TELLING STORIES/READING THE NATION: NEWS AND THE NEWSPAPERS IN THE FORTIES

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The turbulent decade of the forties was arguably even more so in Bengal and Calcutta which suffered the horrific famine in the early years of the decade followed by one of the worst riots between Hindus and Muslims in 1946 known as the Great Calcutta Killings. On the larger political horizon was the Second World War and at home of course there were the increasingly louder and more confident demands and movements for complete independence. Access to information and news became increasingly vital as the everyday life of ordinary people came to be affected by the larger political events. Newspapers were, thus, crucial as channels of information. However, what is interesting throughout this period is the way that newspapers and newspaper editors were themselves not just channels of information, but actors and characters in this multi-stage, many layered drama being staged in the forties.

The act of reading a newspaper is such a daily quotidian habit that it disguises the fact that subscribing and reading the newspaper actually constitutes a daily act of locating oneself within a complex network of language, citizenship, nation and indeed provides for each of us a point of view which creates and reaffirms a way of locating oneself in the events which are taking place around us every day, both nearby and far away. As persuasively argued by theorists of print media and of nationalism, the power of the printing presses was an important crucial element in the growth of the ideology of nationhood. Marshall McLuhan argues that "print technology…isolates the individual yet also creates massive groupings by means of vernacular nationalism"[1] and in Benedict Anderson's still evocative term, in the "imagined community" of the nation newspapers were a daily ritual, a "mass ceremony…a substitute for morning prayers… [affirming] that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life."[2] The significance of the newspaper in the construction of the nation is now well recognized by scholars.

The role of newspapers in the nationalist movements for independence in South Asia too is quite well-acknowledged though perhaps not adequately documented. The source for most commentators and scholars

of journalism in India is the informative *Part II of the Report of the Press Commission* first published in 1955 as *History of Indian Journalism* by J. Natarajan[3]. In this report, the author documents the growth of the newspapers in India and the relationships between the print media and the nationalist movement. However, the book takes a panoramic view of this history and, while remaining the best source of information, lacks an analytical framework. Robin Jeffrey's work[4], while comprehensive, begins from a much later moment in time. The role of the newspaper in reinforcing or reconstructing the nation-citizen relationship is discussed in works such as Anderson's or assumed in Habermas' formulations of the newspaper as constitutive of the "democratic public realm consisting of cafes, newspapers, journals encouraging general discussion on public moral and political issues."[5] However, the role of the newspaper in a colonial situation which is at once and simultaneously attempting to define the idea of a nation and the issue of its national sovereignty at a particular moment of history has not been much explored. This paper looks at the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in the decade of forties to offer a particular perspective on some complex moments of history.

One immediate observation that strikes a reader of newspapers in the forties in India is that the traditional ideas about newspapers being 'neutral' and above political affiliations did not apply to the Indian newspaper community. Perhaps being in the position of colonial subjects forced upon the polity a recognition of the role of the newspapers as being part of the struggle against the colonial masters. The theorisations offered above by Anderson or McLuhan emphasise the process of the act of the creation of citizenship; however, as the nation is itself being imagined in these pre-Independence times, newspapers like *ABP* did their best to report and to construct a political readership simultaneously.

The origins of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* were modest: a newspaper started in a small village called Amrita Bazar in the Jessore district of undivided Bengal in 1868. However, it soon migrated to Calcutta and in Natarajan's words, "The *Patrika* held the centre of the stage so far as the press was concerned for many years after…The battles it fought and the storms it weathered will be dealt with as the narrative develops."[6]

The history of the newspaper in India is traditionally seen to begin at the moment of publication of the *Bengal Gazette* in 1780 edited by James Augustus Hicky though Natarajan cites the evidence of official documents to suggest that one William Bolts had intended to start a newspaper in 1776. However, the very idea was not acceptable to the East India Company, which directed Bolts to leave Bengal and he was forced to leave for Europe from Madras as soon as he could. The long and complex story of the persecution of Hicky by the British administration is not relevant here

except to record the intolerance of the Company administrators toward newspapers and journals from the very beginning. The expulsion of the editor of *Calcutta Review* James Silk Buckingham in 1823 is also a famous example of the intolerance of the Company officials[7]. However, these early newspapers were usually little more than a collection of anecdotes—usually scandalous—opinions and pieces copied from other publications, often with the comments of the editor interpolated. With very small, even miniscule circulation figures, these publications were really little more than local gossip sheets and notifications, hardly the vehicle for reasoned public debate that Habermas describes. Vernacular language publications were, perhaps, more concerned with political issues as Faruqui Anjum Taban argues in her essay "The Coming of the Revolt in Awadh: The Evidence of Urdu Newspapers"[8] based on her reading of three Urdu publications *Tilism, Sadiq-ul-Akhbar* and *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*. All three publications report incidents which capture the anger aroused in the Indians as a result of the annexation of Awadh, including the lynching of a British official led by a group of women. The author concludes, "It appears from all the three papers that the annexation of Awadh in February 1856 led to widespread resentment among the people of Awadh. Contrary to the 'official' view that prior to the outbreak of the Mutiny on 30 June 1857, there were no apparent indications of discontent in Awadh against the British over the Annexation, these papers reveal a growing sense of resentment that ultimately found in the Revolt its most bitter expression."[9]

The great documenter of this period, William Hunter records this change in the tone and subject matter of Indian journalism as follows:

> Owing to the spread of vernacular education and the growth of a reading public, the native newspaper has now, in its own way, become a power in the country. A great change has now taken place in its character, tone and literary style. In 1863 and some years afterwards the papers devoted small space to the discussion of political questions or large administrative measures, and items of news or speculations on religious or social subjects constituted the major portion of their contents. Politics received very meagre treatment; the writers offered their opinions with diffidence, and their tone was always respectful; their literary style was stiff and sanskritised. The principal characteristics of such papers at the present time are the increasing prominence given to political and administrative questions, a reckless, exaggerated, and occasionally disloyal tone and a colloquial, ungrammatical, and anglicised style. With the spread of English education, the papers published in English by the Bengalis are rapidly growing in importance.[10]

Hunter notes the following publications as being political in nature: *Kaiser-i-Hind, Native Opinion, Voice of India, East and West,* and among those published in Bengal the *Bengalee, Amrita Bazar Patrika,* and the *Indian Mirror* in English, while in Bengali he mentions *Bangabashi, Basumati* and *Hitabadi*

as being mostly concerned with political matters[11].

Meanwhile, the critical tone of the vernacular press did not remain unnoticed by the British and the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was, it was believed, aimed at the 'thorn in the side' that *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had become. In the long excerpt from editor Motilal Ghose's version of events reproduced in Natarajan, Ghose claims that, "The blow was aimed mainly at the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* which was then an Anglo-Vernacular paper and fell within the scope of the Act. But Babu Shishir Kumar and his brothers were too clever for Sir Ashley. Before the Act was put in force they brought out their paper in wholly English garb and thus circumvented the Act and snapped their fingers at the Lieutenant Governor for a journal conducted in the English language was beyond the jurisdiction of Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act... [Lord Ashley told his friends] that if there had been only one week's delay on the part of the proprietors to convert the *Patrika* into English, he would have dealt them a deadly blow..."[12]

The cat and mouse game that began then continued and became more and more 'deadly' as the voice of the anti-British 'natives' grew more confident and strong. Soon the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had moved to Calcutta and in 1891 it was published daily rather than the earlier weekly frequency. There was a series of legislation that followed the Vernacular Press Act which generally served to increase the control of the Government over the Press in the Empire. In 1910, the Indian Press Act was passed which gave all power to the Magistrate and made it mandatory for all owners of printing presses to deposit securities with the Government which could be forfeited by the local government if, among other clauses, it was found to have published 'any words, signs or visible representations which are likely or may have a tendency, directly or indirectly, whether by inference, suggestion, allusion, metaphor, implication or otherwise' and:

> to bring into hatred or contempt His Majesty or the Government established by law in British India or the administration of justice in British India or any Native Prince or Chief under the suzerainty of His Majesty, subjects in British India, or to excite disaffection towards His Majesty or the said Government or any such Prince or Chief.[13]

In addition to laws, there were notifications, regulations or other decrees which also attempted to curb the growing influence of the 'native' press in both English and vernacular languages. From 1940 the ongoing War in Europe gave the British yet another excuse to impose restrictions on the Indian press. An order was issued which prohibited:

> ...the printing or publishing by any printer, publisher or editor in British India of any matter calculated, directly or indirectly, to foment opposition to the prosecution of

the war to a successful conclusion, or of any matter relating to the holding of meetings or the making of speeches for the purpose, directly or indirectly, of fomenting such opposition as aforesaid; provided that nothing in this order shall be deemed to apply to any matter communicated by the Central Government or a provincial government to the press for publication.[14]

By this time, the editors of newspapers had organised themselves into the All India Newspapers Editors' Conference who intervened and protested when the regulations were taken to extreme measures as in the case of the repeated forfeitures of security deposits of the *National Herald* which was then edited by Jawaharlal Nehru[15].

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A closer look at the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* during the 1940s gives us a remarkable sense of the range of political activities taking place in Calcutta and other parts of the British Empire in India. The January 1, 1940 edition, for example, includes detailed coverage of both the Muslim Educational Conference being held in Calcutta where the demand for education in Urdu was discussed alongside with the need for social reform and the Conference of the Hindu Mahasabha at Deshbandhu Park. There is full coverage of Jawaharlal Nehru's speech in Amritsar side by side with the resolution of the Working Committee of the Bengal Provisional Congress Committee regarding discrepancies in accounts. Shorter articles report on Subhash Bose's forthcoming visit to Delhi, where he was likely to convene a meeting of the Woking Committee of Forward Bloc and on the convention of the All India Students' Federation in Delhi. Activities of other nationalist leaders such as Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachariar are also briefly reported as is a speech by Dinabandhu Andrews. Nehru's greeting for the New Year issued in Lahore is also published in full where he recalls the pledge taken to fight for an independent India and concludes:

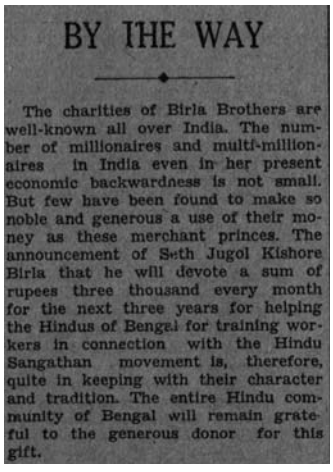
This New Year that will soon be with us is full of the dark shadows of violence and conflict and no man can foretell what the outcome will be...Let us all address ourselves to [the pledge] with good-will to all, working for the establishment of an independent, united and democratic India where every individual has the gates of opportunity open before them and life for all is one cooperative effort for the good of each and all.[16]

All these reports are framed by various news and statements about the ongoing war in Europe. The newspaper, though distinctly Congress in its political inclinations, serves almost as a bulletin board of the many kinds of political and social activism that were connected to the nationalist movements. The earnestness with which social issues such as education and social reform were debated and discussed at a wide variety of fora

also gives a glimpse into the creation of not only a political arena of activity but the sense of an active civil society where the discourses of the political and the social were not as clearly demarcated as they often seem to be today.

Another striking feature of the newspaper is that it is full of advertisements for a variety of products ranging from all kinds of insurance, banking services, Bhim Nag's vacuum-packed rosogollas, Chavanprash, castor oil chocolates as cure for constipation, an instruction booklet guaranteed to teach the reader how to fly an airplane and of course cures for acute and chronic gonorrhoea. What is interesting that almost the advertisements are placed by Indian companies—both small and local like some of those mentioned above—but also by the Tata group of industries. There are very few advertisements for English or British products. Of course that could reflect either the readership of this newspaper or a deliberate policy of refusing to support even through advertising, a newspaper known for its anti-British stance. The relationships between the Indian businessmen and the various strands of the freedom movement are, thus, also hinted at and, perhaps, can be even seen as revealing themselves in the news and advertisements in such avowedly nationalist publications such as *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.

This particular edition carries a short piece under the heading "By the Way" which is typically illustrative of the complex relationship between businessmen, the newspapers and the strands of the nationalist ideology.



BY THE WAY

The charities of Birla Brothers are well-known all over India. The number of millionaires and multi-millionaires in India even in her present economic backwardness is not small. But few have been found to make so noble and generous a use of their money as these merchant princes. The announcement of Seth Jugol Kishore Birla that he will devote a sum of rupees three thousand every month for the next three years for helping the Hindus of Bengal for training workers in connection with the Hindu Sangathan movement is, therefore, quite in keeping with their character and tradition. The entire Hindu community of Bengal will remain grateful to the generous donor for this gift.

By reproducing it in full, I trust that the reader will be able to make her own judgements about the way in which the representation of the event clearly points to the ongoing Hinduisation of the nationalist rhetoric, while the term 'merchant prince' to refer to the emerging national bourgeoisie is interesting in its combination of the feudal and the mercantile.

As was the custom—possibly due to technological limitations—the last page is full of photographs and again shows an eclectic range from a picture of Jawaharlal Nehru at a meeting, a photograph of Girl Guides of Arya Kanya Vidyalaya trained in using arms (though the photograph seems to suggest their discomfort with the rifles they are holding), the opening of a maternity home in Dhakuria by the Ramakrishna Mission, Motilal Roy speaking at the All

Bengal Prabartak Sangha Conference at Burdwan and two photographs from the war front in Poland.

The entire newspaper is markedly political in nature, though there are reports on sports, including horse racing and columns on commercial news, and the daily schedule of radio programmes. Indeed, it is in the listings of the radio programmes that the construction of a spatial nation-identity is most clear as the listings are given not only for Calcutta, but Dacca, Delhi, Lucknow and Bombay. A few of the advertisements too thank their patrons from all over India for their support in the last year.

However, one element is missing from the New Year's Day edition of 1940 of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and that is the otherwise frequent coverage of the battle between newspapers and the administration. Even a random look at the editions of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* throughout the year shows innumerable articles on notices served on editors under the Defence of India rules, ranging from those reported in January 3, 1940 edition where the article "Orders Served On Editors: Sequel to Some Publications" reports on two such cases. The first part of the brief article describes the notice served to the editor of *Hindustan Newspaper*, Ashutosh Lahiri, asking him to provide names, addresses and other information of the informants and the measures taken by the editor to find out the truth of the incidents published the articles in "Alleged Injustice to Hindus of Noakhali" and "Wails of the Villagers" about one of the worst riots in Bengal and indeed India. The second such order was served on Vivekananda Mukherjee, editor of *Basumati*, "In connection with the publication of the article entitled 'In an unclouded storm (Bine Meghe)' regarding the searches and taking away of people to police stations and forfeiture of books, etc." The article ends with a rather wry statement that "In the order it is stated that the Government consider it expedient in the interest of public service to obtain certain information in respect of the said publications."[17] In another article of the *ABP*, there is another even more brief reporting of another such clash—with the headline "Sj Niranjan Sen: Journalist Ordered to Leave Calcutta" it is just plainly stated that Niranjan Sen, sub-editor of *Jugantar* and an ex-political prisoner has been asked to leave the city within 48 hours under the provisions of the Defence of India Act. Interestingly this little snippet is followed by—in the same article—a report of a similar order being served to Balai Lall Das Mahapatra of the Bengal Labour Association and Balai Chandra Bose of the Beleghata Chatkal Mazdoor Union under the same Act to leave Calcutta, the 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Asansol sub-division in the next 48 hours. Perhaps this juxtaposition reveals more than any comment could, the autocratic attitude of the rulers towards editors and labour leaders alike.

While histories of journalism and histories or biographies of nationalist

tell of the grand battles between major figures and the administration alongside glorious stories of resistances as an integral part of the nationalist narrative, a reading of the newspapers of the times gives a clearer idea of the ubiquitous nature of such censuring actions of the British administration. This history would record the administration's recognition of the political clout of the regional and English press and clearly this constant flow of threatening orders, forfeitures of increasing amounts of security deposits and harassments of various kinds was meant to muzzle the press through direct action and indirect threats. *ABP* regularly reports on these orders which are issued as orders or regulations by the Government from time to time. For example, on June 21, 1942, it is reported that the Rules of Defence of India Act have been amended such that no newspaper can report on "alleged assaults by soldiers on civilians and women." It is further elaborated that only official pronouncements on such incidents may be published.

Another short report in *ABP* on June 9, 1942 is worth singling out for mention as it is about the Government's decision to forfeit the security deposit—yet again—of the *National Herald*, the newspaper of which Jawaharlal Nehru was the editor. It is interesting that *ABP* reports that the earlier forfeit of the deposit of Rs 6,000 and the demand for a fresh security deposit of Rs 12,000 is clearly, "in the consensus of opinion of the country" a "repressive measure" and that "by contributing to this end [of raising the money], the public must show to unintelligent officialdom that the real sanction of a nationalist newspaper lies in popular affection and interest." The article notes with satisfaction that the response so far has been "immediate and spontaneous" and has come from "Congressmen and non-Congressmen alike."

This last phrase is particularly telling because there are several reports of fines, arrests and forfeitures of newspapers, editors and printers across the country, including *Janmabhoomi* Press Case in which Shyamaprasad Mukherjee was also involved, the Orissa-based *Samaj* and *Mukho*, the *Hindustan Times*, the *Observer* among others being prosecuted under the Defence of India Act or the India Press (Emergency Powers) Act. This reading of not only the headlines, but the entire paper shows us the innumerable instances of even not so famous cases of the arrest of journalists, editors and publishers. Not all of these are for their writings. One such example is the arrest, acquittal and re-arrest of Aswini Kumar Gupta who was not only a journalist with *Ananda Bazar Patrika* but an activist committed to the Gandhian movement which is reported in the *ABP*. Aswini Gupta was later sent to Delhi as part of the team to set up *Hindustan Standard*, the envisioned English language national daily of the *Ananda Bazar* house.[18]

There are also reports of incidents arising out of political factionalism due to the many strands of ideological affiliations and it is also clear that the newspaper editors too took sides and actions in consonance with their own particular set of political convictions. For example, under the heading "For Pro-Gandhi Feeling/ Journalist Sacked/ Poet Bijoylal Loses Job from 'Desh'" the readers are informed that the poet Bijoylal Chatterjee lost his job as Assistant Editor of *Desh* because of his pro-Gandhi sympathies and because of the fact he was the founder of the Charan movement. However, the report goes on to say that it was the series of articles published in the Bengali *Jugantar* (incidentally owned by the same Ghose family as the *ABP*) which was deemed to be too pro-Gandhi that evoked first a bantering letter from Satyendra Nath Mazumdar editor of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* followed by a letter of dismissal to Bijoylal Chatterjee issued by the Managing Director Suresh Mazumdar claiming this a necessary measure taken due to the war economy. The article ends with a reference to the earlier prosecution and exit of Dhinendra Nath Sen. Sen was a Marxist who held a number of position in rapid succession: he was Assistant Editor *The Servant* from 1926-27, Commercial Editor of *Forward*, a newspaper founded by Chittaranjan Das, from 1927-29, Editor of *Advance* from 1929-38, Editor of *Hindustan Standard* 1938-40 and a Member of the Editorial Board of *ABP* for many years after that. A biography of this figure claims that he eventually gave up his journalist's career and became a teacher of political science because he was too much of a Marxist to be able to toe the line of his proprietors and owners: "Professor Sen's frequent change of journalistic assignments was due to his sharp differences with proprietors of different newspapers on political issues."[19] The reason for mentioning this case at the end of the article on Chatterjee's dismissal seems to be to suggest that *Ananda Bazar Patrika* was intolerant about the political views of its journalists and editors. It is also interesting to note that in several cases, the charges have been dismissed by courts when appeals have been made, as in the case against Sen for sedition as Editor of *Hindustan Standard* (1938). For example, the order of the Bombay High Court setting aside the Bombay Provincial Government's imposition of a Rs 3,000 fine on *Janmabhoomi* is reported on March 11, 1943.

In the report concerning another court case in the edition of May 31, 1942, we learn that A.R. Mahalibadi and Syed Quamruddin, editor and publisher of the Urdu newspaper *Rohasa-Hind*, respectively, were facing charges of defamation on the basis of a case filed by M.A.H. Ispahani, MLA. The MLA claimed that the newspaper had published an article in which it was stated that the Calcutta Corporation had withdrawn all "patronage"—that is in the form of placing advertisements—of the newspaper as it was against the Moslem League. These accounts show

that the factions within the larger nationalist movement were often at war with each other. *ABP* retained a staunch loyal Congress allegiance though it also kept some semblance of 'journalistic fairness'.

The overlap of politics and newspapers is reflected in the interventionist role taken by bodies such as the All India Newspaper Editors' Association during the political turbulence of the time. *ABP* records several letters, resolutions and delegations regarding the role of the administration. This, in turn, created a conflict in the way the administration addressed the functioning of the newspapers. On the one hand, the series of injunctions and attempts to control the newspapers were issued which attempted to keep the newspapers pliant. At the same time, the courts repeatedly ruled in favour of the newspapers, their editors and publishers who represented these charges as violations of the right of the press to report events in the interests of the public. However, it is true that, as reported by Natarajan, newspapers and periodicals had a tough time keeping afloat as their securities were repeatedly confiscated and higher deposits demanded. Only the most generously financially supported newspapers could afford the huge resources of fighting legal battles—both in terms of money and manpower.

A more comprehensive study of this period in the history of journalism could lead to ways of understanding the way in which newspapers constructed their publics in the colonial period. The self-conscious nationalist positioning of the newspapers meant that the notion of newspapers as sites for the kind of reasoned debates that Habermas describes was never really possible for these nationalist newspapers which were from the very beginning adversaries of the colonial administration.

In Indian history, 1942 was one of the most crucial years. An analysis of the October 10 edition of *ABP* can help us to see the way in which events converge into a crisis. The top headline on the right hand side of the paper is about the beginning of the retreat of German troops in Russia, while the top headline on the left is "Police Open Fire on Defiant Crowd in Manbhum/Three persons injured/Thanas and Military Observation Posts Burnt/Post Office Looted/Further List of Collective Fines." Manbhum, then a district under Dhanbad, was a militant centre of Gandhian thought with the Shilpasram providing the leadership to the Quit India Movement. Severe police and army repression, including vicious breaking up of the students' protest march, led to increasingly violent confrontations with the British administration and soon the entire area was under a form of undeclared military rule. Smaller column articles still on the top of the first page are about the Ordinance issued for the military takeover of the Railways and the standoff between the Governor and Chief Minister of Bengal. Still on the first page are reports on bomb blasts, which appear

coordinated, in Bombay leading to widespread arrests and a discussion of the responses to the speech by Leopold S. Amery, British Secretary of State for India, which was strongly critical of the Congress leadership. The rest of the first page carries reports of arrests of people from all over the country—from Sind to Khulna and of police action from firing in Ahmedabad to suspension of postal facilities in a number of post offices in Tamluk, and other districts. Among all these, a short article titled "Pickpocketing Charge/Sub-Inspector of Police Dismissed" seems most incongruous. However, a reading of this article tells us that "Following a departmental enquiry on a complaint of alleged pickpocketing a European Sub-inspector of a police station in the city has been dismissed. It is stated that this police officer was on duty at a local park during Congress demonstrations some days back. One of the members of the crowd complained to a Deputy Commissioner of Police, who was also present there, that his purse had been stolen by an Officer on duty. The Deputy Commissioner asked the person to identify the officer, and on his doing so, the purse it is alleged, was recovered from the said police officer." Perhaps this article too had its purpose!

In fact, the entire front page attunes and accentuates the reader's response to the events of that day by highlighting the repressive measures being undertaken by the British administration whether it be through ordinances, or arrests or fines. The protests are widespread—in terms of geographical location: from Sindh in the West to Khulna in the East, from students of Patna Science College to peasants in Bihar and in a variety of forms of movements: from attacks and violence to peaceful protests. The little piece about the corrupt police officer just adds to the process of discrediting the administration by mentioning that it was an European officer who was responsible for the theft.

It should be recalled that this was all happening after the launch of the Civil Disobedience movement and the subsequent arrest of tens of thousands of Congressmen and women. Also, there was a rise in the more radical activities of bombing and violent confrontation in parts of Orissa, Maharashtra, Bengal and Bihar. As theorists suggest, the newspaper brings into perspective the events of the day for its reader and the *ABP* which by this time is proclaiming itself to be "The Oldest Nationalist Daily" in bold letters above the masthead is able to become a medium for constructing a politically conscious nationalist perspective on the fragmented incidents happening across the nation. The physicality of the newspaper, its layout and its selection of stories is not merely a catalogue but a form of constructing a vision of the nation.

A sense of political interventionist editorialising can be seen during the crisis of the famine in Bengal. The build up is there to see as the

evidence of a tragic disaster is gradually revealed and the indignant calls for action seem to fall on deaf or indifferent ears as stories multiply about corpses rotting on the streets and the huge numbers of starving peasants flooding the city. The *ABP* decides to print white space in place of its editorial until proper action is taken. The newspaper does not merely report or even offer its analysis, but it takes sides and clearly has positions which are not hidden under or behind shields claiming 'objective reporting.' Perhaps 'objectivity' is not possible in a state of colonisation; or perhaps true 'objective reporting' is a myth in all times.

However, even in the grimmest of times, ABP was very conscious about its business and indeed a look at the advertisements can also help us understand the relationship between commerce and politics more clearly. As mentioned earlier, the major share of advertisements in the *ABP* were for industries or companies owned by Indians. The connection between the nationalist spirit and the entrepreneurial imperative is manifested most interestingly in the advertisements that were published in the edition of August 15, 1947. Block capitals above the masthead declare "INDIA INDEPENDENT TODAY" and the masthead is flanked by a photograph of Gandhi on the right and Nehru on the left and naturally the front page covers all the relevant topics for the day. However, the really fascinating pieces of the publication are the text and visuals of the large number of advertisements tailored for this much-awaited day. The tone is set by a dignified reproduction of Rabindranath Tagore's famous poem "Where the mind is without fear" in a box with that day's date and the name and address of the company Radio Supply Stores Ltd a little lower down. Other advertisements are however much less restrained. Bose Chemical Works, for example, has a reproduction of the Indian flag with the words "We salute the National Flag on this momentous day of our Independence." Several advertisements use large font renderings of Jai Hind in their messages which congratulate the people of India and pledge their companies' commitment to the new nation. P.M. Bagchi has a bold font poster with 'Quit India' written under the large

font rendering of the date and the message: "The verdict of History is irrevocable. Ink that History uses is the best of its kind. The letters burn with undying flames and glow with unfading glory." Many salute the sacrifices of 'our countrymen.' Boroline gives away one lakh of its ointments on production of the attached coupon in celebration. A.W. Daw, the seller of guns, points out that "Independent India brings in a new era and affords greater facilities for sports and protection. Be equipped with dependable Fire-arms and ammunition" and offers bookings for goods at a concessional rate for one week to celebrate this historic occasion. Gupta Brothers, Premier Confectioners, advertises its 'National sweetmeats' Rashtriya Barfi, Nehru Sandesh and Malai Gilori to celebrate that day. Many of the advertisements remind the reader of their companys' commitment to the national economy, such as Standard Scientific Glass Works who see a future where the National Industries can develop freely. Indian Silk House's advertisement is reproduced as an example of the way in which nationalistic rhetoric and economic independence are intertwined in the specially created text on this day.

A poignant note is struck on the page which has the listings for radio programmes for that day. This perhaps reflects the

ndence was easily integrated into public
y of the partition of India was not so easily assimilated into the notion of the new nation. Of course, it is also significant that the listings include only the programme for the Dacca station of Pakistan Radio and not the Lahore station. Despite the riots, the Great Calcutta Killings and the mass migrations across the border that did take place on the eastern side of the nation, at some level this was not really actualised or even possibly accepted at the level of emotion and longing.

This unwillingness or inability to accept the boundaries and contours of the nation entity 'India' persists for a while, at least in the pages of *ABP*. If as Anderson argues, the newspaper is an active player in the development and upholder of the imagined nation, then this fact becomes even more poignant. The relationship between what became West Bengal and East Pakistan, it may be argued, did not become typical of a relationship between two sovereign nations. In 1948 and 1949 on the Independence Day, there was included a Special Supplement on Independence Day on Pakistan. However, every single one of the articles in this six-page supplement is about East Pakistan and not a single one on West Pakistan is printed in it.

Perhaps, this unwillingness to accept the tragedy of an Independence

which partitioned the body of the nation that was dreamt of throughout the tragedies and tribulations of the forties is the right note on which to end this paper. Reading through the archives gives one a sense of the everyday quality of the fight for Independence as names which we are taught to revere even today leap out, while the huge number of those whose names are really meaningless today create the bulk of the news. Coverage of Calcutta Races, football matches and pages of advertisements for movies remind us that life carried on even in the days of severe repression or the most harrowing famine. It is only by looking back that one can realise the gains and the losses that emerge from that decade of infinite possibilities, at the moment of birth.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian Language Press 1977-99* C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2000 p. 9.
2. Ibid p. 10.
3. J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism (Part II of the Report of the Press Commission)* Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India; 2nd Reprint edition 2000.
4. See above.
5. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society, Polity*, Cambridge 1962 trans 1989.
6. *HIJ* p. 86.
7. See Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* Permanent Black 2012, Chapter Four 'Liberty of the Subject' for a discussion of the early press in Bengal.
8. *Social Scientist,* Vol. 26, No. 1/4 (Jan. - Apr., 1998), pp. 16-24.
9. *Ibid* p. 20.
10. William Hunter Indian Education Commission 1882Vol. 7 p. 337.
11. HunterVol. 8, p. 453.
12. *HIJ* p. 100-1.
13. Quoted in *HIJ* p. 317.
14. *HIJ* p. 175.
15. See below for more details.
16. *ABP* 1st January 1940.
17. *ABP* 3rd January 1940.
18. It is perhaps a sign of the times that he is today remembered, if at all, as the father of the recently convicted CEO Rajat Gupta.
19. *The Bengalis: The people, their history and their culture* ed S.N.Das, Cosmos Publications, 2002.