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**Policing a Riot-torn City:  
Kolkata, 16-18 August 1946**

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**Ranabir Samaddar**

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# Policing a Riot-torn City: Kolkata, 16-18 August 1946

Ranabir Samaddar \*

And beneath the lapses of memory, the illusions, and the lies that would have us believe that there is a ternary order, a pyramid of subordinations, beneath the lies that would have us believe that the social body is governed by either natural necessities or functional demands, we must rediscover the war that is still going on, war with all its accidents and incidents. Why do we have to rediscover war? Well, because this ancient war is a [. . .] permanent war. We really do have to become experts on battles, because the war has not ended, because preparations are still being made for the decisive battles, and because we have to win the decisive battle. In other words, the enemies who face us still pose a threat to us, and it is not some reconciliation or pacification that will allow us to bring the war to an end. It will end only to the extent that we really are the victors.” (Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76, trans. David Macey, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 51)

## The Suddenness of 16 August

Nobody suspected the day of 16 August in that year of 1946 as a day to be particularly watched out, certainly not the city elders. The organ of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette* in its issue of 10 August 1946 showed no such awareness or inkling of the particular import of the day. The shadow of the infamous famine of 1943 was still over the city. Besides the usual entries *The Gazette* on that day came out with a supplement on “Grow More Food”. The supplement had short notes on food wastage, food prices, need for balanced diet, the principle and the practices of rationing, role of population growth in causing famine, and an overall assessment of the food situation in Bengal. The editor Amal Home in his note was equally innocent. Bengal had come out of famine and war. Rebuilding Bengal, particularly the food situation in the light of another bad year of agricultural production, appeared to be the task.<sup>1</sup>

There are now some accounts on the Great Calcutta Killings, the numbers put by some chroniclers as between 10,000 and 15,000 and by the government as 4000 dead and 100,000 injured. Some have placed the number of displaced as 200,000.<sup>2</sup> According to the Government, the total loss in the riot was to the tune of one crore rupees.<sup>3</sup> Some of the subsequent discussions on the Great Calcutta Killings or The Week of Long Knives as it was later called have taken note of this lack of awareness of the situation on the ground, a similar lack of any anticipation of the coming bloodbath, and bewilderment all around at the sudden appearance of 16 August as the commencement of a week of mass murders in Kolkata. Various reasons have been put forward as explanations, the most plausible being that the leaders and organisers of the two main parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, were still in the old mode of constitutionalist dialogue and had no clue as to the incredible

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seriousness with which their respective vast armies of followers were taking the claims to independence or *azadi*. It is also said that famine taught various sections of population to treat their claims as life-and-death stakes. There is also ground to believe as some think that nation building in the sub-continent had to pass through its due process of religious wars, which commenced with the Great Calcutta Killings. These new developments were taking place in subterranean manner.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the political and educated class leading the city could not anticipate the coming of the Great Calcutta Killings.

The following questions therefore generally emerged in later political and historical enquiries: If the political and the governing class were caught unaware, how did its administrative machinery face the riots? Later inquiries to a great extent revolved around the question, was the administration really unaware? Why did it not call the military? The Chief Minister had on a number of occasions visited the police headquarters during those calamitous days, therefore what was he doing? What was he briefed with? What measures did he take with the knowledge he gained from his visits? What did the Lt. Governor do? Likewise, the head of the military forces stationed in Calcutta?

This essay begins from this point, where these questions and their answers leave us. It does not discuss per se the Great Calcutta Killings, but the way the police looked at the riot-torn city, apparently unprepared, overwhelmed by events, and therefore shaping its own conduct in the midst of events, as if in the most *natural* way. After all when we have exhausted various cultural, political, and economic explanations the city will still remain a particular configuration of *territory* also. The police attempted to secure the territory inch by inch, by disaggregating it, by policing the parts after bringing them under control, by zoning them, by creating safe havens, corridors, and centres. With looters, rioters, murderers, arsonists, provocateurs, and leaders in a state of frenzy, and the political administration either caught unaware or unwilling to act, what did controlling a riot-torn city mean?<sup>5</sup> How shall we understand the dynamics of police conduct in the riot-torn city of Kolkata?

These two questions relating to police conduct and control of territory were inter-related and were complex for Calcutta, as it was the capital of a province where Muslims represented 56 per cent the population and Hindus 42 per cent, and Muslims were mostly concentrated in the Eastern part. The province was the only one in which a Muslim League government was in power under the provincial autonomy scheme introduced in 1935 in coalition with the Europeans, and against strong opposition from the Congress and a Hindu nationalist party, the Hindu Mahasabha, which was supported by members of the rich Marwari trading community, dominating the economy of central Calcutta, although European capital was still important. Kolkata population comprised 64% Hindu and 33% Muslim. Violence in Calcutta sparked off further religious riots in the surrounding regions of Noakhali, Bihar, and the United Provinces.

At a general level we may ask, if riots in multi-community cities have proved to be an abiding feature of post-colonial Indian democracy, how does the governing class bring or fail to bring a riot-torn city under control? How do territory and population mix? In the background of the controversies around the Gujarat riots of 2002 we do not require much to understand the significance of the broad question.

## **The Traversed History of the Events Preceding the Riot and the Battle for Urban Territory**

To understand the stake of the two questions raised as the end of the previous section, it will be better if we go very quickly through the traversed history of the events preceding the Great Calcutta Killings, and readers will appreciate why I have used the word “natural” with regard to the police

conduct. Suranjan Das in his study on *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905–1947* tells the ways in which rioters through the previous two decades had become part of the urban history, congealing in the process rival population groups. Likewise others have shown how strikes, processions, calls for direct actions, street clashes and encounters had all become parts of urban politics by the time the month of August arrived in 1946. These tools of assembly, mobilisation, and mass demonstration had been refined through application over and over again in the preceding four and half four decades of the century.

One commentator noted, “From the viewpoint of institutional politics, the Calcutta disturbances possessed a distinguishing feature in that they broke out in a transitional period which was marked by the power vacuum and systemic breakdown. It is also important to note that they constituted part of a political struggle in which the Congress and the Muslim League competed with each other for the initiative in establishing the new nation-state(s), while the British made an all-out attempt to carry out decolonization at the lowest possible political cost for them. The political rivalry among the major nationalist parties in Bengal took a form different from that in New Delhi, mainly because of the broad mass base those organizations enjoyed and the tradition of flexible political dealing in which they excelled. At the initial stage of the riots, the Congress and the Muslim League appeared to be confident that they could draw on this tradition even if a difficult situation arose out of political showdown. Most probably, Direct Action Day in Calcutta was planned to be a large-scale *hartal* and mass rally (which is an accepted part of political culture in Calcutta) which they knew very well how to control. However, the response from the masses far exceeded any expectations. The political leaders seriously miscalculated the strong emotional response that the word 'nation', as interpreted under the new situation, had evoked. In August 1946 the 'nation' was no longer a mere political slogan. It was rapidly turning into 'reality' both in realpolitik and in people's imaginations. The system to which Bengal political leaders had grown accustomed for decades could not cope with this dynamic change. As we have seen, it quickly and easily broke down on the first day of the disturbances.<sup>67</sup>”

We are thus faced with a strange paradox. On one hand the evidences suggest that the police was unprepared for what would happen on 16 August that year; yet the more we study the genealogy of the Great Calcutta Killings, the more we are surprised at the lack of awareness of the city administration, elders, and the governing class as a whole, given the fact that all trends and incidents were only waiting for one final moment to come together, mix, and explode. The riot was in that sense a clarifying exercise.

Let us therefore quickly see what had preceded the Direct Action Day and then what happened. The Muslim League and the Indian National Congress were the two largest political parties in the country at that time. The Cabinet Mission to India (1946) to arrange transfer of power from British rule to Indian leadership proposed an initial plan of composition of the new Dominion of India and its government. However this could not address the alternative plan to divide the country into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan as proposed by the Muslim League. The Congress rejected outright the alternative proposal. The Muslim League planned general strike (*hartal*) on 16 August terming it as Direct Action Day to protest this rejection, and to assert its demand for a separate Muslim homeland.

Jinnah decided to boycott the Constituent Assembly and rejected the British plan for transfer of power to an interim government which would combine both the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. He said if the Muslims were not granted Pakistan, he would launch "Direct Action". The Muslim League Council Meeting held during the period 27–29 July 1946 passed

a resolution declaring that the Direct Action Day was intended to unfold direct action for the achievement of Pakistan.<sup>7</sup>

In any case, from February onwards communal tension had been very strong throughout India. Anti-British feeling was, at the same time, being exacerbated by other political forces who were trying to stage confrontations different from the more dominant ones characterised by communal type and emotion. Violence in Calcutta, between 1945 and 1946, had passed by stages from Indian versus European to Hindu versus Muslim. Indian Christians and Europeans were generally free from attacks as the tempo of Hindu-Muslim violence quickened.<sup>8</sup> During the riots of November 1945, casualty of Europeans and Christians were 46; in the riots of the 10–14 February 1946, 35; from 15 February to the 15 August, only 3; during the Calcutta riots from 15 August 1946 to 17 September 1946, none.<sup>9</sup> Following Jinnah's declaration of 16 August as the Direct Action Day, the Muslim League Chief Minister of Bengal, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, requested Governor of Bengal Frederick Burrows to declare 16 August a public holiday with the hope that the risk of conflicts, especially those related to picketing, would be minimized if government offices, commercial houses and shops remained closed throughout Calcutta on that day. Bengal Congress protested against the declaration of public holiday, arguing that a holiday would enable the Leaguers to enforce strike in areas where the Muslim League leadership was uncertain. Also, if a public holiday was observed, its own supporters would have no choice but to close down their offices and shops. Therefore the Congress Party urged the Hindus to keep their shops open and to continue their business as usual and not to submit to the *hartal*.

The *Star of India*, an influential Muslim newspaper, published detailed programme for the day, which called for complete strike in all spheres of civic, commercial and industrial life except essential services, and notified that processions would start from several locations in the city and the adjoining areas in Howrah, Hooghly, Metiaburz, and 24 Parganas, and would converge at the foot of the Ochterlony Monument (now Shaheed Minar) where a joint mass rally presided over by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy would be held. Against this, Hindu public opinion was mobilised around the *Aekband Hindusthan (United India)* slogan. Also we have remember that following protests against the British after the INA trials, the British administration decided to give more importance to protests against the government, rather than management of communal violence.

The reality is that troubles started on the morning of 16 August before the assembly had taken place. Lalbazar (the city police headquarters) had reported that there was excitement throughout the city, shops were being forced to close, and that there were reports of brawls, stabbing, and throwing of stones and brickbats. These events were taking place in the North-central parts of the city, such as Rajabazar, Kalabagan, College Street, Harrison Road, Colootolla, Burrabazar, and Entally. The League's rally began at the Ochterlony Monument at 12 o'clock exactly. The gathering was considered as the largest ever Muslim assembly in Bengal at that time. A large number of the participants arrived armed with iron bars and *lathis*. The Chief Minister apparently had seen to police arrangements that the latter would not interfere. However, there is no record of instructing the police to hold back. But his speech may have meant an open invitation to disorder. In fact many participants at the rally started attacking Hindus and looting Hindu shops as soon as they left the meeting. There were also reports of lorries coming down the Harrison Road in central Calcutta, carrying Muslim men armed with brickbats and bottles as weapons and attacking Hindu-owned shops. On 16 August in one incident in Bichalighat 77 Muslims and 59 Hindus were murdered in the first big incident of communal clash. On 17 August more than 400 (according to other reports 500-600) Oriya workers of Kesoram Cotton Mills were massacred in the slums of



Lichubagan, Metiaburz.<sup>10</sup> In another incident 48 people were butchered on the riverside and their dead bodies lay there for next few days.<sup>11</sup>

Hindus and Sikhs became as fierce as the Muslims. Parties of one community lay in wait, and as soon as they caught a member of the other community, they would cut him to pieces. Hindus now attacked the Muslims, and if any Muslim was found in house, road or shop, or even educational institution, he was immediately pulled out, and cut into pieces. The figures of Muslim casualties were heavier as Hindu retaliation took pace, and Muslims started leaving the city. Skirmishes and clashes between the communities continued for almost a week. Finally, on 21 August, Bengal was put under Viceroy's rule. Battalions of British troops, supported by battalions of Indians and Gorkhas, were deployed in the city. The rioting reduced on 22 August. In these six days thousands died in brutal conditions. Methods of murder varied from stabbing, piercing, torching, bludgeoning, severing limbs, cutting, disembowelling, to gagging, gassing, and throwing half dead bodies in water, and pushing the bodies into waste pipes and drains choking the latter. *Bustees*, already with infamous names such as Nakashipara, Karamtolli, Sahebbagan, became the most gruesome sites of murder. Both economic and commercial interests played their due parts as in Metiaburz killings. Also in these six days, property of un-estimated value was looted with the police at times taking part. Population groups were exchanged from one area to another in a vicious cleansing of the rival religious group. Vast stretches of open space including the *Maidan* were turned into shelter camps by the Government.<sup>12</sup>

The Chief Minister Suhrawardy claimed that he had put forth a great deal of effort to bring reluctant British officials around to calling the army in from Sealdah Rest Camp. Unfortunately, British officials did not send the army out until 1.45 am on the 17th. There was criticism of Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister who was also in charge of the Home Portfolio, for his bias and allowing the riots to take place, and of the British Governor of Bengal, Frederick Burrows, for not having taken control of the situation. The Chief Minister spent a great deal of time in the Control Room in the Police Headquarters at Lalbazar. We do not know if the city gained from his presence there or its condition aggravated.

Even the military did not have any good word for Suhrawardy. According to one army report, "There is hardly a person in Calcutta who has a good word for Suhrawardy, respectable Muslims included. For years he has been known as 'The king of the goondas' and my own private opinion is that he fully anticipated what was going to happen, and allowed it to work itself up, and probably organized the disturbance with his goonda gangs as this type of individual has to receive compensation every now and again. It is difficult to estimate the number of casualties but I should say it is somewhere in the region of 2 to 3 thousand at least. There were corpses all over North Calcutta, they were in the river, canals, side lanes, in fact, everywhere. The number of shops looted and burnt must be somewhere in the region of 2 to 3 thousand. I personally think that the killings of both sides were fifty-fifty, or if anything, more Muslims than Hindus, but damage financially have been much greater to the Hindus than to the Muslims."<sup>13</sup> Yet the same report is more significant in terms of the battle for inches of territory in the city ensued. The report continued,

The Hindus started putting up barricades at Tala Bridge and Belgachia Bridge and other places to prevent Muslims processions coming into the town and Muslims goondas went round forcing Hindus to close their shops. As previously mentioned in my D.O. of the 15th the air was electric and this caused crowds to gather, lathis were produced and in no time North Calcutta was a scene of mob riot. By 1100 hours there were brick bat fights all over North Calcutta...

By late in the afternoon the situation changed and the persons involved on both sides were gwallahs, rickshaw pullers, teashop wallahs, pan berri wallahs, cart pullers, cart men, goondas of the worst type. Soon after midnight on the 16/17th these gangs fought out the most desperate battles, murder and butchery of a worst type were carried on in the side lanes and byways of North Calcutta. Round

Vivekananda Road/ Central Ave., crossing about 50 Hindu Behari rickshaw pullers were caught in a cul-de-sac and butchered. Further up Central Ave., round the temple which stands in the middle, a party of some 30 Mohamedans was killed. It was during the period midnight 16/17th and 0700 hours on the 17th that most of the casualties occurred. All the roads in the affected areas were red with bricks.

Our patrols were out, but due to the tremendous fights that were going on, it was impossible for us to force our way into the areas in which the main killings were taking place.

The police opened fire in Harrison Road at about 1100 hours on 16 Aug 1946, 2 rounds of buck shot and Barnes and Smith emptied their pistols into the crowd. The crowd dispersed, formed up in Bow Bazaar St and a fight started between the Hindus in Bow Bazaar St. and the Muslims coming up from Lower Circular Rd. I was there at the time and the police finally dispersed the crowd with tear gas. By 1200 hours there were fights in every street and alley from Sealdah to Shambazar. Eastern Command Intelligence Centre jeeps dispersed some of these crowds and stopped the fights without firing, but as soon as we had gone the fights started again. By 1400 hours on the 16th Government were considering calling out troops but the police had only fired the above mentioned number of rounds...

From the time the riots started every little blacksmith was working like mad in his house manufacturing spears, rods and knives. The iron rods used in reinforced concrete building works were all stolen and sharpened at both ends, and the butchery that these crude weapons did has to be seen to be believed. Men, women and children were slaughtered by both sides indiscriminately and when Mullick Bazar was burnt three Hindu children were thrown into the flames.

The result of this riot has been complete mistrust between the two communities... Though the city is quiet now there are still stabbing cases and both sides are very frightened. The trams are running today (22nd)... We have cleaned up practically all the corpses, D.D.T. has been sprayed and everything possible has been done...<sup>14</sup>

Almost all reminiscences of the killings conjure up two images: the murders of the innocents with their dead bodies lying around for days, and second, the battle for the territory. And it was by murder that the wresting, possession, and control of the territory was to be guaranteed. The connection is important and is brought out vividly in some the reminiscences.

For example Mother Teresa, then a teacher in a city school remembered, "We were not supposed to go out into the streets, but I went anyway. Then I saw the bodies on the streets, stabbed, beaten, lying there in strange positions in their dried blood. We had been behind our safe walls. We knew that there had been rioting. People had been jumping over our walls, first a Hindu, then a Muslim. You see, our compound was between Moti Jhil, which was mainly Muslim then, and Tangra with the potteries and tanneries. That was Hindu. We took in each one and helped him to escape safely. When I went out in the streets -- only then I saw the death that was following them."<sup>15</sup>

One cannot recall murder in a riot without the invocation of territory. Thus, an eye witness account of a travel writer passing through the city at that time had this to say, "Nanda Lal's little 'East Bengal Cabin', at 36 Harrison Road, was located in one of those potential trouble spots where a by-lane of Muslim shops crossed the Hindu-dominated thoroughfare... The Hindu clerks of the Minerva Banking Corporation opposite to the Cabin were frequent customers, as were the boarders in the 'Happy Home Boarding House' near-by. Although Nanda Lal was in the protective shadow of these impressive Hindu establishments, the Muslim quarter began just round the corner in Mirzapore Street, too close for security. On the morning of August 16, Nanda Lal started his oven and set out his tray of sweetmeats as usual. When his little son came out with the jars of mango pickle and chutney, he commented to the child that the streets looked reassuringly quiet. The sacred cows that roam freely through the thoroughfares of Calcutta were sleeping as usual in the middle of the car tracks, and rose to their feet reluctantly, as they always did, when the first tramcar of the day clanged

down Harrison Road. Then things began happening so quickly that Nanda Lal could hardly recall them in sequence. But he did remember quite clearly the seven lorries that came thundering down Harrison Road, Men armed with brickbats and bottles began leaping out of the lorries—'Muslim 'goondas', or gangsters, Nanda Lal decided, since they immediately fell to tearing up Hindu shops. Some rushed into the furniture store next to the 'Happy Home' and began tossing mattresses and furniture into the street. Others ran toward the 'Bengal Cabin', but Nanda Lal was fastening up the blinds by now, shouting to his son to run back into the house, straining to bar the windows and close the door. In the breathing spell offered by this successful move, two of his wife's uncles ran down and helped Nanda Lal build a barricade at the foot of the stairs which would jam shut the door leading to their flat. Whatever benches and tables they could lay their hands on they piled against the door and at the foot of the stairs. Nanda Lal snatched three bicycles from the vestibule and jammed them in amidst the furniture. Then they all ran up to the top floor of the flat, where the women of the house were huddled in the upper floor. Nanda Lal peeped cautiously out of a window. Never had he seen the streets so filled with clawing, surging mobs. In front of the Happy Home, some broken rickshaws had been added to the heap of mattresses, and flames were rising from the pile. When the wind shifted the smoke, Nanda Lal could glimpse figures on the bank steps shaking up pop bottles and hurling them into the crowds'—the bottles bursting like hand grenades when they landed. Flames were racing through the dress goods swinging from racks in front of the 'Goddess of Plenty' dress shop and through the crowded living quarters behind the rows of shops. Nanda Lal suspected that much of this was the organized work of goondas. In India 'goondaism' is a profession; goondas abound in a port city such as Calcutta, where they do a brisk trade in smuggling but may also be hired for strike-breaking or religious outbreak.”<sup>16</sup>

The imagery is one of full scale warfare, trenches, barricades, advanced detachment, resistance etc, and every inch to be guarded or wrested. The goondas are like the foot soldiers of an army – trained in skirmishes and trench warfare exactly as the foot soldiers are. Probably with this imagery in mind, Claude Markovits commented in his study, “It was actually a fight over who was to be master of Calcutta. By organizing huge demonstrations, occupying the *Maidan*, and using whatever State power it had at its disposal, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was trying to stake its claim to Calcutta as the capital of a Muslim Bengal, which would be part of Pakistan, whose shape was still hazy at the time. A massacre was probably not the League’s goal (although one pamphlet circulating amongst Muslims warned of a “general massacre” of *Kafirs*, infidels, i.e. Hindus), but the League’s supporters did not shrink from using violence on a significant scale to advance their objectives... As for the “Hindu” political parties, both Congress and the *Mahasabha* were bent on making a counter-demonstration of their superior muscle power. Therefore, they were not adverse to large-scale killings to decisively defeat the Muslim League’s attempts to impose its dominance. The massacre was the result of the clash of two wills, between which no compromise was possible.”<sup>17</sup>

He further wrote, “Given the tendency of the population in urban areas to congregate in neighbourhoods dominated by one community, most Muslims lived in areas of Northern Calcutta, while Central and Southern Calcutta were almost exclusively Hindu (with a sprinkling of Europeans). Another characteristic of Calcutta’s Muslim population was that it was largely composed of poor people, mostly artisans, factory workers, rickshaw pullers and domestic servants. The Muslim middle class in Calcutta was small, in contrast to the much larger Hindu middle class. Big Muslim merchants and capitalists were few, and could not compete with the rich Marwari Hindus. Although Muslims were clearly a minority in Calcutta and occupied a peripheral position in the economic, social and cultural life of the city, the capital was the only large city in the province, and therefore occupied a privileged position in all provincial politics, whether Muslim or Hindu. Suhrawardy had a particularly

large following amongst the poor Muslims of the city, and was also rumoured to have close links to the Muslim underworld, which played a significant role in the parallel economy, based on smuggling, gambling, and prostitution, which flourished in the great port-city.”<sup>18</sup>

North Indian Hindus (in many cases Dalits) and Punjabis displayed special vengeance on East Bengali Muslim workers in the city, targeting in particular the Shalimar Marine Workshop employing the marines of Noakhali and the East Bengal Muslim *kehalasis* in another side of the Ferry Yard, B.N. railway. On the other hand the Bengal Muslim National Guard wiped off *bustees* in Kidderpore Metaburz area, killing minimum 400 Hindu workers of Orissa working at the Kesoram Mills.<sup>19</sup> Dead bodies lay unattended for days, some bodies clogged pipes and drains, and one account says, “We had gone about wearing iodine masks for three days and nights and picked up from the street 5869 dead bodies, whole and mutilated, and disposed of them through mass burials and cremations”<sup>20</sup> though others reported of disposals in more unsavoury ways.

Suranjan Das has described the participation of common people in riots as mass communalism distinct from elite communalism and has referred to open street battles between large crowds, also the sporadic acts by small roving bands. The latter often targeted passers-by and their acts had a random character which contributed to giving the impression that things had gotten completely out of hand, while in fact part of the killings appeared to have taken place in large-scale confrontations between organized crowds. Joya Chatterji’s central argument has been that the determined and successful attempt by the Hindu elite, opposed to the rule of the Muslim majority, to take physical control of the city if necessary through violent confrontations led to the 1946 riots. She therefore emphasizes the roles of various Hindu organized groups, linked to the Congress Party and the Hindu *Mahasabha*. Toker reports on the intensity of street violence.<sup>21</sup>

This is not the occasion to discuss these different interpretations. What seems in fact lurking behind various analyses and reports is the unmistakable presence of the city as a configuration of territory of a particular type – *territory as the kernel of the city*; and therefore the willingness of both the armies to go to the final extent to change the face of the city forever in their respective favour.

Our chronicle of policing a riot-torn city begins in this background. The chronicle is based mainly on the eleven volumes of proceedings of the *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* (hereafter *CDCE*) and where necessary backing it up by other sources.<sup>22</sup>

### **Political Logic, Legal Logic, Police Logic**

These eleven volumes of course decide nothing as to who caused the riot? Who were responsible for the aggravation of the situation? How should one determine the respective shares of responsibility of the political, administrative, police, military, and colonial apparatus of the state? Counsels argued, intelligent questions were raised, lead answers secured, different biases exposed, and self-explanations were offered to the Commission by different agencies. Yet the binds and closures on the path of every possible line of enquiry ruthlessly demonstrated themselves. One may ask, why was then the Commission organised? Was it to bring out the truth, and if so what was the truth?

It was not the truth of responsibility or the truth of crime and punishment, but the truth of clarification of the post-riot situation *on the ground*, making clear to all parties after this round of religious war as to who stood where, the respective grounds of possession, conditions of the combatants and armies, and the positions the warring forces occupied while the latter were engaged in the race for legitimacy. Even the ways in which the counsels wrangled over the framing of the procedures to guide the functioning of the Commission indicated its nature as a clarifying exercise.<sup>23</sup> Finally when Independence was declared and approached, the Commission decided to wind itself up

without giving any report, saying that time had changed, and further inquiry would serve no purpose (XI: 244-245),<sup>24</sup> it was clear that the Commission was an exercise in armistice. It was a mode of declaring truce till the final positions were announced.

Almost from the beginning of the exercise the minutes of evidence recognised that they were dealing with a war situation, not a simple event of communal violence. After all we have to remember that the call for mobilisation given in 1946 by Abul Hashim, Secretary, Bengal Provincial Muslim League (month not mentioned in the print), was titled “Let Us Go to War”. In that call he termed the coming electoral battle between the Congress and Muslim League as an impending war in the context of Hindu-Muslim conflict and the denial of the Muslims of India of their right to Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha election call spoke of resistance to the last to what it saw the Muslim League designs in the name of self-determination.<sup>25</sup> So questions like what the Intelligence Branch would know or deduce from what kind of evidence or what the word *jehad* meant under what circumstances, how much the military could depend on civilian intelligence inputs, etc., only formally aimed at securing information on particular relevant points. But in actuality these questions had the function of ascertaining positions occupied by the respective forces. For instance, B.C. Ghose, the principal counsel for the Congress (and the Hindus) asked Brigadier Binny, called as witness and appearing on behalf of the military, “Supposing on certain days a large number of people were coming to Calcutta, would your Intelligence Branch know it?” And, “If this large number of people belongs to a certain particular community, would your Intelligence Branch be suspicious?” Brigadier Binny replied, “I do not understand what you mean by ‘suspicious’”. Ghose pressed on the point saying that Kolkata had *bustees*, Hindu areas and Muslim areas, mixed localities, and used phrases like borders, no man’s land, and “low wall with barbed wire to prevent homeless people sleeping in the shrubberies” (CDCE, II: 2-4). With these phrases Ghose began reconstructing the geopolitics of the city riot – a theme that runs through the entire exercise. Thus we find Kolkata designated by North Calcutta, South Calcutta, *bustees*, aristocratic Muslim areas, Hindu *bustees*, Muslim *bustees*, and localities on the edge of clearly designated areas such as Metiaburz, Kalabagan, and Rajabazar. Ghose was not content with reconstructing the geopolitics of riot in the city in this way; he also wanted to clarify the slogans of war and the battle cries. Thus he asked Brigadier Binny of the meaning of the word *jihad*, and the question came up, is fasting not also a *jihad* (CDCE, II: 48)? What sense was the military making of the rising tension in the city in the months preceding the riots?

In his reply the innocent Brigadier reported of “the INA Hindu volunteers parading different parts of the town just before 16 August with slogans of *Jai Hind* and so on and bravadoing that on the INA day the youth would not be cowed down by police and they would not be cowed down by lathis.” (CDCE, II: 53) On 24 July 1946 students demanded release of prisoners, there were “communists and socialists” in the crowd. Mr. Yunus, the counsel for the Muslim League, then drew the unflappable Binny into committing himself in evaluating the situation, which Binny was trying to avoid. Yunus asked, “Was it serious from the point of view of loss of lives?” Binny’s reply, “I am not aware that it was serious”. “Nor if the next day you found in that particular area or pocket 70 dead bodies, would you consider that serious?” (CDCE, II: 47, q 731). These were all Muslim dead bodies near Jadu Babur Bazar – roughly from where South Calcutta begins. In his defence of the calm and unconcerned attitude of the army, the Brigadier referred to the INA warmongering and said that therefore in that perspective they were not particularly worried on the eve of 16 August. Then he painted a picture of the “natural” warmongering attitude of the Indians with this observation, “I have often read many statements of acting peacefully in India and they definitely lead to me believe that the interpretation put by Indians was not always the same as the British do.” (CDCE, II: 37; q 59 b)

The same idea was expressed by Lt. General F.P.R. Bucher (Eastern Command), when he said that “tensions were brewing in the city from the month of February, though essential services were going”, and that they could intervene only when the civilian authority requested it, and that it could happen only “according to well established procedures” (CDCE, III: 3-7). But in any case, communal conflict was not so much a cause of worry. To the question, “May I request you to tell me for the purpose of my information, what would require a large number of forces: to quell a communal riot or a riot against law and order?” But the General was not to be trapped. He answered, “If you have wide scale rioting against law and order as you had in February all over Calcutta, in my opinion that would require a greater force than merely the suppression of communal riots”(CDCE, III: 7, q 87). In the replies by the senior army officials INA was the big spectre hovering over the city. INA people have arrived in the city (CDCE, III: 14-15). While many INA prisoners were released, Rashid Ali was not; hence there was tension. Jinnah had denounced this discriminatory treatment and Suhrawardy led a procession demanding his release. Mr. Yunus then pressed the City Police Commissioner Donald Ross Hardwick to respond to the suggestion that “only 7 temples were attacked as against 52 mosques” and “17 dead bodies were recovered from a mosque in Baubazar near B.C. Roy’s house”. To both inquiries, Hardwick’s answer was, “I do not remember the exact number” and “I cannot say without looking into the files” (CDCE, III: q 2355).<sup>26</sup> They even did not know the details of the Chief Minister’s movements on 16-18 August (reply by Walker, CDCE, III: q 1414). They had only heard cries of *larke lenge Pakistan*.

The colonial government is thus strictly neutral in this war.<sup>27</sup> It will step in after the battle lines have become clear with this round of war over and the results have been clarified. It is the superior power.

At the same time the questions put by the counsels point to a greater underlying reason as to why the superior authority had decided not to intervene. While Suhrawardy had requested the army to help the civilian authority to control the spreading riot and bring back law and order, the army let it play on the supposed weakness of Suhrawardy, namely that his request was not clear and that therefore the army decided not to be proactive in controlling the city. Let the Chief Minister take the blame. The army’s logic was that it did not know if the police force and resources were sufficient in that extremely volatile situation, hence it did not become proactive. The President of the Commission asked Brigadier Mackinley, “I quite appreciate... that the military have always taken up the attitude that they must not be called in unnecessarily and improperly. But when you have got trouble of this size and the police have been operating under the control of either you or Brigadier Sixsmith, I can understand it will be within the power and knowledge of the commanding officer to say when the military ought to come in. But how can a military officer who is not in control of the police operations know whether or not the demand is justified? ...It seems to me, rightly or wrongly the military had taken on themselves the responsibility of saying, ‘Shall we come in, or shall we not? We will come in if only police resources have been used up and we are satisfied that they had been used up.’... The only question, we ask you, is, how can you, not having been in charge of the police operations, really know whether or not the resources of the police had been used up, exhausted...?” (CDCE, IV: 35, q. 371-373). Mackinley’s reply was that he was concerned with the safety of the soldier...”safeguard the soldier who has got only a rifle and no means of using a lesser weapon...” (CDCE, IV: 35, a. 371). To the point then as to what about the protection and safety of the innocent people being killed, the question was, who would responsibly “make the request of asking the force which can only restore order by taking life”( CDCE, IV: 35, q. 372). The hesitation of the commanding officers of the army and the Chief Secretary to explicitly ask the soldiers to become proactive revealed itself under repeated interrogation.

Brigadier Six smith confirmed Counsel Mitter's observation about the possibility of "Hindus and Muslims coming together against the British", and said... "Police efforts were exhausted and there were cases of police firing". Mitter then asked directly, "Could the riots turn anti-government?" The reply was, "It might have been". Mitter pressed, "Therefore you are suggesting that if the military had been called in earlier, the populace could have turned against the government". Six smith replied, "We know the situation on the 16<sup>th</sup> that might have developed into anti-government riots." P. Norton Zones, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, also deposed that that though Hindus and Muslims had not explicitly come together, "not as such", but (there were)" looting, burning of vehicles" (CDCE, IV: 252, q. 210-216, 386).

But asked about specific cases of burning and looting, he said, in Teretta Bazar-Lal Bazar area (where he was on duty), 200-300 yards from scenes of reported trouble, there was "no sound of riot, gunshot, killing, or cry, *Larke lenge Pakistan.*" (CDCE, IV: q. 573)

There were numerous such statements suggesting the blurred scenario. It was reminiscent of post First World War Germany when fascist and revolutionary mobilisations in Berlin were taking place simultaneously, and the government never actively intervened lest it should add fuel to the general unrest and help the revolutionary mobilisations. Counsel S.A. Masud had asked P. Norton Zones significantly, "Do you remember that a political demonstration took place in November 1945 in connection with the INA soldiers? Was any high official injured?" Norton Jones replied, "An SI (Sub-inspector) and a Deputy Commissioner were injured" (CDCE, V: 5). It was clear that the memory of the lawlessness of November 1945 was still there when the city again became lawless. Crowds had learnt the technique of confronting the police. Mitter had asked Mackinley, "Now, when did you first realise that the crowds would disperse at the sight of the police or the military and reassemble as soon as they passed?" Mackinley said, "It was on the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup> or the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>" (CDCE, IV: 26, q. 254). Police Stations such as Bhowanipore were defenceless. The police hesitated to open fire. The attackers were fast and mobile. Goondas were in the crowds. Pakistan was written on the signboards of several shops. Police reinforcements in the form of supply of men, provisions, and vehicles, and related logistical arrangements had to face as their adversary the mobility of the crowd. Therefore for the police the routes of patrol became important. Also the police was aware of a directive introduced in the Kolkata riot of 1926 that it could open fire if it found shops being looted by an aggressive crowd.<sup>28</sup> However, as S.N. Mukherji, the Deputy Commissioner of the Enforcement Department, said that the Chief Minister "did not agree with me and he told me that I could open fire at my own risk" (CDCE, V: 138, q. 166-170).

The deponents of the police and the military and the counsels who doubled up as investigators together tell us through their interlocution the ways a riot enacts as a war. And thus, how the city becomes a battlefield, how respective zones and trenches are marked, how the technique of properly placing barricades is deployed, armed confrontations take place, how other techniques of urban warfare are improvised and polished, and how like any other war, the urban riot has antecedents. However what is noticeable is that these antecedents in time become so naturalised, that we refuse to take note of them as portents of extra-ordinary violence. Indeed, as the depositions show, the military, the police, the urban political class, the municipal elders – all were surprised at the extent of the violence in the city. We are all overtaken by the event. The event now guides history. Nobody willed it, yet everyone became a party. Exactly as in a war, it is the nature of war that determines even neutrality, its nature, quality, and extent. The police was not determining the course of riot; the riot was determining the course of police conduct. The riot demonstrated the materiality of politics. It showed the police how the crowd was taking a leaf out of history, how the police logic of setting up urban territorial divisions in form of police stations and zones under the responsibility

of respective deputy commissioners ran counter to the logic of territorial divisions in form of religions-communal configurations and more importantly and more significantly, how in that all round volatile situation no-man's lands were forming and emerging as dangerous killing zones - the most difficult terrain for the police. The geopolitical logic of riot and the administrative logic of policing ran against each other. The logistical difficulties of controlling the city began from this dissonance.

For instance, did the police know, "What could be the various places, Mohammedan localities, from where Mohammedans wanting to come to Calcutta would come from?" Which were these suburbs? Did it not strike the police "that these people had come out very early in order to make their *hartal* a success?" "Can you give the names of these places? Mohammedans coming from these places would be passing through the Shyambazar turnpike?" (CDCE, V: 143, q. 243-245)

In this continuous remaking of the geopolitical configurations of the city the actors (police, rioters, government, and the crowd) were always connected in their emergence and respective roles. Both in Nonapukur tram depot and near the Beliaghata police station the police reported the deadly combination of logistics and space marked by force, congregation, assembly, select application of violence, and mobile groups of trucks carrying the attackers. We have to listen to the deposition of P.K. Chatterji, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, North Town, when asked by counsel Bashiruddin, "Will you kindly look into this Buratolla police station diary – entry 1686? It speaks of two crowds of Hindus and Muslims. (It says) 'Hindus are aggressive. Have you got it?'" The Assistant Commissioner said, "Yes", and continued, "On my arrival with the armed party of the policemen of the police station at the junction of the Beadon Street and Upper Circular Road I found a very big crowd of Hindus of Beadon Street and another crowd of almost similar dimension of Muslims at the east end of the Beadon Street. Both parties were hurling brickbats. We brought the situation under control. Sometime after, trouble started again at the junction of the Karbala Tank Lane and Upper Circular Road between a party of Hindus and another party of Muslims. We brought the Muslim party under control and made them fall back but the Hindu mob came forward along Karbala Tank Lane and started to brickbat the retreating Muslims and the police party. One of the brickbats hurled by the Hindus hit me on the left leg. With difficulty this party was also brought under control. Sometime after a big crowd of Hindus advanced along Circular Road from the North from near the Sahitya Parishad Street and attacked a Muslim crowd near the Karbala Tank Lane..." (CDCE, V: 293, q. 1168-1169). The police deponents had constant difficulty in marking out for the benefit of the Commission Hindu areas and Muslim areas of the city. What would be the basis of such demarcation? The religion of the inhabitants, the density of the mob, the virulence of the clash, the number of houses, the recording or reporting by the police – how would they make the Commission understand the complexity of the police task at hand? There was no census in 1941; the core riot-affected area of the city (north, central, and the northern fringe of the south) that we are discussing could not be more than two hundred square kilometres in size with an unthinkable density of population and closely situated Muslim and Hindus quarters jostling shoulder to shoulder – contiguity and no break, Muslim and Hindu eateries, *kbataks* (cowsheds), temples, mosques, places of congregation, local clubs, small lanes, bazaars, small parks and tanks, schools, colleges, mansions, printing presses, other small manufacturing units, mercantile offices, shops, *bustees*, and houses, and in this situation how were the police forces going to zone-mark the city?

Therefore throughout these eleven volumes we find the police officers in their depositions trying desperately to classify the areas in sections, in this case the North Town, in this way: (Section A) "Hatibagan, predominantly Hindu area except some pockets of Muslims in little of Bagbazar, a little of Mohanbagan – just pockets"; then (Section B) "Beniatola – a little of Upper Chitpore Road,



Muslim area, I mean Muslim shops, mainly a Hindu area”; then (Section C) “Duliapara Lane and Ram Chandra Ghosh lane – a Muslim pocket, Muslim traders in cows, some milkmen – otherwise a predominantly Hindu area”; then (Section D) “Burrabazar Police Station predominantly Hindu area with Muslim pockets, like Amratollah, Lower Chitpore Road”; then finally (Section E), “from Mechuabazar right upto Colootolla Street it is predominantly a Muslim area. Machuabazar Street starts from College Street. This is one end; that is on the east. On the west it meets Lower Chitpore Road. From Mechuabazar Street right up to Colootolla Street it is predominantly a Muslim area. Excepting a few houses in Tara chand Dutta Street and just a few houses in Zakaria Street, it is a predominantly a Muslim area. And if you take the other side of the Central Avenue, from Mechuabazar crossing up to College Street, again the portion south of Mechuabazar Street is predominantly a Muslim area. A little to the north of Marcus Square, there is a big Muslim area”, and finally (Section F), “The area between Keshab Sen Street and Mechuabazar is a purely Muslim area with pockets of Hindus” (CDCE, V: 318-319, q. 1168-1169). The deponents do not mention *bustees*. We have to imagine the Commission meeting in a room with learned members trying to understand the huge map of the city hung before them and the police trying to mark out “sensitive areas”, “delicate situations”, “borders”, “boundaries”, “roads”, “lanes”, “meeting zones”, and explaining the “protocol of receiving a person under attack” in that grave situation, and the need for “sufficient force to rescue a person or not rescue because otherwise the *thana* would be at risk”. (CDCE, VI: 124-125).

Yet these details were not enough. Was Mechuabazar Street predominantly Muslim? Sir Syed Saleh Lane? “Prabhat Cinema”, which the police deponent thought “had Hindu houses, but I think there will be Muslim houses there”. Is “Phulbagan *bustee* a Muslim area”? “There are Mohammedan houses as well as Hindu houses there”. Then what about the area near Marcus Square? When the deponent again tried to follow the same track, the President of the Commission cried out in exasperation, “Muslims are everywhere but I want you to apply your mind to the question, when I give you a particular area, please tell whether it is predominantly Hindu or Mohammedan?” So, to a counsel’s observation, “also that part between Mitra Lane and Marcus Square is entirely Mohammedan”, the deponent insisted, “No, there is a lot of Hindu houses also”. (CDCE, XII: 117, q. 47-61)

Marking is thus a dangerous exercise. You have to do it well, otherwise lives will be at danger; in fact your life will be at stake. The police task of protecting and controlling will depend how the administration has marked the territory of the city.

Today when we look at the city, same areas but not quite the same, the same quarters of populations but not quite the same any more, we can hardly feel the battle cries, the groans, death calls and cries, the bustle of the “khatala stored with guns” (CDCE, VII: 79), the sound of the trucks and lorries hurling down the roads brandishing swords and lathis, besieged places of worship full with mortified people taken shelter there, dead bodies lying around, and the whispers of fear coming out of the fortified houses – many now gone under the bulldozers of the developers and many inhabitants of the town leaving the city forever. This is also a city’s past. The police depositions bring out under the simplest of pressure the cracks in the city edifice, which remain still today, of course in other forms, buried tentatively under the bourgeois culture of citizenship, waiting to bare themselves out at suitable opportunities.

Politics can perfectly make sense of these moments of contest, contention, attrition, and climactic violence. But has law ever been able to make any sense of crime and responsibility of these what Max-Jean Zins following Foucault calls, the “citizen-massacres”?<sup>29</sup> More importantly, do the

differences between the three forms of logic – political logic, police logic, and the legal logic – hold any relevance to such situation?

Consider in this respect the following exchange in the Commission between the judicial investigator and a police official: Counsel M.N. Ghose asks Rahimuddin Ahmed, a Sub-Inspector (SI) of the Burrabazar Police Station on 14 February 1947, “There was a fire at 3 Amratolla Lane. Have you ever been to 3 Amratolla Lane before?” Rahimuddin Ahmed replies, “I had been to that place; I have gone on many occasions to Amratolla Street”. Ghose, “Do you know the place the Amratolla Lane?” The SI replies, “Yes I know the Street”. Ghose, “Have you ever been to 3 Amratolla Lane?” Rahimuddin Ahmed, “I had no previous occasion to go there.” “So, you did not know of any happenings in No 3 Amratolla Lane during the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>?” The SI says, “No, my Lord”. The Commission did not proceed beyond this simple exchange. We do not know if there was any fire at all, or there was fire but the SI did not know, or if the entry was wrong, and it should have been Amratolla Street, or that there was fire in the Lane, but after bungling the answer the SI did not want to revise his statement. The line in the police station diary is left hanging there (*CDCE*, VII: 5). The police deponents time and again confided apprehensions about their own safety and their state of confusion as to whether they should have been pro-active in taking the innocent people in the *thana* and saving them from marauding attackers.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps religious affiliations played a part in deciding. Or, take this sequence of questions: Fazl Ali, a member of the Commission seeks confirmation from S. Ahmed, the Officer in Charge of the Jorabagan Police Station, “The enlisted information about attack on this hostel was sent as early as 10.10 am. The information was sent to Amherst Street and from there it was passed on to the Control Room...” The counsel of the Congress Jyoti Mitter butts in, “The first information to reach any police station was at 10 am. That was Jorasanko. I am reading from the report, “At 10 am ...” (*CDCE*, VII: 198, q. 685). Again we can surmise an array of questions here. The volumes are replete with such unsolved questions, on which apparently the cause of justice depended.

The legal logic moving around the issue of responsibility therefore much of the time built around questions like, was the police prepared for the eventuality? Had it got sufficient information beforehand and exactly when, with how much time to prepare? And then did it act accordingly? Or, did it not get information at all? If this was a dominating concern behind the questions put by the Commission to the police personnel, we do not know if the depositions satisfied them. Consider this phase of exchange of questions to a police functionary D.N. Mullick and his replies:

(Q) Now, in the past when *bartals* were announced or declared by the Communist Party, was there much trouble there? / No, not much. (Q) Perhaps you will agree with me that the Muslims and the Hindus thought of just co-operating with the *bartal*? / Yes. (Q) You belong to a middle class Hindu family. You have friends and relation among Hindus. Now tell me whether the Hindus were very much agitated prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> - say on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> over Direct Action Day of the Muslims. / I do not know. (Q) Do you read the papers? / Yes... (Q) You must have read the speeches in the Assembly and you must have read the speeches of the various speakers in the meetings that took places? / Yes. (Q) And now, perhaps you remember that the Hindus were very much agitated over this Direct Action Day? / I cannot say they were agitated. (Q) Then what was their attitude when the Government announced Direct Action Day as a holiday? / Of course, the Hindus did not like it. (Q) Did any of the local Hindus come to you and express anxiety as to what was going to happen? / No, my Lord. (Q) Are you aware of the fact that the Hindus of your locality were determined to see that the Muslim League Direct Action Day would not prove a success? / I do not know any such thing. (Q) You never heard of it? / No. (Q) Do you know the Lakhi Jute Mills? / Yes. (Q) It is on Belliaghata Road? / Yes. (Q) Whom is it owned by? / Some Marwari gentleman... (Q) Now, on the 15<sup>th</sup> you got a message from D.C., North's office to this effect that the procession of Tangra and Entally should collect near Entally Market and pass through Circular Road and

Dharmtolla Street, you remember that? / Yes. (Q) Now, this very important information you got on the 15<sup>th</sup>? / Yes. (Q) Did you take any action on the basis of this information? Did you post any picket in the Entally Market? / No picket was posted. (Q) It is because you had not enough force or you did not consider it necessary? / The order was not like that. (Q) I suppose you thought the Emergency Scheme did not permit that?/According to the Emergency Scheme I had to mobilize the whole force in the *thana* and plain clothes men were sent out (CDCE, X: 95).

On this and several similar unresolved questions we have to remember the crucial element was the relation between the police and the mob, the crowd, the mass. Law barely had a role to play here. Therefore almost voluntarily the police officials were giving information about how crowds formed on the streets, how they mobilised, how they faced the machinery of law and order, and how they dispersed. The foot soldiers of politics - the *bustee* dwellers, the denizens of the *kehatahs*, the volunteers of the parties, the fanatic followers of cults and beliefs – all had learnt through the past two decades how to mobilise and enforce the *hartals* and strikes. Contemporary observers in their writings confirm the police version of the elements present in the composition of the crowds, such as the scavengers, milkmen, potters, *doms* who work in the burning ghats and the crematoria, artisans in goldsmiths' shops, petty shopkeepers, artisans dealing with scrap metals (called the *kalwars*), *dosads*, *julahas*, etc.<sup>31</sup> The police logic was if the city had passed on to the hands of the crowd, which meant that normal governance had failed disastrously, what could the police machinery do? Police task makes sense in normal times, but in cataclysmic time like this, the police could treat the events as facing crowds only. Individual protection, individual action, individual suppression, etc., made little or no sense here. Therefore how could the police help the Commission assign responsibility and direct justice?

The deposition of the Nalini kanta Chowdhury, the Officer in Charge of Shyampukur Police Station to questions by B.A. Siddiky is significant. Siddiky asked, "With regard to various entries in the Incidents Diary do you have independent recollection of events with regard to which you had taken personal action?" and "If news came to you that large crowds had collected at the Five Crossings and people were intimidating the shopkeepers that would not have surprised you, or you would not have been surprised if you got information that large crowds of Muslims had gathered and were intimidating the Hindu shopkeepers. Would that information have surprised you?" N.K. Chowdhury replied, "Not surprised, because these things happened on many occasions during Congress agitations. This time assaults took place and it was a new thing" (CDCE, VIII: 5-6, q. 1556-1565). And he followed it up with a description of how large crowds gathered on the road there – specifically on the junction of Barrackpore Trunk Road and Cossipore Road. "Lorries were sending out hullas (warnings)". The police could only disperse mobs, because many in the mobs were unknown, from different places, "up country Muslims" (CDCE, VIII: 13-17, q. 1593). "Processions clashed against each other". "From Cossipore and Chitpore area hundreds of people, all Muslims, are coming with lathis, swords, etc." (CDCE, VIII: 21-24, q. 1848-1849); not satisfied, the Commission persisted and wanted to know, Where were they going? Who were there in the crowd? "There was Sk. Habu alias Habibur Rahman... I thought he was going to attend the meeting at the Maidan". "You actually saw Sk. Habu?" "Yes". "Habu is generally known as Habu Goonda?" "Bully, Badmash (rogue)". Siddiky asked, "Because he had not been declared a goonda under the Goonda Act that you call him a bully?" "Yes". "He was known as goonda?" "He must be declared a goonda under the Goonda Act." "But (what did) the people in the locality (think)?" "They said Habu Badmush" (CDCE, VIII: 21, q. 1882-1892).

In this strange exchange of information, assertion, definition, and confirmation of who could possibly be members of the crowd, we get some idea of the police world, the police planet, in which the crowds feature as actors but half known and half unknown, and therefore a state of

uncertainty in the police apparatus of governance. The Commission wanted to know individual acts of arson, murder, perfidy, etc. To the police making depositions to the Commission these must have appeared as inconsequential enquiries, unhelpful also to understand a crisis situation. (See for instance Volume IX for the depositions by A.K.M. Fazlul Sabir Chowdhury, Officer in Charge of Manicktolla Police Station and Shamsul Hosain Ali, Officer in Charge of Beliaghata Police Station). These enquiries revolved mostly around when the first report of a trouble reached the police station, whether everything deposed was mentioned in the diary, who remembered what and when, and who had seen or heard the first truck carrying agitators or the cry, *Larke Lenge Pakistan* (IX: 153, q, 184-196). In one instance, a police officer N.K. Roy Chowdhury while deposing on the clash between the two communities facing each other on the Ultadanga Road and Fariapukur had to repeatedly answer questions from the counsel Jyoti Mitter, as to exactly which community gathered where and stood on which side of the road – right or left, and the distance between spot A and spot B. “Where did you see the Hindus and where the Muhammadans?” / I saw the Hindus on the Ultadanga side and also western side opposite to Ultadanga Road, and in front of Fariapukur and Nikasipara I saw Muslims up to that mosque; and opposite to that mosque there is Mohanbagan. Facing east was the Hindu mob and facing west was the Muslim mob. The interlocution went like this:

The Hindu mob was facing east? / Yes. Therefore the Hindu mob was to the west of Circular Road? / Yes. And the Muhammadan mob was on the east of Circular Road, is that correct? / Yes. (Witness was asked to point out on the map the exact position where the two mobs were. He pointed out Ultadanga Road, Mohanbagan Lane Fariapukur and opposite to that, Nikasipara, and then said) This Mohanbagan, for instance, is a Muslim *bustee*. Next to that Hindus also live, a few, all respectable Hindus. These people got frightened; they went and joined with these Nikasipara people in front of Fariapukur. Really the Muslims were on the east side facing southwards and the Hindus on Ultadanga Road across Circular Road facing north-east? / Yes. You say Mohanbagan is a mixed *bustee*, predominantly Muhammadan? / Predominantly Muhammadan. Did you see the Muhammadan population of Mohanbagan with the Nikasipara Muhammadans in the crowds? / Yes... Did you recognize them? / Subsequently I came to know. So when you saw the crowd, you only saw the Muhammadan crowd. And the Hindu crowd partly on Ultadanga Road and partly to the in front of Nikasipara? / Yes, opposite Fariapukur, west of Circular Road? / Yes. What time did you see this crowd? / From Hatibagan I came straight here about 12-30. About 12-30 you came from the Muslim *biri* shop? / No, from Begum Mosque... You were driving southwards? / Along Circular Road... What is the distance between the crossing of Ultadanga Road and the mouth of Fariapukur Street? / 50 yards, I think. And you say these two opposing crowds were exchanging brickbats? / Yes. You came from behind the Muhammadan crowd? / In a lorry.... You had to charge them? / Yes. Did the *latbi* charge have effect on the crowd? / Yes. I did not assault them. I charged them without hitting them and both parties ran away. Both parties moved subsequently. What did they say? / The Muslim crowd said “Disperse the Hindus first”. The Hindus said “Disperse the Muhammadans first” (CDCE, VIII: 13, q. 1693-1715).

This was not only a crisis situation, but a border situation (X: 162-163). Violence was always a phenomenon of the borders, it was occurring on the border of two localities, two settlements, on the roads that marked the boundaries of the two, and therefore Entally, Park Circus, Shyampukur, all those borderlands, the murderous zones...<sup>32</sup>

As sporadic clashes and killings continued beyond the murderous week, night curfew had to be extended up to end of December in select areas, such as Beliaghata, Chitpore, Cossipore, Manicktola, Entally and Beniapukur and Watgunj.<sup>33</sup>

## More on the Limits to Legal Intelligibility

Before we proceed further, let us pause so that we can think a little on the significance of these depositions in terms of the limits to legal intelligibility on riots. Facets of the Great Calcutta Riot some of which have been discussed above were later replicated and found in other riots – though the continuity of these facets of the riot of 1946 remains inadequately recognised.

We can say that the minutes of evidence of the *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* exhibit a sense of innocence to be found already in the nineteenth century inquiries into riots. The governmental rationality, at least in the colonial conditions of India, had an air of reflecting what we may call *ground conditions*. Commissions became the artefact of modern policy making. Thus it was not only Hunter, who refused to condemn the entire community of “Indian Musalmans”,<sup>34</sup> in the inquiry of agrarian riots also, “peasant distress” was the theme. For instance in the inquiry report on the Deccan Riots of 1875, historians Vinay Lal and Neil Charlesworth show, agrarian conditions were real causes, and the conspiracy argument found little ground with the Commission for explaining the riots and devising solutions. Vinay Lal has written, “Quite to the contrary, the commissioners were emphatic in their pronouncement that the riots had not been ‘acted upon by persons of higher position and education’. The Deccan Riots Commission’s affinity to the commissions of previous years becomes all the more evident when we consider that it was invested with the authority, which it exercised, to recommend legislation that, if accepted and implemented, would affect cultivators not only in the affected areas, but throughout India.”<sup>35</sup> Commissions had to have relevance to the dynamics of policy making.

In that age, which we can say continued in some sense till the 1940s, riots used to take place over place of worship (for instance, 1890, Aligarh, where there was obstruction of places of worship, because apparently a pot of flesh was thrown at night in a mosque, and then beef was hung into two Hindu wells), animal sacrifice (1896, Patna, 1953 Bhopal), playing music and beating drums before the holy places (1941, Kolkata, occasion of Muharram), defiling of sacred texts (1939, Asansol, where the Ramayana was defiled apparently by a Muslim), “competing religious festivals” on the same day (1871, Bareilly, where Moharram and Ramnavami festivals fell on the same day), etc. In these riots race was the important but suppressed question, and with each round of riots, the project of constructing the “Hindu race” or the “Muslim race” would receive one more dose of boost.<sup>36</sup> In some sense the Great Calcutta Killings formed the climactic moment of the racialization of rival communities, though the observation will be incomplete without an additional one that riots not only reflected the making of races, they were the apparatus of the process. This continued to some extent for some decades even after independence.<sup>37</sup> In this continuing chronicle of riots no one is a terrorist, no community is a danger to nation. It is more a case of race, when living together but separately has become impossible because of “racial” (bio-cultural) difference. The pattern changes with or after the Babri Masjid related riots, when in place of contested cultural practices deliberate and engineered historical issues become the cause of riots. But this is a different issue into which we cannot go now. Yet from a different angle the Great Calcutta Killings presented discontinuities. In the eyes of the police, as the minutes of evidence suggest, “direct action” – the idea of *direct action* – had possessed people and transformed the rival communities into mad mobs, intent on changing the destiny of their country, and embarking on frenzied actions.<sup>38</sup> The D Day had arrived. Many decades, years, and months had gone into preparation. Now it must happen.

In this sense not only the August killings were different, the Commission of Enquiry also proved different in many ways, some of the aspects already indicated. To summarise: Identification of individual actions of violence became less important. Likewise enquiries into individual acts of

commission and omission of the state functionaries including the police became moments of producing narratives of other kind - for instance of territory, logistics.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, unlike on previous occasions, this time no one had any clue as to how to control the crowd because direct action became the rallying point. And finally, the Commission in this case was not acting on a known phenomenon, and therefore inquiring into the culpability of the event and thinking of policies to be prescribed. Rather the Commission was opening itself up to an unknown world of knowledge – by which I mean knowledge of police conduct defined in relation to crowd conduct, in relation to economy, society, and politics. The Commission had to wind itself up not only because Independence was approaching but also because, and this is my argument, the Commission as an apparatus of governing was unequal to the knowledge it had produced; and now it did not know how to use this knowledge for governing. Its two functions as an apparatus of power and an apparatus of knowledge did not sit happily together this time. Its summary closure symbolised a deep internal crisis in the manifold nature of police rationality.<sup>40</sup>

Before closing this essay I shall try to show with the help of a longish presentation of a police diary – entered as affidavit for the Commission – how the events of 1946 presented police in a new light, a disciplinary institution, but one whose “secret history” was in its protection and thus security practices. The police as an arm of legality have to operate in the field of illegality. While it knows the rules on the basis of which it will relate to prisons and other legal institutions of punishment, and this is precisely its institutional function of discipline, the Great Calcutta Killings raised the question: Can discipline be the basis of its relation with an illegal entity – the crowd? In order to manage legality will it not have to employ modes of security and therefore surveillance on groups of extremely mobile bodies?<sup>41</sup> Also, what will happen if the effectiveness of prison is over, that is criminals mix with the non-criminal population, and form the crowd on the street? Police is trained to deal with the organisation of an isolated illegality. Its institutional practices create expert knowledge of delinquent behaviour. But what if the society turns delinquent and what will it do when it will find that its function of discipline cannot automatically ensure security of the population? The police guards against delinquency, but when did it learn to secure territory and thus secure population? Thus the police almost everywhere in the city began its action by trying to protect shop keepers intent on keeping their shops open on 16 August.<sup>42</sup> Then it became busy in saving lives. Security begins with providing security of trade and commerce and then providing security of life. Protection was important, as important or more important, than its counterpart in the form of disciplinary duty.<sup>43</sup> Great Calcutta Killings showed that one function did not naturally lead to the other. The reason of the state found itself only in a fractured form in governmental reason.

More precisely then, the police depositions and the Enquiry show that the police as a legal-administrative calculus of negotiating conduct of population reached its dead end in that time of crisis brought about by a massive spread of illegality. A plethora of divergent police practices collided, whose reports in the form of depositions only served the function of confusing the Commission. As a representative of the internal array of forces the institution of police is intended to modulate the conduct of domestic populations by employing different strategies related to various aspects of life, such as, public health, education, trade, commerce, housing, and population management. The city is inconceivable without the police. The police with its manifold functions make sense only in a city. Yet, as the summary of complaints against the conduct of the police and their own defence<sup>44</sup> showed (and on which much of Commission’s energy was directed), the police had become as a fragmentary institution at sea swimming aimlessly in the swirling waves of different demands of life – politics, commerce, protection, security, possession and control of urban territory,

and risk management. Calcutta was no longer a small or medium size market town requiring a small number of police force in order to function.

## The Police Planet

The diary of a police functionary, Nurul Haq Khundkar, officer in charge, Burtolla Police Station, records the events and his movements on 16-17 August 1946. Entered as an affidavit to the Commission and presented below it gives us a glimpse of how the police was trying to cope with this extra-ordinary situation:

**16 August 1946:** On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1946 I received a telephone message from Assistant Commissioner, North Town to proceed to the junction of Beadon Street and Upper Circular Road... to stop rioting between Hindus and Muslims... in progress there. With S.I. K.C. Mukherji and 6 armed men of this police-station I proceeded to the spot in one of the *thana* lorries... At the junction of Upper Circular Road and Vivekananda Road I met Deputy Commissioner, North Town. Assistant Commissioner, North Town, also arrived there.... Under orders of Deputy Commissioner, North, I proceeded to the spot with my men to stop the fight (which was going on) there. By the time I arrived there, the parties swelled to such a dimension that it was impossible for me alone to cope with the situation with a handful of men. I hastened back to Deputy Commissioner North, when Assistant Commissioner, North Town, picked me up in a police lorry with armed and unarmed men in it. We proceeded to Jugipara Lane to approach the crowds both from the south and the north, sending another batch of policemen to the spot to advance from the north. We entered into the lane where fighting was going on. At sight of us closing in from both ends, the fighters made good their escape...

A few minutes after I accompanied Assistant Commissioner, North Town, with my men in lorry patrol along Vivekananda Road towards the west and we went up to the crossing of Central Avenue and returned by the same route. No fighting was observed anywhere, but many shops were found looted, atta, flour and other things were found scattered on the street.

Just after our return to the junction of Beadon street and Upper Circular Road trouble again started at the junction of Kerballa Tank Lane and Upper Circular Road between a party of Muslims and another of Hindus. We brought the Muslim party under control and made them fall back but the Hindu mob began steadily moving forward and all the while hurling brickbats at the retreating Muslims towards Upper Circular Road along Kerballa Tank Lane. When our party tried to persuade them to go back they started pelting us with big pieces of bricks one of which hit me on the left leg. With the greatest difficulty we were able to push back this crowd and the situation was brought under control. But this was not to last long as a few minutes after a big crowd of Hindus armed with offensive weapons advanced along Circular Road from the north hurling brickbats in front of them and soon attacked a Muslim crowd near Kerballa Tank Lane and hurled brickbats right and left. Rai Bahadur S.N. Mukherji and Deputy Commissioner, Security Control, were there with a big force of policemen and tried to disperse both parties but it appeared that it would be impossible to bring the situation under control. However the Muslims were pushed back and they began to retreat but the Hindus advanced further and showered a rain of brickbats on the police. As I was in the thick of this I was again hit by a brickbat on the left knee. Thereafter a tear-gas squad was brought by Deputy Commissioner, Security Control, and tear-gas was thrown which dispersed the crowd of Hindus.

At about 11.30 a.m. while at the junction of Upper Circular Road and Beadon Street with S.Is K.C. Mukherji, K.M. Zaman, Sgt. Lehaney and armed and unarmed men, I received information that an Eating House of a Muslim at the crossing of Cornwallis Street and Beadon Street was being looted. I hastened to the spot with some of the unarmed men in my lorry and found that the said Eating House had already been looted and its furniture and other things were set on fire on the street... I found a big crowd of Hindus at the place. I with my men chased away the crowd. Three or 4 other *biri* shops there owned by Muslims met with the same fate. The owner of the Eating House appeared then and

asked for being conveyed to the *thana* with his two servants. I got them in my lorry. At sight of them some men in the crowd came up to my lorry and wanted to drag them down. I chased them away.

On Cornwallis Street there were a series of bonfires right from the Cornwallis Square up to the junction of Hatibagan market. I started for the *thana* to ring up the fire brigade. On my way I noticed that these fires were started with furniture and other things of Muslims shops on the line of route. There were hostile crowds all along which we tried to disperse but did not succeed. I came back to the police-station, informed Deputy Commissioner, North, of the situation and the Control Room as well. Informed fire brigade also...

From there I went to the crossing of Beadon Street and Central Avenue with the same force in the lorry and there found some people setting fire to some furniture on the street in front of premises No. 68/E, Beadon Street. We chased away the crowd from the street... The properties were of a perfumery work at 68/E, Beadon Street. The workshop was looted and all properties were dragged out into the street and broken. I met the Hindu Manager of the Perfumery Works, which belonged to a Muslim...The Manager was threatened with violence by the mob so I picked him up and reached him at his residence in Ram Chand Ghose Lane...

At about 3-20 p.m. received information that a mob had attacked the Muslim *bustee* at 76/1, Cornwallis Street, south of Rungmahal Theatre. On this information with S.I. Zaman and a force I went there and found the *bustee* attacked by a large mob which came both from Cornwallis Street and also Sahitya Parishad Street as well. We noticed some of the young men setting fire inside an Eating House and beating men, women and children inside the *bustee*. It was a hard task to disperse the mob which was brick batting us also. We chased them away with determination and were able to arrest one of those who had set fire and beat the people in the *bustee*... On my way back to police-station noticed a crowd on Cornwallis Street opposite Sahitya Parishad Street which was trying to attack the Muslim *bustee* at 76/1, Cornwallis Street, in spite of the presence of the police picket there. I brought armed men from the police-station and posted them there. While I was there information was received by me from ... the police-station that the house of Mr. Manick Mullick, Honorary Magistrate, was about to be attacked by a Hindu mob to kill the Muslims who had taken shelter in his house. On this information I went to Grey Street and met Mr. Mullick at his door and rescued 6 Muslims from his residence. In front of Mr. Mullick's residence I found 6 hackney carriages burnt on Grey Street. While returning to the police-station I found 4 Muslims - 3 young men and an old one-lying seriously wounded on B.K. Paul Avenue (in Section A) near its crossing with Grey Street and groaning. I picked them up in my lorry... Thereafter at 112, Grey Street (within Section A) I found a Muslim groaning under a *taktaposh* having had deep stab wounds. I picked him up in the lorry and made arrangement from there to send him to hospital... Continued rescuing who were there trapped in Hindu houses all over the jurisdiction at the request of Hindu gentlemen whom I met in course of lorry patrol in the section. I returned to police-station with force at 9.30 p.m.

At 11-30 p.m. with force went out on lorry patrol in the section... At 12 mid night I came to the police-station.

**17 August 1946:** At 12.40 a.m. received orders from Assistant Commissioner, North Town, to proceed to College Street where trouble was apprehended...On arrival at College Street Market, found no disturbance there...

While returning to police-station along Central Avenue we found constable Shamsul Huq of Jorabagan police-station lying seriously injured on the head in a semi-conscious state on the east side of Central Avenue in front of Jatun Maitra Park. We picked him up and as we advanced north we found another man, a rickshaw-puller by the name of Tosaddak Mia of 164, Musjidbari Street, lying unconscious with serious injuries on his person in the centre of the road. We picked him up also and I took both the injured men to Medical College Hospital and when they were being attended to in the Emergency Ward I left. While picking up the second injured man I had noticed dead body of a Muslim lying there. On return from hospital I picked up the dead body and brought it to police-station and then sent it to the morgue.



The Muslim residents of 76/1, Cornwallis Street *bustee* were brought to the *thana* and in the evening as the place was quite unsafe in view of the fact that it was over and over attacked in course of the day. At 9 a.m. I went out on lorry patrol with force. Found Grey Street, Central Avenue strewn with dead bodies. I arrived at the crossing of B.K. Paul Avenue and Grey Street to the North of which I found heaps of dead bodies of Muslim men, women and children. I started picking up the injured men, women and children in the lorry and sending them to hospital... I patrolled along Central Avenue and Beadon Street both of which were found littered with Muslim dead bodies. In course of patrol received information that murders had been committed in Gulu Ostagar Lane Mosque on the previous night. On this information I went there and found 4 dead bodies lying in the mosque and 1 man was found lying injured in the mosque. Three more dead bodies were lying on Gulu Ostagar Lane in front of the mosque. There were marks and clots of blood in an around the mosque. All these dead and the injured were Muslims. The Muslim population of this place were frightened to such a degree that they were trembling and none had the strength to stand up. I sent the injured men to hospital and started rescuing the Muslims from there in the lorry. It was learnt that in an old building a very large number of rickshaw pullers lived. Out of them only a few were found; there was no trace of the others...

Thereafter I patrolled the jurisdiction in the *thana* lorry... Immediately after, information came of trouble going on around Goabagan Cattle Market which was being surrounded from all sides I went out in a lorry with armed and unarmed men. I found that the Cattle Market was surrounded on the North, Madhab Das Lane and Raja Raj Kissen Street on the East and Mon Mohan Bose Road and Dalimtolla Lane on the South. There were thousands of men in each mob; they were armed with *lathis*, daggers, knives, axes, and spears, the mob advanced from Sahitya Parishad Street along Mon Mohan Bose Road. They had shot guns. This last mentioned mob numbered more than 2,000. All the mobs were hurling brickbats in from of them and advancing towards the Cattle Market. Those who had guns were firing in front of them at random. These men with the mob came towards us on Mon Mohan Bose Road within a distance of hearing. I warned them to disperse but they persisted in advancing further still firing their guns at random, hurling brickbats and brandishing their weapons. I shouted out another warning to them but by now they started brickbatting us and almost surrounded our lorry. I shouted out another warning to them but they did not move back an inch, rather they made a determined move to surround our lorry from all sides. Those who had guns aimed their weapons at us. As a last resort I gave orders to 3 armed men to fire one round each low which they did in consequence of which the crowd began to retreat... The crowd retreated but stopped at a distance of about 50 yards from us and began to shower a rain of bricks at us. Those armed with guns began to fire at us from there. So again as a last resort I gave orders to fire and my men fired five shots more each in quick succession. The crowd began to disperse and I ordered them to cease fire. The casualty was not known as none was found killed or injured at the spot....

At about 4-45 pm, I met Sgt. Lehaney on the Cornwallis Street. He was leading a band of refugees more than 500 consisting of Muslim men, women and children of all ages whom he had rescued from Ram Chand Ghosh Lane. He told me to go there immediately for the protection of the lives of hundreds more left behind. This locality was, he said, raided by a big Hindu mob which carried on looting and slaughter which they would have carried on further had he and S.-I. Zaman with armed and unarmed force not arrived there in time. S.I. Zaman was found bringing up the rear. I went there in the lorry with armed and unarmed men quickly and leaving the lorry on Beadon Street in charge of the driver and an armed man went into Ram Chand Ghosh Lane with rest of the party. The mosque there was badly damaged and about 12 or 13 dead bodies were found lying inside it and 4 dead bodies were found lying on the lane and two very badly injured persons were lying on the lane. We carried them to the lorry and placed them on it. All these were Muslims looking. Thereafter we collected all men, women and children from the locality who numbered more than 100. We came back to the lorry with these Muslim rescues and put some of them on the lorry and as we were about to march to the *thana* a mob of more than 1,000 of low class Hindus armed with daggers, knives and *lathis* rushed upon us. I gave them a warning which went unheeded and was about to catch hold of

some women and children when I gave them 2 more warnings but all in vain. Then as a last resort I gave orders to... fire... I brought two badly injured men to the *thana* and sent them in the *thana* lorry to hospital. At this time there were more than 5,000 refugees at the police-station and there was no sufficient room for their accommodation. The men were given shelter in a cinema house under construction to the east of the *thana* building and the women and children were accommodated in the officer's quarters, on the open roof of the *thana* building and the stairs. During the night there were several attempts by mobs from all sides to attack the refugees and the Goabagan Cattle *bat* but their attempts were every time thwarted by us. Hindus numbering about 12 men also rescued from Nandanbagan *bustee*. They were kept in the *thana* in the constables guard room. During the next day also other officers and I carried on rescue work and by the afternoon the number of refugees came well up to 6,000. Refugees were brought from the border of the neighbouring sections also... (CDCE, VII: 5-10).

Other affidavits in the same session spoke of similar effort by the police. One such affidavit entered by a Hindu officer says of "some of the Muslims...living near the *thana* premises came back and took shelter and since (we) rescued some of the Muslims, the number gradually increased by the midnight of the 16<sup>th</sup> and on the 17<sup>th</sup> too. Most of the Muslims were fasting because it was Ramzan period. They had nothing to eat. However I bought some things for them just to break their fast. They continued to come in. They had no food, or anything of the sort. Then children, babies, and womenfolk were coming for shelter to my quarters. I had a big verandah in my quarters. They consumed everything I had. I did not mind anything for that. There were newcomers to my *thana* and they did not know what was a Muslim kitchen and what was a Hindu kitchen. In the morning naturally they went to the privy, but as there was a great rush, one could expect that there would be some sort of nuisance committed. There is a big latrine in Jorabagan police-station where Muslims, Hindus, and people of every community can ease themselves. I am told that this enraged the feelings of the constables there... I explained the matter to them and managed to pacify" (CDCE, VII: q. 1196).

Police officers like S.N. Routh rose above any communal feelings in discharge of responsibility and demonstrated governmental reason in all its purity. Yet Routh confessed to the Commission, "Before I took charge of Jorasanko I was very much afraid. I had a peculiar impression of Kalabagan *bustee*. But during the time till the 16<sup>th</sup> August Kalabagan *bustee* gave me no troubles. Their activities till the 16<sup>th</sup> August I did not find too much" (CDCE, XI: p. 122, q. 168). Another police officer, A.K. Mukherjee told a Commission member B. Somayya, to the question, "What did you do in that mosque?", "We waited for a brief period of time and rescued several males, females and children and from their dress it appeared that these were Muslims and we took them in my *thana* lorry and in the weapon-carrier which was with the Assistant Commissioner, North Town, to a mosque in Balmukund Makkar Road adjoining Jorasanko Thana... (Q: After coming back to the *thana* did you inform your Officer-in-charge that the mood of the mob, two to three thousand as you saw, was not very good and they were bent on mischief?)... When I went there and asked those persons whom I rescued as to what was the attitude of the mob, they told us that about 60 to 70 per cent of them were friendly to them and they were trying to save them at the cost of their lives and 10 to 15 per cent were violent and tried to do mischief to the *bustee* people. The whole crowd was not hostile to the *bustee* people. About 10 per cent of the crowd were hostile to the *bustee* people and the other 70 to 80 per cent of the crowd were friendly to the *bustee* people and they were trying to save them and it was due to their care that they were able to save them up till that time when we rescued them" (CDCE, VIII: q. 481, 525).

All these however did not convey anything significant to the Commission or counsels engaged by various parties, primarily the Muslim League and the Congress, who either wanted to fix

individual responsibility or prove or disprove charges of state abetting of riots and mass murders.<sup>45</sup> All these also will mean very little for historians who are busy in mapping long term trends in communalism and the eventual breakup of the country. Yet it seems to me that the Great Calcutta Riots indicated something more and the *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* was grappling with this new phenomenon – unknowingly, ineffectually. The Commission's modality was ineffective because it was based on the banal judicial procedure of evidence (evidence gathering, seeking, testing, examining, and concluding on the basis of examination).<sup>46</sup> The new phenomenon I have discussed here related to the mutually constitutive relation between the police and the crowd, which made the connection between reason of the state and reason of governance highly contingent. It is difficult to pass judgment over the quarrel as to what leads to the breakdown of the other. In the case of the Great Calcutta Killings was it that the colonial state was breaking down, it had no strategic reason any more, and hence there was a loss of direction to the police apparatus in those calamitous days, and thus the riots continued in one way or another for almost full one year?<sup>47</sup> For after all, as the police files dating from the first decade of the twentieth century show, the city police was aware of the growing communal configuration of the city territory. Or, was it that with the failure of the reason of governance in the form of police rationality (whose elements I have discussed in the previous section) in those contentious times, the reason of the state made no further sense?

All we can say is that the apparatus of police built by the colonial state was based fundamentally on the obedience of the individuals and individual subjection to the institution of law and order after it no longer required the feudal form of allegiance. It now required a total and exhaustive obedience in their conduct to whatever the imperatives of the colonial state were in relation to protection of economy, commerce, trade, education, health, territory, and security of life. The success of the apparatus depended on a smooth interrelation of these imperatives and thus between different functions of the police. The Calcutta Riots showed that there may be moments when the smooth relation will break down, when all bounds of obedience will be broken, and populations will imagine their conduct not in juridical terms, but in other possible frames.<sup>48</sup> In other words politics will be conducted no longer in civilian frame, but in the frame of war. In those moments the link between the reason of state and that of government may collapse. The complete failure of police as an apparatus will come out in the open.<sup>49</sup> Therefore four things should not surprise us.

First, borders emerge in situations of violence and hence they are essentially unstable. There is no reason to think that the city is an organic unity unaffected by borders and boundary making exercises. Riots are such an exercise. Indeed through the urban war of August 1946 the internal borders of the city were marked out.

Second, enquiry commissions and judicial deliberations after the infamous riots in post-independence India have often proved inconclusive and have only demonstrated the closure of legal logic.

Third, in view of the past experiences of breakdown of the apparatus of police, which had acquired a kind of social naturalness, the apparatus has evolved further in the form of specialized forces with specific logistical abilities – establishment of special confinement centres,<sup>50</sup> tracking down economic offences, counter-insurgency policing, maintenance of public health intelligence, mobilizing and putting into operation rapid action force to tackle sudden riots, community policing, special ability to undertake relief and rescue operations, airborne supervision and coordinated crowd control, newer techniques such as CCTV and mobile telephony, superior quality and detailed maps of the area of trouble aided by Google and other search engines, newer ways of crowd control to achieve minimum killing, etc. In a more specific way, police reforms ensued in West Bengal to tackle

terror, improving methods of selection of police personnel and terms of the top ranking police officers, improving capacity of police stations, intelligence centres and bureaus, state police academies, training colleges and schools, mechanisms of evaluating the performance of police officers, improving special capacities of police in metropolitan areas, and finally delineating duties of the civil police, which meant more interaction with the population and more vigorous public relations exercise.<sup>51</sup> Of course in the final count, for all these reforms the army remained the final model of organization of power, though one may say that while the police acquired more capacity, the general lessons of 1946 were quickly forgotten. Yet riot after riot in post-independence India showed that the police function of providing security to the population depended on the ability to secure territory – a function of essentially military nature.

Fourth and finally, and again a specific development that happened to Kolkata was in the form of a slew of *bustee* improvement programmes in the city over the years culminating in the Bustee Improvement Programme of the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, because no government in West Bengal could forget that the *bustee* was the other of the police in those calamitous days – the ghost in hot pursuit of the machinery of law and order. *Bustee* reforms complemented police reforms. But this is another story we cannot go into here.

However, we must not forget that the evolution of the governmental intelligibility involved in these four phenomena owed its presence to bodies, dead bodies in hundreds and thousands, maimed, mutilated, burnt, severed, emaciated, tortured, disfigured, and decomposed, which encapsulated various images of the riot. The memory of the bodies displaced the interlocked images of the crowd and the police. The reality of war for territory receded to the background.<sup>52</sup>

For a long time to come these dead bodies were to create terror in the minds of the political class governing the land.

[*Note: Old spellings of places have been retained. However when referring to the city in a general sense, Kolkata has been used in place of Calcutta. I am indebted to Subhas Chakrabarty, Anita Sengupta, J.S. Mukherji, Rajat Kanti Sur, Sucharita Sengupta, and V. Ramaswamy for their help.*]

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette* (hereafter *CMG*), Volume XLIV, no 11, 10 August 1946

<sup>2</sup> We may never know the actual figures. We have various reports of unaccounted bodies being recovered in the following days and months. On deaths - It was difficult to distinguish between deaths occurring between 16 and 20 August and in the following week. Thus, for instance, between 22 and 29 August when sporadic murders were continuing, about 20 dead bodies in various stages of decomposition were recovered from the streets. From the morgue 100 bodies, from the streets 20, and from other places 12 bodies were recovered in this period. – File 398/46, p. 8 (West Bengal State Archives, hereafter *WBSA*). Decomposed bodies also meant that the figures of Hindu deaths and Muslim deaths may not be correct. One note in the police file spoke of asking the Hindu Satkar Samity of re-checking whether the bodies cremated by it were those of Hindus in view of the high state of decomposition. – Government of Bengal (hereafter *GoB*), *Home Political*, File 398/46, Appendix A (*WBSA*). We also do not have any comprehensive account of displacement, relief, and rehabilitation. In many cases Hindu and Muslim charity organizations besides the Hindu Mahasabha, Congress, and the Muslim League ran their own efforts to help the distressed. On the displaced, we have this particular news item – “The total number of destitute in Government centres in Calcutta was during the last week of November 13, 800, of whom 5000 were refugees from Bihar. In addition about 1,500 refugees had passed through Government camps to their destinations in Calcutta and elsewhere. This information was given by Sir Walter Garner, Relief Commissioner, Bengal. Sir Walter said that the relief Department was anticipating

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increased pressure on its organization in Calcutta during the next few weeks, partly as a result of the influx of refugees from Bihar and partly on account of general economic conditions. The Bengal Government had made no representations to the refugees arriving from that province.” – *CMG*, Vol. XLV, No. 1-2, 30 Nov. – 7 Dec. 1946 (p. 5-6). In its issue of Vol. XLV, No. 4 (21 Dec. 1946, p. 78), it reported on the rehabilitation situation and the works by the then Bengal government regarding rehabilitation of the displaced citizens of city due to riots. The government also put “emphasis on rehabilitation of the displaced citizens from the *bustees* in their previous homes.” Bihari refugees were accommodated in the Talah Park previously occupied by the military - *CMG* Vol. XLV, No. 18-21, 26 Apr. 1947, p. 407

<sup>3</sup> *CMG*, Vol. XLV, No. 13-14, 1-8 May, 1947; it also reported expenditure of another one crore of rupees on relief and rehabilitation of the displaced including those from Bihar; one lakh rupees for repair of *dargahs and imambaras*.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the accounts are: Debjani Sengupta, “A City Feeding on Itself: Testimonies and Histories of ‘Direct Action’ Day”, *Sarai Reader*, New Delhi, 2006; “Calcutta Riot (1946)”; the entry in *Banglapedia (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2000)*; D. Chaim Kaufmann, “When All Else Fails: Ethnic Population Transfers and Partitions in the Twentieth Century”, *International Security*, 23 (2), Autumn 1998, pp. 120–156; Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassell & Co, 1950); Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jaya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943–47* (New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 2005); also for a perspective, Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving Blocs – Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapter 5, “War over Music: Meaning and Implications of the Riots of the 1920s and 1930s”, pp. 238-296; Sandip Bandopadhyay, *Itihaser Dike Phire: Chechalissber Danga* (Kolkata: Utsa Manush, 1992); J.S. Mukherji, *War, Famine, and Riots and the End of Empire, 1939-1946*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Michigan, 2011

<sup>5</sup> Only one study by Ghanshyam Shah, “The 1969 Communal Riots in Ahmedabad: A Case Study” of a dozen studies included in the well known volume by Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1984, pp. 175-208) takes the question of territory into account. Otherwise in most studies of riots, city as an agglomerate of contested territories is absent. See also, Jayati Chaturvedi and Gyaneswar Chaturvedi, “Communal Violence, Riots, and Public Space in Ayodhya and Agra City: 1990 and 1992” in Paul Brass, *Riots and Pogroms* (London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 177-200

<sup>6</sup> Sato Tsugitaka, *Muslim Societies: Historical and Comparative Aspects* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 112

<sup>7</sup> On this, H.V. Hodson, *Great Divide: Britain, India, Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997)

<sup>8</sup> *Modern Review* noted “the complete immunity that the Europeans, Anglo-Indians, and excepting a few rare cases, even the Indian Christians enjoyed during the riots” in its report on the killings – September 1946, Volume LXXX, No. 3, p. 172

<sup>9</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, “Direct, Displaced, and Cumulative Ethnic Aggression”, *Comparative Politics*, Volume 6 (1), October 1973, pp. 1-16

<sup>10</sup> On the Bichalighat incident, File 398/46, Appendix A (WBSA); on the Metiaburz incident detailed references are in the text.

<sup>11</sup> GoB, *Home Political*, File 398/46, Appendix A (WBSA)

<sup>12</sup> I have condensed here the findings from newspaper, police, and intelligence reports, affidavits, various eye witness accounts, books, and submissions to inquiring agencies and commission. For the most gruesome details, J.S. Mukherji, *War, Famine, and Riots and the End of Empire, 1939-1946* and Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943–47*

<sup>13</sup> “Extracts from a Military Report on the Calcutta Riots”, 24 August 1946 (WO 216/662) – <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/topics/calcutta-riots.htm> (accessed on 30 April 2014)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Sister Teresa, Teacher at Loreto School, Kolkata, August 1946 in Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa 1910-1997 Beyond the Image* (London: Orion, 1998)

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret Bourke-White, “Calcutta 1946” in Bourke-White, *Interview with India* (London: The Travel Book Club, 1951), pp. 27-28

<sup>17</sup> Claude Markovits, The Calcutta Riots of 1946, Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, published on 5 November 2007 - <http://www.massviolence.org/The-Calcutta-Riots-of-1946> (accessed 29 April 2014)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47*, p. 239; there is no authenticated data of the number of workers killed there. The numbers range from 400 to 600.

<sup>20</sup> P.S. Mathur, “The Great Calcutta Killing”, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 19 August 1973 (pp. 45-47), p. 47

<sup>21</sup> All three accounts are justifiably well known. See, Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947*; Jaya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*; F. Tucker, *While Memory Serves*

<sup>22</sup> *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry, Records of Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence* (hereafter CDCE here and in the text), Volumes I-XIII, Printed by the Superintendent of Printing, Government of Bengal, under the authority of the Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry, 1946-47 (in-text citations will mention volume, page, and where necessary question number); files on reports of violence, police actions and other actions taken by various departments, such as disposal of dead bodies, requisition of forces, internal notes by the Home Department, intelligence inputs, etc. are in West Bengal State Archives, *Home Political*, Confidential File no 351/46, Part B; also in WBSA, “Reports on the Hindu-Muslim Conflict in Calcutta on Direct Action Day”, GOB, *Home Political* File 398/46 GOB, and File 390/46 GOB; “Diary of Events of Eastern Command Intelligence Centre from 16<sup>th</sup> (sic) August to 20<sup>th</sup> (sic) August” (some of these entered as affidavits for the perusal of the CDCE; also some newspaper, magazine, and Gazette reports to the extent they throw light on police conduct,

<sup>23</sup> CDCE, see volume I

<sup>24</sup> Technically, the Commission was adjourned *sine die*. M.N. Ghose on behalf of the Government submitted that “in view of the great changes coming in the country and the constitution thereof and the circumstances under which this application for adjournment is made, I think that your Lordships will be pleased to adjourn it *sine die*.” The President of the Commission said that while the order to close down could come only from the government, “we make the order now to adjourn the Commission *sine die*.” - CDCE, volume XI, pp. 244-245

<sup>25</sup> The two manifestos reprinted as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47*, pp. 232-236; see for reference to the manifesto (in pamphlet form issued by Muhammad Usman, a school teacher and secretary, Muslim League, Calcutta District Committee, and Mayor of Kolkata in August 1946) and discussion on it, *Modern Review* (printed at Eastern Printers, Kolkata), Volume XXX, No. 3, “Notes”, pp. 170-174; for Hindu Mahasabha response, see also, “Short Report of Hindu Mahasabha Relief Activities during ‘Calcutta Killings’ and ‘Noakhali Carnage’”, published on behalf of Noakhali Rescue, Relief, and Rehabilitation Committee by K.N. Dalal, Ranjkan Publishing House, Calcutta, n.d. The report speaks in details of the relief camps in the city, p. 2; what is remarkable in these Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha tracts is the comparatively soft or patient tone. But violence continued in spasms to flare up again and this time severely in Noakhali. Usman, a school teacher and the Muslim League leader, later met Gandhi in Kolkata next year on 9-10 August to persuade him to stay on in Kolkata to bring peace and save the Muslims from Hindus “who wanted to even with Muslims”, even if for few days. See, Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase* Volume 2 (Ahmedabad, Navajiban Publishing House, 1965), p. 363-364; Master Tara Singh, the famous Sikh leader, also invoked the theme of religious war. Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961); p. 77; see also, Sheikh Muhammad Ikram, *The Indian Muslims and Partition of India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1992), pp. 423-425

<sup>26</sup> In fact the Police Commissioner was so defensive that he said, “I presume it is not Government’s desire that I should include in my defence response to against every possible allegation in any statement I prepare...” GoB, *Home Political*, File 390/46, p. 1 (WBSA)

<sup>27</sup> Rakesh Batabyal’s well-researched account of the riots mentions statements of colonial police and high administrative officials in the hour of crisis disclaiming any responsibility to intervene or take any pro-active

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step to stop riot or help the need in need of urgent assistance – See *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943–47*, p. 253

<sup>28</sup> Besides, by an order a government memo of 1945 (802/28) Bengal District Magistrates and the Calcutta Police Commissioner were empowered to directly call for military assistance in situations of emergency and report the fact to the government immediately. – GoB, Home Political, Calcutta 2 August 1945, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata

<sup>29</sup> Max-Jean Zins, “The 1947 Vivisection of India: The Political Usage of a Carnage in the Era of Citizen-Massacres” in M. Hasan and N. Nakazato (eds.), *The Unfinished Agenda: Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 2001), Chap. 2, pp. 49-77

<sup>30</sup> See for instance, *CDCE*, see volume VII, depositions by N.K. Roy Chowdury, Officer in Charge, Shyampukur Police Station, and S. Ahmed, Officer in Charge Jorabagan Police Station – p. 217, q 1142

<sup>31</sup> For instance, Gopal Das Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events leading up to and following the Partition of India*, (1950, reprint, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 63

<sup>32</sup> Logistics were important precisely to address border situations. Police officer Shakurul Hosain admitted in reply to a question that ideally that is if he had the forces he “would have placed a picket at the crossing of the Garpar Road and Bipradas Street (where on festive occasions there were usually pickets placed) and the “crossing of Raja Rajnarain Street and Raja Dinendra Street is an important point where two communities meet...the Sahebbagan *bustee* verges on the Hindu locality there” - *CDCE*, volume IX, p. 150, q. 128-130; additional police forces were requisitioned from the districts (3 Inspectors, 2 Sub-Inspectors, 25 head constables, and 212 constables, plus military forces also arrived to guard vital installation) and received on logistical grounds between 18 and 26 August – GoB, *Home Political*, File 398/46, Appendix B (WBSA)

<sup>33</sup> *CMG*, Volume XLV, No. 1-2, 30 November–7 December 1946, pp. 5-6; in the same issue it further reported, “The last day of the Moharrum in Calcutta-Thursday, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dec. was marked by trouble, resulting in 7 persons being killed and 80 injured. The incidents occurred when the Moharrum processions were proceeding to their destination and were making their return journey along a scheduled route in East Calcutta. The police and the military opened fire on three or four occasions to bring the situation under control. The police also made lathi charges several times. Among the casualties removed to different city hospitals as a result of the afternoon incidents, there were about 20 gunshot and nearly a dozen stab-injury cases. The rest were lathi and brick bat injury cases and also some acid injury cases.” It again (Vol. XLV, No. 18-21, and 19,26 Apr. 1947, p. 408-416) reported fresh flare up of communal troubles in the city on 26 March, 1947. The situation remained unchanged till the 1 April, when the military was called out to control the worst affected areas, such as those under the Manicktalla, Beliaghata, Entally and Chitpore police stations. Since the 2 April, the situation gradually improved, the number of incidents steadily decreasing. Again on 10 April, the situation was very tense. Besides the general night curfew, some additional curfew running to even 32 hours were imposed in various affected areas. An incident of police excess happened in Central Calcutta on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> April. The police were alleged to have molested a number of women in a residential house and to have committed rape a married lady. This incident caused some stir in the city and the situation, which had somewhat improved, again deteriorated. The Government of Bengal warned the Newspaper editors reminding them that, the press laws also governed the publication of court proceedings. Pre-censorship of news and comments regarding police activities were introduced. On 20 April the situation worsened in the Kidderpore area and the spread of riot was marked. The 23 April was declared a ‘hartal’ day by the Provincial Hindu Mahasabha President and other prominent citizens. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee urged disbandment of the Punjabi police and dissolution of the communal ministry. Tension in the city continued to exist and special curfew orders for various lengths of time were imposed on different localities. The hartal on the 23 April practically paralysed the city’s civic and business life.

<sup>34</sup> W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans* (Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa, 2002); original title, *Our Indian Mussulmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?*

<sup>35</sup> Vinay Lal, “Agrarian Unrest: The Deccan Riots of 1975” –

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[http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/British/Deccan\\_riots.html](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/British/Deccan_riots.html) (accessed on 16 April 2014); See on Deccan Riots also, Neil Charlesworth, "The Myth of the Deccan Riots of 1875", *Modern Asian Studies*, 6 (4), (1972), pp.402-409

<sup>36</sup> On this see for instance the study by William Gould on UP, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); on Bengal see besides the works mentioned before Patricia A. Gossman, *Riots and Victims – Construction of Communal Identity among Bengali Muslims, 1905-1947* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1999)

<sup>37</sup> On the continuity, see the collection of essays, Ashgar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1984)

<sup>38</sup> The spirit of Direct Action overwhelmed even long groomed class unity and party loyalty. For some of the details, see, Sunanda Sanyal and Soumya Basu, *The Sickle and the Crescent – Communists, Muslim League and India's Partition* (Kolkata: Frontpage, 2011), pp. 115-152; the discussion also include references to Communist Party union leaders and activists getting involved in communal killings, as in Metiaburz. In a sense *direct action* had a chequered afterlife, for instance in East Pakistan when Sheikh Mujib gave the call for direct action against the Pakistani military-administrative regime. Decades later in the Shahbag movement in Dhaka the spirit of direct action re-surfaced. One can even say that Gandhi's call for Quit India reflected the same spirit.

<sup>39</sup> The argument of logistics cut both ways in those days. While the mob was described as a mobile phenomenon by many police officers, lack of logistical preparation on the part of the police was cited by several other police officers as an important cause of police weakness. For instance, the Chief Minister Suhrawardy blamed the new police operation arrangement introduced in the morning of 16 August as the main reason of police weakness. – GOB, *Home Political*, File no 390/46 (WBSA)

<sup>40</sup> See n 43, which is important to understand the closure the Commission faced in its inquiry.

<sup>41</sup> In the midst of the deposition by S.N. Routh, the Officer in Charge of the Jorasanko P.S. on what happened in the area under his jurisdiction, the President of the Commission observed, "It is an extra-ordinary position that in spite of precautions large crowd were able to gather on the streets during the night of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>". Bashiruddin, one of the counsels, joined in the observation by saying, "My Lord, it was perhaps due to the fact that the area was so wide and the streets so numerous." - *CDCE: XI*, p. 218, q. 1929

<sup>42</sup> The *CDCE* papers speak in abundant details of how riots began with looting of shops, which had defied the call. Also see on Howrah, GoB, *Home Political*, WBSA, File 398/46; they give light on the role of the outsiders (Howrah Railway Jurisdiction's Report and Measures taken to Meet the Situation – File 398/46, pp. 5-6); they also amply demonstrate the war logic of preparation and counter-preparation, for instance by relatives and acquaintances of slaughtered boatmen, *WBSA*, *ibid*. However we have to keep in mind that protecting European property in the central business district stretching up to Bhawanipore was the first task of the police. There are some reports also of participation by the police in looting.

<sup>43</sup> In the first week 95 rounds were fired by the police on 22 occasions - GoB, *Home Political*, File 398/46, Appendix C (WBSA). Apart from continuing for four months night curfew over stretches of the city territory, the police also resorted to imposing collective fines. "The Commissioner of Police on the 26<sup>th</sup> November last, imposed further collective fines on inhabitants of certain localities in the city of Calcutta by Notifications no. 176-189 (dated Nov. 19-20). A total sum of Rs 22,000 was imposed on inhabitants of 13 areas of the city. Hindu inhabitants of four areas were to pay Rs. 7000. Muslim inhabitants of 8 areas were to pay Rs.13500 and both the communities of one area were to pay Rs. 1000. The proprietor of a hotel was required to pay Rs. 500. The Commissioner of Police on the 30<sup>th</sup> November imposed further collective fines of Rs. 12000 on the inhabitants of seven localities of Calcutta by notification Nos. 192 to 196 (dated Nov. 23). On the seven localities mentioned above, Hindu inhabitants of three areas were to pay Rs. 4000 and Muslim inhabitants of four areas were to pay Rs. 8000." - *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, Volume XLV, No. 1-2, 30 November–7 December 1946, pp. 5-6; the Gazette further reported, "The Government of Bengal have demanded security deposits from the Morning News and Star of India, and banned circulation in the province of International edition of the American magazine, Life, dated the 30<sup>th</sup> September last for containing prejudicial matters. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Nov. last, a pedestrian who was ignoring the curfew, was fired upon by a picket and wounded in the left



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leg. The incident occurred in a south western suburb. In another case, the victim was injured in central Calcutta.... The CP announced the imposition of further collective fines, amounting Rs 9000, on the inhabitants of 7 localities in the city.”

<sup>44</sup> The main seven points were: (i) the police did not interfere actively when the crimes were being committed as proved by the fact that it suffered no casualty; (ii) the police took part in arson and killing; (iii) the police took no action to secure control over processions; (iv) they did not set up any armed pickets in advance; (v) the police showed communal discrimination; (vi) they did not respond to calls for help; and (vii) they did not commit themselves fully. As we have seen the probing by the counsels was along these lines, and how their inquiries met dead end. Part of the failure of the examination was in the nature of the allegations which the police found ways to defend themselves against. The broad points were – (i) very few police not responding to calls for help could be identified; (ii) opening fire in all cases while facing the crowds would have been risky; (iii) in view of the earlier political agitations in the city and allegations of high handedness of the police, it had been asked to exercise restraint; (iv) charges of communal partisanship were difficult to investigate as that would have required a special force consisting of non-Hindu and non-Muslim personnel; (v) with limited personnel the police had to authenticate the genuineness of the distress call before rushing to aid; (vi) where evidence of police participation in looting and arson were found (4 in number), disciplinary action had been taken; and (vii) the police suffered few casualties and not no casualty. - Note from the Home Department, GOB, *Home Political* File 390/46 (WBSA).

<sup>45</sup> Suranjan Das in *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* has commented, “Much of the subsequent (to the Riot) elite political discourse centred round the question: who should bear the initial responsibility for the riots? The Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha put the entire blame on the League: by declaring a public holiday on 16 August the League Ministry gave a ‘license’ to its supporters to commit violence on Hindus... On the other hand the Muslim League argued that the Congress started the trouble in order to create a situation which would force the dismissal of the League government and imposition of Governor’s rule... The fact that Muslims lost more lives than Hindus during the riots was used to counter the charge that the League had deliberately organized the riot”. (p. 186) Das also remarked, “It is difficult to judge whether the British officials deliberately refrained from doing much to prevent the outbreak...” (p. 187)

<sup>46</sup> I have given some instances of the way the counsels and the Commission members approached the depositions by the police and military officials; the *Minutes of Evidence* of the Enquiry have several such instances (for instance questions put by Fazl Ali to police officer D.N. Mullick on the number of houses in a *bustee* in Gope Lane set on fire; by S.A. Masud to Mullick on the fire in Bengal Pottery Factory – *CDCE*: X, pp. 95 and 107)

<sup>47</sup> As various notes given above suggest, the riots continued almost right up to 15 August 1947 when Gandhi sat on fast in Kolkata to bring back peace.

<sup>48</sup> In the eyes of the administrators and the governing class, it was all a matter of utter lawlessness, “unbridled savagery with homicidal maniacs let loose” (Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, p. 160), and thus would have to be ruthlessly suppressed because it was essentially a question of law and order. The major English language newspaper in Calcutta at that time *The Statesman* avoided the word “war”, but used “fury”, and commented in its second editorial, “This is not a riot. It needs a word found in mediaeval history, a fury. Yet ‘fury’ sounds spontaneous, and there must have been some deliberation and organization to set this fury on its way.” - 20 August 1946

<sup>49</sup> On this, see Michel Foucault’s observations on the history of some of the functions the police in his *College de France* lectures (1977-78), *Security, Territory, Population* (Trans. Graham Burchell; Kampshire, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, pp. 333-358)

<sup>50</sup> Actually, immediately after the riots, step was taken to set up emergency jails. – GOB, *Home Political*, File 398/46, p. 7 (WBSA)

<sup>51</sup> On a commentary of the West Bengal Police Act, see – [http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/india/acts/critiques/chri's\\_legislative\\_analysis\\_of\\_west\\_bengal\\_police\\_draft\\_act.pdf](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/india/acts/critiques/chri's_legislative_analysis_of_west_bengal_police_draft_act.pdf) (accessed on 2 June 2014); on the public relations exercise, a plan had been prepared before the

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riots by the Publicity Department of the Calcutta Police in consultation with Home and Health Departments of the Government to be ready for operation during an emergency, which meant in this case breakdown of the essential services of the Calcutta Corporation for which leaflets relating to public health were kept ready for distribution. So when the communal disturbances broke out on 16 August the Publicity Department was caught unprepared and the publicity material proved irrelevant. – GOB, *Home Political*, File no 451/46, Part B 10 (WBSA)

<sup>52</sup> J.S. Mukherji's thesis discusses the significance of dead bodies in middle class memory of the infamous famine of 1943 and the Calcutta Killings.

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