

Media History Monographs 16:2
(2013-2014)

ISSN 1940-8862

Speculating “National”:
Ownership and Transformation of the English-
Language Press in India
During the Collapse of the British Raj

Deeptanil Ray
Jadavpur University

ABSTRACT

The imminent collapse of the British Raj in India following the Second World War marked the formal entry of Indian big business speculators into the English-language newspaper business. It was more than a transfer of ownership from British to Indian hands: it merged the Indian speculators’ cravings for respectability, their becoming editor-proprietors of newspapers published in the colonial language of power, with a desire to expand the frontiers of what essentially were city-based dailies. Recording its disaffection with the overtly nationalist histories of the Indian press, this article outlines the historical circumstances in which the newspaper business in India functioned prior to the entry of the Indian big business speculators. It concludes by delineating the horizons of expectations of the English dailies in India conceiving “national presence” in the soon to be post-colonial future.

Speculating “National”: Ownership and Transformation of the English-Language Press in India During the Collapse of the British Raj

With the end of the Second World War, the press situation in the geographical zone yet to be marked and territorially designated as the Republic of India was undergoing a decisive shift. While the press photographer’s flashbulb camera occasionally chose to record moments of pain, misplaced glory, peasant uprisings, religious riots, mass killings, an Empire’s utter inability to sustain its rule and the exodus of more than five million refugees across new imagined borders, the newspapers themselves were changing. This was a period when different clans of the Indian big bourgeoisie who had profited much from the war made a frenzied rush to secure shares of British enterprises, and some of them chose the path to glory and enhanced prestige by becoming editor-proprietors of English-language newspapers. There were others, who had provided financial help to newspapers owned by Indians in the past; they now thought of hitching the fortunes of their other businesses to the prestige associated with the English-language newspaper business. When the fears of “sedition” seemed to disintegrate before Britain’s “shameful flight, by a premature hurried scuttle” (as the old imperialist Winston Churchill prophesied during the first debate over the Labour Party’s Indian Independence Bill at the British House of Commons¹), the business of making “news” in India suddenly appeared more lucrative than ever before. Apart from the *Statesman*, which passed into Indian hands during the 1960s, all the major British-owned newspapers in India were acquired by Indian speculators in the space of ten years after the war. And serious plans were afoot for expansion.

A description of these acquisitions and the expansion attempts of older newspapers during this period is usually missed in the various histories of the press in India. Distres-

singly, two and a quarter centuries after the first newspapers appeared in print in the Indian subcontinent, specific histories of the English-language press in India in the colonial era remain few; still fewer, histories of various Indian-language newspapers which were antipathetic to colonial rule.² More serious are the conceptual problems which have not always been clearly confronted by researchers of the Indian media: the hitherto unexplained transition of newsmaking businesses from colonialism to post-colonial identities and the deliberate insistence on a nationalist history of the press in India, the general negligence of questions concerning ownership, and the ahistorical foregrounding of the “missionary journalism” of Indian-owned newspapers to the extent that we are made to forget that newspapers in British India were also businesses run for profit, both economic and symbolic.³

As this article will try to demonstrate, the changes that occurred in the English-language press in India during the final days of the British Raj had little to do with the missionary zeal of a unitary pan-Indian “nationalism,” which denies the complexities of the rise of different forms of proto-nationalist movements of resistance among the colonized peoples in the Indian sub-continent and their varied use of print.⁴ Nor does the “nationalist” past attributed to the English-language newspaper fit comfortably with the history of commercial newsmaking in India. Rather, the changes and transformations of the English-language press in India during the twilight of the Empire had more to do with the Indian big bourgeoisie and other newspaper proprietors speculating on a “national presence” for their newspapers, and their desire to secure prestige and profit under a sympathetic post-colonial state and its new leaders.

Deeptanil Ray is JU-SYLFF Doctoral Fellow at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, India, and currently employed as a Project Fellow at the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University. His primary research interest is in the history of print culture in the Indian subcontinent. deeptanilray@gmail.com

Newspapers, colonialism, and the Indian big bourgeoisie

There is a popularly-held view that the Indian big bourgeoisie were hostile to British imperialism before the transfer of power in 1947. The proper view would be to see most of them as immediate beneficiaries of the British government's "positive policy" of promoting limited industrialization in British India after the First World War, while it followed the recommendations of the Indian Industrial Commission (1916-18), and through the setting up of Tariff Boards. This policy helped earlier compradors like the Tatas and other Indian textile magnates who had reaped enormous benefits during the First World War to explore newer pastures; the grant of government subsidies (protection) to the iron and steel, cotton, paper, jute, cement, and heavy chemicals industries led to the emergence of powerful new groups within the Indian business scene (going by the family names of Birla, Sri Ram, Poddar, Dalmia Jain, Surajmull-Nagarmall, Ruia, Thapar, Chettiar, Naidu, Goenka, et cetera) whose economic interests were closely interwoven with the interests of the British imperial system in India.⁵

The basic prerogatives of the British imperial system ("a capitalist order of society, international collaboration between capitalists of all countries, avoidance of drastic social changes and respect for the fundamental rights of property") were not contested for all practical purposes by anti-colonial Indian economists and politicians when these capitalist groups built up their own "miniature capitalist system"; the only opposition that they faced was from the secessionist demand of the All-India Muslim League when it later staked its claim for a separate Muslim state.⁶ Some of these comprador families supported Indian-owned newspapers to argue for their causes and run their advertisement; most found proto-nationalist newspapers as convenient vehicles for boosting their social prestige that was denied to them by the snobbish affectations of the British-owned newspapers. The Birla family's participation in the newspaper business during the colonial period can be considered as a case in point.

Baldeo Das Birla, a Marwari *banya*,⁷ arrived at Calcutta in 1896 fleeing from the plague in Bombay, and with money amassed from gambling on daily prices of opium. In Calcutta, the old colonial capital of British-occupied India, Baldeo Das traded in wheat, silver, and oilseeds, and with his eldest son, Jugal Kishor, set up a firm which was one of the leading exporters of opium to China.⁸ During the First World War, the Birla family entered the cotton and gunny business. Reaping huge speculative profits during the course of the war, it emerged after the Tariff Boards as a major player in the textile, jute, paper and sugar industries, apart from floating insurance companies and a bank.⁹ While it confidently explored different business trajectories, and maintained a fine balance between differing business objectives—on the one hand, serving British imperial interests that included the efficient and profitable handling of military contracts during the Second World War, and on the other, generously funding Gandhi and the Indian National Congress on grounds of "nationalism"—the Birla family was cautious in the case of newspaper business.

The Birlas were the consistent funders of M. K. Gandhi's journalistic ventures, the *Harijan* and the *Young India*. After the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), they extended generous help to the English-language newspaper *Hindustan Times*, which was launched in 1924 by two die-hard Congress loyalists and representatives of the Akali political intelligentsia in the Punjab Province, Madan Mohan Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai. In 1931, the *Hindustan Times* had shut down in general protest against the Press Act passed by the British Government,¹⁰ particularly protesting against a demand of Rs. 5000 as security from the paper. It reappeared after three months with a great increase in its circulation. Earlier, Malviya had converted the newspaper to a public limited company with a declared capital of Rs. 1,25,000, while issuing shares in the name of "donors"; his manager later recalled that the biggest donor was a "rich young Marwari magnate" Ghanshyam Das Birla,¹¹ who also paid Malviya and Lajpat Rai five thousand rupees a month respectively for

“public work.”¹² After its re-launch, Birla showed further interest and bought further shares of Rs. 25,000 from the newspaper, and continued supporting the paper through the war by buying its shares, though careful not to be visible as its funder.¹³

Apart from the fear of direct implication in and through charges of “sedition,” the Birlas also played for safety as their earlier attempts to secure newspaper power did not yield desirable results. Soon after the First World War, the colonial government had awarded Baldeo Das Birla the title of Rai Bahadur for “distinguished services” to the Raj. His five sons thought of acquiring a knighthood; a perfect tribute, they thought, to an ageing father before his retirement from business. They deliberated on running public campaigns through newspapers, and finally decided on the easiest process: the acquisition of reputed English-language newspapers. Consequently, they bought three newspapers published from Calcutta, the city which was the Birla family’s principal commercial base until the 1950s. The first two purchases were disasters; the third was a speculative misadventure where the Birlas managed to intervene before it turned really disastrous.

The first purchase was the *New Empire* in Calcutta, a British-owned daily. It was not a flourishing newspaper as the Birlas had hoped, but one with little circulation and huge market debts; the paper collapsed after costing the family a few lakh of rupees. The second was the *Smarajya*, a weekly published by S. R. Das, a pro-British cousin of the widely-respected and famous Bengali nationalist lawyer from Calcutta, C. R. Das. After purchasing this weekly, the Birlas were pained to find out that its subscription was less than a hundred copies, and with mostly British government officials and European houses on its subscription list, less than a dozen of its subscribers knew Bengali, the language of its publication.¹⁴ The weekly’s debts were grudgingly cleared, and it was shut down as well.

The *Bengalee*, the third newspaper purchased by the Birlas was an evening newspaper of great repute in Calcutta and Eastern India.¹⁵ It was published by Surendranath Banerjee, an English-educated

Indian Civil Service officer and an early president of the Indian National Congress. This weekly newspaper (purchased by Banerjee for ten rupees in 1879¹⁶) had run successfully for forty years highlighting the political ambitions and literary inclinations of its famous proprietor; the Birlas hoped that it would help them command wide respect in Indian administrative and political circles. After the purchase, they appointed a person called Srinivas Sarma as the editor of the paper who ran it for a few months with a pro-British stance. However, Ghanshyam Das Birla was soon to learn a bitter truth; one that was to become one of the easiest ways to profit for many in the newspaper business during the Second World War, and also in post-1947 India. Ghanshyam Das’s suspicions were aroused after a chance encounter with a servant who carried over his household clothes for laundry—the washerman had returned the clothes wrapped in pages of the day’s edition of their precious paper. Their newspaper was being printed, he eventually learnt on investigation, and sold right off the presses not to readers, but as the cheapest scrap paper in the market. Thus taken in, the Birla family hurriedly made a gift of the failing *Bengalee* to Sarma, with the advice to “keep the Birla flag flying.”¹⁷ Sarma was the one to reap profits from the entire process; he made profits by inflating the paper’s circulation once again, and was able to dupe Aga Khan III—Sultan Muhammed Shah, the first president of the All India Muslim League—into buying it.¹⁸ The Aga Khan changed the name of the paper to *Evening Star*, and ran it as a pro-Muslim newspaper; in 1937, it became the *Star of India* that sold well for being the only English newspaper in eastern India for supporting the Muslim League, and later, the Pakistan cause.

As to be expected, the Birlas emerged cautious and wise after these papery misadventures. Making no further attempts to be visible as newspaper proprietors, they continued to fund the *Hindustan Times*,¹⁹ the *Searchlight* (an English newspaper run from Patna by Sachidanand Sinha and Babu Rajendra Prasad, later the first president of India), the *Leader* (run by Malviya), the *Harijan* (Gandhi’s political mouthpiece), S. Sadanand’s

Free Press News Agency,²⁰ and numerous smaller proto-nationalist newspapers. Later, in the early 1940s, it were the Birlas who paved the way for the appointment of Devdas Gandhi, Gandhi's son, as the managing editor of the *Hindustan Times*. The Birlas also helped the *Hindustan Times* in 1940 to host the first conference of the All India Newspaper Editor's Conference (AINEC), formed to secure concessions from the British Government; all the while they made good business in and through the British Government's war efforts. Only when the fear of "sedition" had considerably evaporated, and the prospects of profit were clearly discernible in newspaper business, did the Birlas step in to formally declare their claim on the three influential newspapers they had supported financially.²¹

The newspaper scene in British India prior to the Second World War

Prior to the formal entry of big business in the Indian newspaper scene, the success of newspapers depended on their close affiliation with select, commercially and politically interested, élites residing and closely concentrated in the relatively geographically closed off regions demarcating the various provinces of British India. The conditions of economic success and survival for all major newspapers in British India, both Indian and British-owned, from their origins in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century to the end of the Second World War, depended on their close following of these élite interests, which were geographically concentrated rather than dispersed.²² If the English-language press in Company-ruled India was born catering to the mercantile interests of British traders and statesmen at Calcutta;²³ it followed the twin march of the British bureaucracy and trade across the subcontinent, and survived only by functioning from the urban capitals of the provinces of subsequent British India.

The *Times of India* came about in 1861 when Robert Knight, the British editor and consequent co-owner of the *Bombay Times*, with support from Parsi shareholders who had ousted the earlier British editor in the year of

transfer of power from the John Company to the Crown, merged his newspaper with the *Standard* and the *Telegraph* in Bombay on the speculation that Bombay was to emerge as the capital of British India. He laid claim to "India" on his newspaper's nameplate to help the Bombay press grow out of provincialism.²⁴ Thirteen years later, in another capital city, the same Robert Knight resigned from his post of Under-Secretary in the Agricultural Department of the Bengal Government to rekindle his desire of running newspapers for profit. With support from twenty-four merchants of Calcutta and the manager of the Paikpara Raj Estate, Knight acquired the *Friend of India*, a newspaper started in 1818 by John Clark Marshman and earlier funded by the Christian missionaries of Shreerampur, the pioneers of printing in Bengal. In January 1875, Knight started the *Indian Statesman* at Calcutta—dropping the "Indian" from its nameplate in the month of September, the same year, for reasons unknown.²⁵ The *Statesman* gradually rose into prominence in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as Calcutta outshone other provincial capitals with the increasing concentration of British commercial interests in and around the east of British India. Likewise, the *Madras Mail* in Madras, the *Pioneer* in Allahabad, and the *Times of India* in Bombay, provided "news" to the Anglo-Indian and British communities residing in the different provincial capitals.

Indian-owned newspapers, too, stuck to the capital cities as their sites of production and primary markets. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta, for example, was one of the many Bengali newspapers that started in the villages and district towns of the Bengal Province with the lessening costs of printing after 1850. It was launched by Sisir Kumar Ghosh and his seven brothers as a Bengali weekly newspaper in February 1868 from the village Palua-Magura in Jessore district of the Bengal Province, after the brothers Hemanta Kumar and Sisir Kumar "gave up their jobs in the Income-tax Department" and decided to make a newspaper, naming it after their mother, Amritamoyee Devi.²⁶ The *Patrika* gained popularity highlighting the oppression of the indigo planters on the indigenous farmers.

Sisir Kumar Ghosh, co-founder and consequently owner of the *Patrika*, was realistic enough as a “native” newspaper entrepreneur to understand the inseparability of newspaper production from the big colonial capital. Prior to the *Patrika* venture, Sisir Kumar’s elder brother Basanta Kumar had started a weekly newspaper, *Amrita Prababini*, which had failed to sell; and the Ghosh brothers ran the continuous risk of arrest, Sisir Kumar narrowly escaping a libel conviction.²⁷

Although more famous in the history of the Indian press for the “overnight” transformation of his Bengali weekly into an English newspaper to avoid the punitive measures of the Oriental Languages Act (the “Vernacular Press Act” of 1878),²⁸ the success of Ghosh’s *Patrika* to a large extent depended on his decision to shift his newspaper’s office to Calcutta, and his newspaper’s deliberate claim to the prestige commanded by “Englishness” in the colonial era. A year after the *Patrika* commenced publication, the Ghosh brothers made it a bilingual weekly that included few columns in English; then moving base to Calcutta, re-launched it in 1872 as a bilingual weekly newspaper, and re-launched it again as a English-language newspaper on March 21, 1878.²⁹ Gradually, the *Patrika* gained its popularity among the “liberal” Indian beneficiaries of the Permanent Settlement, the decaying Indian gentry, small businessmen, and the emergent English-reading salaried classes of Calcutta, for its championing of Bengali proto-nationalism.

(As *bhadralok*³⁰ newspaper proprietors with Bengali proto-nationalist sympathies, the Ghosh family held no scruples in helping others to set up newspapers, so long as they did not consider them competitors. In 1922, Sisir Kumar’s son, Tushar Kanti Ghosh, helped Suresh Chandra Majumdar, a former anarchist revolutionary who was running a small printing press in Calcutta, to re-launch a defunct Bengali daily the Ghosh brothers had registered with the British government in 1896. It was named *Ananda Bazar Patrika* after Anandamoyee Devi, the sister of Amritamoyee Devi. Majumdar soon expanded his business by more emphatically supporting the proto-nationalist cause than the Ghosh family: the

newspaper’s popularity increased further as he became a Congress leader, and his editor Satyendranath Majumdar, a Subhas Chandra Bose loyalist, braved a few libel suits and imprisonment. In 1937, Majumdar launched a Calcutta daily, *Hindustan Standard*, to rival the prestige of the Ghosh family in the English-language field.³¹ The paper never managed to secure a repute like the *Patrika*, though it was maintained for mostly prestige’s sake till the 1980s. The rivalry between these two newspaper groups played out primarily the Bengali-language field, and lasted well beyond the Majumdar’s death in the 1950s, and until the *Patrika* and *Jugantar* stopped production in the later 1980s.)

All of the important Indian-owned English newspapers that rode on the wave of proto-nationalism grew out of the provincial capitals and major cities. The *Tribune*, founded in 1881 by Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, a Brahmo Samaj enthusiast and banker, began and based its publication at the city of Lahore (presently in Pakistan). The *Hindu*, which struck its roots in the city of Madras, was launched in 1878 by two school teachers and three law students; it became a daily in 1888 giving competition to the two Anglo-Indian dailies published from the same city, *Madras Times* and *Madras Mail*. The *Free Press Journal*, which was started as an English daily in 1930 by S. Sadanand as a conduit for his failing proto-nationalist news agency, Free Press News Service, operated from Bombay. Sachidanand Sinha and Babu Rajendra Prasad’s *Searchlight* was based in the city of Patna. In September 1938, Jawaharlal Nehru, the future Prime Minister of India, launched the *National Herald* in the city of Lucknow to add further weight to his socialist causes; despite its claim of being “national,” from the beginning, Nehru’s paper consolidated its position in Lucknow by making the United Provinces Government the principal target of its attacks.³² Rather than open new centres, all the above mentioned newspapers chose to function from their cities of production and espouse proto-nationalist sentiments. This was to change shortly after the Second World War.

The usually stiff binaries of a “nationalist press” and a “colonialist press” often blind us

in identifying the general growth of the English-language press during this period. Instead, we will briefly look at the major differences and similarities existing between the European-owned (mostly British-owned) and the Indian-owned English newspapers before the war. If the British-owned newspapers were moved by general impertinence to Indians on grounds of racism, also due to their compulsive and wobbly adherence to a threatened sense of themselves as characterizing and upholding “imperial honour” in British India,³³ their contemptuous disregard for Indians of all tribes and castes, even for the most ardent emulators of the British, was also moved by their more definitive interests in obtaining advertisement from “national advertisers,” mostly British commercial enterprises. These “national advertisers” had little interest in the buying capacities of Indian consumers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and long after the First World War, the English-owned newspapers, too, found little reasons to offer importance to the Indian populace as readers whom their advertisers had already chosen to discard.³⁴ They basked in the glory of their closer contact to the rulers of British India that gave them access to more paper, press equipment, and domestic and international “news.”

The *Statesman*, for example, was the first newspaper in India to acquire expensive press equipment. In 1896, it acquired the linotype machine for faster composition, and in 1907, it imported a mechanized rotary press for printing its newspapers. In 1919, it was the first of the Indian newspapers to claim advertiser attention by having chartered accountants certify its sales: it promised to pay Rs. 10,000 to charity if “any English owned daily newspaper in India” matched one-fourth of the *Statesman*’s circulation claims over a period of five months through similar certificates.³⁵ By the 1930s, while it was advertising itself as the “most widely read newspaper in all India,”³⁶ its primary emphasis lay on its self-emphasized status as a nonpareil advertising medium (see Figure 1). The ability of the English-owned newspapers to woo advertisers earned them contempt

from English-language newspapers owned by Indians, who on their part though, remained at ease imitating the domestic and the international British newspapers to the extent they were permitted to gather, or could lay their hands on, printing equipment, paper, and “news.” The high rates of the foreign news-agencies like Reuters made the Indian-owned



The Statesman
as an Advertising Medium
Throughout India is
Unrivalled.

**This page of advertisements
is an arresting example.**

**THE STATESMAN circulates
throughout India and is read by
all classes, European and Indian,
official and non-official alike, whilst
the fact that its Certified Daily
Sales far exceed those of any other
newspaper in India makes it of
invaluable help to Traders in every
part of the country.**

Figure 1. An élite advertising medium for traders: The *Statesman*’s self-identification on January 21, 1931. *Statesman Centenary Volume*, edited by Emmerson, 129.

papers often prefer local “news.” The constant fear of government confiscation of press equipment, the absence of capital, and also their prejudices, made the majority of them to stick to the letterpress and second-hand rotaries bought mostly off the Anglo-Indian press. Their lack of advertisement was often compensated by securing private patrons like the Birlas to indirectly support their causes, while they increasingly sought advertisement from “national” businesses to keep their presses running.

However, the above should not be seen as a strict differentiator. Most of the bigger Indian-owned English dailies owned their linotype machines, rotaries, and offices

modelled on the British ones, and ran advertisements from foreign and British firms aplenty. Often “nationalist” editors chose to design and write special advertisement features and supplements run by American and European companies in various newspapers.³⁷ Both the British-owned and the Indian-owned English newspapers received their share of international and domestic “news” from the same news-agencies: the British-owned newspapers could afford more; they also had their correspondents writing from all major capital cities, and international special correspondents.³⁸

In matters of format and page layout, too, the Indian-owned newspapers chose to stick with the formulas followed by their British counterparts. The Indian-owned dailies of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Delhi, went

for seven-column broadsheets as they blindly copied the standards set by their neighbourhood British-owned dailies whom they held as politically supercilious; in Allahabad and Lahore, the *Leader* and the *Tribune* were quick to follow the British-owned *Pioneer* and the *Civil and Military Gazette* in making five-column broadsheets.³⁹ Almost all of the big English newspapers published in India in the 1930s were evening dailies; they faithfully copied the *Times* of London in carrying advertisement on their first and last pages, with “news” in the inside pages, and all editorial content in the middle. Rather than go for innovation, even die-hard nationalist owners stuck to contemporary (British) standards of newspaper-design and production. (For example, Madan Mohan Malviya, the owner of *Hindustan Times*, told his editor in the 1930s to “keep the *London Times* or the *Manchester Guardian* as models for news display, and the *Hindu* and the *Leader* for editorial comment.”⁴⁰)

With the growth and consolidation of news-agencies across the subcontinent and the change in newsmaking practices in the imperial capital, what has been identified by media historians as the coming of journalistic “objectivity” in the Northern hemisphere,⁴¹ English newspapers in India took to making morning editions. This also effected a change in design and visual priority (see Figures 2 and 3). Irrespective of the racial origins of their owners, or their political sympathies, all major newspapers in India shifted their “news” to the front page, and adopted banner headlines to display the most important “news” beneath the front page mast. Big banner headlines disappeared during the few years of the war as part of the British government’s war regulations, however, the method of portraying “news” with banner headlines continued to remain on the front pages of all Indian newspapers ever after. With these changes in design, the newspapers also increased the price of advertisements—right before the war suddenly came to temporarily upset their peaceful processes of transition.

The business in “news” during World War II

The Second World War caught the



Figure 2.
For “nationalist” advertisers: Page one of the first issue of the *Indian Express*, September 5, 1932.

The issue has twelve pages, and with “news” beginning from page three, and display advertisements entirely occupying pages one, two, eleven, and twelve. The scroll in the newspaper’s nameplate has the words “Suyaraajya vaazhvey sukavaazhvu” (“Life under Self-Government is the only worthy life”) written in Tamil letters—a carryover of the motto of the Tamil newspaper, *Tamil Nadu*, which preceded this daily. T. J. S. George, introduction to *The Goenka Letters: Behind the Scenes in The Indian Express*, edited by T. J. S. George (Chennai: East West Books, 2006), 5, 12.

English-language press in British India unawares: both the English-owned and the Indian-owned newspapers spasmodically struggled to keep their businesses running as the colonial government put restrictions on and drastically cut down their supply of newsprint. Right before the war, the English newspapers were publishing daily editions running with 16-24 pages on weekdays and 24-48 pages on Sundays, apart from the frequent “news” supplements; the war forced them to publish four pages a day.⁴² (Though the Newsprint Control Order of 1941 restricted that the maximum number of pages in a daily newspaper to six; due to the crisis in newsprint, most newspapers could never print more than four pages a day. The use of small type for printing the maximum quantity of “news” in the minimum of space, a characteristic feature of Indian newspapers in the Nehruvian era and after, also dates back to this period.) As S. Natarajan succinctly outlines the new press situation in India that was to emerge in the course of the war:

When the Government of India entered the war and adopted emergency measures, an early precaution was to control available supplies of paper and ration out the total among existing newspapers. At first, the Government allotted 10 percent of the total paper available to the Press. The effect was a great deal of inconvenience and a number of problems which individual newspapers were unable to handle on their own. The Indian and Eastern Newspapers Society was formed to meet the situation and it secured an increase of the press quota to 30 percent. There was resentment on the part of the provident newspapers at being forced to share their stocks with those who had grudged the investment in extra stock. The bigger newspapers could control their quota by restricting subscriptions; the smaller ones which had limited circulations, had to reduce their pages. An already perplexing situation was rendered more confused by inflated circulation claims to obtain larger quotas which went by past performance. And the bureaucracy gained a strategic position by being em-



Figure 3.
British designing standards, Indian “news”:
Page one of the *Indian Express*, February 6, 1940.

Note how the “news” has shifted to the front page. The issue is set in linotype, and consists of five pages—marking the beginning of the crisis in newsprint. The issues of 1939 varied between eight to sixteen pages.

powered to determine the quotas of newspapers. *Obviously few newspapers could come into existence without official favour.*⁴³

The forced crisis in newsprint during the war thus laid the grounds for a closer contact between the bureaucracy and the newspapers, which both the subsequent Indian state and the newspapers working within its territories were to rancorously but conveniently maintain in the future. (Unlike the situation in England, where this war-time measure was gradually done away with in 1956; the post-colonial Union of India later re-introduced restrictions on newsprint in various forms from 1950: mostly for the reason that it heeded the suggestions of certain newspapers to ensure uninterrupted supplies of newsprint, lesser because it found the control of newsprint too powerful a weapon as to be easily dispensed with.)

The need for official favour acquired a particular potency during the war, especially with the Indian-owned newspapers that the colonial government regarded with deep distrust. The British-owned newspapers were

generally held above suspicion (the *Times of India*, the *Madras Mail*, and the *Civil and Military Gazette* considered the “most trustworthy” among them⁴⁴), but the government took little chances. In 1939, it made the Chief Press Censor, and the Press Advisor to the government (who in this case was Usha Nath Sen, the de-facto owner of the pro-British Associated Press of India news-agency) responsible—along with a team of Provincial Press Advisers, District Press Advisers, civil services officers and district magistrates working in tandem with the war government—for carrying out extensive censorship of newspapers. Coupled with the existing press laws and ordinances, the Defence of India Rules granted the colonial administration absolute and infrangible executive powers to proscribe everything they found objectionable in print.

As the real and imagined fears of executive excess herded the Indian-owned and the British-owned newspapers together, the AINEC was formed in Delhi in 1940. With the editor-proprietors of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the *Statesman*, the *Times of India*, the *Madras Mail*, the *Civil and Military Gazette* and all major newspapers as members of its standing committee, the AINEC elected K. Srinivasan of the *Hindu* as its president. Despite its internal contradictions (mostly occasioned by the rift with newspapers favouring the All India Muslim League), the AINEC agreed to the “advisory system” negotiated by the Chief Press Censor and formulated by the Viceroy Linlithgow that demanded “voluntary and loyal co-operation of the Press,” and “internal regulation” on part of the editors towards effective self-censorship.⁴⁵ Though some smaller Indian-owned newspapers closed down in protest against the war-time censorship, the AINEC leadership and the big newspapers they represented continued pleading with the British for greater facilities.⁴⁶ They effectively censored all “news” that was understood as “anti-war propaganda”—the decision to disallow Gandhi’s writings before August 1942 becoming “peculiarly embarrassing” for his son Devdas who was both a member of the AINEC as managing editor of the *Hindustan Times*, and a member of the Central Press Advisory Committee to the

colonial government that recommended censorship.⁴⁷

We may note that the Paper Control Orders of 1942 did not stop the supply of newsprint to all Indian-owned newspapers; rather, they were specifically designed to ration newsprint in the face of acute paper shortage, and forward it, to “friendlier” sections of the press.⁴⁸ These “friendlier” sections included the big newspapers, both Indian and British-owned, that unconditionally supported the war; and also smaller left-wing publications that sprouted during the war: the *Blitz* that was launched in 1941 from Bombay, and *People’s War*, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of India that was launched in 1942, also from the same city. Through their reporting of two years of war, and their coverage of the Quit India Movement,⁴⁹ the big Indian-owned newspapers had proved their mettle: in December 1942, for example, the British government took measures to procure shipments of Canadian newsprint for the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Hindu*, both important members of the AINEC and widely recognized as nationalist newspapers.⁵⁰

During the great Bengal Famine of 1943 (that is now referred to in textbook economics as the best example of a man-made famine), the English-language newspapers, both Indian and British-owned, chose to maintain silence for long on the march of millions of skeletal figures who arrived from the villages, begging for rice froth, and suffered silent, painful, abominable deaths on the streets of Calcutta.⁵¹ Around three million people died of starvation during this famine, which was caused by the British government’s fear of the Japanese invasion of India, and widespread hoarding, black marketing, and profiteering in rice and paddy on the part of Indian government officials, ministers, and traders. The high death count was due to the fact that this famine was denied for long by the British government, and most newspapers in India shamelessly agreed with the government’s view in order to save their skins. The apathy of Calcutta journalists during the famine was particularly overwhelming as most of them walked by these corpses to their offices and chose to ignore the famine as “news.” Certain Indian-

owned newspapers like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had no qualms about publicizing the government's denial through advertisements: on May 3, 1943, for example, the paper published an advertisement by the government's Civil Supplies department that pictured a happy-faced woman making *chapatties* (bread) for her family and praised the British government for arranging large stocks of wheat, "now available in the bazar at controlled prices."⁵² Later, it was the British-owned *Statesman*, rather than the Indian-owned ones, which first defied the government to acknowledge these deaths and the impact of the famine in print.⁵³

(Although the *Statesman* certainly deserves credit for castigating the colonial government, we may note that its reporting of the famine started off as an urban "maladministration" campaign with photographs and all to draw attention to the fear of epidemics in the white neighbourhoods of Calcutta. It highlighted that the government had failed to keep its promises to the city élites: to "remove and tend some of the city's most leprous and unsavoury vagrants . . . despite the likelihood of healthy citizens having to share air-raid shelters with them."⁵⁴ The newspaper was never critical of the scorched-earth policy of the British war machine, the principal trigger of the famine. Instead, it went on to demonstrate "generous patriotism," in the words of Louis Mountbatten, by helping produce and print the daily *SEAC*, a propaganda newspaper and mouthpiece of the Supreme Allied Command of South East Asia, that was published from Calcutta from January 1944 to December 1945, with a print-run of 80,000 copies, and airdropped regularly on the Burma front.⁵⁵ Therefore, the *Statesman's* coverage of the famine is in no ways suggestive of a grand adversarial and "national" tradition of press functioning suggested by the usual press historiographies in India; or by similar poise in the independent vein among later editors-proprietors that see its coverage of the famine as an early precursor of the "little traditions" of journalistic independence that the Indian press, in its enhanced role as a critical "watch-dog," chose to follow after 1947 and prevented "similar situations" from evolving.)⁵⁶

Sensationalism, the flip side of the newly-coined "objectivity," gained further currency in the making of "news" in the subcontinent as imperial prestige and the days of the Raj waned. Most Indian newspapers chose to assume communal policies to boost their sales as the Partition and religious riots proceeded to divide the territories of what was known as British India, and uproot communities and millions of people from what had been their ancestral lands for centuries. From March 1947, for example, *Hindustan Times* started a campaign to divide the Bengal Province on communal lines, even before the colonial government had formally decided on Partition.⁵⁷ In this context, Natarajan quotes a powerful Bengali editor-proprietor justifying his paper's playing up of riots through its increase in sales: "Even the newsboys refuse to touch my paper if my rivals report a larger number of deaths than I do."⁵⁸

Disappearing "sedition"

It is evident from the above discussion that "nationalism" played no great role in the ways in which the English-language newspapers in India carried on their quotidian state of affairs during the Second World War and immediately after. What becomes important at this point is to note that it was only after the war that these newspapers thought of expanding beyond the boundaries of their city-based editions. Changes of ownership precipitated this change, as well as the prospect of having favourable Indian politicians at the helm of the state whose slogan of pan-Indian nationalism could well facilitate an all-India market instead of local newspaper markets. Suddenly, "sedition" was not the frightful word it used to be.

As we have identified at the beginning, one of the principal reasons that earlier prevented the expansion of the newspaper industry in colonial India was the fear of implication through direct and indirect charges of "sedition." From the days of the John Company, the British had built up a stringent system of regulations that sought to render ineffective the fearful power of anonymity offered by print by making printers, editors, and proprietors identifiable, accountable, and punishable by the government. The most

notable of these were: Lord Wellesley's regulations (1799), mandating a newspaper to declare in print the names and addresses of its printer, its editor, and its proprietor, and get the prior approval of its contents by the secretary of the government acting as censor; John Adam's regulations (1823), mandating publishers and printers to acquire licences from the Governor-General, and granting discretionary powers to the government to prohibit publication; Charles Metcalfe's Registration of the Press Act (1835), that did away with the system of issuing licences but retained and extended Wellesley's regulations for penalizing publishers who printed without magisterial sanction and a declaration to the government, or did not imprint their "registered" addresses on their published books and newspapers; and the "Gagging Act" (1857), formulated in immediate response to the "Mutiny," which reintroduced licensing, and enforced prohibition of the press on grounds on "sedition."

After the transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown in November, 1858, these regulations culminated in the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, which upheld magisterial approval before the commencement of any kind of printing endeavour and categorically declared: "Every book or paper printed within British India shall have printed legibly on it the name of the printer and the place of printing, and (if the book or paper be published) the name of the publisher and the place of publication."⁵⁹ In the case of newspapers, this particular act held the printer and publisher primarily liable for whatever was to appear in a newspaper, apart from the author. It was complemented by numerous press laws and bills in the following decades and in the next century that in congruence with penal laws and systems of control allowed the colonial government to confiscate press equipment, effect pre-censorship, close down newspapers it deemed "seditious," and imprison printers and publishers without approval from the law courts. In short, these laws laid stress on preventive and punitive measures to control and curb *any* real or imagined opposition to the incontestable (and self-justificatory) existence of "public order" in British

India through any real or purported use of the medium of print.⁶⁰ With the perils of "sedition" lessening in the hope of a post-colonial dominion gradually freeing itself of imperial control, the press appeared as a lucrative business for Indian speculators who had long stayed away from direct involvement fearing economic and political repercussions by the colonial government.

Speculating "national"

As we have observed earlier in the case of the Birla family, the interests of Indian big business in the newspaper trade was not altogether new. Neither was the Indian takeover of English-owned newspapers: the *Pioneer*, for example, was acquired by Indian landowning interests in the United Provinces as early as 1933.⁶¹ What was however unique at this time was the desire for expansion among the Indian big bourgeoisie: a craving to lay claim to an "all-India" market under a favorable pan-Indian unitary state to be headed by the Indian National Congress, which shunned federalism and hoped to combine an upper caste Hindu/Hindi ethos with the inherited "steel frame of British colonial unification" maintained through repressive bureaucracy, political structures, and the army.⁶²

Altogether, it was a time of planning, and the promise of a new beginning: in less than a year after the formation of an "interim" Indian government, a few liquor barons headed by K.N. Guruswamy (an owner of toddy cartels and distilleries), and egged on by the dewan of the princely state of Mysore, raised a capital of five lakh rupees and launched an English daily, the *Deccan Herald*, in June 1948.⁶³ This paper was to emerge as the leading English daily in the city of Bangalore by the end of the 1950s, and the biggest disseminator of "news" in the state of Karnataka till the early 1990s.⁶⁴

We may note here that not all newspaper takeovers successfully lead to expansion. For example, we can refer to the case of the *Madras Mail*: the most successful English-language newspaper in Madras of the 1940s. In 1945, this European-owned paper was purchased by S. Anantharamakrishnan, a Madrasi businessman, a shareholder and later director

of the Amalgamations Group of companies that produced pistons, paints and chemicals, and automobile parts—the group acquired by Anantharamakrishnan in the same year. Though his other businesses expanded, the *Madras Mail* failed to grow beyond the city of Madras. The dream of expansion also misfired in the case of the *Statesman*, the only English-language newspaper to remain under British control. During the late 1940s, after the Partition, the newspaper planned on opening offices and increasing circulation in both India and Pakistan. The dream of Ian Stephen, its chief editor, to make the newspaper an extra-state “news” provider in the subcontinent (to “hold the scales even between India and Pakistan”) was cut short by the extreme animosity between the leaders of the two newly-formed nations.⁶⁵ The paper, with editions in Delhi and Calcutta, ran into serious trouble with the Indian government by publishing display advertisements of the government of “Azad Kashmir” (recognized by Pakistan, but considered non-existent by the Indian state); it survived after Stephen “made amends” with the Home Minister of India, Vallabhbhai Patel, who summarily asked him to leave India. After Stephen, George Arthur Johnson became its chief editor (wielding the most clout as the resident editor of the paper’s Delhi edition) until 1962 from when the paper was slowly acquired by Parsi stakeholders in Indian business.⁶⁶

The most infamous case of the takeover of British newspaper concerns by Indian speculators, however, was that of the Bennett Coleman. In 1946, Ramkrishna Dalmia (a Marwari war-profiteer from Rohtas in Haryana speculating in cement, paper, spun pipes, and adulterated *vanaspati* oil⁶⁷) laid claim to the Anglo-Indian firm Bennett Coleman, thus securing simultaneous ownership over *Times of India* (held through consensus as the largest selling English newspaper in British India) and the *Illustrated Weekly* (the most popular of the pictorial weekly magazines), apart from an expensive printing plant and a big building in the city of Bombay.⁶⁸ During the same time, he bought an established airlines company, an automobile engineering firm and a travel agency, along with other businesses and

industries.⁶⁹ Technically, Dalmia’s ownership over Bennett Coleman was secured through the sudden purchase of Bennett Coleman shares by the Dalmia Cement and Paper Marketing Company in 1946. Yet, the purchase was an example of speculation at its best: the money was mostly laundered through bank overdrafts, intentional bank insolvency, and company repurchases during and after the war.⁷⁰ After becoming proprietor and appointing himself as the editor-in-chief, Dalmia decided to spread out of Bombay: he bought a newspaper in Delhi, another in Calcutta, and with plans for starting more newspapers in other provincial capitals. (Later, in 1955-56, as a result of the Union Finance Minister C. D. Deshmukh and Nehru’s son-in-law Feroze Gandhi’s hostility to Dalmia, the purchase of Bennett Coleman became an issue of controversy in the Indian Parliament, and led to an inquiry commission. The debts uncovered by the commission in 1963, and the consequent trial and conviction of Dalmia in a law court forced him to mortgage Bennett Coleman to his son-in-law, Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain. The same Sahu Jain family retains control of the company to this date.)

Another important player to emerge during this time in the Indian newspaper scene was Ramnath Goenka, an influential Marwari with stakes in textile and economic speculation, who headed the Indian Express group of newspapers. Goenka had financially supported S. Sadanand’s newspaper company, the Free Press of India (Madras) Ltd. The *Indian Express* was launched in Madras in September 5, 1932, by Varadarajulu Naidu who sought to capitalize on the spurge of anti-colonialism in the wake of the Civil Disobedience Movement by launching an English-language newspaper. After two months of publication, Naidu gifted the paper to S. Sadanand, a Gandhian who started printing the newspaper on one of the six cylinder presses he had earlier acquired for his unsuccessful nationalist news-agency, the Free Press Journal. Soon Sadanand’s needs to run his publication company ran him into serious debts and like other big business speculators, Goenka provided him loans against shares of his company. By October 1936, Goenka had ousted Sadanand in a bitter

legal tussle to assert his position as the principal shareholder, and thereafter, became the virtual owner of the English-language newspaper, *Indian Express*, and other Free Press publications.⁷¹ After the Second World War, Goenka liquidated the company, and in 1946, formed a new one, the Express Newspapers Ltd. With changes in state control in the horizon, Goenka placed himself more visibly; this time as its chairman and editor-in-chief. The newly-formed company retained its earlier publications based in Madras, and launched two dailies in Calcutta: the *Eastern Express*, as an English-language daily, and a Bengali daily called *Bharat*.⁷² In the same year, Goenka took over the assets of the British-owned *Sunday-Morning Standard* group. The *Sunday Standard* was retained by Goenka as a Sunday newspaper as late as 1981; he renamed the daily *Morning Standard* as the *National Standard* (the paper later became the Bombay edition of the *Indian Express* in July 1953).⁷³ Goenka then entered the Delhi newspaper scene in 1948 to jointly acquire with Lala Deshbandhu Gupta the *Indian News Chronicle*; this was in fact a gift from Ramakrishna Dalmia who had acquired the newspaper *National Call* in 1946 and subsequently renamed it.⁷⁴ For four years, the *Indian News Chronicle* was run on Goenka's behalf by Lala Deshbandhu Gupta (a Congress politician and businessman from Delhi and editor of the Urdu daily *Tej*, also an influential member of the IENS, and a later member of the Constituent Assembly that adopted the Indian constitution). After Gupta's death in 1952, the *Indian News Chronicle* passed under the fuller control of Goenka, and underwent a change of name to become the *Delhi Express*; on July 1, 1953, it was re-issued as the Delhi edition of the *Indian Express*.⁷⁵

Older *bhadralok* editor-proprietor families, too, like the Ghoshes of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, were quick to appreciate the value for expansion. In 1945, Tushar Kanti Ghosh, then the president of the AINEC, started the Allahabad edition of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.⁷⁶ This was partly moved by his earlier fears of the Japanese conquest of Calcutta, as was widely presumed during that time. By the time the fear had subsided, Ghosh had already

invested in press equipment and an office at Allahabad, and moved in with his family to the city—its market and that of the United Provinces too enticing to ignore. To make faster deliveries of newspapers and edge over his competitors, he acquired a private chartered plane on which he and his newspapers moved about between Calcutta, Allahabad, and Delhi; the plane also transported regular bulk-loads of coconuts from Calcutta to Allahabad to help the Ghosh family beat the summer heat of the United Provinces.⁷⁷ His competitors (the Ananda Bazar group) acquired a splendid building at New Delhi, and started the Delhi edition of the *Hindustan Standard* in 1951.⁷⁸ Thus, in less than ten years of the Second World War, the English-language newspapers in India laid claim to a supposed “national presence” by setting up few multi-edition newspapers in some of the major capital cities, and preferably one in the capital city of New Delhi. (The multi-edition daily was not restricted to English dailies: in most cases, the English newspaper had an Indian-language daily run by the same proprietor as a “sister concern.”) Their increased circulations were the means to a specific end: increased advertisement revenue; the desire for “national” advertisement, rather than post-war nationalist sentiment, the primary trigger.

The formation of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) in 1948 by the most influential newspaper proprietors, advertising agencies mostly concentrated in the four big cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, and Madras, epitomized these newspapers' needs for re-establishing contact with “national” advertising which had once been the strict reserve of British-owned newspapers: the ABC supplemented these newspapers' dreams of expansion by reinforcing a close contact with the Indian advertising world.⁷⁹ As Robin Jeffrey observes, the ABC evolved not out of the requirements of Indian advertising in this period, but out of the specific need of the owners of mostly English-language newspapers to use the ABC's “authenticated” circulation indices to woo and reassure advertisers of their investment, and to utilize these indices as efficient retrieval mechanisms for uninterrupted

ed advertising revenue.⁸⁰ Élitism was part of the ABC's requirements from the start: its procedural methods of account-keeping effectively barred entry to small newspapers, and its renewable certificates suggested an intense interaction between its audited newspapers and advertisement in India in general, and also the criterion for membership in an élite club of newspapers who had devised and enforced their own set of rules for the newspaper game.⁸¹

A concentration in ownership characterized the newspaper business in India during the interregnum. We have no readily available figures for this, but the report of Rajadhyaksha Commission (popularly referred to as the First Press Commission) sheds some light on the nature of this concentration in the year 1954. Out of a total of 330 daily newspapers in India, fifteen proprietors controlled over 54 newspapers and 50.1 percent of the total newspaper circulation recorded by the Commission; five proprietors controlled 29 newspapers and 31.2 percent of the total circulation.⁸² Technically, most of these newspapers were run as joint-stock companies; in practice they were under the control of the principal shareholder of these companies who acted as their oligarchs. By 1954, newspapers owned by twelve of these companies (registered as chains, groups, combines, single and multiple units) accounted for 83 percent of the total circulation in the English-language field.⁸³ As we have also noted, most of these companies came about as the result of speculative mergers and acquisitions taking place mostly after the Second World War, and before the formal declaration of independence of India and Pakistan in August, 1947. For the rest of the century and beyond, they continued to function as family-owned oligopolies in India; in most cases, their owners (as principal shareholders) donning the editorial cloak to claim respectability. A craving for respectability, and the close relationship these editors-proprietors enjoyed with politicians expected to run the Indian state made them presume an uninterrupted growth, at least in the years immediately preceding the formal institution of the Dominion of India.

We conclude on the note that the above

observations are at odds with the usual histories of the press in India which sadly remain engrossed with the "missionary journalism" of a pan-Indian nationalist press to the extent that they forget the institutional realities that helped the English-language newspapers to emerge as "national" newspapers under the post-colonial Indian state, and the concentrated nature of their ownership that were at distinct odds with the evolution of the idea of a uniform and free "marketplace of ideas" in the Indian subcontinent. Our findings, in a way, also contradict the generalizations suggested by certain critical (albeit minority) approaches to Indian press history, mostly in the Marxist vein, that see the English-language press undergoing a sudden transformation from an antagonistic anti-colonialism to compliance and sycophancy in the post-colonial situation because of the change in their ownership patterns after Indian independence.⁸⁴

As we have witnessed, it was less of a sudden transformation after Indian independence than a series of changes that began during the collapse of the Empire and preceded the formal transfer of power from British to Indian hands. Rather, the changes witnessed in the English-language newspapers in India during this period bear direct correlation to their speculating a "national" presence under a favourable post-colonial state which, they hoped, guaranteed them of greater facilities, lesser political retribution, and a privileged sphere of operation in the future. Time was needed, though, for the redefining of relationships in the post-colonial situation, and somewhat to briefly transmute the cordial relationship that was the basis for the survival of the English-language press in the political state territory identified as India after 1947. Of that history, much remains to be uncovered. A serious re-interrogation of the diverse histories of the newspaper in the Indian subcontinent, without recourse to a unitary "nationalist" historiographic framework, might be an important step in that direction.

Notes

¹ Some British historians still attach great value to Churchill's prophecy. See, for example, Stanley Wolpert's recent consideration of the withdrawal of the British rule in India as a "tragic error of judgment." Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

² For a general historical outline of the growth of the newspaper business in British India, albeit from the colonizer's perspective and with the author's undisguised sympathies with the "civilizing mission" of British imperialism, see Margarita Barns, *The Indian Press: A History of the Growth of Public Opinion in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1940). For representative examples of historical studies following a "nationalist" model approved by the post-colonial Indian state, see S. Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India* (Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi and Madras: Asia Publishing House, 1962); Mohit Moitra, *A History of Indian Journalism* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1969); Sharad Karkhanis, *Indian Politics and the Role of the Press* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1981).

³ The extremest ahistorical argument in this vein is the observation that it was only in the years after 1977 that the Indian newspaper industry properly transformed itself into a business, prior to that all reference to the newspaper business in India can only be made with the word "business" under quotation marks. c.f. Vanita Kohli-Khandekar, *The Indian Media Business* (2003; New Delhi: Sage Response, 2010). We may note that Hickey's *Gazette*, historically the first commercial newspaper that was printed in India, precedes the so-called cut-off point by almost two hundred years (See note 23).

⁴ In the course of this article, the expression "proto-nationalism" is used to highlight the fact that the real driving force of the various anti-colonial movements in British-occupied India was not an inherent pan-Indian "national consciousness," but increasing anti-imperial resentment and resistance against colonial oppression. It does well to remember Eric Hobsbawm's observations in this context: "Insofar as there were proto-national identifications, ethnic, religious or otherwise, among the common people, they were, as yet, obstacles rather than contributions to national consciousness, and readily mobilized against nationalists by imperial masters; hence the constant attacks on the imperialist policies of 'Divide and rule', against the imperial encouragement of tribalism, communalism, or whatever else divided peoples who should be, but were not, united as a single nation." Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1992; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 137.

⁵ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Its Genesis, Growth and Character* (1985; Calcutta: New Horizon Book Trust, 2000), 189-259.

⁶ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 428.

⁷ In the Hindu caste system of the North Indian variety, "Banya" is an endogamous Hindu caste of big merchants and moneylenders, superior in caste hierarchy to petty traders, peddlars, and village-level merchants.

⁸ Ghosh, *Indian Big Bourgeoisie*, 201.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁰ The Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931. This Act gave power to local magistrates to demand security deposits (up to Rs. 1000) from publishers and printers of newspapers. These securities could be forfeited, and the magistrates could demand additional security, apart from issuing search warrants on property. This was not a new legislation, but one founded on older press legislations dating back to the days of John Company that hoped to thwart "sedition."

¹¹ Son of Baldeo Das Birla, younger brother of Jugal Kishor, and the most famous face of the family because of his closeness to Gandhi.

¹² J. N. Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press* (Bombay, Calcutta, and New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1974), 37. Sahni was the editor roped in by Malviya in the 1930s from *The Tribune* to run the *Hindustan Times*. He later became the general manager of the *Hindustan Times*, also alternating as the managing editor of its later Hindi-language daily, *Hindustan*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵ This newspaper was founded in 1862 by Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912), a famous Bengali playwright, novelist, and theatre director of the nineteenth-century.

¹⁶ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 96.

¹⁷ Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press*, 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ By 1933, the Birla family had become the paper's principal shareholder.

²⁰ Also his newspaper, the *Free Press Journal*, before it was acquired by another big business speculator, Ramnath Goenka.

²¹ Devdas Gandhi was retained by the Birlas as the managing editor of the *Hindustan Times* until his death in 1957.

²² Ashok V. Desai, *Economic Aspects of the Indian Press* (New Delhi: Press Institute of India, 1971), 21.

²³ The first English-language newspaper printed in the Indian subcontinent was the *Bengal Gazette, Or Original Calcutta Advertiser*, published in Calcutta on January 29, 1780, by an Irishman, James Augustus Hickey. It was a two sheet newspaper with a print-run of around 200, and had three columns printed on both sides for printing hand-bills and common advertisement. Hickey made no pretensions of his weekly newspaper's devotion to advertisements that included notices of property auction, horse stable charges, lottery schemes,

advertisement of breads and sweet cakes, shoes, candlesticks, clocks, pistols and regimental swords, cheap booze, requests for return of stolen books, rewards for capture of runaways, and the sale of young slaves. The *Gazette* also contained as “news” all the gossip Hickey thought relevant to the British merchant community’s sympathetic pleasures in Calcutta: extracts from English newspapers shipped to the colonial metropolis from Britain, a “Poet’s Corner,” and Hickey’s special comments on the private scandals of officials of the British East India Company that boosted his sales.

²⁴ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 79, 82-83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79, 84.

²⁶ Moitra, *History of Indian Journalism*, 154.

²⁷ However, on the same trial, Ghosh’s uncle and printer of the *Patrika*, Chandranath Roy, was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for publishing an article by Rajkrishna Mitra, the head-clerk of a Joint Magistrate. Rajkrishna got a year’s term of prison.

²⁸ This Act allowed the government to close down Indian-language newspapers, confiscate press equipment, and imprison printers and publishers without approval from the law courts.

²⁹ Moitra, *History of Indian Journalism*, 152-154.

³⁰ Bhadrak (literally “gentle folk”) is a word that came to be used in the Bengali-language to indicate caste-ascendant middle and upper classes in colonial India. All members of the new (though not necessarily Anglicised) professional classes under the colonial administration, including civil servants, lawyers, professors, were considered members of the bhadrak community alongside those who possessed considerable wealth, alongside pretensions of political and cultural clout.

³¹ When Majumdar launched the *Hindustan Standard*, the Ghosh family responded with *Jugantar*, a Bengali newspaper, to challenge him on his turf. Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 223.

³² M. Chalapathi Rau, *The Press* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1974), 152. Nehru remained the chairman of its board of directors from 1938 to September 1946, when he became the vice-president of the Viceroy’s Executive Council.

³³ As Steven Patterson observes, the concept of “imperial honour” and its associated set of protocols, both formal and informal, had been systematically introduced among the Anglo-Indians in British India from the 1850s as part of a “people’s theology” reminding them of the infallibility of the imperial system. It also contained within it the deeper fear of the loss of the empire, and therefore made the Anglo-Indians, as a community and as individuals, vulnerable to greater racial prejudices and more hostile to any thought and attempt that threatened the validity of the imperial mission. Steven Patterson, *The Cult of Imperial Honor in British India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8-11.

³⁴ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 183.

³⁵ “Newspaper Circulations: An Open Offer,” *Statesman*, December 20, 1919, in *The Statesman Centenary Volume*, edited by N. L. Emmerson (Calcutta: Statesman Ltd, 1975), 117.

³⁶ Quoted in Jawaharlal Nehru, “A Window in Prison,” in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Recent Essays and Writings: On the Future of India, Communalism and other subjects* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1934), 80. In this article, Nehru comes out vehemently against the *Statesman* for the truehearted support it lent to the colonial rule in British India.

³⁷ For example, J. N. Sahni of *Hindustan Times* enlists in his autobiography his talents for raising funds from international companies to run the National Journals Limited which was later acquired by the Dalmias. In the 1930s, he made a “synchronised plan of features and advertisements” for General Motors that got him Rs. 15,000 as travel expenses, and an Opel Kladdett car as “bonus” from Mr. Klatt, the then head of General Motors, apart from an undisclosed amount of money for the entire project. In 1936, when the Irish-owned Dunlop Company set up its first Indian factory to manufacture automobile tyres at Sahaganj near Bandel, Sahni worked on creating special supplements for the company to be distributed free with several papers, and preceded by a brief campaign highlighting the new venture. Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press*, 125-127.

³⁸ Again, it was the *Statesman* which was the first Indian newspaper to have a special correspondent in London exclusively writing for this Calcutta newspaper.

³⁹ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 183.

⁴⁰ Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press*, 37.

⁴¹ See James W. Carey, “The Discovery of Objectivity,” *American Journal of Sociology* 87, no. 5 (1982): 1182-1188.

⁴² *Report of the Press Commission*, Part I (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1954), 342.

⁴³ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 238 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War* (Richmond, England: Curzon Press, 2001), 125.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁶ After August 1942, many Indian-owned newspapers, who were members of the AINEC, closed down in protest: however, the bigger newspapers were quick to re-open: the *Indian Express* closed down for three months, the *Hindu* for one day. Nehru’s *National Herald* initially chose to run despite stricter conditions: it published war news without headlines, and with no editorials, to end up paying a total security deposit of Rs. 18000 to the United Provinces government. With Nehru and its editor in jail after August 1942, and its office raided and sealed by the police; the paper closed down on August 15, 1942, and went into a “self-imposed silence” until November 11, 1945. The newspaper reopened with a signed editorial by Nehru with the headlines “Jai Hind” [Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 126].

⁴⁷ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 241-242.

⁴⁸ Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India*, 130.

⁴⁹ The expression “Quit India” was an American journalist’s invention to suit compact newspaper headlines: Gandhi’s initial call was for “an orderly British withdrawal,” though in time, “Quit India” caught on with him, and with most of the peoples in British India, as a convenient call for the ouster of colonial rule [Paul R. Greenough, “Political Mobilization and the Underground Literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942-44,” *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 3 (1983): 354n4]. As Greenough observes in his article, it was mostly the underground newspapers such as the *Biplabi* (mouthpiece of the revolutionary Tamluk National Government in the Midnapur district of the Bengal Province which emerged during the rudderless Quit India movement) that explicitly opposed the imperial war-efforts and the colonial rule during the war.

⁵⁰ “Secret telegram from the Commerce Department, Government of India, to L. Amery, Secretary of State for India, Government of Britain,” December 4, 1942, quoted in Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India*, 146n57.

⁵¹ For a detailed assessment and indictment of the British government’s policy on the famine, as well as for a contemporary account of the famine, see Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal: 1770-1943* (1944; Calcutta: National Council of Education, 1987).

⁵² Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal*, 131.

⁵³ That is, not considering the attempts of a few Communism-inspired artists like Zainul Abedin and Chittaprasad roaming the city and the countryside to sketch the gruesome pictures of death, and reproduce them in cheap lithographs.

⁵⁴ Editorial, *Statesman*, August 29, 1943.

⁵⁵ Louis Mountbatten, “The *Statesman*’s Part in the Production of ‘SEAC,’” in *Statesman Centenary Volume*, edited by Emmerson, 23.

⁵⁶ See, for example, N. Ram, “An Independent Press and Anti-hunger Strategies: The Indian Experience,” in *The Political Economy of Hunger*, vol. 1, edited by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen (1990; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 146-190. Ram’s self-congratulatory reference to the *Statesman*’s reporting of the Bengal Famine fails to take into account (better to say, conveniently ignores) the fact that it was only *after* the *Statesman*’s coverage of the famine that Indian-owned English newspapers such as the *Hindu*, and more specifically those operating from Calcutta such as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Hindustan Standard*, or even the staunchly nationalist Bengali daily *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (then edited by Prafulla Kumar Sarkar) decided to make “news” of the famine that was happening right next to and around their workplaces for months.

⁵⁷ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Constitution and Its Review* (Mumbai: Research Unit for Political Economy, 2001), 49.

⁵⁸ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 283-284. Conjectures are conjectures; but it is likely enough this editor might have been Tushar Kanti Ghosh of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, though more famous for printing blank editorials for three consecutive days to mourn over the killings and arson during the religious riots.

⁵⁹ “Press and Registration of Books Act No. xxv of 1876,” in *Law relating to Press and Sedition*, G. K. Roy (Simla: Station Press, 1915), 1-3.

⁶⁰ As Rajeev Dhavan points out, the success of imperial legality in British India depended on its ability to reduce all issues of freedom of speech and expression to a “public-order-at-all-costs” argument: the uncritical acceptance of the policy of institutional validity of the government, and its elaborate systems of penal order, as the starting point of all discussion. The Republic of India that followed later was to accept this reification of a “public order” as the de facto basis of its legitimacy and unquestionable supremacy. See Rajeev Dhavan, “Obtaining Moral Consensus in a Law and Order Society,” in *The Indian Public Sphere: Readings in Media History*, edited by Arvind Rajagopal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 88-98.

⁶¹ Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 223.

⁶² D. N., “Indian Big Bourgeoisie and the National Question: The Formative Phase,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 9 (1989): 456. Also see Perry Anderson, “After Nehru,” *London Review of Books* 34, no. 15 (2012): 21-36, where Anderson discusses the various means through which Nehru and leaders of the Indian National Congress opted for maintaining the repressive structures of the earlier colonial state, and avoided all references to federalism while staking claim to the territorial sovereignty of a new nation.

⁶³ Harish Damodaran, *India’s New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 209.

⁶⁴ In October 1948, Guruswamy and his associates launched a “sister” Kannada daily, the *Prajavani*. The *Deccan Herald* and the *Prajavani* made an economic drive and tremlined their operations in 1958-59, which made Guruswamy’s company emerge as the biggest player in the “news” business in Karnataka—a position it held until the 1990s after which the *Times of India* entered their almost exclusive playing field. *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁵ Inder Malhotra, “The *Statesman* Story,” *Media Mimansa*, no. 3 (2008): 94.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

⁶⁷ Hydrogenated vegetable oil. This was a commodity that fetched high profits during the war, and remained popular in India as a cheaper (and often black-marketed) alternative to mustard oil well into the 1980s.

⁶⁸ This was no loss of innocence for the Indian press. However, this raised the most objections, perhaps because of the Indian state’s later hostility and public vilification of Ramkrishna Dalmia—a champion of holy cows (not in the metaphorical sense) and Hindu revivalism, and importantly, a bitter opponent of Nehru.

⁶⁹ D. R. Mankekar, *The Press Under Pressure* (New Delhi: Indian Book Company, 1973), 78-79.

⁷⁰ Soon after the end of the war, Dalmia had bought shares worth a crore of rupees by securing a bank overdraft of Rs. 80 lakh from a privately-owned bank, the Bank of India. The bank bought shares of worth Rs. 84 lakh, and sold them at Rs. 81 lakh to another private bank owned by the Dalmia Jains, the Gwalior Bank. The Gwalior Bank declared itself insolvent, and the Dalmia Jains took over its assets and liabilities through another of their companies, the Delhi Glass Works Ltd. The Dalmia Cement and Paper Marketing Company sold itself out to private insurance companies (Indian Insurance, Indian Fire and General Insurance etc.), and repurchased itself, with Dalmia reaping profits in the process. Ranabir Samaddar, *New Technology in Indian Newspaper Industry: A Critical Appraisal* (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1990).

⁷¹ T. J. S. George, introduction to *The Goenka Letters: Behind the Scenes in The Indian Express*, edited by T. J. S. George (Chennai: East West Books, 2006), 12, 18-19, 28-29.

⁷² T. J. S. George, appendix to *Goenka Letters*, *ibid.*, 239. These newspapers failed to make impact, and were quickly discontinued.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ The *National Call* was established in Delhi in the 1930s by Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, a former Congress president, and the founder of the Jamia Milia Islamia University at Delhi. Dalmia was helped in the purchase by J. N. Sahni, who had become the editor of the paper in the meantime, after quitting *Hindustan Times*.

⁷⁵ T. J. S. George, appendix to *Goenka Letters*, 239.

⁷⁶ Chandrika Kaul, "India, the Imperial Press Conferences and the Empire Press Union: The Diplomacy of News in the Politics of Empire, 1909–1946," in *Media and the British Empire*, edited by Chandrika Kaul (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 132. Kaul credits Tushar Kanti Ghosh for being the first Indian newspaper proprietor to own simultaneous publications in different cities; but as we have seen, the Birlas and Ramnath Goenka beat him to it in the 1930s, even if they did not openly stake their claim on the different publications they owned. The *Statesman* too had opened its Delhi office in the 1930s, but its owners do not qualify for the claim, at least in the racial sense implied here.

⁷⁷ In 1959, Ghosh relaunched the Allahabad edition as a separate newspaper, the *Northern India Patrika*.

⁷⁸ Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press*, 197.

⁷⁹ Jeffrey, "Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the Indian State," 749.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 749-751.

⁸² *Report of the Press Commission* (1954), Part I, 309.

⁸³ Calculated from the table of circulation provided in the *Report of the Press Commission* (1954), Part I, 306-307.

⁸⁴ For example, we can refer to an observation made by Sumanta Banerjee: "After independence, the national newspapers in the English language which had played a missionary role in the freedom struggle were acquired by India's industrialists. Some of the British-owned English dailies also were bought over to become the mouthpiece of Indian reaction. The newspaper industry came to be owned by the jute barons, the textile barons, the cement barons, and the steel barons." [Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Monopoly Press: A Mirror of Distortion* (New Delhi: Indian Federation of Working Journalists, 1973), 11-12.] As we have seen above, these newspapers were acquired mostly before India's independence and during the transfer of power, and, with the solitary exception of the *Statesman*, not strictly after. There is another point to be noted in Banerjee's observations: he merges "national" with "nationalism" to the extent that he seems to attach a special significance to the "nationalist" roles played by the English-language newspapers, when in reality the role was shared by them with their Indian-language counterparts, and with the latter definitely deserving more credit for their resistance against the colonial rule.