrated above, it begs the question as to what led the Government to agree to do so. The next sub-section concerns itself with exploring the circumstances and patterns of intervention that rendered the Central Government policy permeable to a certain degree of rethinking and reconsideration of the initiative.

The Logic of Governmentality

When a policy was adopted, encoded and enforced as an ordinance, it acquired the force of law, the violation of which amounted to a criminal act punishable by law. However, the very policy that was executed as a bureaucratic order was itself contingent upon the specificities of the situation. In other words, it was under a specific circumstance that the Government of Bengal and the Central Government thought it desirable that the Bengal "terrorists" should be sent back to Bengal. For instance, if the Government of Bengal thought that, under a specific situation, it would be too dangerous to have the "terrorists" residing within Bengal, they could have pursued the very opposite policy of flushing out such "terrorists" from the Province. Thus, what mattered to the Government was not the externment of the individuals per se, but to render them harmless, so that they could not interfere with the war effort, or cause any trouble in the successful execution of other war-time policies of the colonial state. Thus, it can be argued that the task of the law passed against these "terrorists" was not merely to ensure their obedience to the law, but to achieve a particular aim, a larger objective of the smooth functioning

[74] There are several cases of externment that are successfully implemented during this time. See, for instance, the following files of the Home-Political files at the National Archives of India: File No.75/1/41-Poll(I), F. No. 75/21/41-Poll(I)

of the government policies and initiatives, in this case, the effective perusals of the war effort. This transformation of the function of law as the means to ensure conformity to the law itself, into law as the instrument by which the Government tries to achieve a specific end (and this end may be multiple and vary from case to case basis) is what Michel Foucault refers to as the genesis of a phenomenon called "governmentality", where law becomes the techniques and tactics to be utilised by the Government in order to achieve specific aims. This, for Foucault, is a typical characteristic of the 'modern' state.[75] This insight might help us understand why the Government was willing to give certain concessions to the two individuals in the two cases studied above. What was important for the Government was not their successful externment to Bengal, but to render them harmless, make them impotent, so that they did not form a barrier to the perusal of the Government's war aims. As long as this could be ensured even without attaining the immediate aim of the order, that is, their externment to Bengal, the government was satisfied.

The argument may be pushed a little further. It is possible to argue that the fulfilment of the condition outlined above, which could induce the Government to rethink their decisions, was a necessary condition but not a sufficient one. In order to understand why concessions were made in the two specific cases, two concepts may be useful— the 'economy' of governmentality and the 'language' of governmentality.

Foucault points out that the question of economy is central to the problematic of governmentality. He argues that governmentality could flourish only in a situation when 'political economy' emerged as a distinct field of intervention upon which governmental power could be played out. In fact, the central issue of governmentality, according to him, is the introduction of 'economy' into political practice.[76] In our specific cases, the ultimate aim of the order was to fulfil its objective in the most 'economical' way, that is, in such a way that the aim of the order was secured with the application of the minimum effort possible. Thus the reason why, rather than forcing Surendra Nath Sarkel to return to Bengal, he was

[75] Foucault, 'Governmentality', op. cit.
[76] Ibid, pp. 207-209

allowed to remain in the Sevagram Ashram was because the Government felt that he would be under more effective surveillance in the Ashram than in Bengal. Moreover, in Bengal, it would be the task of the Government of Bengal and the Bengal I.B. to keep him under supervision and see to it that he does not violate the law. On the other hand, if Gandhi himself agreed to ensure that Sarkel would not carry out anti-state activities, the Government would be freed from the task of keeping Sarkel under constant surveillance. Thus, the end of the Government of India's order could be achieved with the minimum of effort. The logic of governmentality is to govern in a way that is least expensive, by spending as little money as possible. Thus, when Bijoy Krishna Pal was allowed to go back to Bengal after the original order of externment to Bengal was cancelled was because the only other alternative was to pay him a maintenance allowance. Sending him back to Bengal did involve a lot of paper-work, a lot of correspondences and negotiations within government circles. Yet, the Government of India was prepared to take the trouble precisely because it was expensive to keep him in Delhi. Letting him go back would have involved less expenditure.

The economy of governmentality, then, provides some understandings of the colonial state's logic of when concessions to the observation of its laws could or could not be granted. But the question still remains regarding the nature of interventions that actually made the state perceive the benefits of making concession. This happened, it may be argued, through the very language in which the interventions were framed, a language that struck a resonance with the logic of the state itself.

The petition filed by Madadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, on behalf of Surndra Nath Sarkel may be taken as a case in point.[77] A careful examination of the letter reveals certain conscious strategies of narration and some specific kinds of articulations, which were crucial for persuading the government officials. Desai first projected Ashram life as a moral influence on Surendra Nath Sarkel that was capable of transforming his inner criminal self, making him rethink his beliefs and

[77] Letter from Mahadev Desai to Reginald, dated 12.7.40. Home-Political, 1940, F. No. 45/1/40-Poll(I)

reorganising his life on the path of a moral existence. He wrote, "His life here is exemplary. He passes his day in the Ashram activities- sanitation, spinning etc... he has discarded his belief in violence or revolutionary activities and wants to spend sufficient time here in order to qualify himself for quiet work in villages." Then, he further added, "So far as the object of internment is concerned , his remaining here should be the safest thing... I am sure you will be taking no risk in allowing him to remain here. It means his virtual internment here." At the end, he virtually sealed the deal by throwing Gandhi's personal weight behind Sarkel. Thus, what Mr. Desai was successful in doing was to speak in the 'language' of governmentality itself that immediately struck a chord with the logic of governance. The intention of the Government order was to render Sarkel incapable of anti-state activities. What better way could there be than the inner moral transformation of the man himself? This, Desai stated, was not something that he hoped would happen to Sarkel, but asserted that he was already morally transformed, immediately reducing the perception of threat the Government had from Sarkel. Second, the specific aim of the order was to restrict Sarkel's mobility. Even this condition, Desai demonstrated, would be fulfilled if he was allowed to stay back in the Ashram. Lastly, in case the Government thought that a possibility of granting concessions existed, the Government would want to know who could be held responsible if something went wrong. Desai realised that nothing could satisfy the Government more than the guarantee from Gandhi himself. Thus, it was the narrative strategy itself that could induce the state to rethink its policies. And this was exactly what happened. The order against Sarkel, externing him to Bengal was withdrawn. On the other hand, Nalini Sarkar who petitioned on behalf of Bijoy Krishna Pal[78] merely requested the Government to see whether anything could be done to help "the young man", and made it clear that Pal was a stranger to him who had come for help. With this was attached Pal's own petition, which, on its own, had little merit considering that Pal himself was a "terrorist" in the eyes of the state. Thus, we find that the Government paid no heed to Pal's initial petition for the withdrawal of the externment order against him.

[78] Letter from *Nalini R. Sarkar* to *Maxwell*, dated 10 April, 1942. Ibid.

Even when the externment orders of the Government of India could not be implemented, the main objective of the Government, of eliminating the perception of threat from the "terrorists" was realized. At this point, it is perhaps pertinent to ask whether governmentality had its limits. Answering this question, however, in my argument, would require the elaboration of the concept of sovereignty.

Foucault argues that in pre-modern times, sovereignty was inseparable from the law. Sovereignty aimed at making subjects obey the laws of the sovereign. Since the sovereign was the personification of law, the task of sovereignty was the exercise of sovereignty itself and its end constituted in ensuring submission to itself. Governmentality of the modern state, on the other hand, has multiple aims and targets, and in this, laws become the means, the techniques, through which such ends were supposed to be realised. However, with the birth of the modern state, Foucault argues, sovereignty did not get obliterated. On the other hand, the need for assertion of sovereign power became more acute than ever, attempting to find its location within the juridico-legal system of the modern state.[79]

In this sub-section, the intrinsic relationship that existed between sovereignty and the limits of governmentality of the colonial state will be examined. For this, the rest of the case of Surendra Nath Sarkel may be looked at. We have already seen that Sarkel had himself written to the Government of India on 5 May 1941 requesting for the withdrawal of the Central Government order restricting him to Wardha. The letter finally reached the Government on 9 May and till the 20th of the same month the Government was debating whether to grant his request.

In the meantime, we find Desai writing to the Government on 14 May informing them that Sarkel had run away from the Ashram on the 9th, that is, the same day his petition reached the Government. He had, however, left behind a note for Gandhi that Desai translates to the Government. It read:

> Revered Bapuji – I shall let you know later why I am leaving and why I have gone away with Ashram money. Until you hear from

[79] Foucault, *'Governmentality'*, pp. 210-215.

> me – I promise to write within a fortnight – please do not judge me wrongly. My head is not all right. My thought change from minute to minute. I have in my possession potassium cyanide to help me to put an end to my life should I decide to do so. Your unfortunate Surendranath Sarkel.[80]

Further enquiry revealed that he had been worried since the departure from Sevagram of a girl named Ava, who, together with the father, Amrit Lal, had been expelled from the Ashram.[81]

The Central Government was now clear about what they ought to do next. They asked the governments of the provinces where Sarkel could have probably gone to keep a look out for him. On 25 August 1941, Sarkel was arrested in Gonda, United Provinces[82] and on 17 November he was sentenced to four years of rigorous imprisonment at Wardha.[83]

It may be argued that in this case, sovereignty can be located precisely where governmentality showed up its limits. As long as Sarkel was operating within the framework set by the tactics of governance, the Government was ready to make concessions and adjustments from time to time. But once Sarkel defied the boundaries set by governmentality, he could no longer be confined within the parameters of it. And precisely it was where governmentality reached its limits that the state demonstrated its authority through the assertion of sovereignty. Of course, Foucault has himself shown how the prison itself was a site of governmental power. However, what happened after he was sentenced to jail inside the prison is not of concern. The very act of arresting Sarkel, bringing him

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[80] Letter from Mahadev Desai to Reginald, dated 14.5.41. Home-Political, 1940, F. No. 45/1/40-Poll(I)

[81] Letter from K.Radhakrishnan, nder Secretary to the Government, Central Provinces and Bihar, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated 20 May 1941. Ibid.

[82] Letter from M.J.K. Sullivan, Under Secretary to the Government, Central Provinces and Berar to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated 13 September 1941. Ibid.

[83] T.C.S. Jayaratnam, Secretary to Government, Central Provinces and Berar to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated 27 November 1941. Ibid.

to a judicial trial, forcing him to obey the state by the very act of imprisoning him, constitutes an assertion of sovereignty.

The aims of the last few sections was to see how the cases of Surendra Nath Sarkel and Bijoy Krishna Pal, could be historically situated within the specific context of a set of governmental practices of a colonial state in a time of intense crises; the essay also intended to understand and flesh out the pressures and pulls around which the colonial state had to function, constantly negotiating with its own aims and objectives, its own understandings of situations as well as certain kinds of interventions and influences from outside. Through a dialogue with Michel Foucault's formulations of the idea of governmentality, it was intended to demonstrate that though the colonial state may not have been a monolithic structure where every official or every wing of the Government spoke in identical voices, yet there were certain commonalities of concerns, and coherence of practices that originated from certain shared notions and techniques of an 'art' of government. Again, these governmental practices were amenable to modifications and permeable to a certain level of rethinking and reformulation at the level of policies, when interventions could be articulated in a language that could resonate precisely with this shared 'logic' of governance. Moreover, though governmantality had its own logic, the policies formulated on the basis of this logic had its limitations, and sovereignty, both as a set of concrete decisions and actions on the part of the Government and as a symbol of ultimate state-power never lost its significance in this practice of governance.

Chapter 2: War Rumours in Calcutta

This chapter examines certain information circulating in Calcutta[1] during the Second World War that the colonial state classified as 'war rumours'. It explores the nature of these 'rumours' as well as the ways in which the government, predominantly the Calcutta Police, sought to bring them under control.

Indivar Kamtekar, in his article 'The Shiver of 1942', gives an almost eulogistic account of Lefebvre's achievement in tracking the rumours that swept the French countryside during the Revolotion.[2] Kamtekar writes, "no matter how mistaken they [the rumours] were, he [Lefebvre] focused unwaveringly on what the *people* [3] thought was happening. He showed how the conviction that brigands were approaching travelled from place to place, identifying many of the people who unwittingly couriered it, giving the rumour dates of arrival in different places, and estimating the speed with which it travelled." In a self–critical mood, Kamtekar observes, "This article has sketched, or scratched the surface, of one Indian fear.[4] Quite obviously, Lefebvre's masterly precision has never been neared." He concludes with the hope, "Perhaps it emerges, however, that the building blocks are not lacking in the data on modern Indian history. Someone may yet use them."

The present chapter draws inspiration from both Kamtekar's hope as well as Lefebvre's scholarship. Yet the approach that it adopts is somewhat different. As is evident from Kamtekar's view, he considers 'rumour' as an index for mapping popular consciousness, something that the historian may profitably study and use

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[1] Though the city is presently called 'Kolkata', I shall retain the older name 'Calcutta' because throughout the period under consideration in this chapter and until a few years ago the city was known by the latter name.

[2] Kamtekar is referring to Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*.

[3] Emphasis mine.

[4] Kamtekar's, article deals with certain rumours floating across different parts of British India during the Second World Was.

in order to go beyond what 'actually happened' and explore "what the *people*[5] thought was happening", and perhaps enable the historian to reconstruct a 'popular history' of a historical event or phenomenon. On the other hand, this chapter hopes to go beyond the idea of 'rumour' as a mere manifestation of fears and anxieties in people's minds and attempt to understand how, in the imagination of at least certain sections of the colonial bureaucracy in British India, and, more specifically in this context, certain sections of the city administration in Calcutta, during the Second World War, the category of "War Rumour" itself comes into being. The contention of this chapter is that this category emerges through the *practice* of handling, classifying and categorizing certain kinds of information circulating during this time, getting defined and redefined in the process, over a certain period of time. The definition of 'rumour' was not pre-given or pre-determined, and thus what amounted to a 'rumour' was under constant debate.

Even though there was no accepted definition or even conception of what constituted a 'rumour', it is possible to delineate some of the basic features that dominated the understanding of 'rumour' shared across a wide spectrum of the bureaucratic apparatus. With the beginning of the war, the colonial state encountered various challenges to its War Effort. A careful scrutiny of the police archive reveals that during the initial phase of the war, till around the 1940, any piece of information that was anti-war in spirit was classified as 'War propaganda'. From late 1940 certain kinds of information, previously categorized as 'propaganda', were thought to be pushing the boundaries of this category itself. And thus was coined a new term called 'war rumour'. It is through a careful examination of what got classified as 'rumour' and what was retained as 'propaganda' in the process of archiving that makes it possible to arrive at some idea of the basic features of 'rumours' that determined the process of classification. This chapter, in a sense, tries to captures this very process in some

[5] Emphasis mine.

detail: the emergence and crystallization of "war rumour" as a bureaucratic and administrative category.

Some of the salient features on the basis of which the colonial state seemed to have classified certain kinds of information as 'rumour' may be spelt out. What seemed to distinguished 'rumour' from 'propaganda' in the understanding of the government was its very elusiveness. Propaganda was seen as a circulating piece of information that explicitly recognized the 'propagandist', an individual, a group or an organization, who was responsible for producing the information; or, at least, the information could be traced to the propagandist, directly, with the minimum of effort. Moreover, propaganda was thought to have a pre-determined target audience (either explicitly recognized in the propaganda itself, or can be easily imagined with a certain degree of precision). Thus the individual, group, or organization which was propagating the information or view-point, did not put much effort in hiding his/her identity, for he/she wanted its target audience to know by whom the propaganda was being produced or where it was originating from. On the other hand, 'rumour' was conceptualized as information without any clear, pre-determined objective, except that of causing panic and confusion. Second, a 'rumour', as evident from government sources, was necessarily 'false' information, or information twisted in a way that completely distorted the truth. Third, the producer of the information that circulated as a 'rumour' remained concealed and undisclosed. Neither could the 'rumour' be traced to its producer in any direct and definite way. This was precisely what made the state uncomfortable, for the inability to fix responsibility on a specific individual or group of individuals also meant that it lacked the 'object' on which it could exercise its control regimes or impose its laws. Finally, a rumour was characterized by the absence of a specific pre-meditated consumer or an audience, and thus it could float across a heterogeneous terrain, sometimes cutting across identities of class, gender, community etc.

By the term 'rumour', then, I mean information that were categorized as 'War rumour' by the colonial state during the Second World War, and remains categorized in the same way in the colonial archive.[6] This naturally means that I do not completely and uncritically share the views that emerge from this archive. For instance, I do not pre-suppose that every 'rumour' was false. Yet for the sake of convenience, I shall use the term without quotation marks in the rest of the chapter.

This chapter shall begin with an exploration of the rumours that were in circulation in Calcutta from the 1940s. This would be followed by looking at the difficulties faced by the government in investigating cases of alarmist rumours spreading in the city by focusing on one case study. The second section shall explore some of the fears and anxieties that the rumours generated and the ways in which these affected the day to day lives of people of the city. The final section would focus on the ways in which the colonial government, especially the city police, tackled the problem of bringing rumours under control.

The Japanese at the Horizons of Calcutta:

The first section shall start with a general survey of the nature of rumours circulating in the city of Calcutta, followed by two narratives of incidents recorded by the Special Branch of Calcutta Police that caused a disruption of the normal daily life and activities of some of the city's residents. Interrogation of the narratives would disclose many of the assumptions that defined a rumour for the government and the kind of challenges that it threw up for the administration. The

[6] The archive from which this chapter derives its material, as will become evident subsequently, comes from the records of the Sprecial Branch, Calcutta Police. But the understanding of 'rumour' as a category is derived from the Calcutta Police in its interaction with the state-level and national level bureaucracy. Thus there are reasons to believe that the views of the officers of Calcutta Police were shared by a larger cross-section of the colonial bureaucracy.

section would end with an effort to grasp some of the ways in which the Second World War affected the daily lives of a wide section of the city's population, and how that determined some of their concerns, actions and beliefs.

Let me begin with an attempt to give a sense of the nature of rumours that were in circulation as the Japanese forces came closer to the borders of British India, and a Japanese attack of India became imminent. There were, mainly, two kinds of rumours concerning the relationships between the Indians, the Japanese Forces and the British colonial state in India. The two general ideas that the Calcutta Police thought were being circulated by these rumours were that the Japanese were kind and generous towards the Indians, and that certain sections of the Indian population had already started collaborating with the Japanese, facilitating a Japanese invasion, and preparing themselves for a change in the government regime. The nature of rumours that projected the Japanese as benevolent towards Indians, at least more generous than the British Government, may be surveyed first.

On 17.2.42 the police noted that there was a rumour in Calcutta that the Japanese were treating the Indians very kindly and even helping them with money. The Japanese apparently looted a Post Office in Burma. The Post Master, who was an Indian, got scared and hid under the table. The Japanese realized this, and they dragged him out of his hiding and asked whether he was pro-British. When the Post Master answered in the negative, he was immediately paid some money by the Japanese soldiers and was allowed to go. This, according to the rumour, was not a one-off incident, and whenever the Japanese soldiers caught hold of Indians, they asked them whether they were "Gandhi-man" or "Bose-man". If those Indians said that they were the followers of either Gandhi or Subhas Bose, they were paid money and allowed to continue their vocations peacefully.[7]

[7] Memorandum on 17.2.42, records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No. File No.- P.M./757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

On the same day was reported another rumour that after the conquest of Penang, a Bengali barrister was made the Governor of Penang by the Japanese. In certain quarters it was believed that the new Governor was a Madrasi.[8]

There was another rumour reported on the 24 February, 1942 that a Bengali doctor, who was the in-charge of a hospital at Moulmein had come back as an evacuee to Calcutta after it was occupied by the Japanese. After the Imperial troops had withdrawn from Moulmein, some Japanese troops entered the hospital when he was on duty and bayoneted some wounded British soldiers and killed them outright. However, they did no injury to the wounded Indian soldiers.

To this act of barbarism, the doctor protested. The Japanese Officer-in-Charge of the Squad told the doctor that no harm was done to the Indian wounded personnel and that it was not his concern to protest against the ill-treatment of the white troops. Thereafter, the doctor was paid some passage money and given a pass to leave Moulmein.[9]

The Japanese were not always tolerant of protests from Indians in the case of brutalities perpetrated on British soldiers. According to a rumour in South Calcutta, the Japanese once surrounded a Military Hospital in Lower Burma and ordered an Indian doctor to shoot all the 150 British patients admitted there. On refusal the Indian doctor was kicked by the Japanese with such violence that he lost several teeth. Later, the Japanese soldiers killed all the wounded British soldiers with revolvers.[10]

On the whole, the Japanese were thought to be good, and sometimes even benevolent towards the Indians, provided they were not loyal to the British, and provided they did not resist the treatment meted out by the Japanese soldiers

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Note on War Rumours on 24.2.42, *ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

towards the British. It was not doubted that the Japanese were brutal. But their brutality was not directed towards the Indians and that the ability of the Japanese to actually practice this brutality on the British exposed the latter's powerlessness to protect themselves, leave alone protecting their colonial subjects.

Certain rumours also talked about how the Japanese were reversing the power-relations between the British and their Indian subjects and humiliating the British by inversing the symbolic racial hierarchy, the corner-stone of British Imperialism. It was being said that after the fall of Singapore, a British high military official was made by the Japanese soldiers to pull a rickshaw mounted by the Indians.[11]

The police noted that there was a rumour among Congress workers prevalent around the office of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee that it was the British authority that discriminated against the Indians in Burma and they treated Indian evacuees differently from even Anglo-Indians. The Burmese people were also hostile towards the Indians and many of them robbed Indians on their way to the northern districts of Burma. On the other hand, the Japanese were gentle towards the Indians who were in government service and even offered to employ them in their own posts with double pay. The Japanese soldiers were also protective towards the Indians in Burma and they shot many Burmese criminals who tried to loot Indians. Thus, the rumour said that the Indians ran away from Burma not because of the atrocities perpetrated upon them by the invading Japanese soldiers, but because of the depredations by the Burmese. The Japanese, in fact, treated the Indians better than the British, who practiced racial discrimination against Indians even in times of grave crises.[12]

On 13 March it was reported from Zakaria Street and Phear's Lane area that there was a rumour that the Japanese were very civil and good to the Indian

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[11] *Ibid.*

[12] War Rumours, Monthly Serial Number 2, *ibid.*

people at all occupied territories. On the same day was noticed another rumour in the Ballygunge area in Calcutta that one Japanese submarine sank a passenger boat about 20 miles from Madras around a week or ten days ago. An Indian officer of the boat who was floating on a raft was rescued by the submarine, but several ship-wrecked British officers were shot dead by the Japanese.[13]

The police noted that the general idea being spread by the rumours was that the Japanese were extremely careful about not causing any harm to Indians. For instance, on the 4th of March it was reported that an evacuee boat, which were preceded and followed by cargo boats on its way from Rangoon to Calcutta was said to have been warned on the high seas by a Japanese aviator against taking the shortest route as it was infested with mines and submarines. The Serang disregarded the warning, and both the cargo ships were lost as a result of enemy action. It was then that better sense dawned upon the Serang and the passenger boat reached harbor safely after duly observing the aviator's initial advice.[14]

There was another important body of rumours that spoke of how certain sections of Indians had started preparing themselves for welcoming the Japanese and were, in fact, looking forward for their arrival. The following account gives certain instances of such rumours in circulation in Calcutta.

On 13 March it was reported from the Ballygunge area that as opposed to the image of the Japanese propagated by British propaganda as uncivilized and anarchists, the Japanese were said to have restored normal business conditions in Hong Kong and Singapore within a week of their capture and have honoured all bank drafts. The Indian companies were also treated well by the Japanese authorities who were attracting huge financial capital by offering 5% interest on fixed deposits and two and a half percent interest on current accounts.[15]

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[13] War, Rumours, Monthly Serial Number 3, *Ibid.*

[14] Miscellaneous, dated 4.3.42, *ibid.*

[15] Miscellaneous, 13.3.42, War Rumours, *Ibid.*

The above rumour was extended even further by 27 March 1942 in another rumour in Calcutta that Japanese firms on winding their business some two years back, handed out tokens to their employees with the assurance that if these were produced on Japanese occupation of India, the token holders would be repaid their losses and given preferential treatment. Many of the ex-servants of the Japanese firms were said to be in possession of those tokens.[16]

There were rumours that many Indians were actually helping the Japanese in defeating the British. For instance, on 4 March, 1942 there was a rumour that the Japanese were employing captured Indian sepoys and pilots to fight against the British on much higher salaries. In fact, it was believed that at the first blitz on Rangoon in December 1941, Japanese planes brought down by fighters and anti-air-craft guns contained Sikh pilots.[17]

The most sensational rumour that caused considerable concern to the city administration was that many young Bengalis had started learning the Japanese language in anticipation of Japanese conquest of Bengal, so that they can serve the needs of a new patron. This was reminiscent of the situation during the aftermath of British conquest of Bengal, when a section of the Bengali literati started learning English in order to serve the cause of British administration in the province by taking up jobs under the patronage of their new British masters. According to the rumour, many Bengali youths believed that a command of the Japanese language would secure highly paid jobs under the Japanese regime. As a sign of this new phenomenon, it was pointed out that a number of copies of a Japanese primary book, written by one Saito, was said to have been bought up

[16] Letter from Special Branch, C.P. and Berar to J.V.B. Janvrin, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, dated Nagpur, the 27th March, 1942, *ibid.*

[17] Miscellaneous, 4.3.42, War Rumours, *ibid.*

very rapidly, and it was said that this particular book as well as other primers were completely out of stock in the market.[18]

The panicky administration quickly started an investigation. They found out that T. Saito, formerly the instructor of the Japanese language in Calcutta University placed an order for 1000 copies of his book entitled "A Primer of Modern Japanese Language" at the Sree Krishna Printing Works at 27B Grey Street. The books were delivered to him at the Nippon Trade Agency at 135 Canning Street in two installments on 20 and 22 March 1941. The press was paid on 28th and 29th of the same month in full settlement of their dues.[19]

At first, out of the 1000 copies, only 74 copies could be accounted for by the authorities, which were disposed of by different book-sellers. Messrs. Das Gupta & Co. at College Street was found to have purchased only 5 copies of the book from the author for Rs. 3/12/- on the on 9 August 1941 and sold off all the copies to the customers at Re. 1 per copy. By March 1942, when the enquiry was being conducted, they didn't have a single copy in stock. Messrs. Book & Co. of College Square was found to have purchased 20 copies of the book from the author in several installments in cash and sold off all the copies at Re. 1 each by 13 or 14 December 1941. The proprietor of the book-shop reported that with the exception of a few copies, the books were sold directly to the customers by Nippon Trade Agency. Moreover, he informed that he received enquiries regarding Japanese, German and French primers very often. Messrs. Thacker Spink & Co., a book-shop at Esplanade, was also found to have received 24 copies of the book from the author on 2.4.41. It sold off all the copies in course of about four months at Re. 1 each. It requisitioned for another lot of 25 copies on 19th of August and sold off all the copies by February 1942. This company had paid off the author for the first consignment, while the price for the second

[18]Miscellaneous- 4.3.42, War Rumours, *ibid.*

[19] A note regarding the printing and sale of "A Primer of Modern Japanese Language" by Saito, *ibid.*

remained to be paid at the time of enquiry. The book was in so high demand that slightly later Messrs. Newman's could not obtain any copies of the book in spite of their best efforts. However, Messrs. Mac Million & Co. never kept any copies of the book for sale.[20]

In course of conversation with several booksellers the authorities learnt that it was mostly Bengali youths and some up-country young men who purchased these books. Students of Vidyasagar College, Scottish Church College as well as those studying in other colleges used to take lessons in the Japanese language in Calcutta University were among those who bought several copies of the primer. It was also learnt that the popularity of the book was a result of the fact that it was a textbook of the B.Com class of the Calcutta University.[21] Later investigations revealed that Saito had also arranged the sale of a few copies at Shantiniketan. Moreover, he had sent around 1000 copies to various libraries in India that made the book available for large numbers of the reading public around the country. However, by March 1942, the book was out of stock in the market.[22]

Even if the situation alarmed the officials, there was hardly anything that the government could do to prevent people from reading a textbook that could not at any rate be classified as objectionable, especially given the fact that it was a recommended text at the Calcutta University. Moreover, it was felt that any attempt to control the availability of the book would instigate wild rumours even further, and would expose the panicky state that the government itself was in. If the general public got to know that the government was giving so much of attention to this issue, people who otherwise would not have thought about learning Japanese could have just started taking lessons in it as well. Thus the government officials simply ignored the issue and tried to comfort themselves

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[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] War Rumour: Sale of Japanese book "A Primer of Modern Japanese Language" by T. Saito, *ibid.*

with the fact that most of the copies of the book were sold out before the Anglo-Japanese war broke out, and that it was presently unobtainable in the market.

This incident points towards an important aspect of the classificatory strategies of the government of certain information as rumour. When the authorities heard that many young Bengalis were learning the Japanese language in order to facilitate administration by the occupying Japanese regime, they *presumed* the information to be false, even before they verified it, and thus recorded it from the beginning as a rumour. Thus, one of the characteristics that preliminarily defined a rumour in the official mind was its alarmist and panicky nature, even before it was satisfactorily proved that the information was actually false.

Next we shall explore one case in which a rumour spread panic in one of the markets in Calcutta and when the police attempted to bring the situation under control.

On 18 March, 1942, a lady named M. Clark, the Deputy Organizer of the Women's A.R.P. Section, came to the shop of A. Barry Bros. in the New Market, a sprawling marketplace in the heart of Calcutta, at around 5:15 pm. She immediately noticed unusual commotion and a flurry of panicky activities among the shopkeepers, some pulling down their shutters, others, especially the jewelers in the middle alley way of the market, bringing out their stocks and trying to dispatch them to other places. On enquiry she learnt from the shopkeeper that a "Memsahib" had been round saying there would be an air-raid before 7 o'clock and that the "goondas" would rush in and loot everything. And thus she advised the shopkeepers to close down their shops immediately.

Without delay, Clark went straight to the Superintendent of the market only to find that he was already out on his rounds. Not knowing what to do, she came back and started requesting the shop owners not to close down business and that this was all nonsense. As she was in her uniform, the shopkeepers finally listened to her and a lot of them pulled up their shutters again.

The following day she wrote to Mr. Janvrin, the Deputy Commissioner of Special Branch of Calcutta Police, giving the details of what happened the night before. The only information that Clark could gather about the lady in question, however, was that she was an Anglo-Indian.[23] An investigation was immediately conducted.

The investigation revealed a story that was slightly different in detail. On being questioned, the Superintendent of the market said that at around 3 pm on 18 March "there prevailed a great panic among the shop-keepers of the market-owing to a baseless rumour that Calcutta will be bombed by the enemy planes... sometime between 4 and 7 pm." Some shopkeepers started closing down their shops while others rushed to the market office to verify the information. The office staff explained that it was completely baseless, following which some of the shops were opened again. The Superintendent confessed that the origin of the rumour was unknown.[24]

The most significant difference between the version of Clark and the Superintendent, then, was that in the latter, there was no reference to the Anglo-Indian lady who, in Clark's narrative, was responsible for spreading the rumour. Anyhow, the police continued its enquiries and soon new facts came to light.

Market Sergeant E.G. Marshall revealed that on 18th morning, his bearer took his daughter, who was about ten years old, to the Loreto Day School at Dharamtala Street where she was a student. One of the lady teachers of the school apparently told the bearer that the girl must be taken back home before 1 o'clock as there was to be an air-raid on the city in the afternoon. On hearing this from the bearer, Mrs. Marshall, the Sergeant's wife went to the school and brought the girl back at around 2 pm.

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[23] Letter from M. Clark, Deputy Organizer, Women's A.R.P. Section, to J.V.B. Janvrin, Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, Calcutta Police. Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

[24] Re: Panic in the New Market on 18/3/42, dated 19.3.42, *ibid.*

The 19 March was a holiday, and so the police went to the Sergeant's house and found his daughter, Miss Marshall, there. On being examined, the girl told the police that it was Miss Rose, a teacher in her school, who told her that there might be an air-raid in the afternoon, her mother had already arrived in the school to take her back, and that she must leave with her mother.

Mrs. Marshall and the bearer were not found in the house and thus the police went in search of the school teacher. Miss Rose was found out to be an elderly Anglo-Indian lady residing in 13 Corporation Street who had been teaching in Loreto Day School for the past 30 years. On being questioned by the police, she narrated a completely different version of the incident. She told the police that she knew nothing about the air-raid rumour till Mrs. E. Marshall went to the school to bring back her daughter at about 2 pm. Mrs. Marshall told her that she got the information over the phone that there would be an air-raid at 2:30 pm and so she must take her daughter back. This caused considerable panic among the teachers and students of the school. But when one of the teachers, named Mrs. Hrey, who was also a part time worker in the Fort,[25] contradicted her, Mrs. Marshall entered into an argument and asserted that she was a Sergeant's wife and thus she had a better knowledge of what was going on. Finally Mrs. Rose sent for the girl and allowed her to go back home with her mother.

While the episode relating to the Sergeant's family and the teachers of the School was getting shrouded in a web of allegations and counter-allegations, the actual incident that sparked off the controversy was getting sidelined. Now the police came back to investigate what exactly happened in the market. First they turned towards the shop that Miss Clark visited the day the incident took place- A. Barry & Bros. There the police learnt that the people heard the rumour from a European lady customer of a shop by the name of M.E. Naskar & Co. but when

[25] 'Fort' probably refers to Fort William, which meant that Mrs. Hrey was closely connected with the Government and she had an insider's knowledge of information circulating in Government circles.

enquiries were made at the latter shop, everyone denied that any of their customers had anything to do with the incident.

Further questionings followed and one Shahabut Ali, an employee of R.S. & Co., cloth and dress makers, gave a new story. He explained that Kartik Chandra Samanta, an employee of an oil cloth store, adjacent to his, had told him that the enemy 'wireless' had announced that Calcutta was to be bombed on 18 March between 4 pm and 7pm. On hearing this, he went to the Corporation Market Office to ascertain whether there was any truth in what he heard. On being told that the information was false, Shahabut Ali questioned Kartik once again; the latter confessed that he had no personal knowledge of the enemy wireless broadcast and that he had only heard of it from others. Kartik was found absent, but the rest of the employees of the shop gave the same version, that is, all of them had only *heard* of an enemy broadcast that threatened to bomb the city on that day, and nobody knew exactly who actually listened to the radio.

An enquiry among the staff of the market office produced yet another version. Mr. Kundu, one of the employees of the office, told the police that Shahabut Ali reported that it was one "Mr. Wallis", a customer, who had spread the panic. Shahabut Ali, on being re-examined, explained that he had only referred to the "wireless" and that the office staff must have misunderstood him and presumed he was referring to a customer.

Thoroughly puzzled by the various conflicting narratives and unable to fix responsibility on anyone, the police decided to close the case. To their relief, they found that the rumour had gradually subsided. However, there were many shopkeepers, especially jewelers and silk dealers, who were packing up and sending their stocks outside Calcutta for safety. Yet the silver lining was that the shopkeepers dealing with foodstuffs were not shifting their goods. The Superintendent of the market complained that the fundamental reason behind the general atmosphere of apprehension and panic was the failure of the Corporation to take adequate Air Raid Precaution arrangements in the market.

Before closing the case, the police decided to question Sergeant Marshall and his family for the last time.[26] Mr. Marshall narrated the same story that on hearing the rumour from the bearer he and his wife naturally got nervous and brought the child back home. Mrs. Marshall, supporting the version of her husband, denied having told Miss Rose or any of the teachers at her daughter's school about the rumour heard by her over the telephone. As proof of the truth of her statement, she pointed out that they had no telephone in their house in the first place.

But one important fact came up that could serve as a suitable explanation of the incident. The bearer, reported Mr. Marshall, was a temporary employee at their house engaged about ten days ago and that he had disappeared since the morning of 19 March, the following day of the panic in the market, without even taking his wage. Unfortunately (perhaps even fortunately for the police, who would have otherwise had to prolong the investigation!), the Marshalls did not know the name or address of the bearer and they simply called him "boy". After rounds and rounds of investigation, the police put the blame on the disappeared bearer, an easy scapegoat, and decided to end the investigation.

Through this narrative, let me try and unravel what has already been outlined as the salient features of a rumour over which there were some degree of consensus in official circles.

The first two defining characteristics of rumours are evident in the narrative of the incident. The police could not identify any motive behind spreading the rumour of a Japanese air raid other than simply causing panic. Second, according to all official sources, the alarm was baseless and thus, for the police, the falsity of the circulating information was beyond doubt.

Third, it has been pointed out that a rumour remained elusive by nature in the sense that the origins of a rumour generally remained concealed. The main

[26] Further report regarding panic at the Municipal Market on 18.3.43, dated 21.3.42, *ibid.*

challenge that a rumour posed for the administration was that of identifying who was responsible for the circulation of it. The above narrative demonstrates this very well. The identity of the rumour-monger and the origin of the rumour kept shifting repeatedly. First, it was thought to be a "memsahib"; then Miss Clark's statement recorded it as an Anglo-Indian lady; to the Superintendent of the market, its origin was unknown; on the basis of Mr. Marshall's statement, the police suspected that the culprit was the Anglo-Indian school teacher of Loreto Day School, Miss Rose; on examining Miss Rose, the Police thought that it could be a message received by Mrs. Marshall over the telephone. In the market, the image of the propagator of the rumour underwent a transformation from a European lady customer, via an enemy wireless broadcast, to a customer by the name of Mr. Wallis. Finally, the police concluded the investigation by tentatively fixing responsibility on the bearer at Mr. Marshall's house. Was it possible to trace the bearer and bring him to the book? There are reasons to believe that the investigation, at least, could go further. For instance, the Marshalls could have told the police where they got the temporary bearer from. On the whole, it appears a little suspicious that the Marshalls were sending their daughter out to school with a bearer about whom they knew absolutely nothing and whom they had employed only ten days ago! Is it possible, then, that the Marshalls knew more than what they were telling the police? Questions remained. But what is instructive is that the police did not even want to find out the answers. The investigators already recognized in their own narrative that they were confronted with a 'rumour', an elusive piece of floating information which has changed its forms in the process of its circulation to an extent that made its origins almost impossible to ascertain.

Finally, the rumour did not have a specific audience, a pre-determined consumer, for whom it was produced. This was precisely what enabled the rumour to float across varied spaces and affect individuals and groups of diverse social backgrounds and identities. This rumour affected work at the market, spread panic in the school among teachers and students, made a Sergeant and his

wife nervous about the safety of their daughter. It spread panic among cloth and dress makers, jewelers and silk-dealers, shopkeepers dealing in foodstuffs and many other Indians belonging to various regions and communities; it affected Shahabut Ali, a Muslim, as well as Kartik Chandra Samanta, a Hindu; it affected daily activities of the market officials; it scared members of a British Sergeant's family; it alarmed the teacher's of a girls' convent school, where many of the teachers and students were British and Anglo-Indian.

The Impact of Rumours in Daily life:

The above section picked up some specific and perhaps extraordinary instances when the normal rhythms of the daily lives of some of the city's inhabitants were suddenly disrupted as a result of certain rumours. This section would examine the ways in which the fears and anxieties generated by the impact of rumours affected at least certain sections of the city dwellers in their experiences of daily lives.

Let us begin by exploring the experience of living in war-struck Calcutta through the eyes of one K.L. Sarkhel, who had come to the city in search of a livelihood from the village of Khayerabad in Barisal. A letter addressed to his brother Prafulla Kumar Sarkhel, undated, but written sometime towards the end of 1941 reads:

> The situation in Calcutta is very bad; everyone is running off to their country.[27] Russia has been defeated. Here in India, Singapore seems to have been captured by the Japanese.[28] From hearsay it

[27] "Desh", which is translated as "country", refers specifically to 'country-home'. Basically, it means that people were running off to their homes in the villages.

[28] Misconceptions about the exact geographical location of Singapore seems to have been fairly wide-spread. Because of its similarity with the names of many places in India, especially owing to

> appears that the Japanese had already entered Burma. In this condition, it is difficult to fathom what is to be done. If they come closer, probably the train services would be stopped. Now itself, there is no space in the trains. I shall watch for a few days more. Then I shall do what is needful. My heart has become very sad. I shall not compromise on my duties. Calcutta is full of white soldiers. One feels scared to walk in the streets. Everyone is running away...[29]

As indicated in the letter quoted above, the fear of Japanese air raids led to an exodus of people from Calcutta. Whoever could afford to leave the city was running away. There were rumours that many of the labour contractors, who had supplied the labour force for the factories in Calcutta by recruiting people from the countryside of Bengal and the neighbouring provinces, were not just leaving

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the suffix 'pore', many people believed that Singapore was a place within British India. This is illustrated through a series of dialogues in the novel *Asani Sanket* by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. In this novel, the dialogues involve a conversation between a group of people in the village by the name of "Notun Gna" [New Village]:

> The old Navadvip Ghoshal said -...I heard there is some "pore" that the Germans have taken over.
>
> Mr. Biswas said – Singapore.
>
> Navadvip said – Which district? Our Jessore or Khulna? Near Midnapore?
>
> Mr. Biswas smiled and said – Neither Jessore nor Khulna. It is on the sea-shore. Most probably near Puri, Midnapore district. Is'nt that so, Sir?
>
> Gangacharan himself did not know clearly, but it was not wise to exhibit his ignorance in front of these people. So he said – Yes. A little far off- towards the west. Not very near...

Bhibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Bibhuti Rachanabali*, Vol-3, Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, Calcutta, pp. 938. Translation mine.

[29] Letter from K.L Sarkhel to Prafulla Kumar Sarkher. Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/41, K.P.M. No.- 01565/05, Year- 1941. Translation mine.

the city themselves, but were advising the labourers to run away as well.[30] What scared the people into leaving Calcutta even more were the publicity vans of the Calcutta Corporation who went around asking those who had no business in city, especially women and children, to leave immediately. Sometimes such government publicity would get exaggerated as the speeches delivered from the vans would circulate from mouth to mouth, and when these would be reported in the newspapers. One such news, first reported by the Bengali newspaper Dainik Basumati, appeared in The Statesman of 7 February, 1942. It reported:

> According to our Calcutta contemporary the BASUMATI, a publicity van appeared at a crowded thoroughfare in Calcutta on Thursday noon and made an announcement in Bengali to this effect:-
>
> The Corporation of Calcutta wishes it to be known that evacuation has taken place in Singapore which is in danger. Those who have not yet removed women and children from Calcutta are called upon to do so without delay. This is necessary in the interest of saving their lives. The Corporation of Calcutta takes no responsibility for those who will not be careful after this announcement.[31]

Later, however, Bipin Bihari Ganguli, the Councilor of the Calcutta Corporation who was delivering the speech from the van complained to the editor of Dainik Basumati that his speech was "mischieviously dressed up"[32] and the Government, taking notice of the incident warned the newspaper. Subsequently, The Dainik Basumati even published an apology on 10 February. Yet, the damage

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[30] See, for instance, the notes on Jalaluddin, the contractor. Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M. 757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

[31] *The Statesman*, dated 7.2.42. Ibid.

[32] Letter from Bipin Bihari Ganguli to the Editor of *Basumati,* ibid.

was already done. The people thought that the newspaper had been forced into apologizing and felt even more alarmed.[33]

The details of *who* exactly were running away from the city are difficult to recover from the archive produced by the colonial state. The government was more concerned about *how many* were leaving, and as a consequence, attempts were made to collect the exact statistics from different sources, especially the railways. This, however, was often without much success.[34] The reason why they were leaving, the police thought, was already known, that is, they were leaving because they were scared off by false rumours. Thus, no attempt was made to probe the questions any further.

Reflections on some of these issues, about which the state-produced archive large remains silent can, however, be found in some of the literary works on the experiences of the Second World War in Calcutta. Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's novel *Manvantar*, which first came out in 1943 in *Saradiya Ananda Bazar Partika*, provides us with significant insights about the people who were running away from the city. The passage where this is described is in the authorial voice, and provides us with the author's own reflections, breaking away, somewhat, from the flow of the main narrative.[35] It reads:

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[33] See the notes of the Calcutta Police on this incident. Ibid.

[34] Some of the fragmentary statistics collected by the Calcutta Police can be found in the following files in the Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police: File No.- P.M. 757/41, K.P.M. No.- 01565/05, Year-1941; File No.- P.M. 757/42, K.P.M. No.- 01566/05, Year-1942. A more systematic collection of data can be found in the following file: File No.- P.M. 757A/43; K.P.M. No.- 01573/05, Year- 1943. For the limitations that the police faced in collecting the required statistics from the railways, see File No.- P.M. 757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II. Collection of statistics was restricted to the railways. It seems that the state did not have much of an idea about how many people were leaving through other modes of transport.

[35] What, I think, is important is the fact that the passage is written almost in the spirit of an essay, where the author directly reflects upon the issue. The function that it had in the fictional narrative was to develop the plot.

...Scared for life, men and women are leaving Calcutta. The scene is as much pitiful as it is scary. Deprived of education, those who earn their living through lowly professions, they are the most numerous- even if we say 'thousands and thousands', it still does not convey the sense of exactly how many they were. Those who work day and night and yet do not earn more than just about enough to be able to fill their stomach twice a day, surviving somehow- for them, continuing with life, itself, is profoundly more than what they can want ["paramartha"]. For ages they have been constantly running away from famine-stricken land to other places in order to be able to survive through begging, they have been living on the little food they could dig out from the soil in the forests when they have been unable to secure arms in human societies, in times of scarcity they have survived on boiled leaves, unable to meet the expenses of treatment during epidemics, they have always known that running way was the only way open to them; there have been so many political revolutions and political crises in the world, yet their conditions have never seen any changes; that is why the experiences of their unchanging circumstances have always enabled them to survive by running away from their land at the earliest- the instinct of running away is their hereditary tendency... Male and female domestic servants, cooks, barbers, coolies, daily-wage labourers are all running away by road without waiting for any transport. Even though train after train is leaving the stations, the railway administration still cannot manage to make sufficient provisions for the run-away passengers. People are running away in cars, lorries, horse-carriages, rickshaws, bullock-carts, and even the horse-carriages meant for carrying sewage. Those who are rich- those whose lives are impatient with unlimited unfulfilled wishes and fears of death,

> those who buy others blood when their own bodies become deficient of blood; during famines, epidemics, political crises, these people are also always the first ones to run away with their wealth to take shelter in safer places. When the political crisis ends, they come back after the revolution; if there is a regime change, they accept their servility with bowed heads before the new power. Among the others, there is the extremely intelligent middle-class...[36]

After a while, many of those who had fled the city earlier started coming back. The state thought that they *knew* why people were coming back, that is, the fear of bombing had subsided and that people had become confident of the government measures once again. Apart from recording this in-migration in a slightly celebratory tone, the officials seldom made any attempts to probe further. A completely different picture emerges, however, from another voluminous novel, *Dewal* by Bimal Kar, which he started publishing in parts from 1956. Consisting of three parts, the relevant passages come from the second part, first published in 1958. Again, these passages appear not as speeches delivered by the imaginary characters in the novel, but in the authorial voice, in the process of setting up of the plot for the ensuing story-line:

> And when this is the condition of the city— the people of Calcutta who were still running away in fear of bombing, leaving behind their houses, jobs, savings— staying away for a few months or, some of them for a year— they are coming back once again to Calcutta in several groups. What options are there other than coming back! Where is any assurance! Is it not because daggers were hanging above their heads that people ran away— but where

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[36] Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, 'Manvantar', in *Tarasankar Rachanabali*, Vol. 5, (eds.) Gajendra Kumar Mitra, Sumathanath Ghosh, Sanatan Bandyopadhyay, Mitra & Ghosh, 1972, pp. 275-276. My translation.

is the fear of the dagger any less palpable? Even there, life is harsh. Price of rice exorbitant, no sugar, salt almost unobtainable, Kerosene oil very difficult to get, medicines unavailable during illness, wives and sons die of snake bites, health breaks down due to malaria, on top of that there is this new danger— uprooting of the railway lines, burning down railway stations, robbing the post office. Where is any assurance outside? If the railway lines are uprooted, post offices are burnt down, those staying in Calcutta and those members of the family who are staying in Madhupur, Deogarh, Sainthia and other places become separated by a sea of distance. The wife gets mad worrying about the husband, the son gets mad thinking about the old father, and the earning males spend sleepless nights worrying about their families. On top of that there are rumours. Sitting in Calcutta, the male bread-earners hear— outside there are no stations worth the name, railway sleepers are lying in rice-fields and open grounds, the telegraph wires are torn to pieces. This train is going only till Burdwan or Gomo, after this on that side there is Santahar, beyond this there are no routes; this train has arrived at Howrah or Sealdah after fourteen hours. The sky seems to have broken down above the heads of the evacuee families residing in the mufassils. Someone's father— someone's son or husband is in Calcutta, earning a livelihood to fill their stomachs— who knows what conditions they are in? Apparently there are machine guns firing in the Calcutta streets— tons and tons of explosives are being thrown from the planes by the military, trams and busses have stopped, houses are being burnt down. Hundreds of other stories circulate through rumours. Someone hears that the Howrah Bridge has been destroyed, there are no routes available to enter the city, nor for leaving. Even that is not the end. See what the condition is due to

> the burning of post offices and newspaper buildings! Even exchange of letters has almost stopped. That so many people do not receive the money sent to them for their family expenses from the city, and that so many are still not getting— no one will keep a record of that. What shall one eat in this unknown place? ...unless one is stubborn, extremely rich and very courageous— after this, who wants to live outside, leaving behind the men of the family in Calcutta? On top of the worries about food, clothing and illnesses, is it possible to bear this new agony? Rather, there is no need any more to stay outside, let's go back to Calcutta, if death is imminent, let's die together. If one is not destined to die, one shall not die. God alone knows about death. Yes, there is still time. Who knows what will happen afterwards? Maybe, there would be no railway lines worth the name, post offices will be turned into ashes. Then—?[37]

Even police records show that some rumours similar to the ones mentioned in the novel did actually circulate. For instance, the rumour that Howrah Bridge was to be blown up and that Howrah and Sealdah stations were to be destroyed were noted by the police as a prevalent rumour in Calcutta. As early as December 1941, the police noted a pervasive rumour among "the illiterate Hindus and Muslims" of Calcutta that the local government was not sending money orders which were deposited at the Post Office and that a certain amount per rupee was deducted from the money which was delivered to the addressees.[38] That many letters did not reach is a fact borne out by a number of letters along with envelops that are still to be found in the files of the Calcutta police and other archives. Other similar rumours will be described later.

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[37] Bimal Kar, *Dewal*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 2003, pp.194. Translation mine.

[38] Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42, K.P.M. No.- 01566/05, Year- 1942.

There were a significant number of people, however, who did not leave the city in spite of the fear of Japanese bombing, even when Calcutta actually faced air-attacks. Japanese military planes dropped bombs on Calcutta on 19, 20, 21, 24 and 27 December 1941. In these few days of bombing, the Japanese dropped about 160 bombs, though it killed none and injured only those who failed to take shelter.[39] 24 and 25 December 1942 saw another spurt of air-raids, this time killing 25 and injuring about a hundred people throughout Bengal.[40] Besides aiming at military targets, the Japanese bombed civilian targets in December 1942, which included the railways, the wharves and jetties, the rive steamers in Chittagong, the Sahaganj factory near Calcutta, and the oil installations at Budge Budge. Again, between January and March 1943, the air raids resulted in 549 casualties- 180 deaths and 360 wounded.[41]

Amidst these fears, there were still many people who stayed back in Calcutta, knowing that it was logically one of the main targets of the Japanese. It is difficult to talk at length about this section of the city population. The state had a ready answer- these were, in their understanding, the people who did not get scared by false rumours, had faith in the government's ability to protect civilian lives, and were personally courageous. What the official archives ignore is the fact that many people had nowhere else to go to, others did not think that it was wise to leave, given the prevailing circumstances in the countryside which was far from promising, and still others, who actually wanted to stay back, but for different reasons.

One significant section was first generation or second generation migrants who had lost everything in the villages, and had made themselves into permanent

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[39] Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine: Bengal 1939-45*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, pp.57.

[40] *Ibid*, pp.57-58.

[41] *Ibid*, pp.69.

residents of the city.[42] There were others who had their families in the villages, yet they could not go back as the family members were heavily dependent on their income from the jobs in the city. The letter from K.L. Sarkhel, a section of which is quoted above, reveals the agony of a man staying alone in the city in order to earn a living for his family. It was his sense of 'duty', his "kartavya" towards his family, his obligations of sending a part of his income to his relations in the villages, the responsibilities that he thought was obligatory upon him as a male bread-earner to feed his family, which made him stay back in Calcutta even when his heart longed to be in his country-home. The agonies and inner conflicts of this man are revealed by another letter he sends to his wife, along with the one for his brother. The letter to his wife, written in the form of a love letter, reads:

> I am extremely melancholy these days. In this gloom, my heart yearns to see your face, even if just for once. I have never been able to give you any happiness since I married you. This is especially what makes me very sad. I pray to God that you be happy and be the best wife[43]... If the condition of the war worsens, I shall probably be able come back home and see you very soon.

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[42] The upheavals that rural Bengal witnessed in the 1930s depression are significant here. Many villagers lost all means of survival in the villagers, for whom migration to the city in search of livelihood was the only available option. Even though the depression made circumstances favourable for certain sections of the agricultural population, the agrarian sector as a whole suffered huge disinvestment. Foreign capital shifted away from the agrarian sector. Many people sold off their gold and the money obtained was diverted away from land. Since gold was offered as firm security against monetary credit, its loss to the Bengal country-side meant a long-term disinvestment by the agrarian sector as a whole. These and many other factors made rural Bengal financially extremely weak and insecure, and increased destitution which contributed to huge permanent migration from the countryside. Detailed examination of the issues involved here is beyond the scope of the study. Works on the agrarian history of late colonial Bengal reveal these tendencies. See, for instance, Sugata Bose, 'Starvation Amidst Plenty: The Making of Famine in Bengal, Honan and Tonkin, 1942-1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, 24(4), October 1990, pp.699-727; Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-47*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986; Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-47: The Land Question*, K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1984.

[43] The words used in Bengali are "sati" and "sukhi".

> Take care of your heath. Make sure I can enjoy everything after I come back. My heart yearns to kiss your rosy lips... I shall not write any more of this nonsense. Do not be angry on me, my love. Reply as soon as you get the letter. Let me know whether you have received the money. Accept my kiss.[44]

The letter shows how much he yearned to go back home, yet he could not, because of the compulsions of earning a living in Calcutta. I dare suggest, he was not the only one.

Incidentally, almost all of the characters in the two novels by Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay and Bimal Kar stayed back in Calcutta during the entire period of the war. These give us some insights. It appears that some of them who stayed back were old urbanites whose only home was in the city. They had no home in the countryside to go to. Some of them could be the descendants of families that were at one point of time quite prosperous, but their fortunes had declined over time, and could be counted among the lower middle class by the late thirties of the twentieth century. Kanai, one of the main characters of *Manvantar*, who can, perhaps, even be describes as its protagonist, was the descendant of a declining and decaying urban aristocracy. But there were those who were engaged in various professions in the city- lawyers, doctors, journalists, and others engaged in various services. There were, again, the middle class who permanently resided in the city. Being completely dependent upon a moderate income from the city, they could not afford to spend a long time outside. Nila, one of the characters of the same novel belonged to such a family.

There could be many other possibilities and reasons why some people preferred to stay back, and one could go on with various permutations and combinations. But far more common was the tendency, even among those families who did not leave Calcutta, to send off some of their members to other

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[44] Letter from K.L. Sarkhel to Sreemati Rani Devi, Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/41, K.P.M. No.- 01565/05, Year- 1941. Translation mine.

places. Even if they did not have a home in the villages, some of them had their relatives and friends living in other cities, and arrangements were often made for women, children and old men to put up with another family living elsewhere. However, even this was not always the best option, as the letter from one Suresh to his friend Jatindra Babu, dated 18 September 1942, demonstrates. Jatindra had asked Suresh to send over his mother and son to the former's house in New Delhi, and the following letter is a reply, giving reasons why it was not possible for him to do so:

> I ask — how to send mother and Khoka [his son]. 'By train'— you are likely to suggest. My friend, there is only one train, Delhi Mail, to leave Howrah for Delhi. Even that one is subject to many limitations. The number of seats irrespective of classes is very limited. Last evening's information is that City Booking offices for the purposes of issuing tickets for travel on E.I.R. are closed. Only Howrah office issues tickets— about 150/160 tickets for 3rd class and about 50/60 tickets for inter-class passengers. Like limitations hold good even in the case of higher classes. To illustrate the difficulty: On the 15th a Punjabee gentleman (of our office) wanted a ticket for Amritsar and he was told that no tickets would be issued until the 19th in as much as all the available spaces up to 19th stood reserved. By strenuous effort he could have a 2nd class ticket issued last evening for travel to Amritsar only on the 19th. So you see the difficulty in the easiest part of the job. But then there are things of grave concern which overweigh all early misgivings— sabotaging of fish plates in between many different stations in the past, prospects of more sabotaging, slow runs, stoppage of night trains in between many stations, scarcity of food on the way, faithful knowledge of a journey of a train taking 12 days in a Down journey between Howrah and some village in Punjab, faithful knowledge of a 3 day journey by a Railwayman on the top

> of a train in a Down journey between Moghalsarai and Howrah— all these conditions of uncertainty and unsafety argue weightier reasons which no sensible man can mince. Add to it the earlier misgivings, which still hold good. Rather on the authority of Radio-rumour and on the authority of the public utterances of no less a person than the Governor of Bengal the prospect of enemy action has been intensified and is imminent. It is said it is no longer a question of months, it is now a question of weeks...[45]

Interestingly, the letter was delivered after 4 copies were made by the police, even though later on the higher authorities noted that it should have been withheld on the ground that it contained false rumours regarding the war. This confusion within the administration of Calcutta Police would be dealt with later, but one wonders which part of the letter was believed to be false— the difficulties of the railway journey or the prospect of an imminent enemy attack. On the whole, the colonial state was utterly paranoid about any reference to the radio broadcasts, and it might well be the case that it was only the latter part of the letter, the reference to the radio that was considered to be 'false' and hence problematic. Otherwise, had the entire information contained the letter been groundless, it would be difficult to understand why this letter would be delivered, when so many other letters which, at least in hindsight, seems to be far less alarming, were withheld. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the difficulties involved in railway travel is most likely a little exaggerated, since this is not corroborated by any other evidence. Even then, this reflects the level of uncertainty and fear that was prevalent among at least certain sections of population. At least some people were convinced of the horrors that long distance railway travel involved, and hence decided not the leave.

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[45] Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/III, K.P.M. No.- 01568/05, Part III, Year- 1942.

Uncertainties encouraged speculations about the future, and I shall conclude this sub-section with an exploration of a specific form through which this speculative tendency manifested itself. The speculations about the uncertain future were often expressed in a proliferation and belief in astrological predictions.

The belief in astrological predictions with regard to the future of the war comes out though an intercepted letter dated 24 January 1942, from one Sree Kumar Das of Benaras, addressed to his friend, Anil, residing at 5 Deshapriya Park, Calcutta. The former described his meeting with a "great world famous astrologer", who had travelled the whole world and had gone to Europe and America three times, had seen the palms of many great men, including that of Hitler, and who could perform many miracles:

> He has seen the palms of many great men of whom one is Herr Hitler. I have an opportunity to see the impression of Hitler's hand... He has seen my hand and predicted many things. And above all how wonderful it is that he told my sister's name Avati Das at my first appearance to him. And I ask him again to examine him that please tell me the name of my friend whom I love very much or who is very intimate to me. He showed a miracle. He answered me that your friend's name is Anil. Is it not a miracle? Really I adore him. He told me that he will teach me "Will Force"... If opportunity comes I must introduce you with him... It is my earnest request to you that please leave Calcutta within 24 Magh.[46] For there is a possibility of happening danger in Calcutta after 24 Magh and that it is predicted by that astrologer...[47]

[46] Magh is a month in the Bengali calendar that includes dates from December and January.

[47] Letter from Sree Kumar Das, Benares to Anil Kumar Raha, Calcutta. Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M. 757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05 Part II, Year- 1942.

It was not just a matter of believing in astrologers or Sadhus capable of performing miracles, however. There were those who themselves took an interest in astrology and wanted to acquire the ability to predict the future. In the above letter is evident the thrill with which the writer informs his friend that the "world famous astrologer" has agreed to teach him how to perform a miracle. A letter dated 2 February 1942, from Calcutta to Amritsar, again, is revealing. The writer, Bandhu, says:

> According to rumours here [in Calcutta] it is believed that before the 15th of February, 1942 we shall have a bombardment. I too according to astronomical calculations believe that something of military importance shall take place before or on the 15th of this month. It may not be so for India alone but for the whole world. There is every possibility of ending this war for a little time of 5 or 6 months and after that "Gas War" which shall decide the fate of this war within a month or less even (sic).[48]

Then the letter gets out-rightly seditious in the eyes if the colonial administration:

> It is quite certain Germany is to win in the end. She shall make a dangerous attack on England from Norway side and you will soon find the German forces operating in England.[49]

As the above letter admits, there was a profusion of astrological predictions circulating in the city, and the police took note of them with concern. On 18 February 1942, for example, the police noted:

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[48] Letter from Bandhu, Calcutta to Krishan Kumar Kapur, Amritsar, dated 2.2.42, *ibid.*

[49] *Ibid.*

> Calcutta's astrologers, including Bijoli Banerji of Shalimar and Rai Bahadur Kailash Chandra Jatisarnava, had been engaged in careful study to determine the future fortunes of British arms. They have reached the conclusion that the present will prove to be the most disastrous for British arms and that reverses will continue until the 2nd March 1942. The tide, however, will turn in favour of the British from the 3rd of March 1942, and ultimate victory will be theirs.[50]

An interesting report of an I.B. Officer reveals how the form of circulation and anti-government tone of astrological predictions sometimes became a cause for serious concern. On 30 March 1942, an I.B. officer in Bengal reported a pamphlet that he came across in a tram the previous night. The pamphlet was titled "Forecast by a Great Sadhu Astrologer"[51] and contained a series of predictions:

> 1. Invasion of Great Britain and Ireland between 15th April and 30th May (Edward VIII installed in power)
>
> 2. Great Britain giving something to India between 15.3.42 to 15.4.42.
>
> 3. Revolution in India— April and May 1942.
>
> 4. War in Asia will be finished before 5th September 1942.
>
> 5. Complete independence of India between 25th November by Axis powers.
>
> 6. War in the World will be finished within 15th August 1942.

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[50] Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42, K.P.M. No.- 01566/05, Year- 1942.

[51] Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

7. Canada attacked and given independence by Japan.

8. China joins Japan within 30th April '42.

9. Russia will surrender between 15.3.42 to 15.5.42.

10. Japan will join Axis powers at Aden between 5th April to 30th May.

11. Australia will fall between 15.3.42 to 15.4.42.

12. Germany coming towards India in June 1942.

13. Japan will attack Assam Dist., Ceylon, Dibrugarh, Bombay and Aden.

14. Sea blockade India.

15. Japan will bombard Assam Dist., Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Central Bengal.

16. Calcutta proper will never be bombed.

17. Germany will attack Iran, Russia, Iraq and Middle East between 15/3 to 15/4.

18. Calcutta may be declared an open town and British military establishment may be removed to near stations making these places and Rly. Lines and bridges connecting these places of war production centers round Calcutta liable to bombardment.

The police could not trace any other copies of these predictions, however, and could not proceed with any action against the circulation of such pamphlets.

This section as a whole attempted to explore the rumours generated by the fears and anxieties, and sometimes even hopes, about the coming of the Japanese to India. Beginning with a survey of the nature of specific rumours it circulation,

this section examined a narrative of an incident when the fear of Japanese bombardment caused panic among certain sections of the city's population that disrupted the normal rhythms of their ordinary lives. Finally, some of the general experiences of the war and manifestations of anxieties in varied forms transformed the day-to-day lives of some of the city's inhabitants.

State Control over Rumours:

From very early years of the war, the government felt the need to bring rumours under control. For this purpose quite a few strategies were adopted. This section shall briefly reflect upon certain regimes of control that the city administration as well as certain sections of the state bureaucracy put in place in order to restrict their circulation and neutralize their influences. One such control mechanism has been indicated above, which consisted of generating more positive pro-British propaganda and highlighting the brutalities of the Japanese forces. The nature of such propaganda is not the subject that shall be dealt with at much length.[52] What would be focused on, mainly, are the strategies of 'policing' that were involved in bringing anti-British and sometimes Pro-Japanese propaganda already in circulation in Calcutta under control. In the course of the discussion, it would also be explored how the efforts of the city police were under constant challenge and their influence was often under-cut by various factors.

But, one distinctive form of state propaganda against rumours shall be explored. Such propaganda was not about either eulogizing the British or demonizing the Japanese, but was articulated as warnings to the public against circulating rumours, instructing them to disbelieve them. These were in the form

[52] The nature of pro-British Propaganda in Eastern India has been worked upon in considerable detail in Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War*, Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, 2001.

of press communiqués issued by the police. Few of such communiqués, issued in the early stages of attempting to control rumours, are given below[53]:

On 29 April 1941, the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, issued a communiqué in which he declared, in a celebratory tone, "a distinct lessening, almost disappearance of the tension or apprehension", assuring the people of the city that the police was taking all necessary steps to deal with the "rumour-spreading criminals":

> Information from all quarters of the city indicates a distinct lessening almost disappearance of the tension or apprehension that existed a few days ago. The majority of people now understand that rumours were being spread deliberately by certain evilly disposed people for their own evil purposes. There is now not only a distinct tendency to disbelieve rumours but there is growing up also a feeling of resentment that these mischief-mongers should be trying to involve law-abiding and innocent citizens in ruin, misery, and even death; a calamity in which all creeds and classes must necessarily share. Every citizen will agree that these mischief-mongers are guilty of a crime attempted against the whole city; a crime worse than murder. The Commissioner of Police requests the co-operation of every citizen in tracking down and reporting against these rumour-spreading criminals.
>
> Every beat in the city is being patrolled every night by civic guards. Behind these civic guards is the whole force and authority of the Government, as a pledge to the safety of the citizens of Calcutta, and a warning to evil doers of every description. These civic guards have come forward to perform certain duties on behalf of the people of Calcutta. Amongst these duties is the duty of

[53] The communiqués are from: Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/41, K.P.M. No.- 01565/05, Year- 1941.

> watching goondas and criminals infesting their beats. Civic guards will also assist the police in dealing at a moments (sic) notice, with all such criminals who have been listed. Special measures for dealing effectively with these habitual criminals are now under the contemplation of the Government and there is little doubt that, very soon Calcutta will be a much safer place for the law-abiding citizens than for the criminals.
>
> Everywhere in the city there is an openly expressed desire for peace amongst all classes and communities, and if all citizens co-operate with the Civic Guard and Police in tracking down their common enemies (the rumour mongers), there is no reason why they should not enjoy peace indefinitely.[54]

No matter how celebratory the tone was of the Commissioner regarding the "almost disappearance of the tension and apprehension" among the people, the police obviously knew that this was incorrect. In fact, there was a pervasive fear of the "goondas" taking advantage of the lightning restrictions in the city and causing trouble in many localities. Thus, another communiqué was issued by the Commissioner on 2 May, 1941, assuring people of the initiatives that the police was taking to handle the situation. It said:

> Certain citizens of Calcutta have expressed apprehension about the presence of goondas in Calcutta. It is published for general information that lists of goondas and bad characters are maintained by the Police in every Police Station and these listed criminals are kept under surveillance. It is not to be expected, however, that these lists are complete and if any of the citizens of Calcutta are aware of the presence of goonda or habitual criminal in their

[54] Ibid.

> immediate locality, they should take steps to inform the Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department, Lall Bazar.
>
> It was stated in my previous communiqué of the 29th April 1941 that certain measures are in contemplation for dealing effectively with habitual criminals. This refers to certain alterations in the law dealing with goondas and habitual criminals. It has to be expected, however, that action against goondas and habitual criminals would not, in any emergency, be delayed pending the decision on these new legal steps.
>
> Normally the Commissioner of Police is prepared to act immediately against any goonda, provided any person supplies information, that the said goonda is actually causing apprehension to the people of any locality.[55]

The police realized that the communiqués were not producing much effect. Thus, the tone of the next communiqué issued by the Commissioner of Police on 23rd June became much more severe. Instead of assuring the public of the precautions that the police was taking to ensure safety from the "goondas", the communiqué treated the fear of the "goondas" itself as a rumour. Rather than explaining the measures taken by the police in order to protect the population, the Commissioner denounced the expression of concern for safety itself and characterized those who did so as "rumour-mongers":

> It appears that certain interested persons are spreading rumours regarding the occurrence of street robberies since the beginning of the period of lightning restrictions in Calcutta. These rumours are, without exception, completely false. Not a single case of robbery has been reported to the police upto (sic) date.

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[55] Ibid.

> As these rumours are calculated to cause unnecessary fear or alarm to the citizens of Calcutta, I hereby issue a warning that any person found spreading such rumours shall be severely dealt with.
>
> The only people who should have any cause for alarm are the criminals and old offenders of Calcutta who are now being externed from the city.

In some time, the police realized that such communiqués were not producing much of an effect, and discontinued the effort. The war-time institution that the commissioner urged the people of Calcutta to put their faith in— the Civic Guard— soon emerged as an extremely unpopular one, and many people looked down upon those who joined it. The unpopularity of the Civic Guard finds literary expression in Bimal Kar's novel, *Dewal*.[56]

The novel depicts a lower-middle class family of Calcutta under tremendous hardships. The family consists of an elderly widow, Ratnamayee, who has lost her husband quite a few years ago, her elder daughter, Sudha, who takes up employment in a private company in order to support the family, her younger daughter, Arati, and her useless and unemployed son, Basu. Basu wiles away his time doing nothing, and have become a liability for the family. He is often abused for his misconduct by both his mother, Ratnamayee, as well as his elder sister, Sudha, who is the sole bread-earner, and has assumed the role of the head of the family. In order to earn some pocket-money, Basu announces his decision to join the Civic Guard, and a quarrel ensues in the house between Basu and Sudha:

> I'm going to enroll myself with the Civic Guards.
>
> Sudha stood bewilderer. Ratnamayee kept on staring at her son. Only her expression took on a new meaning.

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[56] Bimal Kar, dewal, op. cit.

> Could you not get hold of anything else? Baneful choice. So you are about to begin to put on the khanki outfit and prowl about the streets with a stick in your hand like the gate-keepers and the chowkidars... and boss about with people, seizing them at will... extort a few annas from the peddlers and drink tea and smoke cigarettes for free at the local stalls... Awful! You have done much already to let our father's name down, so humiliate all the more'. Sudha became restless and impatient in her agitation. Irritation and hatred filled her face.
>
> Basu was completely unprepared for a reaction such as this. Sudha's words confounded him so utterly. It was Basu himself who had been telling stories in the house about the Civic Guards' conduct in the locality. He had told such stories to Arati, to his mother. He had thought that the Civic Guards' demeanour was worthy of drawing people's respect; he had no idea that they could be looked down upon. He had always meant to relate to his family how the guards had a good hold upon the local people who regarded the guards with so much modesty.
>
> 'If your son is really going to enlist himself with those miserable guards... I... I... you shall see...'
>
> Not knowing how to complete her words, Sudha stopped. She left the room before anything could be said.[57]

In order to further elaborate the deep-rooted dislike for the Civic Guard among at least certain sections of society, Bimal Kar describes Ratnamayee's mental state after her son had actually started working as a Civic Guard:

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[57] Bimal Kar, *Dewal*, op.cit., pp. 27.

> Since Basu joined the Civic Guard, Ratnamayee's anxieties were increasing day by day. Not that it was only Sudha who detested the work with her heart and sould, she herself could not come to like her son's lowly profession. And strangely, even though Ratnamayee had not seen anything with her own eyes, Arati, Parul, Bela, no one said anything good about the activities of those like Basu. Everyone used to look down upon this profession. And that the job was not a respectable one, the greatest proof of this were those had joined the Civic Guard themselves. All the useless boys, disowned by their parents, who used to wile away their time in useless pursuits, the entire uneducated illiterate lot— all of them joined this body. Since then Ratmamayee had developed a bad idea of them...[58]

Evidences of the unpopularity of the Civic Guard are to be found in other kinds of sources as well. For instance, a pamphlet issued by the Communist party from Bengal on 3 September 1940, described the Civic Guard as "Bibhisan Bahini", alluding to the mythical traitor of the Ramayana, Bibhisan, who betrayed his own brother Ravana and helped his foe, Rama, in his epic battle. Referring to the practice of using the Civic Guard as black-legs in workers' strikes, the pamphlet goes:

> Civic Guard are a band of treacherous force... They have defeated the paid Police and the Military Force for the sake of bread... Civic Guards are more treacherous than the Police and more detestable than the Goondas. They are being beaten by the Dhangars and the methors in all localities still they have no shame and sense in them. Beware of them... Leave the Civic Guards who

[58] Ibid, pp. 46. Translation mine.

> are the enemy of this country. People of the country! Boycott the Civic Guards.[59]

On 8 February 1942, the police noted a rumour with considerable alarm that the Commissioner of Police himself was said to be arrested for being a Japanese spy:

> A queer rumour was afloat on Saturday and Sunday last among the educated people that Mr. Fairweather, CP, has been arrested for his connection with the Japanese!!! This rumour spread upto Barrackpur where from a gentlemen came and corroborated the rumour... Debabrata Sen, a student of Carmichael Medical College first heard the rumour from Dr. Distopada Chatterjee of Uttarpara in his College and enquired from me whether there was any truth in it. He was told that it was absolutely groundless. A press reporter, name not known, also told about this rumour. Bhupandranath Mukherjee, a pleader's clerk at Barrackpore also corroborated.[60]

After this, the police was convinced of the uselessness of measures like issuing communiqués in order build confidence in the police and the city administration. Rumours of this kind directly delegitimized the authority of the police. This does not mean, however, that the press was no more utilized for countering rumours. In fact, it was precisely a Calcutta newspaper, Amrita Bazar Patrika, where an official contradiction of the above rumour was published on the 13th of the same month.[61]

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[59] Home-Political (Internal), File No.- 37/104/40-Poll(I), NAI. Translation in original.

[60] Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

[61] Ibid.

Nevertheless, even if the police knew that in most cases it was impossible to determine the source of the rumour and thus punish the "rumour-monger", it nevertheless continued keeping a meticulous note of every rumour that the police came across for a long time. This involved a laborious collection of data and filling up a form in great detail, as an attempt to keep track on the rumours. The form had six columns where data needed to be entered under six headings— the nature of rumour, the locality in which these rumours were heard, the section of population affected, whether a particular rumour was heard by a few or a large number of people, the "presumed" source of the rumour, and the general effect that the rumour had on the people.[62]

This pattern of information collection underwent significant changes from May 1942, and this change. On 19 May, the Department of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India instructed the Government of Bengal that the supply of daily reports of rumours to the Central Intelligence Bureau was to be discontinued. In its place, "a weekly report based on a selective process, giving only such rumours as are important in indicating the general trend of gossip may be substituted."[63]

The above statement reveals one important interpretation of "rumour" as an administrative category. Rumour was equivalent to gossip, but not any gossip. It was understood as gossip with a "trend", a pattern that the government continuously tried grapple with, to decipher, to understand, in order bring it under control. However, there are grounds to believe that this was more than a growing lack of interest about the nature of circulating rumours at the top of the colonial administrative machinery. There was a growing fatigue that was setting in at the

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[62] These filled-up forms can be found in the archive of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, especially the following file: Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

[63] Letter from P.N. Thapar, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 19th May, 1942. Records of the Sprcial Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 III, K.P.M. No.- 01568/05, Year- 1942, Part III.

lower levels of the police force regarding the amount of labour that had to be put in for the meticulous collection of the data on rumours, and many of them came to regard this endeavour as unworthy of so much of effort. This can be inferred from a series of exchanges that takes place among the Government of Bengal and the police establishment. On 9 June, 1942, a high ranking bureaucrat of the Home Department of Government of Bengal sent out a note to the Special Branch of Calcutta Police, asking why for several weeks no rumour had been reported. He observed, "... it would be interesting to know if this results from the fact that no rumours are now circulated, or none has come to the ears of the S.B., or that the rumours are so numerous that all hopes of keeping pace with them has been abandoned."[64]

The two notes from J.V.B. Janvrin, the Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, on 11 and 13 June, 1942, are revealing. On the 11th, he wrote, "Truly speaking most of the rumours current are stale and as such no repetition was made in our reports. Only when a fresh rumour having somewhat wide circulation is reported it is noted... and brought to the notice of the Govt."[65] on the 13th, he raised two points apart from emphasizing the above point once again. First, he noted that many of the information that were in circulation had turned out to be true. Since falsity of an information was a necessary prerequisite for it to qualify as rumour, these were no more reported as rumours: "Some of the old types of rumours are no longer rumours; eg.- Chittagong has been bombed, troops have assaulted villagers."[66] Lastly, he observed:

> It is I think very probable that whereas formerly officers used to report rumours thay heard in the course of their day's work, now-a-days they do not unless the rumour is of particular interest. They

[64] Note from A.E. Porter, dated 9.6.42, ibid.

[65] Note from J.V.B. Janvrin, dated 11.6.42, ibid.

[66] Note from J.V.B. Janvrin, dated 13.6.42, ibid.

> find they have duties more immediate and important than to report rumours in the elaborate form now laid down. I would abolish the form. Forms may be useful in the compilation of reports, but the best intelligence officers who have to go forth and collect information are, I find, individualists who loathe forms. Regrettable but true.[67]

The pressure from within the official hierarchy of the police force to cut down on the labour input required to collect information on rumours was also echoed by another note by A.E.A. Ray on 17 June, 1942 saying, "Regrettable, but scouting for rumours is largely waste of time, results in a mass of paper reports, and diverts officers from more important duties."[68] He further suggests that it was "better to insist on a careful appreciation of public opinion in which prevalent rumours might be mentioned."[69]

The forms where rumours had to be recorded were eventually abolished. but the idea that rumours were simply a part of "public opinion", as expressed in the note by A.E. Ray above, did not gain much currency. Rumours continued to be reported, but the volume of material collected on the subject did certainly diminish after the first half of 1942. However, one channel through which rumours continued to be tracked down right from the beginning in 1940 till the end of 1944, when all files relating to rumours were closed by the Special Branch, continued without interruption. This channel was that of personal letters, which clearly was seen as the most important carrier of rumours and the domain over which the administrative apparatus had to maintain strict control. But this was also the most formidable domain to keep control over because of the sheer magnitude of personal letters that had to be tracked down. The immensity of the

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Note from A.E.A. Ray, dated 17.6.42, ibid. the official designation of A.E.A. Ray is not mentioned.

[69] Ibid.

task becomes apparent from an official note which stated with alarm that as many as 2000 panic letters came to the notice of the police in the course of interception in Calcutta over a period of just two days— 31 December, 1941 and 1 January, 1942.[70] Obviously, there were many more that escaped notice.

The police establishment was clearly unequipped to deal with a problem of this magnitude. This is evident from the fact that records of not even half of 2000 letters are to be found in the police files throughout the five years from 1940 to 1944 when the police was attempting to keep track of war rumours. And it is only natural that the mechanism that was put in place to deal with the issue was internally ridden with loopholes and uncertainties. It was quite a common affair that a senior policeman would opine that a letter containing rumours was unfit for delivery after it was already delivered to the addressee. There was evidently a lack of a shared understanding among the entire police establishment regarding exactly what kind of rumours were to be dealt with in what fashion. As late as 22 March 1942, upon discovering that an "objectionable" letter already delivered were not supposed to be delivered, a high ranking bureaucrat responsible for censorship of private letters announced, "We will like to have such intercepted letters in original if possible. If we would have got this particular letter we would have taken some other action on it."[71] The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, replied, " If you want letters of this kind in the original I will have them sent to you, but could you please give some kind of definition of what you want."[72] Thus, there was no concrete definition available of what was considered "objectionable" that was available to everyone involved in the running of the control mechanism.

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[70] Note on War Panic, dated 6.1.42, Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42, K.P.M. No.- 01566/05, Serial No.- 1, Year- 1942.

[71] Notes on the letter dated 22.5.42, from Kanu to Mrs. Sulochana Das Gupta. Records of the Sprcial Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 III, K.P.M. No.- 01568/05, Year- 1942, Part III.

[72] Ibid.

And this was the situation as late as May 1942, after two years since censorship of private letters were initiated.

Confusions regarding exactly what kind of information was under censorship were pervasive even among the public at large. It is evident from some of the private letters now available to us in the police archives that people, at least in certain quarters, were aware of the practice of censorship of personal correspondences and also of the restrictions imposed by the Defence of India Rules. Yet those very letters that show a general awareness of such restrictions contained discussions that were classified as objectionable. For instance, the letter from Sree Kumar Das to Anil Kumar Raha, parts of which has been quoted in the last section, spoke of the suppression of letters by the post office for which correspondences many personal letters were not reaching the addressees. Furthermore, urging his friend, Anil, to leave Calcutta by 24 Magh according to the Bengali calendar, Kumar asked him not to spread the news for "a great fear of the Defence Act."[73] But, the same letter got picked up for censorship as it contained references to an astrologer who were making war predictions. Kumar surely had no idea that mentioning astrological predictions about the war would result in his own letter getting censored.

No matter what confusions there were regarding the definition of what was considered 'objectionable' and the extent of 'rumours' that were to be tolerated in private correspondences, the censorship regime had a fairly clear chalked-out policy to deal with the letters that came to their notice. In many cases, only copies of letters were kept by the police, while the original was delivered to the addressees. In other cases, the original letters themselves were withheld. In both cases a police enquiry was carried out, first in secret, and then, if there were sufficient grounds to believe that either the sender or the addressee were involved in anti-war activities, one of the two were directly interrogated. In most cases, it

[73] Letter from Sree Kumar Das to Mr. Anil Kumar Raha, dated 26.1.42, Records of the Special Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 II, K.P.M. No.- 01567/05, Year- 1942, Part II.

was the sender of the letter who was picked up, but in case the sender could not be traced, the addressee was questioned regarding the whereabouts and activities of the sender in order to trace the latter.

It needs to be emphasized that no matter how much the police or the administration felt threatened by rumours spread through private correspondences, it was not crime enough to be tried in a court of law. No one could be prosecuted and convicted for merely writing a private letter. Thus, the police made all attempts to uncover any traces of anti-war activities that the senders or addressees of the letters could be involved in. For this purpose, interrogation on the basis of private correspondences involved a thorough house-search, with the objective of recovering anti-war leaflets, pamphlets, books, or anything that might establish a link with other subversive activities that could give the police some legal legitimacy for their actions. However, in the overwhelming majority of the recorded cases, nothing could be found. Even in those very small numbers of cases where something suspicious were found, it was not enough to initiate a trial. Thus, in almost all such cases, all that the police could do was to compel the individual under interrogation to sign a statement of regret.

As is amply evident, the lack of proof of any definite involvement in anti-war or anti-state activities made the actions of the state at best 'para-legal' and, at worst, purely despotic. Even though the actions of the police had the force of the Defence of India Rules, the knowledge of a lack of firm legal sanction made police actions subject to a variety of pressures for which they were forced to step back and allow certain concessions. One such instance may be taken up. It shall be noticed that this case resonates with the kind of negotiations with government orders that was taken up in the first chapter.

A letter from one Samar from Calcutta addressed to Nanda Lal Sen of Simultala dated 26 May 1942 was intercepted at the Baghbazar Post Office.[74] The letter contained references to Japanese military strategies and a long quotation from a Japanese radio broadcast. Like many other letters, this one was delivered to the addressee even though the police later thought that it was extremely objectionable and should not have been delivered.

This was just another letter among so many that was said to contain rumours and hence objectionable. Thus, once the letter was sent out for usual investigations, the police virtually forgot about it. Until 15 October 1942, when the Commissioner of Police received a letter from M.N. Sen, a man of 70 who was also the senior-most practicing Indian Solicitor.[75] Moreover, the letter was forwarded by Sie Abdul Halim Ghuznavi, a Member of the Legislative Assembly.[76]

The letter from M.N. Sen informed the Commissioner that his youngest brother Nanda Lal Sen, a diabetic patient, used to stay for the greater part of the year in their family residence at Simultala for the benefit of his health. On 14 October, he was called up by an "Up-country" police officer and told him in a threatening tone that he was in the possession of a subversive letter addressed to him from Calcutta, and that he was given the charge of investigating the matter.

Instead of talking about the incident at hand, M.N. Sen began with a statement of "stead-fast loyalty to the Crown" of all the members of their family, and how much their family suffered at the hands of the Swarajist Calcutta Corporation of Subhas Bose. Coming to his brother, he reassured the Commissioner that he could have nothing to do with any subversive activities, and that he was "dead against

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[74] Extract of a letter from Samar of Calcutta to Nanda Lal Sen, Simultala, dated 26.5.42. Records of the Sprcial Branch, Calcutta Police, File No.- P.M./757/42 III, K.P.M. No.- 01568/05, Year-1942, Part III.

[75] Letter from M.N. Sen to the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, dated 15th October, 1942, ibid.

[76] Letter from Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi, M.L.A., to The Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, ibid.

the Congress Gang." Describing Nanda Lal as a "simple and innocent as a child", he gave a statement in support of his credentials by informing that he was personally known to Lord Sinha and Sir Abdul Ghuznavi, who were their family friends. Then was demonstrated their familial support for the war by informing that about ten members of their family were in the civic Guard and A.R.P. Units in the Shyampukur area and that one of them even got a King's Commission. Finally, M.n. Sen concluded that the conduct of the police officer was a "pure hoax" and that there could be not a single word of truth in what he said. However, had something of this sort happened with him or his other brothers, he would not have cared. But his younger brother was a diabetic patient, "an invalid, the matter is sure to have a very serious effect on him, including the risk of sudden collapse." He closed the letter with a prayer for the Commissioner's "gracious protection."[77]

Sir Abdul Ghuznavi, who forwarded M.N. Sen's letter attested to the family's trustworthiness. First, he stated, "The firms of P.N. Sen and M.N. Sen , Solicitors, are well known and have been acting as Solicitors for many rich families in Calcutta including the Indian Mercantile community. Mr. M.N. Sen is also my Solicitor."[78] Demonstrating how loyalism virtually ran through their blood-stream as well as his own personal acquaintance with the family, Ghuznavi explained:

> Mr. Sen's uncle Mr. Brahma Nath Sen was the first S.D.O. in Tangail... and all the members of Mr. Sen's family were the friends of our family and I know everyone of them since childhood. They are thoroughly loyal and have nothing to do with the Congress and its mischievous activities and that is my personal knowledge about the family.[79]

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Letter from Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi, M.L.A. to Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, dated 15th October, 1942, ibid.

[79] Ibid.

Ghuznavi requested the commissioner to take the necessary action in the matter and to ensure that Nanda Lal Sen was not harassed. But the fact was that the police did have a letter addressed to Nanda Lal Sen that contained rumours about Japanese radio broadcast. However, the police was in no mood to prolong the issue against a Solicitor's brother with high-level contacts with politicians. Again, irrespective of what the letter contained, the police was convinced of the loyalist credentials of the Sen family. Describing the letter, now, as "more or less harmless", Janvrin, the Deputy Commissioner of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police closed the matter there and informed M.N. Sen that "... the matter has been dealt with." Even if impartiality and uniformity of action were of the propagated principles of government policies, implementation necessitated recognitions of special considerations and making of exceptions.

Chapter 3: Texts in Circulation: War-time Challenges and Controls over Newspapers

The first chapter attempted to demonstrate some of the aspects of war-time policy formulation at the highest echelons of the colonial administration in India. For this, a close examination of a meeting of Provincial Representatives in Simla on 29 and 30 August, 1940 was undertaken. This conference, held under the auspices of the Government of India, was one of the major attempts to standardize policies across the provinces for dealing with certain administrative difficulties that were expected in the future years of the Second World War. It has also been noted that in the case of implementation of the policies in concrete cases, the control mechanisms put in place by the state machinery had to be responsive to the demands of the situation, that often lead to a rethinking of the modes of implementation of the policies themselves.

This chapter seeks to take up some of the issues raised in the first chapter by examining the ways in which the news published by the press was sought to be brought under control. This would be followed by an examination of the difficulties in the control of news published in the newspapers during the war-time famine of 1943. The third section shall look very closely at some of the articles and reports published in a popular newspaper, *The Statesman*, in order to demonstrate some of the difficulties of press control on the basis of the texts that critiqued government policies.

Policies of Press Control:

Once again, let us begin with the meeting of provincial representatives in August, 1940. As news of the approaching conference became known, the Government of India started receiving numerous enquiries from the press

regarding the issues that the conference proposed to discuss. The Central Government neither had the intentions of divulging the main issues that were to be taken up, nor could the officials ignore the enquiries completely and maintain complete silence. Thus, on the 26 August, Richard Tottenham wrote out a note regarding his opinion on what could be said to the press:

> Here have already been some enquiries from the Press about our Conference of Provincial representatives. The fact that Advisers and others are coming to Simla is bound to become known and, therefore, in order to minimize speculation, I think it will be desirable to issue a short Press note. We cannot, I think, mentioned most of the subjects for discussion, but there might be some advantage in referring specifically to 'A.R.P.' and 'Aliens' although these will not be the most important subjects discussed. I have spoken to Secretary, who sees no objection to mentioning these two subjects...[1]

This initiated some discussions on the issue and another high-ranking official of the Home Department wrote back:

> I agree that we had better give them something to keep them quiet. As to what should be said, I did not myself recollect that any A.R.P. subject was on the agenda, and if this is mentioned it will be difficult afterwards to refuse information to the Press as to what decisions have been taken: and if in fact no important decision can be pointed out, it will be obvious that the Conference was mainly about other matters which are being suppressed. Would it be possible to say that "Various aspects of Internal Defence" (I think

[1] Note by R. Tottenham, dated 26.8.40, Home-Political (Internal), File No.-159/40, Year-1940, NAI.

that is now the recognized term?), including such subjects as the treatment of enemy aliens, will be discussed?[2]

It was agreed that the press would only be told that the conference proposed to discuss "Various aspects of Internal Defence", without giving out any more details. This reflects the general attitude of the government officials towards the press. Even though the government itself used the medium of newspapers to reach out to the public, the press was always looked upon with a certain degree of suspicion. Neither was there a definite official policy to be followed with regard to the press, and the general impulse was to "keep them quiet" by giving them something to talk about in order to "minimize speculation."[3]

The issue of the A.R.P., though it was mentioned in the agenda of the conference, was ultimately dropped from the discussion and the subject of "Enemy Aliens" was only touched upon as a subsidiary issue. What the conference did attempt to work out, however, was a general policy that the provinces were asked to adhere to in their dealings with the press. As has been pointed out in the last chapter, the colonial state was expecting an anti-government movement against the war-time policies of the government. In this regard, the conference tried to outline how the press could be used or controlled if and when a "revolutionary movement" begins.

The conference declared that even if a movement of a revolutionary nature had not begun, it was already time that the Provincial Governments started putting certain control mechanisms in place in order to keep a check on publication of "...reports of important speeches containing an advocacy of civil disobedience or statements from members of the Congress Working Committee or other important personages on the same subject."[4] The representatives observed that signs of the

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[2] Note in the Home Department by N.N.M., dated 26.8.40, ibid.

[3] Ibid

[4] Questions Relating to the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance, ibid.

difficulties of maintaining uniformity of action were already evident, for there was already a case where a speech by Jawaharlal Nehru was allowed to be published in Bombay but prohibited in Bengal. In order to avoid such discrepancies, the conference asserted the need for a consensus regarding a common policy towards the press. Accordingly it was decided that pre-censorships under the Defence of India Ordinance was to be avoided but a warning was to be issued to the press "as to the classes or statements that they would be well advised to submit to the authorities before publication."[5]

In other words, what the conference meant was to push the press to exercise 'self-censorship'. This was a general policy that was favoured throughout the war years, even when the Government had to intervene and exercise control over the press. This was largely because of the enormity of the practical challenges involved in monitoring the press. Some of these issues would be taken up in the following section.

During the early years of the war, the colonial state managed to exercise at least some degree of control over the newspapers regarding the reports on war. It is true that many of the newspapers did maintain an anti-war stance, but these could be restrained from publishing reports that could be classified as "seditious". However, matters came to a head as the Bengal Province was gripped with a famine by 1943. What made the circumstances truly extraordinary were the regular reports containing scathing critiques of government policies published even by the newspapers that maintained a pro-war stance and were generally looked upon by the Government with relative favour. For example, a leading role in famine reporting was played by *The Statesman*, a British owned newspaper published simultaneously from New Delhi and Calcutta, generally considered "responsible" in government circles.

[5] Ibid.

A somewhat detailed analysis of the famine reports that came out in *The Statesman* will be discussed a little later. The next section would examine the challenges faced by the government at various levels in their effort to keep track on news about the Bengal famine. This would also provide the opportunity to turn the focus specifically to the war-time and famine situation in Bengal, one of the most important provinces that became a frontier zone with the approach of the Japanese forces, and the area that forms the main thrust of the dissertation.

Controlling News:

News related to the famine was widely circulated in the contemporary press. This section will look at how state control was sought to be exercised on the circulation of information and publicity. But before this, a brief background of the political scenario, especially that of the Communists, will be relevant.

Based upon the argument that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism, the Indian communists had always been at logger-heads with the colonial sate in India, while the latter had always fought the 'communist menace' with singular conviction. However, Hitler's invasion of Russia in the latter half of 1941 faced the Communists with a difficult choice. Britain was now the ally of the world's only socialist state engaged in a life and death struggle for survival. After six months of hesitation and internal debates, the Communist Party of India in January 1942 lined up with the rest of the international Communist movement in calling for full support of anti-fascist 'people's war', now arguing that fascism was a greater and more immediate threat than imperialism.[6] Coming out with a party mouth-piece, the C.P.I. named it after the very name they ascribed to the war: the 'People's War'. C.P.I., at least its high-command, being the only party in India to come out in open, unconditional and enthusiastic support of the war

[6] For a brief overview of the situation one could refer to Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-194*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 384-385.

efforts, the colonial government accepted their co-operation. Yet the relation between the state and the C.P.I. was never smooth.[7] The government was convinced that the communists were not to be trusted and decided to keep a vigilant eye on whatever they were writing in their weekly newspaper. Right in the beginning itself, P.C. Joshi, one of the editors of People's War, fell out with the Bombay Government as the latter asked for a security for the new paper.[8] But it continued nonetheless and extensively covered the food crisis in Bengal since 1943, something that the state had no reason to be happy about.

From the outset, not just the Provincial Government of Bengal, but also the Home Department and the Department of Information and Broadcasting of the Central Government were keeping a track of every article that was being printed in the *People's War*. Even a fleeting glance over the files in the Home Department reveals that almost every article related to famine and food situation was being minutely studied and commented upon. By September 1943, even the Food Department was advised by the Home Department to subscribe to the weekly so that the latter could give their opinion regarding "the usefulness or otherwise of the Communist Party's views and activities in connection with the food situation in this country."[9] However, at this stage, what the paper published did not seem particularly objectionable to the government. First, though it was recognized that some of the reports were "alarmist", the government pointed out that *People's War* was not doing anything that the other newspapers were not, especially *The Statesman* and *The Hindusthan Standard*. Second, in comparison to the other newspapers, *People's War's* attitude was seen to be "constructive" as

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[7] The persisting suspicion of the bureaucracy at the local level and the local C.P.I. activist's refusal to blindly follow the directives from the high-command has been discussed in Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'An Extremely Troubled Relationship:The British Colonial State and the Communist Party of India, 1942-44' in *Turbulant Times: India 1940-44*, Biswamoy Pati (ed), Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1998, pp. 138-167.

[8] Notes in the Home Department entitled, 'Notes on the People's War- September 5th', by V. Sahay. Home-Political (Internal), File No.- 33/37/43, NAI

[9] A note in the Home Department, probably sent by some official in the Food Department, ibid.

its central argument was that the Communists alone were successfully enrolling people in the effort to fight the food crisis. The Home Department explained, "This constructive attitude - let us give as much aid as possible - runs as a theme throughout the articles, though with the sub-theme- see how the Communists are showing the way!"[10]

The government soon realized that it was useless to target the *People's War* alone. What they needed was a comprehensive control over all information circulating throughout the country. Accordingly, the Central Government sent out their advices to the Provincial Press Advisory Committees of different states, asking them to warn the editors of all newspapers in their states that alarmist and sensational news about the break-down of food-supply would prompt the Japanese army to bomb Calcutta and invite them to invade India.[11] Since the preceding year, the Japanese threat was no more a distant one. British colonial possessions in South-East Asia were swept away in a matter of four months by March 1942, making North-East India the eastern frontier of the Allied army. If Singapore could fall, If Rangoon could be occupied, Calcutta could also be bombed. Yet, the threat did not seem to have had much of an effect on the newspaper editors, not even those in Calcutta. The Bengal Government frankly told the Centre "they should be left to do the work in their own way and the Government of India should not try to impose upon them methods of publicity which the Provincial Government are not willing to accept."[12] The U.P. Government also informed "the press are... not prepared to believe that reproduction in U.P., of such reports as freely appear in Bengal would invite the Japanese to attack India."[13]

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[10] Notes in the Home Department entitled, 'Notes on the People's War- September 5th', by S.J.L Olver, ibid.

[11] Notes in the Home Department, ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

However by mid-September itself, the situation had started changing dramatically. In March, relying on the age-old principles of Smithian political economy, the Government had introduced free trade in the grain market of Bengal, hoping that the invisible hand would sort things out on its own. By September, famine prices had spread not only to all parts of the province but also to Assam, Orissa, Bihar and beyond. The Government realized its blunder and in a desperate attempt to take some measures, imposed strict control over grain trade and fixed the maximum price of food-grains in the market. The result was worse. Rice went back to the go-downs of banias and rich zamindars from the market, sending the black-market price up to astronomical levels. When the situation started improving by the turn of the year with a fairly good harvest of the aman crop, the Government started its food procurement drive. By then, people had lost all faith on Government schemes and policies, and it was feared that the procured rice would finally end in the army barracks, leaving the poor to starve and die. This time, the press could not be controlled. Every day, news started pouring in with scathing criticisms of government policies. The Governor of Bengal reported directly to the Viceroy, expressing his amazement at "the surprising degree of latitude that has been given to the Press... in their efforts to undermine public confidence and to locate a feeling of insecurity particularly in respect of Food Policy."[14] In the same letter, he expressed his mistrust for his own Ministers: "I do not as yet know how far my Ministry will go in measures to stamp out this kind of... press publicity."[15]

The Government surely could not allow such a situation to continue and thus started considering ways of tightening its control through legal means. However, laws themselves were not enough, for in order for them to be of any use, the state had to be able to implement it. Violations of ordinary laws had to be enforced through the judiciary and it was this that proved to be a major stumbling block.

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[14] Letter dated 26 January, 1944, from the Governor of Bengal to the Viceroy, ibid.

[15] Ibid.

Here can be found a clear expression of a major argument that is made in the dissertation that at least the war-time emergency led to an increasing reluctance on the part of the executive arms of the government all levels to involve the judiciary in the enforcement of its regimes of control. The Governor of Bengal wrote, "I am told that resort to the courts is very often unsatisfactory owing to the labour of preparing cases and delays in their disposal and to the uncertainty of judicial decisions and the chances of appeal; and it seems to me that this is a situation in which prompt and decisive executive action is called for."[16] It was also felt that the ordinary executive powers, like the Indian Press (Emergency) Powers Act were also inadequate, as it was also subject to an appeal to the High Court "which, on past performance and in its present temper, my officers do not seem to think can be confidently relied upon to endorse the executive point of view."[17] It seems that by 1944, the gap between the different wings of the state- the judiciary and the executive- have widened to quite an unbridgeable degree. Rather than using the judiciary to strengthen the iron fist of the bureaucracy, the executive authorities were trying to by-pass the former at all costs.

Finally, the Bengal Government started hunting for clauses and sub-clauses in the Defence of India Act for appropriate provisions. But before that, it had to define what exactly they sought to prosecute. Accordingly, a suitable definition of "prejudicial acts" was found out and fitted within a suitable clause:

> Criticism of Government is of course legitimate, but when criticism is designed not merely to secure a change of policy but to ensure that the policy now approved by the Bengal Government in so vital a matter as the feeding of the Province is a failure, criticism ceases to be legitimate and falls within the definition of a "prejudicial act" contained in rule 34(6) of the Defence of India Rules. This definition includes "any act which is intended or is

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

> likely to impede, delay or restrict...the supply or distribution of any essential commodity". The Bengal Government would therefore be justified in using the means at its disposal to confine criticism within legitimate limits.[18]

Before state-control could be effective, the Home administration soon realized that there were too many loop-holes in the executive as well. In February, Richard Tottenham, the Additional Secretary to the Home Department, Government of India wrote:

> No one seems quite to know whose business it is and no very clear policy has been formulated or followed. We have reason to know (Cf. the last Fortnightly Report) that Bengal are perturbed about this matter and other Provinces are or may be affected. The Provinces may say it is for them to formulate a policy and give effect to it. But clearly one Province have to be affected by what is published in the Press of another Province over which it has no control. The Food Department (as far as food is concerned) and other Central Departments (so far as other essential commodities are concerned) may say they have nothing to do with the Press... The Home Department may say it is only concerned from the Law and Order point of view... and anyhow they are only concerned with the use of the Law against the Press. The I. & B. Department may not think it necessary for them to exercise their responsibility for guiding or influencing the press, unless they are definitely moved by some other Department to do so. And so the whole subject is liable to fall between several stools.[19]

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[18] Letter from Wavell, the Viceroy, to R.G. Casey, PC., CH., DSO., MC, ibid.

[19] Notes in the Home Department, by R. Tottenham, Additional Secretary to the Home Department, Government of India. Ibid.

Exactly how bad the situation was can perhaps be demonstrated by one example. On the 17 January 1944, an article by a special correspondent of the "News Chronicle" published from London caught the attention of the Bengal Government. The article declared that though a good harvest in December raised hopes for an end to the distress for the people of Bengal, a fresh cycle of famine was already evident which, he predicted, would be worse that what was hitherto witnessed.

The next morning, everyone in Bengal saw an article in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a news daily from Bengal, entitled, "A Second and Worse Famine Threatens Bengal/ Causes Of Last Catastrophe Coming Again: Bungling From Top To Bottom." It quoted the same correspondent of News Chronicle: "Despite a record rice harvest, a second famine, bringing even worse suffering, threatens Bengal's undernourished and disease-ridden millions, cables the News Chronicle special correspondent in New Delhi. The hopes of a few weeks ago that the corner had been turned, he says, have faded."[20] The following day, on 19 January, the Japanese radio picked up the news and broadcasted it at Saigon.[21]

The Bengal Government pointed out that such news could not have gone out without the approval of office of the Chief Press Advisor and asked the Home Government for an explanation. Tottenham himself pleaded helplessness and wrote back:

> Those responsible for censoring outgoing press messages here have seldom any means of checking the accuracy of correspondent's statements, nor in the nature of things there is a possibility of referring such statements to, for instance, the Provincial Government concerned owing to the delay that would

[20] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 January, 1944, enclosed in Home Department file, ibid.

[21] Letter dated 28 January, from the Additional Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of India, ibid.

> be involved. They are necessarily concerned, therefore, principally with the general effect of the message in question. They were in this case faced with the problem of weighing the disadvantage of passing a message containing statements which might or might not be true, and which might tend to discredit the Bengal Ministry, against the disadvantage of exposing Government to the charge of exercising censorship merely in order to suppress unpalatable opinions. Their choice of the former alternative was we think correct, since the message reflected views that have been expressed ad nauseam and with apparent impunity in the Bengal Press.[22]

It becomes amply evident therefore, that even if the state had some control over news that was circulating within the territory of British India, it could hardly regulate any information that was going out of the country. Such news could not just come back to be circulated within India but could also be picked up by the enemy.

The Home Department thought of doing something about this sorry state of affairs by calling a meeting of the different Departments who had a stake in the matter: "My own view is that the co-ordinating Department in a matter of this kind should be the I. & B. Department, but whether they agree to take the matter up, whether they would prefer us to do so, I think an early meeting between representatives of the Departments concerned should take place- primarily to get over respective responsibilities clear and also if possible, to decide a general line of action."[23]

Accordingly a circular was sent out to the other Departments. But no one showed much interest. Everyone suggested that the state of affairs have improved

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[22] Letter dated 7.2.44 From the Additional Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, New Delhi, to the Additional Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Calcutta, ibid.

[23] Notes in the Home Department, Government of India, by R. Tottenham, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, ibid.

and that everything was just fine. With evident displeasure, Tottenham put an end to the matter with a short note: "My chief object was to get it accepted that Press control and publicity methods were not the close preserve of the I. & B. and Home Depts. This seems to have been accepted and progress has been made."[24]

Texts of Dissent: Criticism within a Loyalist Idiom:

The last section attempted to explore some of the difficulties that the various arms of government faced in their attempt to control the appearance of 'alarmist' reports on the Bengal famine. It is true, as has been demonstrated above, that the control regime was fraught with internal problems that the state was unable to surmount during the difficult was years. However, it is also true that the government, both at the centre as well as in the provinces, were armed with extensive executive - almost despotic - powers that the war-time emergency ordinances bestowed upon them. Thus, the "surprising degree of latitude" given to the press about which the Governor of Bengal himself remarks upon seems to require further explanation.

One of the principles exemplified in much of the discussions on war-time policy formulation was that of uniformity of action. Thus, if certain criticisms of government policies were allowed to appear in one newspaper, the government[25] found it difficult to ban publication of similar material in other newspapers. Of

[24] Ibid.

[25] As the discussions in the previous section has shown, the responsibilities of the various departments of the government as well as its different levels at the centre and the provinces with regard to exercising control over the press was not clearly chalked out. Thus, while referring to the 'government' in this respect, it is rather difficult here to specify exactly the department or level of government in question. As a result, 'government' has been used as a more general term denoting the overall administrative structures of the state that were concerned with exercising control over the press. The non-specific expression- 'government'- used in much of the discussions in this section points towards the ambiguities in the structure of control exercised upon newspapers.

course, as we have seen in the previous chapter, principles elucidated in discussions of government policy could seldom be strictly adhered to during their implementation. However, in the case of news reports, the government saw little use in permitting certain newspapers a degree of freedom to criticize authority while clamping down on others, especially when the points of criticisms were similar. Moreover, as becomes evident from the above section, criticisms of government policies were, in fact, allowed by the Bengal Government provided they were "within limits" and directed towards securing "change of policies."[26]

What baffled the government further was the fact that most criticisms of government policy in case of the Bengal famine was coming from unexpected quarters. They were not confined to those newspapers that the government were generally suspicious of. For instance, the *Peoples' War*, which was always looked upon with suspicion was on the whole less critical of government at all levels whereas *The Statesman*, a British owned newspaper generally considered with favour as "moderate", championed the campaign against government policies during the famine.

The Statesman pioneered public critiques of government policies. Yet its critiques were crafted in a textual mode that made the administration powerless to take any stern action against it. This section would carefully look at the reports that came out in *The Statesman* during the famine and the overall politics towards which these reports were geared. This can, I think, point towards another dimension of the complexity that the authorities were faced with in their attempt to deal with unpleasant reports in newspapers.

The first aspect that made it difficult for the administration to impose censorship on many of the strong critiques of government published in *The Statesman* was its strong overall support for the war-effort. In fact, the government was predominantly criticized for ignoring signs of a chronic food

[26] Letter from Wavell to Casey, ibid. the extract is quoted in the above section.

crisis in a place which not only fell within the war zone but was a major base for Allied military activities. What it stressed upon was the difficulties that the military might face while operating from a famine stricken zone. Complaining about Calcutta's garbage and sewage disposal problems that could lead to an outbreak of epidemics in an already famished city, an article on 20 June, 1943, concluded with the statement, "Calcutta is full of troops of all nations, geography has made her an important war-base for Democracy... If only for the sake of efficient prosecution of the war, the city's affairs should be put into tolerable order without delay."[27] Again, an article from its issue of 8 August, 1943 said:

> But it so happens, from a turn last year in the wheel of global war, that some scores of millions of rice-eaters nowadays live within daily range of hostile air-raids and in diminishing but continued invasion by land or sea. They will presumably be living behind the Indian and British and American forces moving next autumn into Japanese occupied Burma, should a major counter-offensive in this war-theatre be staged. Their physical and moral condition is thus an important military factor; a populace three-parts starved is in no condition to support armies or resist dangerous rumours.[28]

Thus, the criticisms, on the whole, did not arise out of a humanitarian concern for the starving poor, but because a famished population would be an impediment for military activities in the region. Another article on 10 October, 1943, read, "That the part of India most conspicuously cast by geography last year for the role of eventual springboard for the Allies' counter-offensive eastwards should have been allowed to become famine-stricken without any justifying monsoon failure is one of the war's big mysteries..."[29]

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[27] *The Statesman*, 20 June, 1943.

[28] *The Statesman*, 8 August, 1943.

[29] *The Statesman*, 10 October, 1943.

Second, the views of *The Statesman* regarding the nationalist movement were particularly uncharitable. The government was happy to discover that a newspaper so critical of government policies, which can in no way be labeled as "loyalist", were criticizing the activities of the nationalist movement and its leaders. Referring to the Quit India Movement of 1942 as a "political sabotage"[30], *The Statesman* observed, "...Indian nationalism generally has cut a peculiarly sorry figure under the hard test of war."[31] Criticizing the government at all levels for not paying adequate attention to the food scarcity in Bengal, an editorial commented, "If one revered man fasts, the whole field of politics is convulsed. If 5,000,000 people are threatened with famine, there may not even be a Cabinet Meeting."[32] This obviously referred to Gandhi's fasts and the importance that were given to it by the administration.

Again, *The Statesman* put a large part of the blame for their misery on the Indians themselves. First, an article on 10 March, 1943, predicting a possible food crisis and famine-like conditions in the future, wrote, "India as a whole is we think about to be obliged by the hard spur of war to develop much wider adaptability in matters of diet."[33] For the provisioning of more food, it observed, "the Government of India will try to help; but it seems to us that Bengal may best help herself..."[34]

On 15 October, when large numbers of poor vagrants were dying in the city, *The Statesman* came out with a strong criticism against the inability of the poor in Bengal to adjust to a different diet during the famine:

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[30] *The Statesman*, 23 September. 1943.

[31] *The Statesman*, 5 October, 1943.

[32] *The Statesman*, 10 March, 1943.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

> It seems to be true, though it may not be easy for the foreigners to believe, that some are suffering from various degrees of malnutrition not because foodgrains, but merely because rice is unobtainable by them. The apathy jointly engendered by cumulative misery and inflexible habit, complicated perhaps by unsuitability of culinary utensils or methods, prevents their preserving health by eating what they are unaccustomed to. Commonsense use of unfamiliar vegetable nourishment such as the millets and similar foods imported from other parts of India seems beyond their powers of dietary adjustment. Rice indeed is in the medical sense a light diet, and the rougher foods such as Jowar and Bajra, maize and atta eaten in the C.P. or Punjab may exceed the assimilative capacity of some Bengali digestive systems already impaired by prolonged dearth of sustenance. But the reluctance among a proportion of stronger sufferers, especially of the middle classes, to accept any kind of dietary innovation suggests a degree of mental conservatism unsuitable for modern conditions.[35]

Failure to adapt to a new diet during an emergency was not the only criticism labeled against the ordinary people of Bengal. The cultural habits and mental conservatism that produced the apathy for modifying culinary habits were also responsible for a work-culture that were considered unsuitable for the difficult time of the famine. The newspaper reported with alarm how for the fortnight between 1 and 15 October government offices were functioning at half-pressure with not more than 50 percent of the clerical staff working, because of the Durga Puja festivities. Government food shops, despite the starvation in the streets, were closed for three days out of the first eight days of October. Commenting on the situation, it observed, "...Bengal, or at any rate the HQ of her civil administration in Calcutta, has during the worst crisis of her history enjoyed one

[35] *The Statesman*, 15 October, 1943.

more general holiday in one month, than is allowed in Britain during the whole year."[36] Blaming the Indians for their own miseries, *The Statesman* went even further to point out that "The religious susceptibilities and practices which have half paralyzed the functions of the Government for 15 days are hers, not Britain's."[37] On a more philosophical note, it concluded:

> Life is a struggle. All living organisms, says biologists, wage a constant many-sided fight for existence. And the chief secret of success in the struggle is the organism's adaptability. To survive, it must be resilient and enterprising enough to change its ways quickly in adjustment to any dangerous changes in its external circumstances... Judged by this modern scientific test, the prospects for the Government and people and people of Bengal are somber...[38]

From August 1943, *The Statesman* launched its unsparing criticism of the government at all levels. However, the first target was, of course, the elected Bengal Ministry and, as far as the city of Calcutta was concerned, the Calcutta Corporation. An article on the 8 August, commenting on Bengal's lamentable state, wrote:

> For that state Bengal herself is in part blame-worthy. Few of any signs of innate greatness, such as these tremendous days in the world's history demand, are discernable among the provincial politicians who have manned her ministries. Most of their energies from the war's outset have evidently been bent on petty intrigue and acrimony and manoeuvre for the spoils of office... For

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

> incompetence and irresponsibility the Corporation which runs the municipal affairs of her capital is probably unexcelled in all Asia.[39]

However, it neither spared the provincial bureaucracy in Bengal, nor the Government of India. Referring to the provincial administration, it remarked: "Her permanent officials, whether British or Indian, have shown unmistakable symptoms of infection by the pervasive provincial malaise; consequently they tend to lack imagination or grip."[40] But the criticisms of Government of India's policies were most hard-hitting:

> But blame for the extremely grave situation now confronting Bengal rests heavily on the Government of India. The province's outstanding present problem is food...We find ourselves amazed, in retrospect, by the Government of India's lack of vision or consistency in this supreme and vital matter. From the military knowledge in their possession, a coming food-shortage and rocketing prices for primary commodities in Eastern India should have been clearly discernible to an alert eye within their New Delhi organization from the moment of Japan's belligerence... Yet a full year was allowed to elapse before a food department at the Centre was even set up... Nor, during the Food Department's first seven months of existence, so far as the public can judge, has it possessed anything legitimately describable as a fixed and well-considered policy, at any rate for Eastern India. There has on the contrary been every sign of hasty muddle-headed improvisation.[41]

Continuing its criticisms of the government, *The Statesman* finally asserted in an article on 23 September, 1943, that the famine was "man-

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[39] *The Statesman*, 8 August, 1943.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

made".[42] It argued that all other famines in India were primarily the outcome of natural calamities, but the present one was not the result of climatic failure since there was no lack of rainfall. In fact, it observed that what Bengal's state would have been if a large scale drought accompanied the administrative failure was an "appalling thought."[43] But it said, "outstandingly the largest factor has been shameful lack of foresight and planning capacity by India's own civil Governments, Central and Provincial... Each ugly step towards the actuality of famine has found them staggering along several moves in the rear."[44]

It accepted that the Indians themselves, especially their elected representatives and the politicians, were equally responsible for the disaster. Yet, it gave a curious apology for the failure of the Indians to stand up to the crisis. It read:

> India not yet being self-governing, disproportionately many of her people inevitably lack both the conferred actuality and the traditions of public service. Under the present system of government, responsibility for breakdown inescapably rests in the last resort upon Authority in Britain, and its immediate representatives here. Every British citizen is necessarily shamed and sullied when his Indian fellow-subjects die of starvation in Bengal.[45]

In fact, when some comments on the Bengal famine transmitted from Britain tried to put the blame for the food-scarcity and the administrative breakdown only upon Indian shoulders, *The Statesman* vigorously opposed such views and

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[42] *The Statesman*, 23 September, 1943.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

asserted the culpability of the entire administrative structure in India. Without denying the fault of the elected Bengal Ministry, it pointed out that the Bengal Ministry was advised by British as well as Indian officials. It observed, "so long as the British Parliament through its British representatives in Whitehall and Delhi continues to bear some obligation for governing of this country those representatives are in some measure chargeable where affairs go gravely awry."[46] It argued that the catastrophe was "general" and did not originate from no one particular group of individuals:

> Here is a great human tragedy by which the whole administrative structure relating to this country, whether India Office, in Parliament or on India's or Bengal's own soil, is collectively besmirched... Government in respect of Indian Empire is still in the last resort one and indivisible, on the moral as well as the constitutional plane."[47]

These opinions expressed in the paper had far-reaching implications that need to be delineated. Of course, the Government at an all-India level as well as the British Parliament was held responsible for the catastrophe. This assertion contained within it an allegiance to the British Crown and the Empire at large, and it was on the basis of India's 'subject-hood' under the British Empire that India could claim protection and fair administration from the Government in Britain and its representatives in India. What it reminded the government was that Empire, in order to be legitimate, had certain inalienable responsibilities. Those responsibilities in times of crises could not be shrugged off. This obviously was a critique of authority, but one that also, at the same time, asserted the legitimacy of the authority. It asserted the rights and expectations that the subject-people had from the Empire, yet, in the process accepted the subject-hood of the people in relation to the Empire. Thus, critiques of government put forward by The

[46] *The Statesman*, 5 October, 1943.

[47] Ibid.

Statesman were expressed within a peculiarly loyalist mode, one that enabled it to escape charges of sedition as well as loyalism. This made it so much more difficult for the administration to take any stern action against the newspaper, in spite of its criticisms being quite harsh and scathing. But this led to further complications, since this made it even more difficult for taking action against other newspapers, for they could claim that the substance of their criticism was not much different from what the government allowed The Statesman to publish. All stakeholders in the administration with respect to newspapers were faced with this peculiar dilemma.

One of the reasons for the misery identified by the newspaper was the hiding of the gravity of the famine situation prevailing in Bengal from the British public. In fact, it pointed out that the Bengal famine of 1873-74 the government achieved a great success in controlling the situation and reducing famine mortality to negligible levels because of "the warm-hearted vigilance of British public opinion"[48] facilitated by the publication of news about the famine in the British press. In contrast, not only was the government trying to stop all information about the famine from going out of the country, but the Government of India itself was in a denial mode and did not want to accept the harsh realities. It contended that there were enough warnings given to the government by the Indian press way back in November 1942, when *The Statesman* itself criticized the establishment of the Food Department as "dangerously belated." It had further warned the government in an editorial on 21st November 1942, "... should widespread administrative breakdown befall India during the difficult years ahead... there is greater likelihood of its originating from economic rather than from political distresses..." however, such warnings remained unheeded.

As an instance of the administration trying to play down the scale of the havoc caused by the famine, The Statesman pointed out that the statistics of the number of starvation deaths in the Calcutta hospitals released by the Government of

[48] *The Statesman*, 23 September, 1943.

Bengal replaced the word 'starvation' with 'sick destitutes'. It pointed out that this was similar to the Government of Orissa's argument in a press conference that most of the deaths were caused by actual starvation but malnutrition and inability to obtain food of a ' proper kind', leading to dysentery and diarrhea. In a spurt of scathing criticism, the newspaper lashed out against the Bengal Government:

> Such fine Secretariat distinctions and essays in false optimism will not do; instead of impressing a public grown tired of soothing governmental assurances they merely irritate. Whether a man dies because he has eaten nothing, or not eaten enough or well, alters in no way the hard fact of death, nor the reality of widespread famine.[49]

The Statesman concluded that one of the gravest problems with regard to the famine was that news about it was being deliberately suppressed by the authorities. Not only was it keeping the people of the country in the dark, it was also preventing the British public from pressurizing the Indian administration to act with determination to stop the disaster. Since the people of India were the subjects of the British Empire, starvation in the colony was destroying the reputation of "the fair name of the British Government." The situation, in its opinion, could only be remedied if the British citizens in England could be told the hard realities of the famine. Criticizing the Government of India, it wrote:

> On that august body apparently rests responsibility for the British public's evident and deplorable ignorance of the dire conditions created in the country and particularly in war-threatened Bengal, by food shortage attributable largely to administrative shortcomings. There are reasons for believing that the dread words

[49] *The Statesman*, 14 September, 1943.

> starvation and corps have not yet appeared in the British Press except through bureaucratic oversight; famine is not officially recognized to exist. As we have remarked before, if special war-time reasons necessitate only emasculated versions of the brutal truth being transmitted from India by correspondents of overseas newspapers or agencies, these reasons cannot be applied to the Government of India itself or the India Office. Silence in Whitehall will only be interpreted as inspired by an unworthy hope of shielding departmental or personal reputations from criticism.[50]

The Statesman was unsparing in its criticisms of Amery, the Secretary of State, for his statements in the British Parliament that trivialized the desperate famine situation in Bengal. On 14 August, 1943, it reported of a speech delivered by Amery in the British Parliament that spoke of the Indian food "situation." The speech suggested that so far as the Government of India and the India Office was concerned, all that could have been done to prevent a food shortage was done. Carefully avoiding words such as famine, starvation, corps or cholera, the speech contained no reference to the grave administrative mistakes committed by the higher authorities in the Indian administration. Moreover, Amery had asserted that it was due to the timely action taken by the Central Government in India that the distress could be confined only to Bengal, Cochin, Travancore and parts of the Deccan. Labeling the speech as "irritating to tempers already under some stress", the newspaper commented that "as an example of the politician's art of smoothly evasive meiosis this takes memorably high place."[51]

On 16 October, 1943, *The Statesman* reported yet another incident when Amery had told the Parliament that the weekly death-roll in Bengal including Calcutta was about 1000, but that it "might be higher." Using two different kinds of official statistics made available by the Government of Bengal, both dubious

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[50] Ibid.

[51] *The Statesman*, 14 October, 1943.

and gross underestimations, the newspaper arrived at nine times and eleven times the estimate given by the Secretary of State's. Criticizing Amery, it wrote:

> The Secretary of State for India seems to be a strangely misinformed man... the continuous appearance of effort on the part of persons somewhere within India's Governmental machine, perhaps out here, perhaps in Whitehall, to play down, suppress, distort, or muffle the truth about Bengal is dragging the fair name of the British Raj needlessly low.[52]

However, two days after, in his speech in Birmingham, Amery reversed the tone while speaking about the famine in Bengal. He proclaimed that Bengal was struck by a "grievous famine" where people were "dying of hunger in the Empire's second city."[53] Referring to "this terribly anxious situation," he said that the matter was uppermost in his thoughts for months. Even though *The Statesman* differed with Amery in the details of the famine in his speech, it nevertheless reported this with congratulatory excesses:

> What can there be in Birmingham's air that changes the hearts of ageing British statesmen? ... [A]t Birmingham emerged a different Mr. Amery. Plainly a human being with generous hearted sympathies after all, not a distant icicle. Instead of by studious meiosis denying even the existence of famine in Bengal he recognized it frankly, bringing himself to use the previously unmentioned word.[54]

Justifying the previous critical comments on the Secretary of State, it went on:

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[52] *The Statesmen*, 16 October, 1943.

[53] *The Statesman*, 18 October, 1943.

[54] Ibid.

> Newspapers of the soberer sort do not enjoy frequently criticizing Authority, especially on subjects so grave as Bengal's present horrifying state. Lately we have done some criticizing, not with glee, but because in our judgment it was needed. We now find pleasure in felicitating Mr. Amery for an utterance which, though in parts questionable, is conspicuously more appropriate to the dire realities of the situation than any he has yet made.[55]

In spite of some strong criticism of government policies, the authorities found it difficult to deny the claim that *The Statesman* was a newspaper of a soberer sort. This becomes evident in some of the suggestions that it gives for dealing with the famine in Bengal. It recognized that the famine was caused by an administrative failure. And thus, by a simple stroke of logic, it argued that the only way of bringing things under control was to strengthen the administrative structure. Regarding this, it had quite a few suggestions. The first suggestion was to eradicate all faction fighting and petty politics from the existing Bengal Ministry so that it could function without any distractions. The Ministry could be made more broad-based by bringing in people with a variety of expertise, whose members trusted one another and could function as a team. However, it observed that given the history of Bengal politics, such a situation was almost impossible to achieve. In fact, many Bengal politicians actually were willing to welcome direct Governor's rule in the province rather than an administration of the Muslim League with Sir Nazimuddin at its head. However, it considered that direct rule by a Governor could actually be a good option to meet the crisis. However, a far better and simple solution, in their opinion, was the option of imposing martial law in the province. This would also have recognized Bengal's new status as a "dangerously exposed frontier province."[56] However, this was a more unlikely course of action because the military would not perhaps like to take up the

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[55] Ibid.

[56] *The Statesman*, 23 September, 1943.

responsibility: "Their job they may think is to fight, not to fiddle around repairing a civilian administration broken down through mishandling."[57] The best solution in its analysis, though it could have invited legal objection, was that the administration of Bengal could be handed over to Governor could also to be given a high military rank. This military Governor with civilian functions could be aided by "an administration consisting in three equal parts of eminent Indian public men unconnected with the past or present Bengal Ministries, of serving soldiers with open minds and ample energies, and of members of the ICS cadre."[58]

No matter how harsh and unsparing the criticisms of government policies might have been, it was difficult for the administration to prosecute the newspaper that was seen as a major contributor towards a public propaganda for what the state wanted in the war-time emergency— strengthening the administration of civilian government through an intensification of bureaucratic power and marginalizing democratically elected provincial politicians. In fact, *The Statesman* went one step further— it suggested a militarization of civilian government— a suggestion that the government knew was almost impossible to implement, but something that they were far from apathetic towards.

Even when *The Statesman* was launching its powerful anti-government criticisms, certain reports continued to appear in its pages, sometimes directly in connection with the reports on the famine, which would be dubbed as unabashedly loyalist. For instance, commenting on Lord Linlithgow, who was vacating his office of the Viceroy in the midst of the famine in Bengal, *The Statesman* of 19 October, 1943, read:

> This week the office would be vacated by a man big in every sense of the word, whom history however will we think regard as having

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

> missed greatness... In force of character, as in physical stature, he has towered above his colleagues in the enlarged Executive Council. A man of unremitting industry, deep moral earnestness, and strong perception of his offices massive responsibilities, he never spared himself. Therein perhaps partly lies the explanation of the tragic note upon which his Viceroyalty ends. No man in his position could have foreseen all. His foresight and endurance have averted many perils, and the peril unaverted may in some measure be attributable to his preoccupations and overwork.[59]

Perhaps no other newspaper in Bengal could have vindicated a Viceroy of all responsibilities for the catastrophe that his regime inaugurated, even while criticizing over-all government policies responsible for the famine. *The Statesman* summed up his Viceroyalty with the statement: "A strong and upright man, who did his best in one of the world's most awkward jobs at an exceptionally hard time."[60]

Even more striking was *The Statesman's* love for the military. When Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed the Supreme Commander for South-East Asia, it came out with a report that was striking in its tone: "At a New Delhi Airport... alighted in Admiral's uniform a hearteningly youthful figure inspiring hope of bold policies. We offer Lord Louis Mountbatten our good wishes in a singularly arduous task..."[61] At a time when the army was the most unpopular organization in Bengal and its relationship with the civilian population most strained, *The Statesman* published reports of how the British soldiers, as warm-hearted citizen of Empire shamed by the irresponsibility of the Crown's representatives in India, coming all out in helping the poor destitute. It reported:

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[59] *The Statesman*, 19 October, 1943.

[60] Ibid.

[61] *The Statesman*, 10 October, 1943.

> And nowadays in famine stricken-Bengal, many remarkable instances have come to our notice of troops helping the poor, even in ways which strictly speaking involve awkward breach of regulations... particularly perhaps to the young men from Britain comparatively new to Indian conditions, the terrible sights now daily visible in Eastern India come as a profound shock. Some such newcomers evidently feel personally disgraced that such conditions should have been allowed to develop among the helpless and ignorant of a great Province for whose welfare Britain still carries a heavy share of responsibility."[62]

This was valuable propaganda, spontaneously produced without directions from the government. Moreover, the critical tenor of many of its editorials and articles precluded dismissal of the newspaper as a whole as die-hard loyalist. It is no surprise therefore that *The Statesman* was left alone in spite of its sharp criticisms of the government. However, in one respect, the administration was rather perplexed— the frequent appearance in *The Statesman* of photographs of famine victims that were considered 'alarmist'.

The Statesman was thorough in defence of the photographs that appeared in the paper. On 29 August, having printed quite a few photographs of Calcutta's famished destitute, it came out with an article defending the rationale of having done so:

> They are terrible photographs. We publish them with reluctance and after anxious thought, believing that to do so is unavoidably our duty. Confronted this year with numerous instances of maladministration in the Empire's "Second City," it has been our experience that until they are discussed in the Press nothing is done... Many we are aware, will view the photographs with

[62] *The Statesman*, 24 October, 1943.

> surprise as well as repugnance— not only readers in Northern India (still largely ignorant of Bengal's state) but even in Calcutta. For it is a large city... and the comparatively unobservant may still pass through its wealthier quarters without noticing much difference from the rather unattractive normal.[63]

It observed, in conclusion, "It is our hope that the photographs published today will at any rate induce realistic understanding and interpretation throughout India of her present less resounding but more fearful difficulties."[64]

One of the ways in which the government sought to deal with these photographs was to describe them as 'unnecessarily alarmist'. For instance, the Central Government spokesperson suggested in the Bengal Legislature that Bengal's distress were "over-dramatized" by the press by printing photographs of famine victims. The Statesman was quick to come to its own defence once again:

> The reference was apparently to publication in the Press of photographs. These only came into use when it seemed plain that public speeches, Press statements, and leading articles in newspapers were having practically no effect on the New Delhi Secretariat's imagination. To save the innocent poor of Bengal in their thousands from death, bereavement, and wretchedness, and to avoid spread of epidemics to the troops in the War Zone, sharp stimulus seemed needed.[65]

The Statesman's views towards the famished poor were neither so charitable nor so sympathetic however. It made several appeals to the Government of Bengal to make arrangements for the removal of the starvation victims from the

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[63] *The Statesman*, 29 August, 1943.

[64] Ibid.

[65] *The Statesman*, 12 September, 1943.

boundaries of the city. First, as becomes evident from the passage quoted above, it claimed that such a course of action was necessary in order to protect the military from epidemics that might be spread in the city through contagion with the famine victims who could be the carrier of diseases. Moreover, epidemics could also spread because of no fault of the vagrants themselves, but because of the inability of the administration, especially the Calcutta Corporation to deal with the challenges of sanitation facilities thrown up by the swelling numbers of the city's poor. However, the second reason cited in support of their claims for the removal of the famine destitute from the city was even more noteworthy. It observed that the peculiar circumstances of the war had created possibilities for the healthy (and, by implication, the better-off) residents of the city to come into direct physical contact with the famine victims. It accused the Government of Bengal of not removing "the city's most leprous and unsavoury vagrants... despite the likelihood of healthy citizens having to share air-raid shelters with them..."[66] contact with the famine vagrants were considered necessarily polluting.

In spite of their annoyance, the government found it difficult to take action against the publication of famine photographs, primarily because these photographs represented a reality that was too evident to be covered up. Moreover, apart from printing images of victims, *The Statesman* also published pictures of relief being carried out by organizations under the supervision of the government authorities. There also appeared photographs of the military helping the famine victims by arranging for their relief. Such photographs necessarily had propaganda value that the government saw no reason to suppress.

However, it seems that the charges of over-sensationalization of the famine situation through the photographic medium were not completely groundless after all. In a compilation of various articles published by *The Statesman* during the

[66] *The Statesman*, 29 August, 1943.

famine[67] covering the period from November 1942 to October 1943 sometimes during the immediate aftermath of the calamity, the cover-page contained a sketch of a scene in a Calcutta street showing three destitute women (Figure 1). All the three figures of famished women, as becomes evident from the photographs printed within the special issue, were taken from three different photographs clicked on three different occasions (Figures 2, 3 and 4). What the cover-page sketch had done was to extrapolate the three figures in three different photographs from their spatial contexts and brought them together in such a way that it seemed that all three disturbing figures of the famished poor were in the same spatial location. The image that finally emerged was far more striking and did not represent any one particular dreadful scene on the streets of Calcutta. Neither was it acknowledged that the image was a composition made out of three different photographs, and were simply labeled as "Destitution Scene in Calcutta", producing an illusion of hyper-reality.

This section cannot be concluded without reference to one strong voice of critique directed at these photographs from an unexpected quarter. This was a voice from within the public sphere itself. The very famous play by Bijan Bhattacharya, *Nabanna*, that gained enormous popularity and critical acclaim in the Calcutta stage during the war years, contained a scene depicting two press photographers in a famine relief camp. Extracts from the scene are as follows:

> From inside the auditorium, a press photographer, clad in western attire, pointed to a beggar woman bearing a child and called out:
>
> First photographer: Excellent! That's a fine model! (Addressing a friend) Mr. Mukherjee, come on, quick! Lets take a few snaps for our paper. Won't get many as good...

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[67] *The Statesman* [Calcutta], "Maladministration in Bengal," Special publication, 31 October 1943. This issue is in File No.- 6/1943 (Press Cuttings), Nanavati Papers, Manuscript Section, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

With her utter destitution written on her face, the beggar woman laid out her hands.

First photographer: (Adjusting his camera) Mukherjee!

Second photographer: Yes?

First: Can you just make her smile a bit? Just try and see...

Second: What? A smile!

First: Yes Yes, I can, then, give the caption 'Madonna of Bengal... to this snap.

Second: The idea! Our paper's circulation might enhance two-fold tomorrow! And our boss will be terribly pleased with you...

First: An excellent idea, right?[68]

What the play registered its protests against was the very process of commodification of the famine victim that was being capitalized upon for purely profit-making enterprises. What the play also tried to show was that this process of commodification was also responsible for trivialization of the reality of sufferings of the starving poor. Neither was it a fact that this was not understood by the famine victims themselves. Pradhan, a famine victim in a relief camp, was shown to be murmuring at the press photographers his annoyance at their activities:

Pradhan: Go, sell, good snaps of skeletons, good good![69]

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[68] Bijan Bhattacharya, *Nabanna* (Dey's Publishing, Calcutta 2009, first published in 1944) pp.69-70

[69] Ibid.

Conclusion:

The aim of this chapter was to discuss some of the aspects of government control over the newspapers. As has been noted in the previous chapter, the government at all levels had to actively participate in active negotiations regarding the implementation of their policies. In the case of newspapers as well, the chapter attempted to demonstrate that in spite of certain principles enunciated at the level of policy formulation, such as the principles of impartiality and uniformity of action, these could seldom be adhered to while implementing those policies.

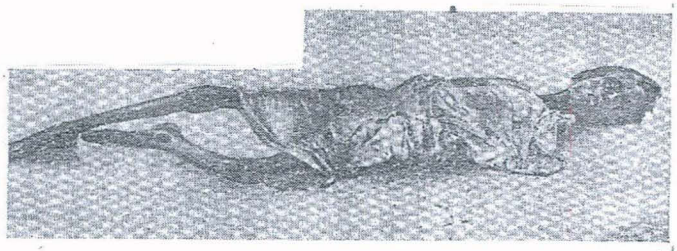
For this purpose, the difficulties that the government faced in their attempt to control the press had been studied by taking up the case of the Bengal famine of 1943. This was because the famine inaugurated a crucial break in the nature of press reports that were published during the war. The initial years of the war, as a result of several war-time repressive policies in place, the newspapers tried to avoid much confrontation with the authorities. Even those newspapers that were opposed to the war or the war-effort in India exercised a certain degree of restraint while criticizing government policies. The outbreak of the famine, in a sense, led to the pushing of boundaries that were drawn in the field of criticisms of policies. This was because of at least two reasons. First, the reality of the famine, after a point, became too evident to ignore, and criticisms of the administration with regard to the famine were often carried out without any direct opposition to the war per se. this was demonstrated through the discussion of certain press reports of *The Statesman*, where opposition and criticisms of government policies were carried out within a completely loyalist idiom.

Second, and a related point, that criticisms of policies with regard to the famine were often carried out by newspapers that took an overall loyalist position. Some of these reports, even those that criticized government policies, sometimes had propaganda values for the government. Consequently the government thought that

imposing restrictions could be counter-productive. Criticisms of government inaction during the famine was championed by *The Statesman*, a newspaper considered 'moderate' otherwise, who declared itself as the first newspaper to have warned the government of a possible famine long time back. This, in a sense, proved to be a shield behind which the other newspapers could find protection from state repression. Even though uniformity of action could not be applied in its pure form in implementation of policies, it could neither be completely violated by allowing some newspapers to criticize government activities while suppressing other newspapers who were also criticizing the government for the same failures.

Destitution Scene in Calcutta.

Figure 1: The image on the cover page of *The Statesman* [Calcutta], "Maladministration in Bengal," Special publication, 31 October 1943.

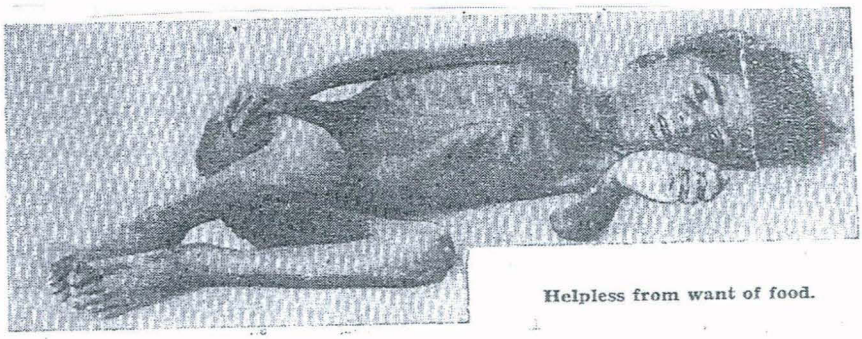


Top: Figure 2

Bottom Left: Figure 3

Bottom Right: Figure 4

The three images that was combined together in Figure 1.



Helpless from want of food.

—STARVING CHILDREN—

Above—An emaciated child eats a scrap of food by the wayside. Left.—A mute appeal for help—two Calcutta tragedies.

Top: Figure 5; Bottom Left: Figure 6 Bottom Right: Figure 7

Images of Starving Children

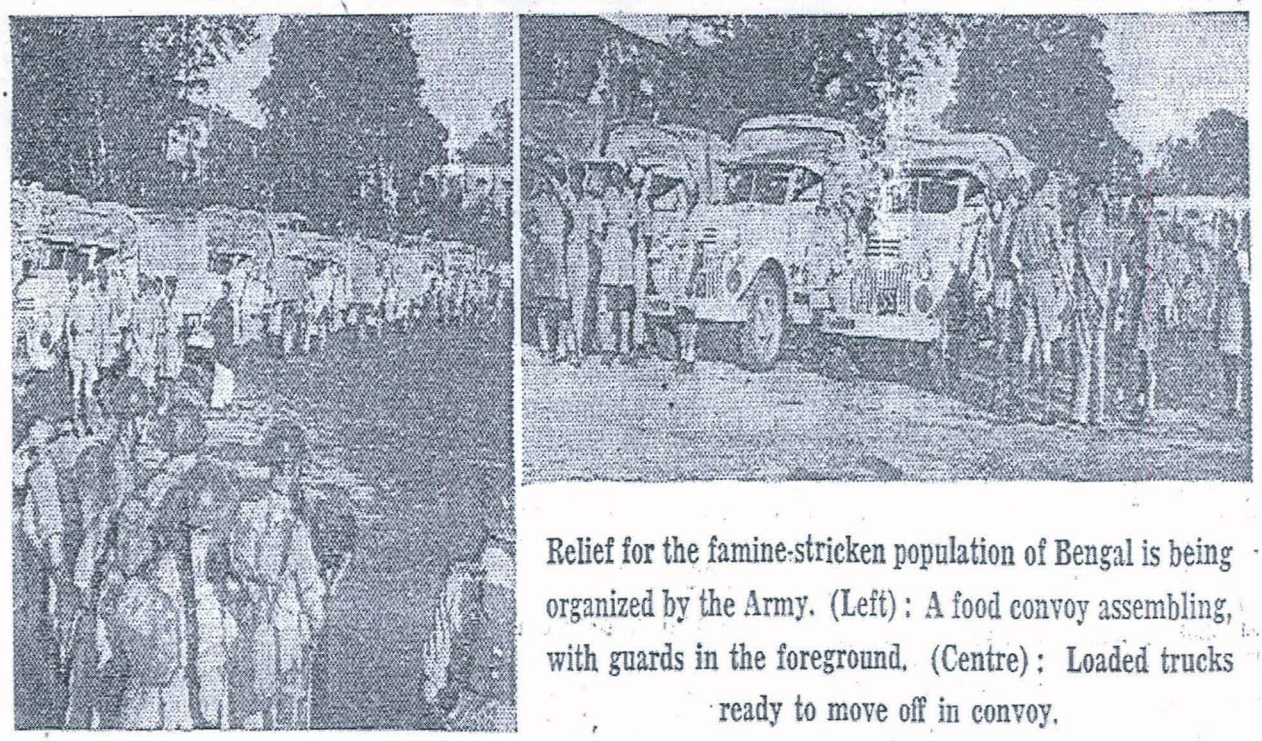
Army trucks being loaded at a depot.

VING VILLAGERS

H.E. The Viceroy and Lady Wavell accompanied by the Governor watching destitutes at a meal when they paid a surprise visit to the Rotary Club Free Kitchen in S. Calcutta. (L to R.) Lady Wavell, Mr. E. M. Jenkins, Private Secy. to the Viceroy, Sir Thomas Rutherford, Lord Wavell and Mr. J. K. Biswas, chairman, Rotary Club Relief Committee.

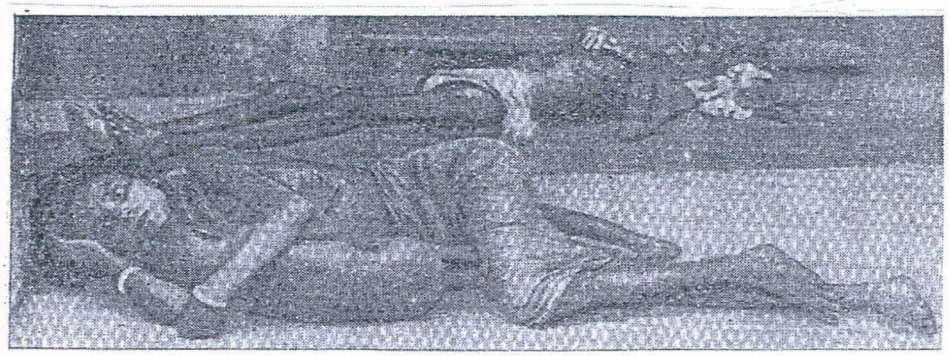
Top: Figure 8; Bottom Left: Figure 9; Bottom Right: Figure 10

Images of Military Aid for Famine Victims



Relief for the famine-stricken population of Bengal is being organized by the Army. (Left) : A food convoy assembling, with guards in the foreground. (Centre) : Loaded trucks ready to move off in convoy.

Figure 11

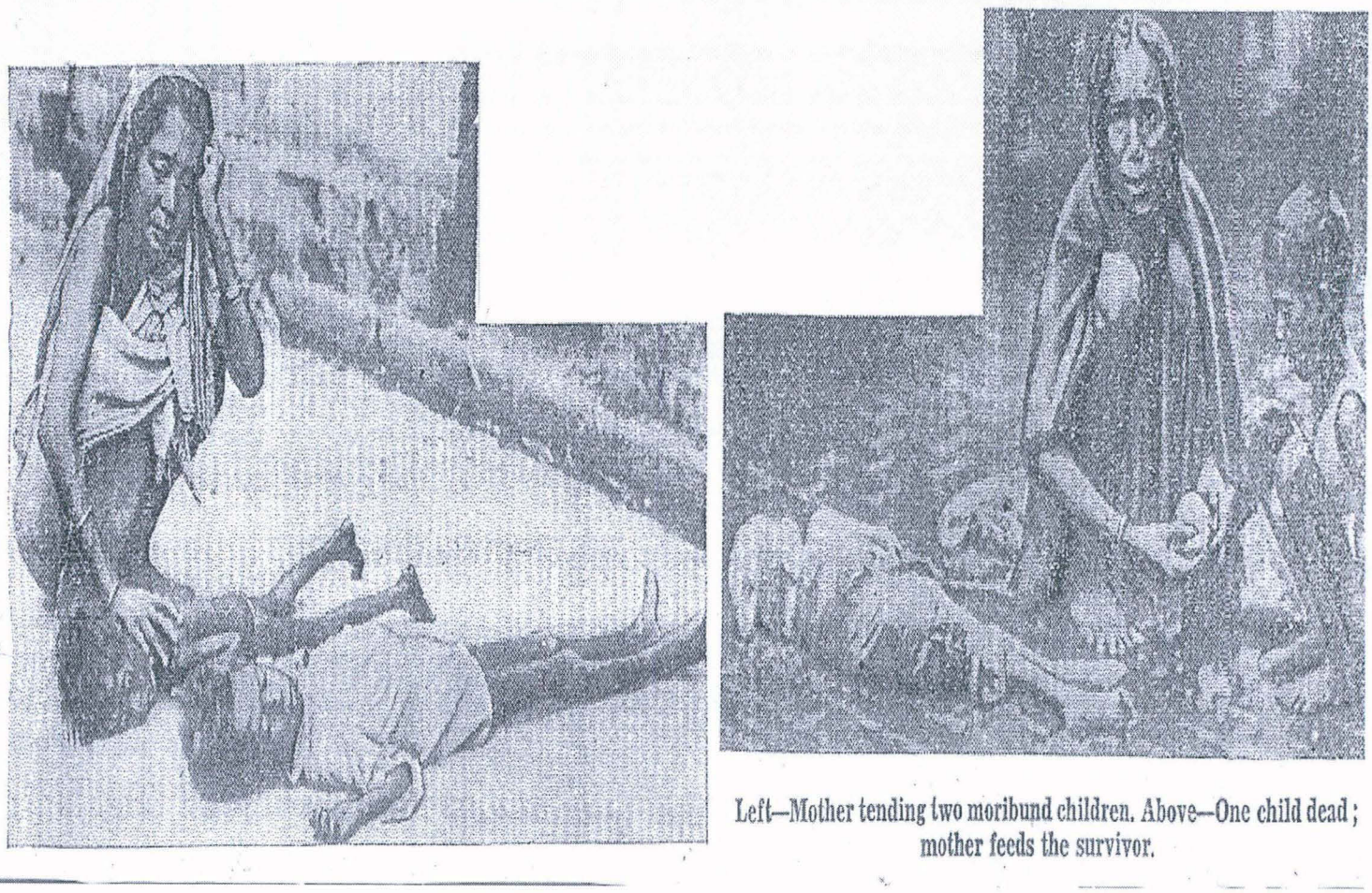


A young mother, with a child clasped to her breast, weak from want of food, lies on the pavement of a Calcutta street, while a man, apparently on the verge of death, is in the background.

Top: Figure 12

Bottom: Figure 13

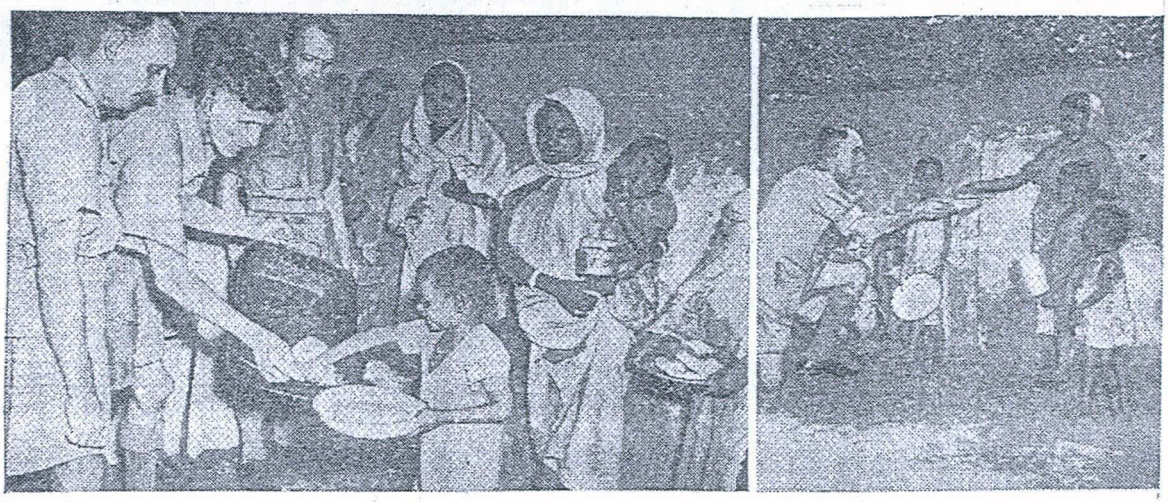
Images of Starving Women



Left—Mother tending two moribund children. Above—One child dead; mother feeds the survivor.

Figure 14

MILITARY BRING RELIEF TO STAR



From the beginning of the famine in E Bengal military personnel have been feeding women and children from their own rations. At one R.A.F station there are three set meal-times a day for the hungry. Above—(left)—Sgt. Jack Cole, fitter air frame mechanic, of Edinburgh, Sgt. David Price, parachute packer, of Wolverhampton and Sgt. Arthur Gilbert, aircraft stores hand, of Nelson, Lancs., feeding victims outside their mess. Top right.—An Indian woman with her four children being fed by W/O Bertie Fenn of Crumlin, Co. Antrim. Right—Handing a tit-bit to a little victim.

Figure 15

Conclusion:

Much has been said in recent historiography on the late colonial state in India about the fact that it was not a monolithic structure, how the different levels of the administrative edifice did not function as a composite whole with a clear hierarchy of command formulated by those at the top and implemented by those at the bottom of the official hierarchy. It has been pointed out that the local administrative machinery always enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in both interpretation and application of regulations handed down from the top through the bureaucratic chain of command.[1] In Bengal, where an elected ministry remained in place throughout much of the war years, the functioning of the state structure was even more complex, the bureaucracy and the elected ministers often involved in complex processes of negotiations. Proofs of dissent and dissatisfactions among the district-level bureaucracy and local politicians about decisions taken and policies formulated by the bureaucratic or political high-command have also been provided to show the fractures and fissures within the late colonial administrative structure.[2]

Such interventions, no doubt, were of considerable value in charting out new modes of enquiry and framing new questions on the subject at a time when studies on the war-time colonial state were restricted to the assessments of Indian war-time economy and high military policies, which undoubtedly accentuated the image of the colonial state as a rather unified structure.[3] In many of these earlier

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[1] I am referring primarily to Sanjoy Bhattacharya's work here. Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War*, Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, 2001.

[2] Much of the recent works commenting on the war-time state almost without exception make these observations. See, for example, Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45*, Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine, Bengal 1939-45*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2009, Bikramjit De, 'Imperial Governance and the Challenges of War', *Studies in History*, 22 (1), n.s. (2006).

[3] I am referring to earlier works such as H. Knight, *Food Administration in India, 1939-47*; N.C. Sinha and P.N. Khera, *Indian War Economy.*; J.H. Voigt, *India in the Second World War.*

works, policies formulated at the top of the administrative structure was often generalized to represent the nature and character of the colonial state during the Second World War. Much less attention was paid to the conceptual slippage that was involved in uncritically assuming that policies formulated were also automatically translated into practice.

However, it seems that the assertion that the colonial state was not a monolithic structure have been overstated in recent historiography. It is indeed difficult to imagine a form of state governing a society with a certain degree of complexity and extending over a considerably large territory which can act as a composite whole without any internal tension. This is not to argue that the complexity within the structure of the colonial state in India was negligible or without importance. But, along with an exploration of the multi-layered nature of the state apparatus, it is equally important to indentify the ways in which this complex state functioned in practice. In other words, what this dissertation attempted to do was to explore whether there was a logic in the practices of governance according to which the different organs of the state apparatus, with their internal tensions and contradictions, functioned. This exploration was conducted in the context of a range of control regimes put in place by the colonial state during the Second World War in order to meet the increased challenges involved in mobilizing the resources of the colony for the war-effort and to counter several internal oppositions to the same. It is in this regard that the concept of 'governmentality' as put forward by Michel Foucault seemed useful.

Attention to the logic of functioning of the colonial state also meant attributing far more complexity to the practices of state control, rather than simplifying it. Complexity of the functioning of the colonial state not only becomes evident in the discrepancy between the policies formulated by the higher levels of the bureaucracy and the ways in which these policies were implemented by the local administration. Rather, this work has tried to explore the complex ways in which officials at all levels of the administration negotiated in accordance with the

specificities of actual situations in the implementation of policies. That policies formulated at the top of the decision-making hierarchy had to be altered according to the specificities of the situation was no surprise even to those officials involved in policy formulation. In fact, bureaucrats at the highest echelons of colonial officialdom themselves had to make exceptions in several individual cases they were confronted with, negotiate with various kinds of pressures they were subjected to, and even tolerate certain degrees of violations of the policies. Colonial administration at all levels had to undertake various cost-benefit calculations, make exceptions on a case-to-case basis, ignore violations and negotiate with different pressures from individuals and groups in the implementation of government policies.

What have also been emphasized are the classificatory procedures that had to be carried out for policy implementation. In order to combat certain phenomena, the colonial state had to understand what precisely these phenomena were, and these prompted the state, at various levels, to formulate classificatory categories for administrative purposes. For instance, controlling war-rumours in Calcutta necessitated the police and sections of the bureaucracy to classify certain information as rumours while the problem was being tackled.

One specific aspect of the functioning of the administrative apparatus during the war has been stressed upon. This was the tendency of the executive bureaucratic arm of the government to distance itself from judicial procedures. There was a wide-spread feeling that approaching the court to ensure implementation of government policies or punish violations of its rules was undesirable because judicial procedures were expensive, time consuming and did not guarantee a favourable verdict attesting the view of the executive administration.

Even though the fact that the bureaucratic officials were reluctant to approach the court has been demonstrated, the outcomes in the instances when the administration actually decided to go to court have not been examined. I shall take

this opportunity to briefly refer to one such criminal case when the administration sought to prosecute the offender, which gives us an insight into the difficulties and problems that the bureaucratic administration faced in such situations.[4]

On the 5th of May 1941, the Calcutta Police received information that one Kishori Singh, Durwan of the Calcutta Medical College, and Ramdas, a menial working in the Nurses' Quarters were in possession of a six chambered revolver that they were trying to sell. An Inspector was given the charge of this case with the help of a sub-inspector, the latter being deputed in the guise of a bogus purchaser. According to the negotiations that followed, a police party surrounded the area where the purchase was to take place. Badri Muchi, who agreed to carry out the transaction on Ramdas' behalf brought the revolver, and after ascertaining that the revolver was genuine, he was placed under arrest. Subsequently, Ramdas and other acquaintances believed to have assisted him were arrested in the Menials' Quarters of the Medical College and both of them were charged with an offence under the Indian Arms Act.

However, when the case was brought up before the Court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, Ramdas and the others who were arrested from the Menials' Quarters were acquitted of all charges while Badri Muchi was subjected to only one month's hard labour. The Presidency Magistrate pointed out that the police neither had search warrant nor acted in accordance with the provisions of the Calcutta Police Act when they searched the room of Ramdas and thus he was perfectly justified in law in exercising the law of private defence against the police party who appeared to be committing criminal trespass at the time of the offence. The charge that Ramdas and his acquaintances had assaulted the police party during the search was also dismissed because the Magistrate felt that the intensity of the assault was exaggerated by the prosecution witnesses and were not corroborated by the medical reports. The contention of the prosecution

[4] Detials of the case are to be found in File No.-13/41 (Calcutta), Intelligence Bureau Records, West Bengal State Archives.

that the presence of Ramdas and his acquaintances inside Ramdas' room constituted unlawful assembly was also dismissed by the Magistrate.

The police had to face further embarrassment when *Amrita Bazar Patrika* came out with a report on the judgment of the case on 21 November, 1941, which said:

> We congratulate the Magistrate not only on his order of acquittal but on the refreshingly candid observations he has felt constrained to make in the course of the judgment. These are difficult times and in the name of the war emergency there is every possible threat to the elementary civil liberties of the people armed with extra-ordinary powers. Over-zealous policemen do not appreciate the nature of the war emergency but are apt to lose their heads by an exaggerated notion of their self-importance in the machinery of administration. These men must be brought to their senses and made to realize that the law and the offices they occupy are no protection for them against excess of jurisdiction or unlawful activities.[5]

Emphasis on the tendency of the executive administrative apparatus of the government from the judiciary does not mean that this work seeks to replace the view of vertical fractures within the colonial administration between higher bureaucracy and lower level officials with that of horizontal fracture between the executive and the judiciary. What it argues, on the other hand, is that it was in the logic of war-time administration in India that control regimes were sought to be enforced by the bureaucracy rather than through judicial mechanisms. The new challenges that the colonial state was confronted with because of the war, demanded fast and flexible procedures of implementation of regulations that

[5] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, dated 21.11.41.

judicial procedures were incapable of facilitating, making it logical that implementation had to be carried out through executive action.

This raises more vital questions about the late colonial state in India. Many historians who have emphasized growing tensions within the state structure during the Second World War has often assumed that this was a sign of the growing weakness of the colonial state towards the end of colonial rule in India.[6] Others, however, have identified several continuities in the character of the late colonial state with that of its post-colonial successor.[7] The issue at stake is far more complex to be conclusively answered here. But, the contention of this work is that even if the colonial state was in considerable stress due to the new challenges it had to face because if the war, this does not automatically prove its weakness. Yet, this work also does not suggests that nothing changed in the character of government because of the impact of the war, and that the colonial state was simply taken over by the post-colonial state without any changes. One needs more intensive research to understand what exactly changed in the character of the state in India as a result of the huge impact of the Second World War.

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[6] Apart from nationalist historiography which assumes a weakening of the colonial state during the last decades of the Raj subsequently taken over by a strong nation-state, many historians working on the impact of the Second World War seems to assume, even if they do not explicitly admit, a growing weakness of the state during the war. See, for instance, Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45*, op. cit.; Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine,* op. cit., Bikramjit De, 'Imperial Governance and the Challenges of War', op. cit.

[7] Indivar Kamtekar has noted several institutions of the colonial state being taken over by the post-colonial national state in India almost without any structural alterations. See Indivar Kamtekar, *'A Diferent War dance'*, op. cit.

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