Chapter 4

Without the Raj:

State Control and the English-Language Press in India
This I know, that errors in a good government and in a bad are equally almost incident; for what magistrate may not be misinformed, and much the sooner, if liberty of printing be reduced into the power of a few?

—John Milton, Areopagitica (1644)
This chapter attempts to provide a brief historical overview of the relation that existed between English-language newspapers in India and the Indian state in the long decades that saw the final collapse of the British Raj, and the growth of the Nehruvian developmental state. Since any discussion on the English-language press in post-1947 India necessarily precludes an understanding of the complex colonial past that had shaped the priorities of newspaper business here, I make brief forays into the long twilight of the colonial era to locate certain patterns and prejudices that remained characteristic to the English-language newspaper business after the Empire had disintegrated.

My intention is not to outline a detailed and systematic history, but to look beyond the prevalent myth of the “nationalist press” to locate continuities, and importantly, the build-up of expectations that characterized the growth of the English-language press in the Nehruvian era and after. In the course of this exploration, I hope to argue that the fancies of these newspapers—most of which were operational as city-based single-edition dailies till the end of the Second World War but hoped to become the “national press”—were potently hoisted by the lure of prestige and profit associated with English-language newspaper business that prompted many, including participants from Indian big business, to acquire old newspapers and begin multi-edition dailies. I also intend to demonstrate that, from the 1950s to 1970s, the Indian state made no serious, systematic attempts in controlling the newspapers under its geographical territory, but rather acted as their overzealous benefactor by safeguarding them
from international competition. In cases it forced guidelines, these guidelines forced no simple embargo on “free speech”, but an embargo on the pretence of being liberal. As it is argued here and in the following two chapters, the pragmatic regulations and the regulatory apparatuses that the state instituted, and with which the newspapers later became persistently uncomfortable, guaranteed them of a privileged sphere of operation that lasted well beyond the collapse of the developmental state.

1. Press owners, nationalists, and speculators

With the end of the Second World War, while the occasional flashbulb camera recorded moments of pain, misplaced glory, riots, mass killings, refugee exoduses, an Empire’s inability to sustain its rule, and the setting up of barbed wires across the Indian subcontinent, the press situation in the geographical zone yet to be marked and designated as India was undergoing a decisive shift. 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 English-language newspapers owned by Indians in the past; they now thought of hitching the fortunes of their other businesses to the prestige associated with newspaper business. Apart from the Statesman, which passed into Indian hands by the middle of the 1960s, all the major British-owned newspapers in India were acquired by the Indian big business in the space of ten
years after the war. 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 in the British House of Commons during the first debate over the Labour Party’s Indian Independence Bill\(^1\)—the business of making “news” in India appeared lucrative than ever before.

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 not only 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 interests were closely

\(^1\) British historians still attach great value to Churchill’s prophecy. For example, we can refer to Stanley Wolpert’s recent study of the hasty withdrawal of the British from India as a “tragic error of judgment”. See Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).
interwoven with the interests of the British imperial system in India.² (As Amiya Kumar Bagchi observes in this context, 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 nationalist 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 staked its claim for a separate Muslim state.³) Some of these comprador families supported nationalist newspapers to argue for their causes and run their advertisement; most found the English newspapers run by Indians 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 increasing interests in newspaper business can be considered as a case in point.

Baldeo Das Birla, a Marwari banya, arrived at Calcutta in 1896 fleeing from the plague in Bombay, and with money amassed from gambling on daily prices of opium. In Calcutta, their principal commercial base until the 1950s, 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.⁴ During the

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⁴ Ghosh, *Indian Big Bourgeoisie*, 201.
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.\(^5\) 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 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 newspaper *Hindustan Times* that was launched in 1924 by Madan Mohan Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, two die-hard Congress loyalists and representatives of the Akali political intelligentsia in the Punjab Province. (In 1931, the *Hindustan Times* had shut down in general protest against the Press Act passed by the British Government,\(^6\) 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

\(^5\) Ibid., 202.
\(^6\) 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. As we will see later, 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”.
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, who also paid Malviya and Lajpat Rai five thousand rupees a month respectively for “public work”. 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. 8

Apart from the fear of direct implication in and through charges of “sedition”, the Birlas played for safety as their earlier attempts to secure newspaper power did not yield desirable results. Baldeo Das Birla was awarded the title of Rai Bahadur, soon after the First World War, 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 decided for the easiest process; the owning of established newspapers. Consequently, they bought three newspapers published from Calcutta. The first two purchases were disasters; the third was a misadventure, for the Birlas managed to intervene before it turned really disastrous.

7 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.
8 Ibid., 99.
The first purchase was the *New Empire* which was not a flourishing British daily as they had hoped, but a newspaper with little circulation and huge market debts—the paper collapsed after costing the Birlas a few lakh of rupees. The second was the *Swarajya*, a Bengali weekly run by S. R. Das, a pro-British cousin of the widely-respected nationalist lawyer from Calcutta, C. R. Das. After purchasing this weekly, the Birlas were at pains 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 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 published in the English-language by Surendranath Banerjee, an English-educated Indian Civil Service officer and an early president of the Indian National Congress. This weekly paper (purchased by Banerjee for ten rupees in 1879\(^9\)) had run successfully for forty years with political ambitions and literary inclinations; 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—one of the Birla brothers, the most famous of the lot because of his closeness to Gandhi—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

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\(^9\) Ibid., 39.
also in post-1947 India. Ghanshyam Das’s suspicions were aroused after a chance encounter with one of his servants who carried over his household clothes for laundry—the dhobi had returned the clothes wrapped in pages of the current edition of the precious paper. Their newspaper was no doubt being printed, he eventually learnt on investigation, but sold right off the presses as the cheapest scrap paper in the market. Thus taken in, the Birlas hurriedly made a gift of the failing *Bengalee* to Sarma, with the advice to “keep the Birla flag flying”.\(^{11}\) 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.\(^{12}\) 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 Indian Muslim League.

As to be expected, the Birlas emerged cautious and wise after these papery misadventures.\(^{13}\) Making no further attempts to be visible as newspaper proprietors, they continued to fund the *Hindustan Times*,\(^{14}\) the *Searchlight* (an English newspaper run from Patna by Sachidanand Sinha and Babu Rajendra

\(^{11}\) Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press*, 40.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) We can note in the passing that Baldeodas Birla could not get his knighthood, though it came as a consolation that in 1925 his sons managed to find for him the title of “Raja” from the Governor of Bihar and Orissa. He retired from business to move to the holy city of Benares, and lived happily ever after in religious ceremonies and spiritual pursuits.

\(^{14}\) By 1933, the Birlas had become its principal shareholder.
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,\(^{15}\) and numerous smaller pro-nationalist newspapers. Later, 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 in the early 1940s; they 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.\(^{16}\)

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 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

\(^{15}\) Also his newspaper, the Free Press Journal, before it was acquired by Ramnath Goenka.

\(^{16}\) Devdas Gandhi was retained by the Birlas as the managing editor of the Hindustan Times until his death in 1957.
geographically concentrated rather than dispersed. If the English-language press in Company-ruled India was born catering to the mercantile interests of British traders and statesmen at Calcutta; 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. 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

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18 Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 79, 82-83.
September, the same year, for reasons unknown. The Statesman gradually rose into prominence in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as Calcutta outshine 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 British community 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, with the oppression of the indigo planters the chief object of their attack. It was launched by Sisir Kumar Ghosh and his seven brothers as a Bengali weekly newspaper in 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: they named it after their mother, Amritamoyee Devi. Sisir Kumar Ghosh, co-founder and consequently owner of the Patrika, was realistic enough as a newspaper entrepreneur of Bengali origin to understand the inseparability of newspaper production from the big colonial capital—prior to the Patrika venture,

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19 Ibid., 79, 84.
Sisir Kumar’s elder brother Basanta Kumar had started a weekly newspaper, *Amrita Prabhabini*, which had failed to sell; and the Ghosh brothers ran the risks of arrest, Sisir Kumar narrowly escaping a libel conviction.\(^{21}\)

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)\(^{22}\)—the success of Ghosh’s newspaper 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 it commenced publication, the Ghosh brothers re-launched the *Patrika* as a bilingual weekly that included few columns in English; then moving base to Calcutta, re-launched the *Patrika* in 1872 as a bilingual weekly newspaper, and re-launched it again as an English-language newspaper in 1878.\(^{23}\) 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.

(As *bhadralok* newspaper proprietors with Bengali nationalist sympathies, the Ghosh family held no scruples in helping others to set up newspapers, so long as

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\(^{21}\) 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.

\(^{22}\) 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.

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 after Anandamoyee Devi, the sister of Amritamoyee Devi—the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*. Majumdar soon expanded his business by more emphatically supporting the nationalist cause than the Ghosh family—the newspaper’s popularity further increasing 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. 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 as we will see later, lasted well beyond the change of ownership of the Ananda Bazar company in the 1960s, and until the *Patrika* and *Jugantar* stopped production in the later 1980s.

Some of the other notable Indian-owned English newspapers that grew out of the capitals, riding on the wave of nationalism, were the *Tribune*, which began and based its publication at Lahore; the *Hindu* which struck its roots in the city

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

25 It was founded by Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, a Brahmo Samaj enthusiast.
of Madras—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* in Bombay, which was started as an English daily in 1930 by S. Sadanand as a conduit for his failing nationalist news agency, Free Press News Service; the *Searchlight* of Patna; and the *National Herald* of Allahabad, launched by Jawaharlal Nehru, the future Prime Minister of India, in 1938, to add further weight to his socialist causes.\(^26\) Rather than open new centres, all the above mentioned newspapers chose to function from their cities of production. This was to change shortly after the Second World War.

The usually stiff binaries of a “nationalist press” and a “colonialist press” blind us in identifying the general growth of the English-language press in India. 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;\(^27\) their


\(^{27}\) 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
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. 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. By the 1930s, while it was advertising itself as the “most

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.


widely read newspaper in all India”, 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 news-agencies made the Indian-owned 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

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30 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.
to indirectly support their causes, as they increasingly sought advertisement from "nationalist" business 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. Often "nationalist" editors chose to design and write special advertisement features and supplements run by American and European companies in various newspapers.  

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.

In matters of format and page layout, the Indian-owned newspapers chose to stick with the formulas of 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

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31 In his autobiography, for example, J. N. Sahni enlists 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 Kladett 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 automotive tyres at Saharanpur 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.

32 Again, it was the Statesman which was the first Indian newspaper to have a special correspondent in London exclusively writing for this Calcutta newspaper.
Leader and the Tribune followed the British-owned Pioneer and the Civil and Military Gazette to make five-column broadsheets. Almost all big English newspapers published in India in the 1930s were evening dailies; they faithfully followed the model of 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.

With the growth and consolidation of news-agencies across the subcontinent and the change in newsmaking practices in the imperial capital—which we have looked at in the earlier chapter as the coming of journalistic “objectivity” in the Northern hemisphere—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 of the newspapers in India shifted their “news” to the front page, adopted banner headlines to display the most important “news” beneath the front page mast, and increased the price of their advertisement—right before the war came to temporarily upset their peaceful processes of transition.

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33 Natarajan, History of the Press in India, 183.
34 Madan Mohan Malviya, the owner of Hindustan Times, for instance, 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”. Sahni, Truth About the Indian Press, 37.
35 Big banner headlines disappeared during the few years of the war as part of the British government’s war regulations. However, “news” with banner headlines remained on the front pages of all Indian newspapers ever after.
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 vaazhvye 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.

(Source: *Goenka Letters*, edited by George, 5, 12.)

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.
The Second World War caught the English-language press in 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 published daily editions running with 16-24 pages on weekdays and 24-48 pages on Sundays, apart from the frequent “news” supplements;\(^{36}\) the war forced them to publish four pages a day.\(^ {37}\) As S. Natarajan succinctly sums up 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 per cent 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 per cent. 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*


\(^{37}\) Though the Newsprint Control Order of 1941 restricted that the maximum number of pages in a daily newspaper to six; because of the crisis in newsprint, most newspapers could only print four pages a day. The use of small type for printing the maximum quantity of “news” in the minimum of space, a characteristic shared by Indian newspapers in the Nehruvian era and after, also dates back to this period.
went by past performance. And the bureaucracy gained a strategic position by being empowered to determine the quotas of newspapers. Obviously few newspapers could come into existence without official favour (my emphases). 38

Unlike the situation in the imperial headquarters, where this war-time measure was gradually done away with in the 1950s; 39 the emergent government of the independent union of India, as we will see 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 forced crisis in newsprint during the war also 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.

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 press was generally held above suspicion—the Times of India, the Madras Mail, and the Civil and Military Gazette considered the most trustworthy among them 40—but the government took little chances. In 1939, it made the Chief Press Censor, and the Press

38 Natarajan, History of the Press in India, 238.
39 The rationing of newsprint was fully withdrawn in England in 1956. Mike Temple, British Press, 58.
Advisor to the government (who in this case was U.N. Sen of the Associated Press of India) responsible—along with a team of Provincial Press Advisers and District Press Advisers, all civil services officers and district magistrates, working under them—for carrying out extensive censorship of newspapers. Coupled the existing press laws and ordinances, the Defence of India Rules granted the colonial administration executive powers to proscribe virtually everything they found objectionable in print.

As the fear of executive excess herded the Indian-owned and the British-owned newspapers together, the AINEC was formed in Delhi in 1940: with K. Srinivasan of the Hindu as president, and editors 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. Despite its internal contradictions (mostly occasioned by the rift with newspapers favouring the 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. Though some smaller Indian-owned newspapers closed down in protest against the war-time censorship, the AINEC leadership and the newspapers they represented continued pleading with the British for greater facilities. They effectively censored all “news” that was

41 Ibid., 128.
42 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
understood as “anti-war propaganda”—the decision to disallow Gandhi’s writings before August 1942 becoming “peculiarly embarrassing” for his son 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. 43 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. 44 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—such as 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, 45 the big Indian-
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].

44 Bhattacharya, Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 130.
45 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 were 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.
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.⁴⁶

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 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.⁴⁷

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 almost denied by the British government, and most newspapers 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 ignored the famine as “news”. Certain nationalist newspapers like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had no qualms about publicizing the government’s denial through

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⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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).
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 bread (chappatties) for her family and praised the British government for arranging large stocks of wheat, “now available in the bazar at controlled prices.”48 Later, it was the British-owned Statesman, rather than the nationalist newspapers, which first defied the government to portray these deaths and the famine in print.49

(Although the newspaper certainly deserves credit for castigating the government, we may note that the Statesman’s 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 city 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”.50 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...

48 Ghosh, Famines in Bengal, 131.
49 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.
1944 to December 1945, with a print-run of 80,000 copies, and airdropped on the Burma front. Moreover, 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 “watchdog”, chose to follow after 1947—effectively preventing “similar situations” from evolving.

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 peoples 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 government had formally decided

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52 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. Apart from the liberal pretence, Ram’s self-congratulatory reference to the Statesman’s reporting of the Bengal Famine also 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 Ananda Bazar Patrika edited by Prafulla Kumar Sarkar decided to make “news” of the famine that was happening right next to and around their workplaces for months.
on the Partition. 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”.

The growth and practices of news-agencies in India perhaps needs some telling at
this point. All English newspapers in India, prior to the war, depended on the
same news-agencies for “news”: with Reuters, Associated Press of India (API),
and Indian News Agency (INA) orchestrating a virtual monopoly over the supply
foreign and domestic “news” in the subcontinent. Reuters had its headquarters in
Bombay, and the Times of India one of its earliest subscribers. In 1910, Keshab
Chandra Roy, a correspondent for eight different newspapers, planned to set up a
news-agency to sell “news” to Indian-owned newspapers. Instead of making these
newspapers pay separate telegraph charges for each “news” despatch, Roy found a
way to mutual profit. He set his assistant Usha Nath Sen to set up offices of his
company, the Press Bureau, first at Calcutta, then at Bombay and Madras, where
correspondents soon telegraphed their “news”, and these “news” were copied and
distributed by peons to the offices of his subscribers, saving additional telegraph
charges in the process. At the same time, Everard Coates, a correspondent for

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53 Suniti Kumar Ghosh, The Indian Constitution and Its Review (Mumbai: Research Unit for Political
Economy, 2001), 49.
54 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
riots.
Sarkar was one of the first Indians to become an assistant editor in the British-dominated newsroom of
the Statesman and Reuters, had a similar idea and started the INA. With the First World War on the horizon, the owners of the news-agencies had brief competition and then decided to pool together their business to reduce the costs of business; their racial animosities forgotten. At the initiative of Roderick Jones, Chairman of Reuters, Roy’s Press Bureau got linked with Reuters to emerge as API; Coates joined hands with Roy to set up the Eastern News Agency (ENA) and he became the managing director of API, while Roy became the director of ENA, and the API’s chief correspondent at the headquarters of the Government of India in Delhi. By the 1930s, these news-agencies had worked out an efficient, cheap, and collaborative system of “news” distribution in British India. As J. N. Sahni observes in his autobiography:

During the sittings of the Assembly and the Council of State... the Roy factory would produce four reports of the day’s proceedings from four different angles, picking up at the same time odds and ends for distribution as “specials” according to regional interests. The agency reports would be routine, sequential, inanimate and dull, with neither highlights, nor low lights. All this was explained away as resulting from the strict compulsions of objectivity. A second report would be prepared from the Anglo-Indian angle. A third report worked up the liberal angle and a fourth with a strong nationalist bias to be relayed to newspapers like the Tribune, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, or the Bombay Chronicle. Even on occasions a few “specials” were produced for the Muslim press.56

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56 Sahni, Truth About the Indian Press, 62.
S. Sadanand of Bombay, a former API employee and a Gandhian nationalist, tried to break the monopoly of these news-agencies by setting up the Free Press News Agency in 1925, with blessings from Gandhi, and financial support from the big businesses of Ghanshyam Das Birla, Walchand Hirachand, and Puroshottamdas Thakurdas, he failed. Sadanand’s telegrams-as-bulletins, and cyclostyled news-sheets during the Civil Disobedience Movement, found little takers among Indian-owned newspapers as the government took to task every newspaper that subscribed to his bulletins; the API, under Roy and U. N. Sen, applied additional pressure by threatening to deny services to any newspaper who subscribed to any other news-agency other than their own. Another attempt to set up a nationalist news-agency was made by Sadanand when he sent his colleague Bidhubhusan Sengupta to set up the United Press of India in Calcutta in 1933. It failed to spread, or make considerable impact, and died out in 1959.

A media-technological “revolution” helped consolidate the power of the news-agencies further. Before the Second World War, “news” communication between the London office of Reuters and the India offices of the news-agencies took place through the wireless Morse machines, dependent on the deftness of telegraph operators who sent messages with skilful touches on the key, and the

57 Ibid., 63.
58 Natarajan, History of the Press in India, 213.
59 Sahni, Truth About the Indian Press, 109. Sahni makes a laconic comment on Bidhu Sengupta’s failure to run the United Press: “Bidhubabu... being the father of a score of children preferred stability to the spectacular”. Ibid. Bidhu Sengupta moved on to newsprint business and tried to set up a newsprint paper mill in the United Provinces in and around 1963. With the central government’s continuing decision not to relax its authority over the pricing of newsprint, Sengupta closed down his mill before it had started production.
alertness of others on the receiving end, who quickly jotted down the messages by carefully listening to the sounds of clicks and noting the meaningful pauses. The teleprinter, invented in 1928 in America, dealt a death blow to the telegraph operators, as it continuously punched out messages on unrolling paper tape, over long days and nights, and spread throughout the world. The API became the first news-agency in British India to install a teleprinter: in 1937 a teleprinter line connected the head office of Reuters at Bombay to the API head office at Calcutta; soon similar lines were established with Delhi, Madras, and other cities.60 With resources and international support from Reuters, the API expanded throughout the subcontinent and moved its headquarters to Delhi.61 During the period of its growth, it also maintained close contact with the colonial government which helped it in preserving its monopoly, and subsidized its operations.62

The power of Reuters (as the “external news agency”) and the API (as the “internal news agency”) grew uninterruptedly with the war as the British government granted them status as the only legitimate sources of “news”. Enhanced legitimacy led to more profits: Reuters, for example, made good money by selling to the Indian newspapers the international “news” it received for free from the British Overseas Service, a branch of the British war propaganda

department. Apart from selling “news” to the newspapers, Reuters and the API sold a daily summary of national and international “news” through the INA to the governors and other British officials; they also ran a commercial service for Indian and British business concerns. Both API and Reuters invested heavily on teleprinters during the war, and after it ended, fast teleprinter systems poured out an abundance of “news” using the Roman alphabet that Indian newspapers, like their Northern counterparts, could never hope to accommodate on print, even without the crisis in newsprint.

A significant feature of the growth of “news” business in British India, and in the Indian state that followed it, was that its triumph depended on the close ties its principal players had with people at the helm of the state. We have seen some proof of it above; the career trajectory of Usha Nath Sen, one of the major players of the news-agency business, can add further strength to the observation. In 1899, on a visit to Simla after having failed the First Arts examination in Bengal, U. N. Sen ran into Keshab Chandra Roy—the “pioneer of news-agency business in India”. Roy took him under his wings, and made him an accredited correspondent with the British government. U. N. Sen followed in Roy’s heels during the making of API, and became one of his most devoted followers in establishing the “news” monopoly of Reuters and API. Sen’s power and influence

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63 Sahni, Truth About the Indian Press, 54-55.
64 A “news” bulletin consisted of two typed foolscap pages; it was sold at Rs. 60 a copy till 1948 when it was discontinued by the Nehruvian state.
65 Natarajan, History of the Press in India, 286.
grew with the rise of the API, which soon became the principal news-agency in British India. After the death of K. C. Roy in 1931, the “Roy factory” passed under his controls. U.N. Sen was knighted, and during the Second World War, he was in charge of the API Delhi office when he was appointed the Chief Press Adviser to the British government in India. He was a powerful man: reputed to be the only Indian with direct telephonic access to the British Viceroy. Apart from his role as the Press Advisor during the war—who liaised with different newspapers, and was directly responsible for suppressing important “news” that went against the British war efforts—U.N. Sen played a number of public roles, both in British India and in the newly-formed state of India. He was the chairman of the Indian Red Cross Society, the secretary and treasurer of the Indian League of Nations Union, a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, the president of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, the founder of the Delhi Rotary Club, and the Chairman of Associated Hotels which owned, together with others, the Imperial Hotel at Delhi. However, what is significant for our exploration is that after 1947, when API changed form to become a nationalist trust and was reorganized into the Press Trust of India (PTI)—its board of directors nominated, rather than elected, by an elite club of newspaper owners in India, the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society (IENS)—Sen faced

no troubles, either from the newspapers or from the Indian state, in instituting himself as its managing director. The continuing influence of U.N. Sen through the “not for profit” press trust in the post-1947 period—especially when the idea of forming a national news-agency came from Nehru, and with eager support from both the IENS and the AINEC—is a pointer to the fact that people like Nehru at the rudder of the nascent Indian state chose to forget past animosities and sail along expeditiously with experienced players of the trade, with whom newspaper owners too held some intimate correlation.

(During this time, the Free Press News Agency made its final comeback attempt. In 1945, it embarked on the grand plan to supply Indian “news” to the world, setting up offices in London and New York, and with plans for more offices in Nanking, Singapore, Batavia, and Cairo. With the government denying it the use of leased teleprinter facilities, the Free Press News Agency went into voluntary liquidation in May 1947, three months before the transfer of power.69 After the formation of the PTI, Kasturi Srinivasan of the Hindu became its first Chairman and A. S. Bharatan its first General Manager. With the Indian state’s support behind the PTI’s operations—particularly that of Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, “with whom the enthusiastic Bharatan had a good rapport”70—the PTI had little trouble in making its old partner Reuters relinquish direct control over “news” and its commercial operations in India. By

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69 Natarajan, History of the Press in India, 286. The voluntary liquidation of a company did not mean end of business during this time. As we will soon see, voluntary liquidation was a strategy frequently employed by company owners and directors to reorganize their businesses.

70 Ramakrishnan, “Independent India’s Premier News Agency.”
1952, the PTI was buying “news” from Reuters in bulk and distributing it throughout India along with its own domestic compilations as chargeable “services”; these were to inform the overwhelming crux of “news” appearing in the various Indian newspapers till the decades of liberalization, that is, “news” that were not foraged by their reporters and correspondents.

We return to consider the conditions of the English-language press after the war. As observed earlier, the interests of Indian 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. What was unique at this time was the desire for expansion: a craving to lay claim to an “all-India” presence. 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—this paper was to emerge as the leading English daily in the state of Karnataka by

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71 The rates of subscription in 1952 were fixed according to three grades (A, B, and C) of “service” provided—charging English newspapers Rs. 3600, Rs. 2400, and Rs. 1200 a month respectively, and offering Indian-language newspapers a concession of 50 per cent on the same. Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 287.

72 Apart from the PTI, the United News Agency (UNI) was another major news-agency that provided “news” to the newspapers in India. Modeled on the PTI, it came into existence in 1961 with infrastructural support from eight influential newspapers.


the end of the 1950s.\(^{75}\) We may also note here that not all newspaper takeovers successfully lead to expansion. For example, we can refer to 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.

Indian big business formally announced its presence in the newspaper trade in 1946, when Ramkrishna Dalmia—a Marwari from Rohtas in Haryana speculating in cement, paper, spun pipes, and vanaspati\(^{76}\)—laid claim to the Anglo-Indian firm Bennett Coleman, securing simultaneous ownership over *Times of India* (held through consensus as the largest selling English newspaper in India) and the *Illustrated Weekly* (the most popular of the pictorial weekly magazines), apart from securing an expensive printing plant and a big building in the city of Bombay.\(^{77}\) During the same time, he bought an established airlines

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\(^{75}\) 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 streamlined 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.

\(^{76}\) Hydrogenated vegetable oil. This was a commodity that fetched high profits during the war, and remained popular as a cheaper (and often black-marketed) alternative to mustard oil well into the 1980s.

\(^{77}\) 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
company, an automobile engineering firm and a travel agency, along with other businesses and industries. 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. After becoming a newspaper-proprietor, 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. The debts uncovered by the Vivian Bose Commission of Inquiry in 1963, and the consequent trial, forced Dalmia 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.

champion of holy cows (not in the metaphorical sense) and Hindu revivalism, and importantly, a bitter opponent of Nehru.

79 Soon after the end of the war, the Dalmia Jains 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.
80 It corresponded with the government’s antagonism to private insurance companies and led to the nationalization of insurance in 1955.
Another important player to emerge during this time was Ramnath Goenka, an influential Marwari with stakes in textile and economic speculation, who had financially supported Sadanand’s company, the Free Press of India (Madras) Ltd. In 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. In 1946, Goenka liquidated the company, and formed a new one, the Express Newspapers Ltd. As its largest shareholder, 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. 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 (it became the Bombay edition of the Indian Express in July 1953). Goenka then entered the Delhi newspaper scene in

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81 The Indian Express was launched in Madras in September 5, 1932, by Varadarajulu Naidu who sought to capitalize on the spurge of nationalism in the wake of the Civil Disobedience Movement through an English newspaper. In less than two months of publication, Naidu sold the paper to S. Sadanand who started printing the newspaper on one of the six cylinder presses he had earlier acquired for his unsuccessful Free Press Journal. Sadanand’s needs to run his publication company ran him into debts. Ramnath Goenka provided loans to Sadanand against shares of his company and became its principal shareholder. In October 1936, Goenka successfully moved court preventing Sadanand to enter the offices of the Free Press Ltd. though Sadanand remained its Director. 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.

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

83 Ibid.
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. 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*.

Older *bhadralok* editor-proprietor families, too, like the Ghoshs 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*. 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

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84 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*.

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

86 Kaul, “India, the Imperial Press Conferences and the Empire Press Union,” 132. Chandrika 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 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.
that of the United Provinces too enticing to ignore. To make faster deliveries of
dnewspapers 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. (In 1959, Ghosh relaunched the Allahabad edition as a separate
newspaper, the *Northern India Patrika.*) The Ananda Bajar group acquired a
splendid building at New Delhi, and started the Delhi edition of the *Hindustan
Standard* in 1951.87

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.88 Their
increased circulations were the means to a specific end: increased advertisement
revenue;89 the desire for advertisement, rather than post-war nationalist
sentimentalism, the primary trigger. The formation of the Audit Bureau of
Circulations (ABC) by the most influential newspaper proprietors, advertising
agencies mostly concentrated in the four big cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi,

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87 Sahni, *Truth About the Indian Press*, 197.
88 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”.
89 As Walter Lippmann observed early in the twentieth century, circulation becomes an asset to a
commercial newspaper “only when it can be sold to the advertiser, who buys it with revenues secured
through indirect taxation of the reader”. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922; New Brunswick,
New Jersey and London: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 323. Lippmann also held the greater its
circulation; the greater would be the independence of a newspaper from its advertisers. However, as we
have seen in the previous chapter, the opposite took place in the course of the twentieth century, when
the appearance of journalistic “objectivity” meant greater dependence on the favour of advertisers.
and Madras, and a number of big companies in 1948 epitomized these newspapers’ needs for re-establishing contact with “national” advertising which had once been the reserve of British-owned newspapers; the ABC supplemented these newspapers’ dreams of expansion by reinforcing a close contact with the advertising world.\(^90\) 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 advertising revenue.\(^91\) Elitism 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 worked out their own set of rules for the game.\(^92\)

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

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\(^90\) Jeffrey, “Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the Indian State,” 749.

\(^91\) Ibid.

\(^92\) Ibid., 749-751.
controlled over 54 newspapers and 50.1 per cent of the total newspaper circulation recorded by the Commission; five proprietors controlled 29 newspapers and 31.2 per cent of the total circulation.\footnote{Report of the Press Commission (1954), Part I, 309. Since circulation figures provided by newspapers to both their auditors and the state are bound to be of suspect, here and in following citations where I refer to circulation, there is attached no intrinsic value to the truth claims offered by the figures. Here, and subsequently, the stated circulation figures are only suggestive of the patterns argued for as such.} 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. Newspapers run by twelve of these companies—registered as chains, groups, combines, single and multiple units—accounted for 83 per cent of the total circulation in the English-language field.\footnote{Calculated from the table of circulation provided in the Report of the Press Commission (1954), Part I, 306-307.} As we have also noted, most of these companies came about as the result of speculative mergers and acquisitions. For the rest of the century, they remained family-owned oligopolies; in most cases, their owners and principal shareholders donned 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 Indian republic.

We conclude this section with the note that the above observations are at certain odds with the nationalist histories of the press in India which sadly remain blind to anti-colonialism to the extent that they forget the institutional realities that helped these newspapers to emerge as “national” newspapers in the Nehruvian
period, 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. These observations, in a way, also contradict the generalizations suggested by certain critical and minority approaches to the Indian press—mostly in the Marxist vein—that see the English-language press undergoing a sudden transformation from an antagonistic to a compliant position because of the change in their ownership patterns after Indian independence.95

What I wish to suggest here is that it was less of a transformation from a larval stage to a winged menace (or ineffectuality) than a series of interconnected continuities focussing on a redefining of roles and expectations on part of the English newspapers most of whom underwent a change of ownership, but all desiring greater facilities from a state that was expected to act with greater leniency towards them. On its part, as we will see in the next section, the Indian state congenially agreed to allow “freedom of speech”, at the same time, taking some measures to prevent newspapers to emerge as formidable opponents to its rule. Time was needed for redefining its benevolent attitude to its press and its

95 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, preface to *India’s Monopoly Press*, 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 attaches a special significance to the nationalist role of the English-language newspapers, when in reality the role was shared by them with their Indian-language counterparts, with the latter definitely deserving more credit for their hostility to the colonial rule.
editors-proprietors, 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.

2. The desire for a “responsible press”

One of the principal reasons that earlier prevented the expansion of the Indian newspaper industry 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.96

After the transfer of power from the 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

96 The most notable of these being 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”.
publisher and the place of publication.” 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, they 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.

When the days of the Raj were finally over, the Indian state followed its predecessor in retaining some of these punitive measures; it did away with the preventive measures like direct censorship and executive action without judicial validation, nevertheless with the constitutionally-enshrined intimation that the press needed to remain “responsible” for its actions, as earlier.

98 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 Indian state was quick 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.
The Constitution of India—the final draft of which was adopted in January 1950 by an Indian Parliament not founded on universal suffrage—discontinued the use of the word “sedition” but made no specific reference to freedom of the press apart from granting, under its Article 19(1), “freedom of speech and expression” in the abstract to all Indian citizens as a fundamental right. This constitutional guarantee bore within it its antithesis: a sub-clause contained in the Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution allowed and interpreted this fundamental right as invalid when its exercise impinged upon the Indian state’s legitimacy or its power to make laws; it was further amended in the first constitutional amendment in May-June 1951 to introduce the phrases “reasonable restrictions” and “incitement to an offence” that allowed a greater scope of interpretation and control by the state, and with a renewed emphasis on the preservation and upkeep of “public order”. (Robin Jeffrey suggests the possibility of a historical comparison in this context: the first amendment to the United States constitution guaranteed “freedom of speech” for the press; the first amendment to the Indian constitution, appearing more than a century later, was a restraint on the same.) On their part, the AINEC leadership were quite happy that the amendment included the

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99 The first general elections based on universal suffrage in India were held between October 1951 and February 1952, with the first elected body of representatives attending the lower house of the Indian Parliament on April 17, 1952, more than two years after the formal adoption of the Constitution.

100 After these additions, the sub-clause of the Article 19(2) read as: “Nothing in sub-clause (a) of clause (1) shall affect the operation of any existing law, or prevent the State from making any law, in so far as such law imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub-clause in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, including in particular any existing or other law relating to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.” Quoted in Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, 290.

What was the attitude of the “founding father” of the early Indian state towards the press? Though often referred to, the opinions of Nehru with reference to “nationalism” and “nation-building” are the least reliable in this respect. During the British rule, Nehru had been sufficiently sceptical and dismissive of these ideas to suggest that he later entertained any serious belief in their validity; and yet he actively promoted the myth of a universal and benevolent nation-state long after he became the patriarch of the newly-formed state of India represented by its “national government”, which through effect and implication was the Indian National Congress. As for the press, Nehru publicly hoped that it would remain loyal to publicize the state’s rhetoric for “collective and disciplined national progress” and its insistence on centralized planning and infrastructural development that was to exist in harmony with industrial efforts of the Indian big bourgeoisie. Yet it can be safely assumed that Nehru did not entertain real hopes about the Indian press’s capability to publicize the state’s “nation-building”
ethos. Despite his assurances of limited interference to the big editors-propietors of the AINEC and the IENS in matters concerning their ownership, economic consolidation, and the little autocracies of control existing inside their newspaper establishments, he was more of the belief that the ends of “useful publicity” were properly realized “more through contacts than by press-writing or other old, worn-out methods”. His waning of interest in the 1950s in the running of his newspaper, the National Herald, proves this to some extent: though in 1947 the newspaper was placed under the control of his son-in-law, Feroze Gandhi, Nehru showed continual reluctance as head of the state to help his newspaper to grow and spread out in other cities, or as witnessed in some other countries, he did not make it the mouthpiece of his regime. His recruitment of journalists as state publicists during the initial years of the Indian state also points in this direction: despite the opposition of editors like Devdas Gandhi, many journalists were drafted in for the state publicity machinery.

[These journalists were of two types: those who chose to stick with state publicity; others who returned to their journalistic careers shortly afterwards to reclaim their “freedom”. Of the first type were people like H. Y. Sharada Prasad—a journalist from Madras who lost his ten-year-old job with the Indian

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105 This is a point deliberately missed by most Indian analysts, even by those who argue for a policy-oriented approach to the greater Indian media scene. For a representative example, see Keval J. Kumar, Media Education, Communications and Public Policy: An Indian Perspective (New Delhi: Himalaya Publishing House, 1995) where Kumar uncritically accepts Nehru’s views on the “freedom of the press”.


107 Ibid., 55-56.
Express at Bombay for attempting to build a journalists' trade union in the years 1947-1948; he was recruited to edit official magazines and compile volumes of Nehru's speeches. Later, he became the chief editor of Yojna, the journal of the Planning Commission; still later a member of Indira Gandhi's infamous staff as the Press and Information Adviser to the Prime Minister. Of the second kind, there were people like Khuswant Singh and Prem Bhatia. The recruitment of Prem Bhatia again points to the peculiar dependencies of the Indian state that we have noted earlier in the case of U. N. Sen: Bhatia was a lieutenant-colonel with the public relations wing of the British Indian Army during the Second World War; the Director of Public Information for the provincial Bengal government under the Muslim League chief minister, H. S. Surhawardy; and when recruited by Nehru, he was working as the special representative for the British-owned Statesman at Lucknow. He served as the First Secretary (Information) with the Ministry of External Affairs at the Indian Embassy in Moscow. Later he returned to work with the Statesman, and to move on as an editor with the Times of India, and much later, became the editor-in-chief of the Tribune.

108 “I was reluctant, wishing to retain my ‘freedom’,” writes Sharada Prasad of the time when the director of the Publications Division of Nehru’s government offered him the job, “but I couldn’t find a suitable counter-argument when he said: ‘If you can work for Goenka, why can’t you work for Jawaharlal Nehru?’ ” H. Y. Sharada Prasad, “The Call of Editorship,” in Editors on Editing (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1993), 79.

109 The “special representative” was a designation typical to the Statesman’s internal hierarchy—it implied greater prestige for the person who was acting as a special correspondent to the paper from a particular city. This was at a time when the internal hierarchy of other English newspapers was still to achieve levels of stratification.

Every state—liberal, democratic, republican, socialistic, and so on—aspires to a specific kind of operational stability that justifies its legitimacy in the field of ideas and in the societies it tries to control; this stability remaining vulnerable to its critics in proportion to its ability to govern through political persuasiveness, and its ability to do violence. After 1947, the enhanced need for legitimacy led the Indian state to adopt a “Congress system model” with aspiration for a “total system” in governmental and policy processes; it called for a dynamic redefinition of pursuits—not only in the realm of politics but in all operative spheres of social reality-shaping enterprises in India. The operational aspect of the legitimizing process, as Rajni Kothari observes, hinged on an important presumption: all the participants were not just to involve themselves in consensus-building tasks, but simultaneously agree to the “legitimizing of both a system of authority and of opposition to it”. The press, too, with its ties to big business and its implied objective of providing “public news”, could not remain impartial to the colossal legitimizing project championed by the Congress system model; it had to be explicitly clear about where its allegiances lay. In this context, we can refer to the Statesman’s attempts during the late 1940s to provide “news” to both India and Pakistan. The dream of Ian Stephen, its chief editor, to make the newspaper an

111 Rajni Kothari, “The Congress System Revisited: A Decennial Review,” Asian Survey 14, no. 12 (1974): 1035-1054. Yet, this “total system” always remained an aspiration in India. Even during the days of the “internal Emergency” the Indian state could not force a system of effective totalitarian control—partly because it lacked the necessary state apparatuses for penetrative surveillance of the entire Indian population, partly because of the immensity of cultural and temporal distances actually existing between the geographical and cultural territories under its realm. It is another aspect that the big English newspapers claimed credit for battling the “internal Emergency” on behalf of democracy. 112 Ibid., 1036.
extra-state “news” provider in the subcontinent—to “hold the scales even between India and Pakistan”\(^{113}\)—was cut short by the animosity between its leaders. The paper 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, Vallabhbhai Patel, who summarily asked him to leave India.\(^{114}\)

The opinions expressed by Patel’s successor, Chakravorty Rajagopalachari,\(^{115}\) in the Indian Parliament concerning the Press (Objectionable Matter) Bill, 1951, can offer us further light concerning the nascent Indian state’s expectations concerning its press. (Though this bill sanctioning arrests and forfeiture of press equipment for publishing “objectionable matter” was later discontinued, Rajagopalachari’s opinions need to be considered as he was the first Indian minister to move a press bill; more because he was one of members of the powerful triumvirate that ruled India in its early decades and considered more “liberal” than Nehru and Patel: he was the first to decry at a later time the elaborate system of networked licensing, permits, and quotas—more commonly referred to as the “licence-permit raj”—that proliferated under the shadows of the


\(^{114}\) 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 when the paper slowly passed into Indian hands. Ibid., 94-95.

\(^{115}\) It was after Patel’s death in 1951 that Rajagopalachari became the Home Minister of India between 1951 and 1952 for a period of ten months, though antagonistic to Nehru who remained the formal head of the state.
triumphal pillars of the Nehruvian state; also one of the later founder-leaders of the Swatantra Party that made the abolition of these dependent networks in favour of “free trade” and “minimum interference by the state” its principal issue of political campaign.\textsuperscript{116}

While introducing the above bill in September 1951 to a parliament chock-full of nominated members—including big editors-proprietors such as Ramnath Goenka and Lala Deshbandhu Gupta who opposed the bill—Rajagopalachari dealt at length with the necessity of having a “free press”. And yet he stressed the need for stricter control of the press because the general populace was “not educated enough to discriminate and escape the hypnotism of the repeated printed word”;\textsuperscript{117} simultaneously dashing all hopes of editors-proprietors for unbridled growth and freedom from the indignity of compulsory registration according to the British press laws (particularly the provisions contained in the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867). Ramnath Goenka raised a feeble objection in this regard—not on grounds of absoluteness of “press freedom”: the old Miltonic objection to the “cautelous enterprise of licensing” and state control, later invoked a million times out of context by literary-minded journalists, politicians, and even Supreme Court judges of India. He referred to the delay caused during the registration process—which the minister dismissed as an easily-

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{116} For a brief overview of the political demands and aspirations of the Swatantra Party, see Howard L. Erdman, “India’s Swatantra Party,” Public Affairs 36, no. 4 (1963-1964): 394-410.}

rectifiable administrative problem.\textsuperscript{118} Rajagopalachari made it unambiguously clear that this law—enabling the demand and forfeiture of security deposits from newspapers on judicial approval, and the confiscation and destruction of unauthorized publications and their presses—would remain behind the screen (as an “ugly scare-crow” and an “empty scare-crow”\textsuperscript{119}) so long as Indian newspapers agreed to the legitimacy of the state:

Controls may be good, controls may be bad... It is not criticism that I do not like. I only do not want interference in the working of that system: I do not want a spanner to be thrown into the machine. The machinery may be criticized, you may even change it, but do not put a spanner into the machine.\textsuperscript{120}

The fact that this law was passed by a “liberal” minister and accepted with little protest by an Indian Parliament yet to achieve legitimacy through popular (electoral) mandate, and grudgingly approved by powerful members of the Indian press within the Parliament, as well as representative bodies of editors and journalists—the AINEC and the Indian Federation of Working Journalists (IFWJ)\textsuperscript{121}—shows that the Indian newspapers were more than willing to share

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118] Ibid., 36. Decades later, the same Goenka was to emerge, as we will see, as an “uncompromising fighter” acting on behalf of “press freedom”.
\item[119] Ibid., 32.
\item[120] Ibid., 66. The reference to controls follows Rajagopalachari’s tirade against “sabotage” by communist insurrectionists and his earlier insistence that the intended Press Bill was “only intended against the abuse of the printing machine and the constitutional right of freedom of speech by some bad people in furtherance of their criminal purposes”. Ibid., 56-57. This Act was allowed to lapse in 1956, once the communists made it to the “national mainstream”, and after Nehru had stepped in the field of international politics. It was mostly from 1954 that he started gaining favour from different brands of international communism, and projected himself as a champion of world peace at the Asian-African Conference at Bangdung (April, 1955).
\item[121] Though opposed “in principle” to this legislation, both the AINEC and IFWJ conceded before the First Press Commission that they had no complaints regarding the execution of the Press Act. The
\end{footnotes}
the variety of “press freedom” offered by the state, on conditions on wilful allegiance to its legitimacy. This explains to a considerable extent their future role in upholding the omnipotence of the Indian state. It also explains the English newspapers’ later anxious and lachrymose attachment to the constitutional validity of “freedom of speech and expression” and its infringement in the law-courts when the state seemed to threaten their businesses, and at the same time, their sustained decision to refrain from legality and comply with the state during moments of upholding that freedom for the sake of it. In February 1959, for example, charges of corruption were brought in the Indian Parliament against Nehru’s Special Assistant, M. O. Mathai: an informant for both the CIA and Indian big business since he took up work with Nehru in 1946. Newpapers reporting these parliamentary debates were brought to a quick check by a legislative motion on the breach of “parliamentary privilege”, and soon, “better counsels prevailed and the matter was dropped” with Mathai’s resignation. By the beginning of the 1960s, it became a custom in Indian press reporting that controversial questions and debates in the Indian parliament and the state legislative assemblies could not be reported, unless they received express sanction in printed circulars or from the Speaker of the respective legislative body.

AINEC went on to observe “there is greater freedom of the Press in India today than ever before and more than in most other countries”. Report of the Press Commission (1954), Part I, 382.

122 This given the fact that between February 1, 1952, and October 31, 1953, 134 cases were made on the basis of this Press Act against newspapers: 86 of them demands for security, and 48 for the forfeiture of security deposits. Report of the Press Commission (1954), Part II, 117.

123 Zachariah, Nehru, 235.

124 For a brief overview of some cases in which the privilege of the parliament and the state legislative assemblies was asserted over certain Indian newspapers’ right to “freedom of speech” in the 1950s, see
Similar customs were in effect as checks for reporting on the judiciary, the armed forces, and the intelligence agencies—these customs, too, were not contested for once in the law-courts by the big English newspapers. Rather than argue for the freedom of expression as an inalienable, natural, and absolute moral right in the borrowed, but nevertheless justifiable on grounds of their being assimilative, traditions of nineteenth-century liberalism and Enlightenment rationality, the English newspapers chose their freedom to operate in accordance with both the constitutionally-valid and restrictive “liberal” parameters set by the Indian state. It was yet another capitulation of their fabled adversarial position to the needs of power; though not the least unexpected, as we have already had some glimpses of their role during and after the Second World War.

It is also to be remembered in this context that the Indian Constitution too was no tabula rasa; its authors had been least eager to play creative roles as long as their demands and expectations were satisfied by drawing on easily available Acts of the colonial times: mostly the Constitution was a reworking of the colonial

M. V. Pylee, “Free Speech and Parliamentary Privileges in India,” *Pacific Affairs* 35, no. 1 (1962): 11-23. These customs lost their relevance in the 1980s with the advent of the television and relaxations introduced by the Indian state.

125 Apart from these customs, there was the fear of implication through the Contempt of Courts Act, 1952. This Act was amended in 1971 to particularize two categories of “contempt”: the “civil” and the “criminal”, where disobedience of judicial decrees and orders constituted “civil contempt”, and “criminal contempt” encompassed real or intended attempts to interfere with or undermine the “administration of justice”.

126 The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958), formulated against the backdrop of rising demands for national self-determination in the north-eastern states of India, made it the prerogative of the state governor to declare an area “disturbed” with powers to dismiss a state legislative assembly. According to its “special” powers, the military could arrest anyone on grounds of suspicion. Amended in 1972 by Indira Gandhi’s government, this Act granted all military and para-military personnel acting on behalf of “public order” in the “disturbed areas” a virtual licence to kill.
Government of India Act, 1935. Alongside British laws and acts directly concerning the role of the press, the Indian state inherited the repressive machinery of the colonial state—complete with all the trappings of the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, the Police Act, the Official Secrets Act, Defence of India Rules, Preventive Detention Acts, and an unwritten inheritance of state violence through effective extra-judicial use of the police, the paramilitary forces, the military, and the state’s own “underground”——which made the constitutional guarantee of fundamental rights in India primarily dependent on the whim and pleasures of the executive.

Although the big newspapers wallowed over greater concessions and cried for the interpretation of the fundamental right in the law courts in the following decades—with the judiciary’s interpretations sometimes inimical to the government’s immediate intentions; they were nonetheless aware from the beginning that the constitutional assurance of “freedom of speech and expression” offered them little real-time protection against a state who could enforce greater

127 “One of the striking features of India’s ‘new’ Constitution is the continuity with British-Indian practice,” observes Michael Brecher, one of Nehru’s biographers: “Approximately 250 articles [out of 395 articles] were taken either verbatim or with minor changes in phraseology from the 1935 Government of India Act, and the basic principles remained unchanged.” Michael Brecher, Nehru: A Political Biography (London, 1959), 421, quoted in Ghosh, Indian Constitution and Its Review, 8. As Suniti Kumar Ghosh points out, Nehru once called this 1935 Act a “charter of bondage”.

128 Here the reference to the state’s “underground” is borrowed off Sumanta Banerjee’s useful reminder that in the history of the Indian state, it has been a matter of policy for the people at its helm to consistently use the state’s undercover agencies “not only to violate human rights in the name of counter-insurgency, but also to subvert democratic movements in parts of the country through underhand deals—either by buying off some of their leaders, or by infiltrating into the movements to sow divisions, or even by supporting armed insurgents to hassle state governments run by the opposition”. Sumanta Banerjee, “Revisiting the ‘Underground’,” Economic and Political Weekly 44, no. 7 (2009): 17.

control by modifying the Constitution at will through legislative amendments, impose sanctions on their reporting through claims of various “privileges”, and threaten them with extra-constitutional consequences. However, these consequences mattered little for the English-language newspapers so long as they aligned themselves and maintained close contact not just with the shifting policies of the state but with the rulers themselves—the “tin-gods of the Congress”\(^1\)\(^3\). All that these newspapers needed for their survival was the perfecting of a skill acquired during the colonial era: a careful playing out of the role of journalistic “objectivity”, a performance which the Indian state chose to accept for its own benefits.

3. Consensus and collusion

An inability to reconcile popular legitimacy and élite control was a problem peculiar to the Indian state from its earliest days: what Partha Chatterjee identifies in more generous terms as the perennial problem of liberal democracy in India, caught irreconcilably (and irredeemably) between the mediating notions of community and property.\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^2\) It was because of this inability that with all its early affection for Soviet-style planning the Nehruvian state went for

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\(^1\)\(^3\) Another constitutional amendment in 1963, following the war with China, added the phrase “in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of the country” to the Article 19(2) to imply additional powers for affecting “freedom of speech and expression”. Sharad Karkhanis, *Indian Politics and the Role of the Press* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1981), 86.

\(^1\)\(^3\) Ramnath Goenka, “Letter to Lala Sri Ram” (December 7, 1951), in *Goenka Letters*, 78. Lala Sri Ram was the proprietor of Delhi Cotton Mills, and a close friend of Goenka who advertised heavily in the Delhi edition of the *Indian Express*.

reconciliatory attempts with the Indian big bourgeoisie; it acquiesced to have a
privately-owned “national press” exist as a (legitimizing) adversary to it for the
same reason. This acquiescence was less circumstantial than a matter of choice: it
was consistent with the broader developmental strategy of the Indian state that
prioritized differential rewards and benefits to big business over a radical
reorganization of society through economic redistribution of income and earlier
accumulated wealth—which was held as altogether impractical and detrimental to
“ordered growth”.133 In other words, the question of seriously taking into account
the influential newspaper proprietors, on grounds of (oligopolistic) concentration
of ownership, did not arise for once in the Nehruvian era.

To the extent that an élite newspaper did not question the historically-implied
and presently-emphasized nature of its legitimacy, the state would consent to its
“liberal” (in the etymological sense) attempts at social criticism with recourse to
that old tradition of pretence, part of the fabled history of newspapers in general,
that separates the “public service” offered by the newspaper from the specific
nature of newspaper-functioning as a capitalist enterprise: so ran the mutually-
beneficial initial accord. The First Press Commission—said to be conceived by
Nehru “under pressure” from the AINEC and the IFWJ,134 and set up to
particularly examine on behalf of the Indian state the “control, management and
ownership and financial structure of newspapers” and “the working of monopolies

133 A. Vaidyanathan, “The Indian Economy since Independence (1947-70),” in The Cambridge
Economic History of India, vol. 2, edited by Dharma Kumar and Tapan Raychaudhuri (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2008), 953.
134 Natarajan, History of the Press in India, 292.
and chains and their effect on the presentation of accurate news and fair views”\textsuperscript{135}—was categorical on stressing the nature of this accord:

It is, perhaps, inevitable that a paper that is owned by business men or industrialists, whether directly or through the control of Joint Stock Companies, should adopt editorial policies which advance directly or indirectly the interests of the business community as a whole, or the particular business interests or commitments of the proprietors. \textit{To the extent that such policies are openly espoused in the editorial columns of the papers concerned, we can have no cause to complain}. Where, however, the effect of such allegiance to a particular business interest extends beyond the editorial columns and affects the fairness, objectivity, accuracy or comprehensiveness of news reporting, the community is justified in protesting. A man’s opinions are his own, but if he claims to purvey news, the buyer is entitled to insist that it shall be untainted, unadulterated and undiluted. It is from this aspect that we are most concerned with the effect of ownership and the control that it exercises on the quality of the service provided to the public (my emphases).\textsuperscript{136}

We may observe here that the Press Commission with its fondness for the “purity” of “news”—and with its earlier bemoaning of the “highly imperfect” nature of competition existing among Indian newspapers with “no automatic restraint exercised by the forces of free competition”\textsuperscript{137}—simultaneously attests to its inability to raise serious objections on having a capitalist-owned press in India. The importance attached to the “purity” of “news”, in turn, had two serious flaws.

\textsuperscript{135} These were, in fact, the first two points of the seven principal points of reference for the Press Commission. Instituted by an Act of Parliament on September 23, 1952, it was expected to carry out “an inquiry covering the larger issue of the Press, such as had been carried out in the United Kingdom by the Royal Commission,” for doing good to the Indian press, and for “the development of this very important aspect of public affairs.” \textit{Report of the Press Commission} (1954), Part I, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 267.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 265.
Primarily, the concept of “purity” when associated with “news” is bound to remain as a wishful thought so long as it does not seriously interrogate the role-playing resorted to by newspapers in general. A newspaper, as we may recall, is always a commercial institution than indulges in simultaneous role-playing: the role of a repository of human knowledge, and the role of an information broker to society; these roles are inextricably intertwined in the ways in which the newspaper’s published materials are designed as cultural codes—as “news” which acts as information, as commentary, as advertisement—so that no absolute distinctions can be worked out between them; in the words of Anthony Smith: “In one society the announcement that a ship is arriving or departing is news; in another it is read as advertisement.”138

The Press Commission’s recommendation for the separation of the informative aspect of “news” from the educational and propagandist aspects of a newspaper was benighted, and as realistic as a wish made to the tooth fairy: it refused to see that so long as “news” removed context and signification from events and invested certain events and interpretations with value over countless others, the eremitic self-sufficiency of “news” in newspapers could only survive as an indeterminate reality based on a consensus—founded on an agreement on the newspapers’ role-playing as privileged information brokers. Secondly, the preoccupation with “purity” again indicated that the Press Commission was hovering at the brink of indecision as to suggest concrete remedies on the press situation which it held as

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138 Smith, Goodbye Gutenberg, 11.
unsalvageable without a overhaul: if not through a radical dispersal, then by a gradual diffusion of ownership. Given the essentially taken-for-granted capitalistic nature of newspaper production in India, and the status granted to its existence by the state through its institution as a commission, it could only suggest (on behalf of the “buyer”, the “community” and the “public”) the need for inculcating “purity” in “news” while insisting on the canons and ethics of editorial professionalism—an idealistic, impracticable, and unrealistic way out for newspapers perpetually interested in advertisement revenues over socially beneficial “news”.

In July 1954, the First Press Commission recommended the formation a Press Council as an “internal tribunal” for newspapers, discontinuation of press-specific legislations such as the Press (Objectionable Matters) Act in favour of strengthening general law to prevent “excesses”, a central institution to keep an eye on press functioning on behalf of the state—which later became office of the

139 “It should be the responsibility of the editor, as a professional man,” observed the Press Commission, “to decide finally what items of news should go in a paper, and the owner should not be in a position to order a blacking-out of any item of news unless, of course, its publication would offend against the law” [Report of the Press Commission (1954), Part I, 337]. It was ominously silent on the question as how an editor could choose, at the risk of losing her job, to go against the proprietor’s wishes to promote or suppress some piece of “news”, and simultaneously uphold her rank as a professional. It also ignored the editor’s troubled position with respect to the business side of the newspaper, in terms of the generation of advertisement revenue and sales, where the editor had little or no say over the “news” prioritized or rejected by the managerial professionals, and managing editors acting on behalf of the owner.

140 This was with the intention to make the law more stringent: the Commission recommended a “tightening up” of the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, particularly those laws relating to defamation of officials. It also recommended the taking into account of the editor of a publication for “excesses”, who was earlier excluded under the Press (Objectionable Matters) Act. Ibid., 393.
In September, 1955, a central government cabinet resolution, following the Press Commission's recommendations, barred all foreign-owned newspapers such as

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141 The office of the Press Registrar—the RNI—with a central office at Delhi and with regional centres at the state capitals, was instituted by the Government of India on July 1, 1956, through an amendment of the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867. Its official duties were to issue certificates of registration to all newspapers published in India, the verification of their publication data, including circulation and production costs, and to summarize a compilation of its findings in the form of an annual report for the central government. Yet, as we will see, due to the importance of its non-statutory function of issuing recommendations concerning newsprint allocations and licences, it emerged as the pivotal player in the newsprint field within India.
the *New York Times* and other periodicals interested in publishing Indian editions.\(^{142}\) On their part, Indian newspapers freely recycled “news” and features published in foreign newspapers along with highly-subsidized “news” provided by the news-agencies at prices that remained constant for more than a quarter of a century,\(^{143}\) and minus the fear of losing advertisement and circulation revenues to international “news” cartels. Despite their passionate advocacy of “free trade” and deregulation in all economic spheres, they vehemently, albeit contradictorily, opposed the entry of foreign “news” media capital in India.\(^{144}\) The English-language newspapers, in particular, spearheaded this opposition. On the one hand, they enthusiastically cried for the disassembling of governmental controls over newsprint, which were affecting their businesses; on the other, they vociferously opposed the dismantling of state regulatory mechanisms that prevented international media conglomerates from threatening their curious and

\(^{142}\) B. R. P. Bhaskar, “Flourishing Papers, Floundering Craft: The Press and the Law,” in *Practising Journalism: Values, Constraints, Implications*, edited by Nalini Rajan (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 2005), 24-25. The only exception in this case was the American periodical, the *Reader’s Digest*, which had earlier acquired permission to publish in India. While its publication not discontinued, the government’s policy prevented all other international contenders in the “news” and “current affairs” field to open shop in India. Ibid.

\(^{143}\) In contrast to the colonial period, news-agency services remained highly subsidized in India in favour of the newspapers throughout the decades preceding liberalization: in 1978, some of the English-language newspapers subscribing to the PTT’s highest grade news-service paid as low as 0.5 paisa per copy, the same price they had paid in 1952. *Report of the Second Press Commission* (1981), 167.

\(^{144}\) The usual grounds cited over the decades were the corrupting influence of “western cultural invasion” and the need for preservation “national self-respect”, though it remains questionable whether these two factors sufficiently account for the acute hostility of Indian newspapers to the entry of foreign media capital. As Nireekshak observes, these factors were bogeys constructed by these newspapers editors and proprietors who had no qualms about being totally dependent on foreign news-agencies for international “news”. The principal trigger of this opposition and hostility was in these newspapers’ threatened sense of themselves as losing their secure markets and revenue, once foreign media corporations with their huge capital backings were allowed to print newspapers in India. Nireekshak, “Entry of Foreign Media: Reviving Old Bogeys,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 46 (2000): 4000-4001.
privileged position as arbitrators of printed “news” and advertisement in India. Perhaps more significantly, their continual opposition to the entry of foreign media throughout the greater half of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first points to one of their distinguishing traits. It shows that their processes of making “news” and newspapers, their attempts to maximize profits and impose their definitions of what should be controlled and allowed to work as “free” enterprises in the marketplace, were structured by a continuing and almost parasitical dependence on the state for resources, facilities, privileges, with the insistence that state safeguard their exclusivist economic hidey-holes.

The containing of the newspaper’s control within a family, as Ben Bagdikian observes, generally plays a special role in the mythology of the newspaper business, where legends abound of one or the other crusading proprietor solely interested in social action, “for whom personal profit is so unimportant as to tempt him to perpetual bankruptcy for the sake of journalistic virtue.” In the Indian context, if there was a similar proliferation of legends, they were accentuated by the caste family’s caution to indefinitely prolong its control over the newspaper business. It is significant for the context that of the many wishes of the Press Commission that were not granted by the Indian state, the diffusion of ownership was the one most disregarded. As we have seen, the primary cause of this was that the notion contravened the state’s refusal, as part of its strategies of development, to meddle with Indian big business. In reality this refusal meant

145 Bagdikian, Information Machines, 116.
that the state was unwilling to take into account the typical structures of ownership of Indian big business where the pre-industrial form of the hereditary caste-based business family was inextricably woven around the practices and pursuits of business enterprises.

All the major English newspapers in India, in terms of their ownership, continued to share an important trait of Indian big business: even when they were not run by bania families ruling the bigger industrial scene, they were controlled by individuals representing business families—with all their characteristic casteist hierarchies, prejudices, and conceptions of social exclusivity, and importantly, with closely-guarded secrets passed on from generation to generation and self-enclosed, densely woven and interlinked circles of control for financial management and speculation—for whom their modern business institutions and the traditional institution of the family were and continued to be coterminous. The slow pursuit of caution, rather than uncalculated risk-taking, followed as an important consequence of this interwoven state of the caste family with its businesses: this internal peculiarity culminated in a long and continuing tradition of strict familial control of newspapers that preferred to tread well-beaten and proven tracks of commercial success rather than risk the family's stake by playing aggressive pioneers in new areas, which to most of these families were foreboding, inauspicious, and irrelevant as intergalactic space. Rather than squarely put the blame on the state's regulatory apparatuses, it is more accurate to hold this
specific form of familial caution and control equally responsible for the so-called “stagnation” of the Indian newspaper business till the 1980s.

The Press Commission’s suggested method for the diffusion of ownership—the transfer of a newspaper’s management to a “public trust” so that the owner held nominal control—was not realizable without the government seriously taking into account the family and its circles of kinship, rather than the individual owner. The government was least willing in this regard: the only newspaper concern to become a “public trust” in this period was the Associated Journals Ltd. which published Nehru’s English daily, the National Herald. Acute financial crisis, mismanagement, and troubles within the Nehru family—rather than an innocent or licit socialistic yearning for diffusion of ownership—contributed to this company’s hasty reorganization in 1956.

[The reorganization of the Associated Journals Ltd. into a trust was a quasi-governmental operation: it was chalked out by Nehru’s Special Assistant Mathai and the then Attorney-General of India, M. C. Setalvad, to thwart its managing director Feroze Gandhi’s attempts to sell the concern to C. B. Gupta, the Congress chief of Uttar Pradesh.146 The “public trust” was christened Janhit Nidhi by Indira Gandhi, and shareholders and funders of the Associated Journals were peremptorily urged to transfer their shares, debentures, and loans to the trust: some of these funders included Govind Ballabh Pant (then the Home

Minister of India), K. N. Katju (the Defence Minister of India), Sri Prakasa (Governor of Madras), B. H. Zaidi (a Congress parliamentarian who became the vice-chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University in the same year), Lala Ram Ratan Gupta (a coal-mine owner from Kanpur and later a big player in the pump-set manufacturing industry in India), the nawab of the erstwhile princely state of Bhoral, the maharaja of Gondal, and the prince of Vijayanagaram.147 Chalapathi Rau, a Nehru confidant and the foremost among the members of the First Press Commission who argued for greater state control of newspapers, was retained as the chief editor of the *National Herald* for the next two decades. The Janhit Nidhi passed under the control of three trustees directly and indirectly related to the Nehru family: Indira Gandhi, P. N. Sapru, (a judge of the Allahabad High Court and a Congress parliamentarian with old ties to the Nehru family), and Padmaja Naidu (daughter of Sarojini Naidu, another Nehru family confidant). Indian big business, too, was not aloof to this reorganization: Ramnath Goenka donated an expensive printing press to the *National Herald*; generous “special advertisement” were made available to the Associated Journals Ltd. in the 1950s and 1960s by the business families of Mafatlal, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Tata, Birla, and Bhandari (owners of the BIC group that dealt primarily in heavy transportation and real estate).148 The *National Herald* and its associated newspapers continued as failing businesses owned by the most powerful political family in India and propped up with support from big business. Although Indira Gandhi held informal control

147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 98-99.
over its functioning, the “public” nature of Associated Journals could not resist a section of Indian big business from slowly percolating into its ownership structure: at the beginning of the 1980s, the Associated Journals was being jointly run by the Janhit Nidhi Trust and the Ratan Tata Trust.\textsuperscript{149}

Eleven years after the First Press Commission’s recommendations for “internal control”, a Press Council was created by the Government of India in November, 1965. Five years later, the range of functions of the Press Council was widened: all newspapers as well as news-agencies working in India were brought under its purview; it was vested with powers to scrutinize and requisition government and court records, and to compel editors of newspapers to publish its decisions on a complaint made to it against the newspapers.\textsuperscript{150} These powers, conceivably, were not utilized for once.\textsuperscript{151} The First Press Commission had hoped that the Press Council would become a kind of effective domestic tribunal for newspapers with powers to publicly censure newspapers.\textsuperscript{152} However, in less than ten years of its existence, it was clear that this curious state-funded experiment for the (almost spiritual) exercise of self-regulation by privately-owned newspapers had failed: in 1974, Chalapathi Rau, one of the members of the First Press Commission who

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., vol. 1, 79.  
\textsuperscript{151} The Press Council had no statutory power of calling into question the proprietor of a newspaper. This was most evident in the dismissal of B. G. Verghese—the Information Adviser to the Prime Minister of India from 1966 to 1968, who joined the Hindustan Times as its chief editor from 1969. He was summarily dismissed in August 1974 by the newspaper’s owner, K. K. Birla (technically the chairman of its board of directors), for suggesting that the newspaper be converted into a public trust. The case dragged on inconclusively before the Press Council until Verghese went to the law courts which, however, could not reinstate him. Verghese later found work with the Indian Express from 1982 to 1986.  
was most vocal about state intervention in newspaper business, was to complain about the complete lack of voluntary action of part of newspapers to inculcate “internal control”.153 (The Press Council was dismantled during the “internal Emergency” in January 1976 by a government more keen on forcing “voluntary” action through intimidation of newspapers, than seeing voluntary action as a way in itself. It was reinstated in January, 1979, by the Janata Party government after Indira Gandhi’s defeat in the parliamentary elections, and continued as institution of “expensive irrelevance” during the initial decades of “economic liberalization” and after.154)

Yet, to be honest to the newspapers, they did inculcate “internal control” in ways they saw fit, even before the coming of the Press Council. This was most evident after the war with China in the autumn of 1962, when the AINEC leadership at Delhi coordinated with the central government on “matters affecting defence and national security”, and agreed to nominate from itself an Emergency Press Advisory Committee that was to “mitigate and help administer” the wide-ranging powers of the Defence of India Act and Rules, 1962.155 The “warnings” issued by the central government during the “external Emergency” were in fact formed on the advice of this committee, which also helped the government’s own Central Emergency Press Advisory Committee to censure newspapers which were

identified as pro-Chinese or critical of the war efforts.\textsuperscript{156} The censuring of errant newspapers during this period proceeded through several stages: warning ("informal advice"), warning (formal), demand of security deposit, pre-censorship, ban on publication, proscription, arrest and detention of the editor, and prosecution under the Defence of India Rules. Though no major English-language dailies was taken to task, between 1962 and 1965 fifty-five newspapers were censured by the central government, which also issued formal and informal "warnings" to twenty-two newspapers, demanded security deposit from one newspaper, imposed pre-censorship on two newspapers, and banned one newspaper for alleging neglect of the armed forces by the Indian government. During the same time, the state governments took action against eighty-two newspapers, resulting in the arrest of eleven different editors, and twenty-three prosecutions.\textsuperscript{157} It was typical that most Indian newspapers, in their analyses, interpretations, and reports on the China war, exclusively relied on government communiqués, and "news" from the British and American news-agencies; they refrained from publishing major Chinese pronouncements unless they had been "cleared" by the government or the established news-agencies.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 19, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 66, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{158} This dependence was not restricted to the war-zones. When the Chinese premier Chou En-Lai made an African tour in the early 1960s, Indian newspapers were flooded with speculations and apprehensions concerning his visit, mostly gleaned from reports of the international news-agencies. At the same time, no reporters were sent to Africa cover his visits, his speeches were summarized, distorted, and in most cases, subject to "black-out". In 1964, one of his press conferences in Dhaka, then the capital of East Pakistan, was reported by Calcutta newspapers under a Tokyo dateline. Chanakya Sen, "Chou En-Lai’s African Journey as Viewed by the Indian Press," \textit{Asian Survey} 4, no. 6 (1964): 888.
Throughout the period of “external Emergency”, and during the two subsequent wars with Pakistan, most newspapers practiced “internal control” to the verge of xenophobia, and hysteric support for the Indian side. Apart from the odium of being labelled as “anti-national”, the fear of state reprimand—which meant the automatic withdrawal of government advertising—put an effective check on the few, solitary voices that could have emerged in print to argue for sanity or peace. Albeit in more peaceful circumstances, the newspapers closely followed the developmental projects of the Indian state. They correctly interpreted the communication programme of the state as a linear, top-down process focusing on “planned publicity” with no possibilities for feedback, and paid little attention to “development communication”, except for their narrow attention to the formal inaugural acts of politicians.159 (As B. G. Verghese observes in this context, “In the ‘old journalism’ of the day, planning—projects, allocations, announcements—made news; development did not.”160)

An exceptional preoccupation with politics—a characteristic and lasting feature of Indian newspapers cutting across all spectrums—was to emerge in practice as a preoccupation with the activities, speeches, and reactions of politicians and statesmen residing mostly in Delhi and the capital cities. This was because most journalists and editors, with their imagined roles and real positions in the

159 This has drawn considerable criticism from the “development communication” school. See, for example, Uma Narula and W. Barnett Pearce, Development as Communication: A Perspective on India (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 77-81.
routinized processes of newsmaking, chose to demonstrate—as individuals working for newspapers owned by proprietors and bound together to politicians by the prospects of power—that they were discreetly capable of self-clarification.

If irreverence was the key to the fabled adversarial position of the Indian press, the ability to control the direction of political reality through its celebratory act of trespassing on the restricted gardens of the powerful; its obsessive, “objective”, and tendentious interest in the words, gestures, and equitation of the political élite residing in Delhi showed that the peculiar nature of its interest and motivation held little space for irreverence: the make-believe magical powers of the trespasser were largely founded on the authenticity of his nominal (but ineluctable) role as the gamekeeper to the hortus conclusus, who simultaneously inspired awe and import for the wonderful and loathsome creatures of the gardens—with suggested powerlessness, a large element of marginality, and absence of respect for other forms of life inhabiting different spheres of reality elsewhere in the subcontinent. The English-language newspapers in India, without the slightest hint of doubt, were the most elitist in this regard. By staking arrogant and chauvinistic claim to the title of the “national press”, they sought to singularly represent élite political opinion in a troubled geographical zone composed of numerous linguistic nationalities moving between various stages of orality and literacy, and without respect for any. The absurdity of this claim is

161 I have consciously refrained from using the term “illiteracy” here, as is common Indian media-related discussions, replete with developmentalese jargon, that make intellectually straitjacketed references to the rise in “literacy” through uncritical acceptance of census figures made available by the
even more apparent if we keep in mind the vastness and expanse of different, and often conflicting, socio-cultural zones existing across India. With all the technological enhancements for newsmaking and advanced distribution methods achieved in the early decades of the twenty-first century, the most exaggerated cumulative (and associative) circulation figures that these newspapers’ marketing professionals can dream of today pale in insignificance to the enormity and overpowering mental distances of the socio-cultural spaces and political geographies they seek to include. At the beginning of the 1950s, the declared circulation for any of the influential English-language newspapers in India was even less than trivial—as evident from the following table.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Year of establishment</th>
<th>Average daily circulation for the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times of India</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>51,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statesman</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>51,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>35,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindustan Times</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>12,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras Mail</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>17,730</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I want to emphasize here that these scant circulation figures do not point to the absence of a general business motive in the media monopolies in India during the government, and contrast that to the growth in circulation of newspapers to argue for enhanced models of “democratic communication”. For a representative example, see G. N. S. Raghavan, *Development and Communication in India: Elitist Growth and Mass Deprivation* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1992).

Ibid., 19. We can see that except for the Statesman (whose Anglo-Indian control was disliked by Nehru, resulting in lesser state support), the other newspapers grew in terms of the circulation figures they chose to share with the Press Commission.
early Nehruvian era or after—as some contemporary media critics have suggested.\textsuperscript{163} Neither do they suggest an allegiance to “missionary journalism” by these newspapers, which, because of their naiveté and hostility to the commercial side of newsmaking business, supposedly remained gullible to the rhetoric of socialism for almost half a century.\textsuperscript{164}

Rather, and more significantly, they point towards the collusion of interests that really existed between the English newspaper business and élite interests in India, and the closely intermeshed nature of its linkages to Indian big business and the state: one that enabled these newspapers as nominal individual businesses to lay unconscionable and arrogant claim to “national” presence,\textsuperscript{165} despite the caution that was characteristic to these businesses as family-owned enterprises, and the utter insignificance their projected circulation held in the real.

From the Nehru era to the 1990s and beyond, it was advertisement, and especially state advertisement, that played a decisive role in the fixing of the elitist

\textsuperscript{163} Kohli-Khandekar, Indian Media Business, 19-21.
\textsuperscript{164} Rajiv Desai, Indian Business Culture: An Insider’s Guide (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 60. A media advisor to Rajiv Gandhi during his electoral campaigns of 1989 and 1991, and later, one of the players of the public relations business in post-liberalization India, Desai holds “missionary journalism” as the principal cause of the Indian press’s susceptibility to the vociferous socialist rhetoric employed by Jawaharlal Nehru and later by Indira Gandhi: “It participated in the ‘great lie’ to suggest that India fared well under the restraints imposed by the commitment to socialistic principles” (ibid.). However, as I have argued earlier, socialist rhetoric played no role in the running of Indian newspapers as businesses, even for newspapers like the National Herald which Desai holds as exemplar for describing the triumph of “missionary journalism” in India.

\textsuperscript{165} The self-importance assumed by certain English-language newspapers can as well be gauged by their efforts during this time in making available overseas editions: in the early 1950s, it was only the Statesman, the Hindustan Times, and the Hindu that published weekly compilations in the tabloid format on special light weight paper for overseas distribution; by the 1970s, it was a matter of prestige for most English-language newspapers to claim international presence through their insignificant overseas reach.
bias of the English-language newspapers in India. Even if the volume of government advertisement was not initially impressive, the workings of the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, ensured a steady and increasing flow of advertisement revenue to all newspapers after its formation in 1955: the Government of India spent Rs. 45 lakh on press advertisement for the year 1951-52; in 1971-1972, approximately Rs. 33 crore worth (about sixty per cent) of the total advertisement handled by the DAVP and government-recognized advertising agencies went into influential, mostly English, newspapers registered with the IENS. In other words, the Indian state slowly emerged as the biggest advertiser for the Indian press—by 1979, the Second Press Commission estimated, the state was funding through direct and indirect means, one-third of the total advertisement carried by all influential newspapers under the IENS umbrella. In comparison to their Indian-language counterparts, the English-language newspapers were the primary beneficiaries of this phenomenon due to an earlier-formed consensus on part of different government departments and agencies, as well as commercial advisory bodies such as the ABC, on their efficacy as prime “news” outlets. Though denied in official policy documents, this is led

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to the unquestionable recognition of their status as élite advertisement media, or according to their own intumesced portrayal, their being the “national press”.

The steady flow of state advertisement to their pages was partly responsible for these newspapers’ relative inattention to circulation—often mistakenly assumed, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as symptomatic of their “missionary” disposition.\textsuperscript{170} However, these assumptions are blind to the fact that the recognition granted to the advertising capacities of these newspapers by the state did not prevent them in seeking further advertisement from commercial advertisers and big business, doubly assured of their “national” reach and impact. In 1955, one-third of the total advertisements carried by these newspapers were about automobiles and their accessories, refrigerators, washing machines, domestic air conditioners, jewellery, watches and clocks, cheaper transport and airlines\textsuperscript{171}—commodities and facilities inaccessible to the majority of India’s population. A study conducted under the aegis of the Indian Institute of Mass Communications in the 1970s shows that the percentage of advertising space in the pages of the Delhi edition of the \textit{Statesman} increased from thirty-eight per

\textsuperscript{170} As I have suggested earlier, an extensive preoccupation with nationalist historiography together with the distortion of circulation figures characteristic to the newspaper business, clouds our understanding in this area. No definitive study of the circulation problems of Indian newspapers exist, except for a 1960s monograph published by the Press Institute of India in the nationalistic vein where the author refers to the “missionary” urge as the prime cause of inattention to circulations, and vaguely recommends editors of newspapers to tour areas where their newspapers are circulated “to assess on the spot the taste of readers”, the formation of a state institute to train circulation managers for newspapers, and the establishment of a state-recognized association for circulation managers. See T. N. M. Lingam, \textit{Circulation Problems in Indian Newspapers} [New Delhi: Press Institute of India, n.d. (1966)], 23-30. Not surprisingly, none of his recommendations were carried out by newspapers, or the Indian state.

cent in 1947 to sixty per cent in 1971—a time period usually explained with reference to severe state control of newsprint; in those fourteen years, the volume of advertisement for consumer goods in the pages of the same newspaper increased fifty-five times their amount in 1947, unaffected by India’s foreign exchange crisis, acute food shortage, impoverishment, and the political crises of the late 1960s. Nor were these newspapers dependent on sale of newspaper copies—as circulation revenue—over advertisement revenue, as characteristic of activist journalism.

Advertisement revenue emerged as the principal source of income for all major Indian newspapers by the 1970s, even in terms of the scant and unreliable data they provided to the state and its enquiry committees. For example, based on data provided to it by sixty-three major newspaper undertakings, the Fact Finding Committee on Newspaper Economics, 1975, headed by the economist Bhabatosh Dutta, estimated that between the years 1967 and 1973, the proportion of these newspapers’ advertisement revenue to circulation revenue was, on an average, 53.3 per cent to 46.7 per cent respectively.

What is also notable is the nature of judicial support enjoyed by these newspapers. Particularly in situations when their employees contested their versions of fairness in terms of equitable distribution of their profits through regularized wages and improved working conditions, the courts upheld the

newspaper managements’ pleas alleging violation of their constitutional right to “free expression”. The English newspapers functioned as long as they could without the slightest concern for their employees, both journalists and press-workers, who continued to fight unsuccessful legal battles through the decades for job security, regular wages, gratuities, dearness allowances, adjustments, leave rules, a standardized retirement age, and post-retirement compensations. The Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act—a welfare legislation enacted by Nehru in December, 1955, to regularize the conditions of work for newspaper employees through government wage boards, was consistently bypassed by newspaper managements with uninhibited judicial support. Ramnath Goenka’s Indian Express group went to court to question the constitutional validity of the Act; in 1958 the Supreme Court of India annulled it for transgressing the “principles of natural justice”. The subsequent attitude of the Indian judiciary can be singularly gauged by a judgement pronounced by the Supreme Court of India when in 1962 it decided in favour of the Birla family-owned Hindustan Times.

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175 Two particular points of contention concerned the twelfth clause of the Act which empowered the central government to enforce the recommendations of the wage boards for unwilling newspapers, and the clause 13A which enabled the government to fix interim rates of wages.

and against its employees demanding better working conditions and pay with respect to the profits made by the newspaper:

Held, that while social justice demands that workmen should get a fair share of the national income which they help to produce, it has also to be seen that that does not result in the drying up of the source of national income itself. Inroads on the profits of the capitalists should not be such as have a tendency to drive capital away from fruitful employment and thereby affect prejudicially capital formation itself.\textsuperscript{177}

What followed in the judicial advocacy of the interests of “capital formation” was a further blurring of the distinction of “national income” to the profits made by the newspaper-owners, and the absence of workplace security for newspaper employees in general. From 1967, when the central government formed separate wage boards for journalists and non-journalists under pressure from their unions and in a climate of general political unrest, to the middle of the 1980s, the recommendations of the wage boards were mostly ignored by the newspapers because of the non-statutory character of these boards; later they became even more malleable at the face of the central government’s policy of deregulation and active support to the “newspaper revolution” pioneered by the same “national” newspaper families, and some newer players in the field.\textsuperscript{178}

An important set of cultural factors was also at work in favour of the English newspapers. Predominantly, they were the direct beneficiaries of an inherited

\textsuperscript{177} Hindustan Times Ltd. \textit{v.} Their Workmen (1962), Supreme Court of India, \url{http://judis.nic.in/} (March 11, 2011).

\textsuperscript{178} Samaddar, \textit{Workers and Automation}, 14, 88.
colonial fetish with English as a language of power: where a deep-down fear of a
ensorcelled language, charmed with the explosive despair of the powerless, upheld
for even its most unequipped and despondent user the promise of penetration
into realms of knowledge and reality reserved almost exclusively for the colonial
master wizards. If the desire for mastery of the English language and its literature
carried with it the occasional promise of aesthetic negotiation during the long
colonial rule,\(^{179}\) the English newspaper carried with it the additional powers of
intercession—it appeared as an arbitrary and quick technological medium that
could cut short, for those with sparse cultural capital, the rigours and the complex
socio-cultural processes involved in approaching English literature, and yet, was
more utilitarian in its acts of recreation of social magic.\(^{180}\)

Apart from its functions as a newspaper, the English newspaper in India had
alternated for long as a primer, a dictionary of difficult words and a cultural style-
guide, also a precious and numinous gadget with high-end social utilities for all,
and especially for the clued-up classes who aspired for government jobs, conceit,

\(^{179}\) The best example of this yearning remains Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s exclamation in an 1854
essay: “I am no stranger to the eloquence of fiery Demosthenes, of calm and philosophic Cicero... I
have visited the lightless regions of Hades with Dante: I know Laura’s sad lover who gave himself to
fame with melodious tears: but give me the literature, the language of the Anglo-Saxon!” Michael
Madhusudan Dutt, “The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu,” in Madhusudan Rachanabali (Collected

\(^{180}\) Though it goes beyond our context, we may note here that historical studies of the ideologies and
practices of English studies in India during the British colonial rule often pay little attention to the role
played by the English newspaper in the institutionalization of English as a language of socio-political
and cultural command. See, for example, Gauri Viswanathan, Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and
British Rule in India (1989; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), where the author attempts to
historically summarize a “tyranny of representation” with her primary attention devoted to British
policy documents on education, without a passing reference to the English newspaper. Even if it is
more nuanced than other attempts that stick exclusively to Macaulay’s Minutes on Education for
explanation, Viswanathan’s work is riddled with a restrictiveness of vision that she hopes to avoid.
and social respectability. As Nirad C. Chaudhuri caustically observes with
reference to the *Statesman*:

(1)t must not be imagined that at first we read the paper for its news or
views. Our elders and teachers admonished us: “If you want to write
good English read the *Statesman*.” This was a revolutionary shift in
standards. In the nineteenth century all Bengalis who had aspiration
after style took Macaulay as their model. How delighted the Knights
would have been to learn that their paper had replaced Macaulay among
the Bengalis in their worship of fine English!181

This peculiar and abnormal worship of the magniloquent English newspaper was
not restricted to the Bengalis, nor was it degraded or renounced after the end of
the Raj. With the Indian state’s general absence of a cultural policy, the English-
language newspapers across the Indian sub-continent benefitted from all the
functional separations and linguistic trappings of neutrality offered by English as
a language of distance—“a high wire strung above the particularist thickets of
caste, religion, and region.”182 Moreover, through a kind of decolonized abjection,
English gained further prestige to emerge as the principal language of power
during the years of high Nehruvianism.183 Technocrats and planners, proselytes
drawn from diverse linguistic communities to handle colossal state projects and
their implementation, increasingly participated in a sycophantic and

181 Nirad C. Chaudhuri, “An Article from A Wholly Unknown Young Man,” in *Statesman Centenary
Volume*, edited by Emmerson, 29.
182 Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian
183 This gain in prestige is insufficiently understood when it is seen as solely resulting from the
untroubled inheritance of English as the colonizers’ language; as Arvind Rajagopal argues, it was its
important connection to the emergent political and socio-economic systems of command which made
English acquire greater potency over Indian languages, especially after the end of the Raj. Ibid.
bureaucratically-inclined culture that needed to know “good English”—what Nirad C. Chaudhuri has referred to in his autobiography as the “linguistic basis of modern Indian culture”—“a combination of English, a denatured written vernacular, and a mixed colloquial language.”

The real ugliness lay elsewhere. Closely following the Pavlovian reflexes of the Indian bureaucracy, the state technocrats, and big business, “good English” emerged as the indispensable necessity for cultural snobbery in a country that, after three millenniums of linguistic exchange with the world, deliberately chose to devalue the cultural potencies of more than a thousand autochthonous languages surviving under its realm. It is imperative to recognize in this context that in the garbled urban and semi-urban social spaces that emerged in India, someone walking with a rolled-up copy of the day’s English newspaper in his hands was not, therefore, someone simply carrying along a rolled-up newspaper. The English newspaper in India continued to function as a cultural artefact symbolizing distance, a conspicuous object of snobbery, and an ornament of social exhibition: a more stable and distinctive marker of pseudo-cultural affectation and detachment for its possessor over others exhibiting a pair of golden-rimmed spectacles, a stainless steel “Janata” wristwatch, or later in the 1980s, a pocket transistor radio.

Although the state imposed a Sanskrit-influenced version of the Hindi language in the Devanagari script as the *rashtra bhasha* (state language) of India, “good English” of the bureaucratic variety functioned as the official language of command. It became a precondition for entry into the elite, a cultural prerequisite for the lowest white-collar job. The reading of English newspapers was, in this respect, cultural aspiration epitomized: Prime Minister Nehru was known to read the *Statesman* and the *Hindu* every evening; the newspapers publicized this and subsequent and similar readings to claim off-hand symbolic distinction. With the state bureaucracy’s singular privileging of the “good English” variant that served the dual purposes of obfuscation and intimidation, the shortest way to mastery of the same lay through the most visible: the English newspapers. As beneficiaries of this prejudicial disposition, these newspapers carried the bulk of government tenders and vacancy advertisements\(^\text{185}\)—and incidental “general knowledge” gloated over by benighted examinees and examiners alike for the rest of the century, and beyond.

Insouciance, coupled with arrogance, held real weight for these newspapers in their use of the English language. This becomes apparent when we consider the sheer insufficiency of their efforts in addressing abuses of the English language in

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185 All government jobs were predominantly advertised in the English-language newspapers. *Employment News*, a weekly published by the Government of India to formally announce job vacancies under its various departments, was to arrive two decades later: it was launched in April, 1976, during the “internal Emergency”, and it was brought under the control of the Publications Division of the Government of India in 1978. Even decades later after its appearance, the English-language newspapers continued as prominent sources of “news” for government and private jobs, and notices of tenders by various departments of the government.
India in print, despite the great (and nonsensical) symbolic import attached to the kind of Englishness employed by each of them. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, editors and reporters of every English newspaper in India in their *soi-disant* roles as civilizers and educators continued to scoff at the ways their compatriots used the language, inventing terms like “Tribune English”, “Patrika English”, and “Statesman English” to ridicule their opponents or venerate the linguistic purity of the newspapers they worked for (in the case of the *Statesman* this self-aggrandizement was severe, since the newspaper was run by editors of British origin till 1967). At the same time, none made efforts to cleanse the language, and discontinue their heavy use of convoluted and otiose Company-era commercialese in “news” discourses,\(^{186}\) also replete with everyday idioms translated from Indian languages specific to the language zones in which each newspaper operated.\(^{187}\)

A newspaper’s claim to distinction in terms of linguistic superiority over its peers, in this respect, had the least to do with its editorial systematization in favour of the English language in general. This can be induced by the fact that house-specific editorial style guides, even in the twenty-first century, are unheard of in the newsrooms of English-language newspapers in India. The earliest, and until


\(^{187}\) For example, the *Hindu* would use many unidiomatic and debilitating expressions comprehensible only to those who understood English as well as the Tamil language; the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* bristled with numerous malapropisms solely understood by a Bengali who read English. The ubiquity of these expressions in the contemporary daily edition of any English-language newspaper in India provides sufficient proof of their historical continuance through the decades.
now, the only style guide for English newspapers in India appeared as a typewritten manuscript in the offices of the Statesman as late as 1992; it is was compiled by an acerbic assistant editor on the basis of his experiences with the editorial craft, rather than it being the outcome of any newspaper's systematic effort to further its unfound mystical credence in the realm of language.

Another important characteristic of the above cultural superiority assumed by and working in favour of the English-language newspapers was the segregation of similar newsmaking tasks, which were hierarchically separated based on a linguistic typification of tasks, and almost irrelevant to the nature of the work done. While the jobs were lowly-paid in contrast to the profits gleaned by the newspapers, the reporters, editors, and press-workers, engaged in the same kinds of jobs, and in many cases, working for newspapers owned by the same business family, received comparatively modest wages if they happened to work for English-language publications; meagre amounts if they worked for Indian-language publications.

Of the many newsmaking traditions that took shape in Indian “news” business during the Nehru era, this practice of segregation remained a unique feature of the Indian newspaper business: it had little to do with the supposed financial losses of newspapers as their managements consistently insisted before the government's wage boards, their pretentious eagerness to equitably compensate non-journalist newspaper employees, or the technological tasks of newsmaking
that did create a number of handicaps for the Indian-language newspapers.\textsuperscript{188} (This discriminatory and humiliating policy of linguistic segregation is pursued even now—more than two decades after the “newspaper revolution” reached its pinnacle, and consequent technological systematization that brought the tasks and production speed in Indian language newspapers almost at par with that of English newspapers; it has been so internalized by most editors and reporters that it is taken for granted as a necessary condition of workplace reality.)

If press-work in India was in general terms grossly underpaid, and editors of English newspapers received salaries greater than their Indian-language counterparts, senior reporters of the English-language press laid claim to symbolic prestige and certain material benefits via a mystified repute derived mostly from the quasi-official system of accreditation. The system of accreditation had evolved during the days of the Raj. The Home Ministry of the colonial government prior to the 1940s, and after the Second World War the Press Advisory Committee, accredited select journalists after meticulously investigating their political views. As the licensed hounds of newsgathering, these correspondents had the guarantee of certain unwritten privileges whispered into their press cards. After 1955, with the abolition of the Press Advisory Committee, the responsibility for accreditation fell to the Central Press Accreditation Committee, with the Principal Information Officer acting as its convenor. What is notable is that from 1955 to 1973, the committee issued press

\textsuperscript{188} We will look into the media technological differences in detail in a following chapter.
cards to Indian reporters with its convenor as the sole government representative on its board; the rest of its members nominated by journalists’ unions and similar representative bodies.

It was only after Indira Gandhi’s increasing antipathy to the Indian press, the Indian government started nominating its own representatives in the committee: in December, 1973, it nominated two members to the committee; after reconstituting the committee during the “internal Emergency” in February, 1976, it nominated three government representatives.\(^{189}\) Not for once, not even during the rosiest phase of its dream of socio-political control, did the Indian state try to put an end to the system of unwritten privileges drawn upon through accreditation: the autocracy of the state during the “Emergency”, in the context of press accreditation, was limited to the reconstitution of the committee and the non-renewal of accreditation, with no reasons cited, for twenty-nine journalists and six press photographers.\(^{190}\)

What we may also consider is another closely-connected fact: if the principal purpose of journalistic accreditation lost some of its glory after the end of the colonial period, the symbolic implications accompanying the recognition it inspired did not. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a press card issued to an accredited English-language newspaper correspondent in India for purposes of identification differed from those issued in many other countries.


\(^{190}\) Ibid.
in that it conferred quasi-official power to its bearer: apart from privileged access to government departments and documents, its possession also implied concessional travel, health-care, housing, transport facilities, and the self-importance characteristic to limited power operational and visible in the spheres of the socially powerless.

Perceivably, it was arrogance which mostly moved editors-proprietors and newsmakers of the English-language newspapers when they thought of and projected their publications as the “national press”. This arrogance gained strength when these newspapers found themselves indispensable to the state—despite its monopoly control over broadcasting—for disseminating its printed communiqués, either as advertisement, or regurgitated as “news”. If moderation was generally assumed visible in “news” carried by the “national” English-language newspapers in comparison to the shriller “regional” voices of their Indian-language counterparts, it was because the use of English upheld and nurtured for these newspapers, as for the state élite, the languor of “objective” spectatorship from the vantage point of an exclusivist, detached, and culturally insulated “national” space—one that saw easy opportunity and promotion unevenly spread across different big cities and industrial projects, and read irrelevance for life and reality outside these zones of influence.
Conclusion

In the years following 1947, the year of formal transfer of power from British to Indian hands, to the end the 1970s, none of the big English-language newspapers in India chose to discontinue their newsmaking businesses indefinitely on grounds of opposition to the Indian state, as acts of protest, or in terms of the state's curtailment of their “freedom of speech” through control measures. The Indian state, on its part, wanted a clear-cut allegiance from these newspapers as it wavered between Nehruvian ideals and the impossibility of putting them to practice. More importantly, as I have tried to argue, it remained a guarantor of the unequal conditions and social relations which helped the English-language newspapers to project themselves as the “national press”.

What became important to these English newspapers, from the Nehru era to the waning of the state’s control mechanisms, was the logic of what they were dealing with: a state that was toying with socialistic ideas that most of them considered dangerous for their businesses, and yet a state that was consistently providing them both cultural and economic facilities to emerge as the “national press”. As we will see in the following chapter, this was where collusion, consensus, and an anxiety to please linked up fairly with the specific commercial end of acquisitioning newsprint.