

**Project: Colonial Archiving Policy, 1858-1947, and Early Modern  
Historiography in India**

**by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Tagore National Fellow, National  
Archives of India.**

**Report on first phase of project work, June 2012- November 2012.**

In the period under review (June 2012 to November 2012) the documents of the period from 1858 to 1872 have been examined. The initial findings are as follows : The record series of the Imperial Records Department are available in the National Archives, and though they are departmental records not open to all researchers, the permission of the DIG, NAI, is needed. That permission was readily given to me by the Director General and I examined those records. None of the Imperial Records Department files go back beyond 1890. The West Bengal State Archives (hereafter WBSA) in Calcutta hold some records relating to establishment of Imperial Records Room in 1891, as well as some records relating to the "segregation of records" of the government of India from records of government of Bengal in the Central Secretariat, by the Records Committee formed in 1861 (West Bengal State Archives General Department, General Branch, May-December 1867). Apart from this, the WBSA contains some pre-1860 records relating to the establishment of General Records Office in 1830, which was the depository of both Bengal and India government record. As regards the National Archives of India, the best source is the Home Dept, Public Branch, series of files; in particular there is a good summary of Govt. of India proceedings in respect of the Record Committee in Home (Public), Dec. 1872, nos. 647 et seq., of which I have procured digital copies (incidentally digital copying is expensive at the NAI). An outline of the developments which one can trace in the above-mentioned documents follows:

After the termination of East India Company administration there was an attempt to put in order the records of the government of India. The original motivation seems to be to destroy old records to save space and expenditure on record preservation in the offices of the Indian government in Calcutta. The Finance Commission and the

Civil Auditor (he was like the latter-day CAG, except that Military Audit was done by a different auditor) recommended that files may be sorted out to identify those which are not likely to be useful and to sell those old documents as "waste paper". Thus, curiously, a proposal for demolition of records was the beginning of the organized system to preserve documents after 1858. Initially the Finance Commission was assigned the task of pruning record collections and, probably due to the magnitude and complexity of the task, the Commission admitted their inability. Thereafter, in April 1861 the Government of India appointed a Record Committee "for the purpose of superintending the scheme for the destruction of all useless records in the Public Offices, after carefully selecting such as might be statistically or historically valuable for preservation." (Home Dept, Public Branch, Dec. 1872, no. 647, Record Committee, para. 3, NAI). This Record Committee became the body which framed the archival policy and made recommendations to the government in that regard.

**Three Phases of the Record Committee:**

Broadly the activities of the Committee fall into three phases: (1) 1861 to 1865 the Record Committee deliberated on the archival policy to form two alternatives. Either the government should set up a central 'muniment room' i.e. record room, or the different departments should have record rooms of their own and document selection for preservation was their concern. The first alternative was at first recommended in the Committee's report in June 1861. The second alternative was recommended by the President of the Committee in August 1863. After some dithering, in 1865 the latter alternative was chosen by the Government of India. The work of archiving as estimated by the Record Committee was enormous, amounting in their estimate to over 16,255 volumes and 16,300 bundles of current files alone. The Record Committee's work was hampered by the fact that its recommendations to appoint a Record Keeper and archival staff consistently met with rejection by the Government of India on the ground that additional expenditure must be avoided. The only position sanctioned by the government was that of J. T Wheeler as the Committee's secretary, part time, with a salary of Rs. 500 per month. The Govt. of India was recovering slowly from the financial crisis and debt burden caused by the enormous increase in military



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expenditure during the uprising of 1857. Hence they denied financial support to the Record Committee. The Record Committee was in fact entrusted with a responsibility without the means of discharging that responsibility. (2) From 1865 to 1869 there is no further discussion of a central record room. The Secretary of the Record Committee, J T Wheeler, was engaged in preparing for publication some state papers but he was unable to complete the task till 1869 when he left the Committee to join a higher post in the British Burma Commission. The post of Record Committee's paid secretary thus fell vacant and was never filled up again. The Record Committee's members visited some departments to begin the process of setting up departmental record rooms and to put the old papers in order. Since a regular archival staff was estimated to be expensive the higher authorities in India and the 'Home authorities' preferred the cheaper alternative of publishing selected documents. (3) 1869 to 1872 was a phase when the government returned to the plan of publishing selected records and calendars and decisively abandoned the idea of a central record room. In this matter the advice of Sir William Hunter was decisive: there was no need for a public record office as they existed in England and elsewhere in Europe. Viceroy Northbrook was of the view that it would serve a political purpose to selectively publish some documents. Thus the deliberations on an archival policy ended in this phase with a firm rejection of the plan for a central record room and prioritization of publication of selected documents of the imperial past. Hereafter I will focus upon the more significant details of the report above.

### **Important Personalities in Archival Policy-making**

Who were the people interested in and responsible for the organization and preservation of records in the first decade after the take over of the Indian Government from the East India Company by the Crown? Were persons who had historical interest appointed to serve as members of the Records Committee 1861-1872? The NAI records do not contain any clue except for the names in the files, but those familiar with 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian history can identify several members with historical interest and attainments in historical research. The first Secretary of the Committee was Rev. J. Long (1814-1887) who was known for his publication of old records *Calcutta in Olden*

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*Times* (1852), and his knowledge of Indian languages. (He translated from Bengali *Nil Darpan*, a play highlighting the exploitation of natives by English indigo planters). The first President of the Committee was James C. Erskine (1821-1893) of the I.C.S. who edited and published his father William Erskine's (1773-1852) work, *History of India under Babur and Humayun* (1852); he was also Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and Director of Public Instructions in Bombay Presidency. The third member was Richard Temple (1826-1902) who later biographized *James Thomason* (Rulers of India Series, Oxford, 1893) and showed some historical interest in his more well-known work, *India in 1880* (London, 1881). Among those who joined the Committee in the next ten years there were some who had historical works to their credit. James Talboys Wheeler (1824-1897) came from a humble background as a book seller in England, worked as the editor of *Madras Spectator*, and edited old Madras records under the title *Madras in Olden Times, 1639-1748* (Madras, 1882) While serving as Assistant Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department from 1862 to 1870, he was drawn into the Record Committee. He was the only paid Secretary of the Committee from 1863 to 1869. Among his historical works, *India under British Rule* (1886) was quite well-known as a text book. He was also the author of *Early Travellers in India*, (drawing upon S.Purchas and J.H.Van Linschoten, published in 1864) and *Early Records of the British in India* (London, 1878).

While Wheeler or Rev. Long from outside the I.C.S., served as Secretaries of the Record Committee, the President was always a distinguished Civil Servant. The last one among them was W.S.Seton-Karr, I.C.S., who edited *Selections from Calcutta Gazette, 1784-1823* (six volumes, 1864-69) and *Marquess of Cornwallis* (Rulers of India series, Oxford, 1893). As has been mentioned earlier, the files at NAI contain not a clue as regards the scholarly interests of the persons in the Records Committee. However, the Records Committee probably drew to itself men with such interests. Members inducted in the late 1860s included "A. Colvin", probably Auckland Colvin who served in the ICS in the North-western Provinces (later to become Lt. Governor of NWP and Oudh in 1887-1892) and wrote a biographical account, in the *Rulers of India* series of history books edited by Sir William Hunter. "Dr. Mouat" was evidently Dr. Francis J. Mouat (1816-1897) who was a teacher in Calcutta Medical College. For a



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while James Cave-Browne served on the Record Committee; he was the author of a historical treatise on *Indian Infanticide, its Origin, Progress and Suppression* (London, 1857).

Among the higher authorities in India, A.O.Hume, ICS, played an important role from outside the Record Committee. He is chiefly known as one of the Englishmen who lent support to the Indian National Congress, but he is also to be remembered as an important supporter of the cause of archiving for purposes of historical documentation : that was his contribution, as a Secretary to the Government of India in the Home Department and later the Revenue and Agricultural Department, when the Record Committee was floundering for want of administrative support. Another friend of the Record Committee was Sir Charles Trevelyan, the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council; he helped in getting Wheeler the post of salaried Secretary to the Record Committee. Among those outside of the Record Committee, Sir William Hunter was an important personality in determining archival policy. He joined the ICS in 1862 in Bengal Presidency and very soon he produced *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), an historical account that is still cited. There followed twenty volumes of the *Statistical Account of Bengal* (1875-77) and the *Imperial Gazetteer* (1881). He became an unquestionable authority and the Home Government depended on his advice on record keeping in 1871-72. Hunter was a prolific author who moulded the outlook associated with colonial historiography. Many of the historical works mentioned earlier, written by Erskine, Temple, Colvin, et al. were part of the *Rulers of India* series edited by Hunter. He was instrumental in giving an imperialist turn to the archiving of records and the narration of the history of British India. At the same time his academic acceptance and reputation was undeniable if one considers his works on *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1871), *The Earl of Mayo* (London, 1876), as well as his contribution as Chairman to the Indian Education Commission Report (Calcutta, 1883), and his last major work *Marquess of Dalhousie* (Rulers of India series, Oxford, 1895).

**Policy Issues and Differing Perspectives**

On many policy issues there emerged differences among the members of the Record Committee in 1861-71, as well as between them and people in positions of authority in

the Government of India. Initially there was a strong lobby in the Record Committee in favour of setting up a Central Record Room or 'muniment room', because the members with a historian's bent of mind preferred that. Moreover, there was the example of record management in England. That is now generally forgotten but it was a model for the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Englishmen in India. They looked to the pattern set by the Parliamentary Committee of 1800 who took up the question of preservation of State Papers, the Record Commission that worked in England towards that end from 1800 to 1837, the Record Act enacted by Parliament in 1838 (1 & 2 of Vic. Cap. 94), and the re-organization of State Papers in England under the directions of the Master of Rolls and a large archival staff recruited from the best universities. Hence the Record Committee in India initially recommended in 1861 that valuable historical documents "in place of being scattered, as at present, over all Calcutta, should be preserved in one muniment room." (Record Committee's recommendation cited in Despatch from Governor-General in Council to Secretary of State, Duke of Argyll, no. Public 95, 13 Dec. 1872, NAI). The Record Committee at that time also recommended the printing of Calendars and Index to Calendars of documents on the lines of the system followed by "the Master of Rolls in dealing with English State Papers." Had this recommendation been implemented a Central Record Room would have been created, i.e an archive like the Imperial Record Department which was eventually set up in 1890, the predecessor of the National Archives.

The opposite point of view eventually prevailed, i.e. the view that a central record office was neither needed nor affordable in terms of expenses. In August 1863 the President of the Record Committee wrote to the Govt. of India that the Committee had changed its mind; this was a concession to the views of higher authorities that the point about expenses mattered the most. The new policy recommendation underlined "the propriety" of allowing the Head Office of each Department to retain "the records in bulk and in their present shape, instead of a central muniment room as had before been proposed by the Committee." Thus the idea of an expensive Central archive was dropped in favour of the cheaper option, the status quo of records being retained in the



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custody of the concerned Departments. (Home Dept., Public Branch, Dec. 1872, no. 647, paras. 3-6, NAI)

The Home authorities accepted this new plan but they showed greater awareness of the need for a central record office to serve historians in the future. The Secretary of State Sir Charles Wood wrote in response to the decision of the Govt of India to drop the idea of a central record office: The preservation of records "for historical and antiquarian purposes" was of great importance. And he added: "although, perhaps, the latter object would be best promoted by the formation of a central muniment room, I approve, on the whole, your decision to leave the records which are to be preserved in the several offices to which they belong." (Secretary of State, Sir Charles Wood, to the Governor-General in Council, no. 19, 12 Feb. 1866, NAI). Clearly the Secretary of State would have preferred a central depository of records.

It seems that the majority of the members of the Governor-General's Council were averse to additional expenditure on account of archiving. Some of them, no doubt, were highly supportive to the basic idea of archiving. "Year by year records are decaying; and unless some measures be adopted, it will before very long, be found that like the defunct Commission [Record Committee, sometimes called Commission] the subjects of their investigations have dissolved themselves." (A. O. Hume's noting of 31 July 1871, on file, Home (Pub) Dec. 1872, no. 647, p. 10, NAI). In writing thus A. O. Hume, later to become a founding member of the Indian National Congress, represented in the Viceroy's Council a pro-archive point of view. However, given the decision at the highest level in 1865 to abandon the scheme of a central muniment room, the only option that was open was to press for publication of selected documents.

It is possible that the opposition to the idea of a central record office open to the public was partly motivated by political considerations. The file noting of 'E.C.B.' of the Viceroy's Council on the question of muniment room are significant. Sir Edward Clive Bayley (1821-1884) had a long tenure as Home Secretary (1862-1872) and he had also worked in the foreign and political department. He did not mince words: "There are records even of the last century which it might cause inconvenience to throw open to the public." (ibid., noting by 'E.C.B.', 19 Dec. 1871). The political motive is



not so openly visible in the position taken by another I.C.S. veteran, Sir William Hunter. He was content with saying that a muniment room open to the public will bring in natives who worked for the Press, if at all natives take any interest in historical records. In India, he writes in 1871 in reply to a query from the Govt. of India, "there is no class of men of letters and leisure to use such a Central Office [of Records]....Writers of considerable ability are to be found...but they constitute a very small body, and their talents are devoted to the Press or other forms of current literature, rather than those greater researches which a State Paper Office in a European capital subserves." (ibid., W. W. Hunter to A. P. Howell, Govt. of India, 17 Nov. 1871, no. 649, NAI). That was one part of Hunter's argument against opening in India a central record office of the European type ; the other part was that Indian government need not spend money on a central record office of the European pattern which would cost over thirty thousand pound sterling per annum. Hunter's opinion was decisive because he had a reputation as a scholar and his opinion was that India was too backward to need a central record office open to researchers, nor could India afford it.

#### **Tentative Conclusion: The Alternative Models of Archival Policy**

What are the tentative inferences one may draw from the developments and deliberations in respect of archival policy in the period surveyed here? Perhaps the story till 1872 can be summed up as follows: The British in India were evolving an archival policy that tended to oscillate between certain polar opposites postulated implicitly in policy level thinking. Individual policy-makers were also adopting these different positions. The polarities between alternative models implicit in policy level thinking were as follows: (1) First, there were two opposite models in the 1860s – that of archival organization in a *decentralized departmental basis*, as opposed to the concept of a *centralized record office or "muniment room"*. (2) Second, there were two different ideas about how to go about the business of documenting British rule in India : one idea was to collect and preserve and calendar the documents, in a *permanent accessible collection*, the other was to *publish selections from the available documents* and in this view a low priority was accorded to the task of creating an archival



collection for future research. (3) There was another issue : choice between a policy of *limiting access* to documents to those authorized by virtue of bureaucratic privilege (i.e. Englishmen in the civil service), as opposed to *allowing access* to the interested public including historical researchers. (4) The fourth area of conflicting policy perceptions was at the epistemological level: is the object of archiving acquisition, preservation and dissemination of *historical knowledge*, or is the objective something more limited , viz. documentation as an *instrument of governance*? Implicitly the question at issue was the relationship between knowledge and power.

The inclination of the personalities whom Eric Stokes has called “hard-boiled imperialists” was to opt for (a) departmental decentralization without centralized archiving, (b) for selective publication and not a universalist agenda of preserving historical records for the posterity, (c) for excluding from access to archives the public, including the researchers outside of the bureaucracy, (d) and for an overall policy that regards archiving mainly as an instrument for colonial governance. However, as we have seen earlier, the opposite point of view was not entirely unrepresented in the discourse of archival policy in the early phase we have studied. In the later phases from the 1890s these policy alternatives were articulated more clearly and the dialectics of policy making became more pronounced as there developed a nationalist point of view about the colonial government’s archiving policy. In the next installment of this Report we hope to elaborate on those issues.



Sabyasachi Bhattacharya.

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## Tagore National Fellowship for Culture Research (Template for Six-monthly Report)

1. Institution : National Archives of India
2. Name of Tagore National Fellow : Sabyasachi Bhattacharya
3. Fellowship Tenure : From 4 June 2012 to 3 June 2014. ?
4. Report for the period : December 2012 to June 2013.
5. Six-monthly report : No. II
6. Project Title : Colonial Archiving Policy, 1858-1947, and Early Modern Historiography in India.
7. Brief Note on Research Work : **Vide Enclosed Note/Report.**  
done during the period
8. Methodology: **Vide Annex. II of this report**
9. None, because publication will be feasible only at a later stage of present research.
10. As above; the text of a public lecture as stipulated in the Fellowship rules is ready and I wrote to the former D.G. of NAI, Professor M.Hasan, indicating my readiness to deliver lecture when called upon.
11. Note on field work : Vide item 8 above.
12. Highlights/ Progress of Project : Purely in chronological terms, of the period to be covered half a century is done, 1872-1911, and the last thirty-five years of British rule remain to be explored.
13. Difficulties, if any : Working conditions in the NAI are excellent.
14. Other academic work : Oxford University Press has accepted for publication my manuscript of a book on the period 1920-1947. I delivered the annual Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture in Calcutta on 16 March 2013. After demission of office as Chairman, ICHR, I continue to edit their journal *Indian Historical Review*.

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*S. Bhattacharya*  
**Signature of Fellow/Scholar & Date:**

**Remarks of the Head of Institution:**

**Signature & Date :**



*Project: Colonial Archiving Policy, 1858-1947, and Early Modern Historiography in India*  
By Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Tagore National Fellow, National Archives of India

**Second Report on Project Work, December 2012 to June 2013**

This report on project work in the period under review (December 2012 to June 2013) comprises the following parts: An Executive Summary in the beginning is followed by the academic part which follows the pattern of the first report submitted to the DG, NAI, on 12 December 2012.

**Executive Summary:**

In the earlier report data collected for the years 1858 to 1872 were covered along with a preliminary analysis. (For ready reference the first report is enclosed, Annex. No. I) The present report covers the years 1872 to 1911. That is to say, purely chronologically speaking, data collection for the first fifty years of the period under study in the project has been completed, and thirty-five years remain to be covered in the next one year. Further, apart from data available in the NAI in Delhi, data from the archives in Calcutta have been explored; the latter are relevant in the period prior to the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi, for reasons explained in the enclosed note on methodology in this report. (Annex. II) On completion of one year in June 2013 I wrote to the then DG, NAI, Dr M Hasan indicating my readiness to deliver a public lecture at the NAI; the text of the lecture is ready and the NAI may call upon me to deliver the lecture at any time considered suitable. The academic part of this report addresses the following points. The earlier report on this project studied the first phase, 1858-1872 and in the present report two subsequent phases are studied, 1872-1891 and 1891-1911. In the phase 1872 to the formation of Imperial Records Department, 1891 – the predecessor of the present-day National Archives – the chief points to note are (a) an uncertainty in archival policy making after the termination of the Record Committee in 1872, (b) the decision to start the Imperial Records Department in 1889-91, (c) the objectives of the British Indian government leading to the formation of the archives. In the next phase, 1891 to the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911, the policy trends are: (a) to keep a

permanently employed officer in charge of records, designated eventually as Keeper of Records; (b) the formation of an archiving programme for the newly constituted records department, (c) the influence of the English model of archiving, (c) the policy of denying native Indian students, researchers and the public in general, access to government records.

### Phase II: 1872-1891

The years between 1872 and 1891 constitute the second phase of the history of the imperial records office. The year 1891 may be considered the end of this period for that was when a decisive turn was given to the development of archives – the appointment of the first head of the Imperial Record Department. In 1872-1891 the main policy trends were as follows:

#### **A period of uncertainty in policy making;**

(1) Throughout the 1870s and 1880s the government of India dithered through a period of uncertainty about its archival policy. The chief reason for that uncertainty was the failure to make a decision in respect of starting a centralized records department or a 'muniment room' till 1891. The alternative to that was to retain the decentralized system of record keeping in different departments like the Foreign Dept., Military Dept., Public Works Dept., Finance and Commerce Dept., etc. along with a policy of publishing selections from the records with the help of editors recruited from education service or amateur British historians employed from time to time. The only outcome of the latter plan was the publication of a selection of documents, under the title *Early Records of British India* (London, 1878) by J. Talboys Wheeler who was brought to Calcutta on deputation from the Educational Service of the Madras Presidency. Wheeler was of the view that there was little of historical interest in the vast mass of administrative records and, therefore, publication of selections from some of those records was not worthwhile; that precluded further publication of records by the government. That view was against the earlier advice of the Secretary of State as well as the decision of the GOI under Viceroy Northbrook in 1872. (Despatch from Govt. of India to Secretary of State, no. 95, 13 December 1872). The cessation of publication came to the notice of Secretary of State



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Lord Cross in 1887 and he appointed a Committee in England to advise the government regarding publication of records; the Committee advised that the practice of the Public Record Office of England should be followed by the government of India in respect of State Papers. (Despatch from Secretary of State to GOI, no. 30, 31 May 1888). In the meanwhile the Govt. of India under Viceroy Dufferin in February 1888 proposed revival of the records publication scheme. The outcome of this joint initiative was a plan to prepare press lists of records in London, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, and thereafter to commence calendaring of documents. That is where the matter rested in 1888.

### **Policy Alternatives and the Decision in 1891**

(2) In hindsight when we look back on this period it is clear that there was a false dichotomy postulated in the idea that listing and calend<sup>AT</sup>ing and publication of records was an alternative to the creation of a muniment office or a central record office. The work of listing and calendaring was repeatedly urged by the Secretary of State (and his advisor, the Master of Rolls in England) and accepted by the Govt. of India, but little was done because there was no agency like a central record office to perform those tasks. However, till 1889 this fact was not perceived by the superior policy-makers, viz. the Secretary of State and the Viceroy and the high ranking civil servants in his Council. In 1889 almost by coincidence the Govt. of India identified a person who could be trusted to head a central record office, or to begin the process leading towards that end. The man thus identified was G. W. Forrest, destined to be the head of the imperial record office in future; the unstated premise of this line of action was to abandon the policy recommended by Sir William Hunter and accepted by Viceroy Northbrook's government in 1872 to refrain from setting up a central record room. Forrest was a school teacher in Bombay Educational Service who acquired a reputation after publishing in 1885 a selection of documents of Bombay government. In 1888 he was deputed by Bombay government to put in proper order their record which had been in a chaotic state due to negligence. In 1889 the Bombay government resolved to record their appreciation of "the progress made [by Forrest] in the arrangement and classification of the government records in the new Record office". (Bombay Govt. Resolution no. 4964, 30 November 1889 in the General Department, in GOI, Home, Public, March 1891, Nos. 24-42). The

creation of the new Record Office by a subordinate government in Bombay Presidency, as well as the urgent need to respond Secretary of State Lord Cross's pressure, probably led the Indian government to institute a central record office of its own. Forrest, a relatively young man of 45 (and a teacher in the low grade of Rs. 750–Rs. 1000) was deputed by the Indian government to organize in proper order the Foreign Department records, then considered the most important department. His work was found to be satisfactory and the GOI was impressed with his promise that, if he were to be given an office and building he would create the GOI "a Record Office which will rank with any Record office in Europe". (Home, Public, March 1891, nos. 24-42, p. 16). Thereafter the GOI in their dispatch to the Secretary of State emphasised the need for such a central record office, drawing attention to "the vast mass of records, indifferently housed [in concerned Departments], which are seldom consulted and which are subject, as the result of exposure to damp and insects in this climate, to rapid decay" unless preserved properly. (ibid, p. 98). As a result, the Secretary of State Lord Cross approved the creation of a post of "Officer in charge of the Records of the Government of India" and G.W.Forrest thus became the founder head of the record office of the government of India in March 1891.

### **The utility of Archiving Records: the government's objectives**

(3) No discussion of the archival policy can be complete unless we consider the agenda or objectives of the government. Old records were of value to the government on account of the need the government often felt to build policies and practices on the basis of past precedents. It is interesting to see from the correspondence that while administrators at lower levels were impatient with the mass of historical records in their departments, (Home Public, October 1899, nos. 227-28), the policy-makers at the top, e.g. Secretaries in the Viceroy's Council, were keen to have access to old records. The latter wrote in their Despatch to the Secretary of State in 1889: the old records must be kept in "a condition in which they can resist the ravages of time, and to make their contents *available for reference in the discussion of current affairs*". (Home, Public, March 1891, nos. 24-42, p. 98; emphasis added). Most frequently consulted by bureaucrats were their records of the Foreign Department because relations with hundreds of native princely



states and chieftains, from Afghanistan to Manipur, and Kashmir to Travancore, were regulated by numerous agreements and protocols which went back to the eighteenth century East India Company records. Further the frontiers of British India were determined according to agreements with neighbouring states. (Even the post-Independence period saw the Indian government delving into these archived data to defend its position *vis a vis* the MacMahon Line, or India's relations with the states on or beyond the Himalayas).

Secondly, the documents in the Home Department were an important source for precedents and conventions in respect of internal administration. How to do deal with tribal groups in the North-Western Frontier Province? Who were the local notables and landlords who were reliable allies for the British in the past, e.g. during the uprising of 1857? Which were the ethnic groups for the British Indian army? Who were dangerous nationalist agitators or groups in the past? These questions were settled with reference to records. In some other matters too records were consulted by the administrators. The most apposite instance of that necessity was the periodical assessment of land revenue demand in areas outside Permanent Settlement; there were other means such as crop cutting or 'eye-estimate' etc to gauge increase in production to increase revenue demand, but the rule of thumb usually applied was to find out what the assessment was at the last revenue settlement operation, twenty to thirty years ago, and to jack it up by a certain percentage. Thus to the District Collector access to old revenue settlement records was an essential necessity. (B.H.Baden-Powell, *The Land System of British India*, Oxford, 1892, vols. I-III; reprint 1972). Apart from that, there was a statutory obligation to maintain records and statistics of revenue, commerce, population, education, etc. Since the crown administration took over from the East India Company in 1858 the British Parliament required the Govt. of India to submit periodically a *Report on Moral and Material Progress* which included these data, collected from records.

Apart from the above reasons which were *pragmatic*, there were also *ideological* elements in the discourse of archives. Respect for precedents was an important feature of the political culture of the British. Their habit of mind of founding contemplated action on precedents and conventions required reference to previous records of action on various administrative matters. Secondly, there was another ideological element in their desire to

secure their place in history, and to defend themselves against adverse judgement of the posterity. This historical consciousness was enhanced by colonial historiography – James Mill’s *History of British India*, followed by works of Mounstuart Elphinstone, J.T.Wheeler, Alfred Lyall and others. In Sir H.H.Risley’s notes we already see an awareness of the nationalist critique of British rule: for instance he refers to a historical work of N.N.Ghosh, a prominent nationalist journalist who used some published government records in a book on Nubkissen (Navakrishna), the dewan of Lord Clive; Risley therefore desired rules in the archives which would “prevent unscrupulous students from selecting and publishing those portions of records which tell in favour of their point of view”. (H.H.Risley’s note of 23 June 1904, Home, Public, September, 1904, no. 98, p. 12). There can be little doubt that policy-makers at higher level like Lord Curzon, whom Risley mentions as “keenly interested” in the imperial records, shared this point of view. For all these reasons proper archiving of records mattered to policy-level thinking and this is why very often the British statesmen urged upon the Indian government to apply themselves to archiving in a manner appropriate to a great Empire. From Sir Charles Wood to Lord Cross a series of Secretaries of State kept reminding the Indian government of the grave importance of that objective; probably they were more keenly conscious-of its importance because they were, as members of the Parliament and the Cabinet, political persons, unlike the average bureaucrats in the Indian government.

### Phase III: 1891-1911

The Imperial Records Department was founded in March 1891 and an era came to an end with the transfer of capital to Delhi in 1911. In the phase 1891-1904 the newly created Imperial Records Department had a series of distinguished officers heading the department: G.W.Forrest the founder of the Department, in 1891-1900; a distinguished historian of the period of Sirajuddaulah and the battle of Plassey, S C Hill in 1900-1902; and archivist historian of the East India Company C.R.Wilson in 1902-1904. Wilson was a historian of repute and he published a widely read selection of records, *The Early Annals of the English in Bengal*. He was followed by an officer appointed for a brief



period N.L.Hallward, in 1904-1905, and an eminent Persian expert E.Denison Ross in 1905-14. Though this phase comes to an end with the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, the actual re-location of the records from Calcutta took a long time, since that awaited the construction of the building on Queen's Way (Jan Path) which was completed in 1926.

**Designation of the Head of the Record Department:**

The head of the department was originally called in 1891 'the officer in charge of Records' and we can see in contemporary files and noting reference to him as the 'O.R.' (e.g. a set of about fifty memos of 1896 in Home (Public), October 1899, nos. 227-228). C.R.Wilson occupied that position in rank equal to only an Assistant Secretary. In 1904 he wrote in an official note to the Secretary, Home Dept.: "It seems to me that title Officer in Charge of the Records of the Govt. of India is very lengthy and cumbersome....Mr Forrest used to call himself 'Director of Imperial Records' or something of the sort....it seems to me rather meaningless. How can I be said to direct records? What does directing records mean? 'Imperial Archivist' is quite short but the term sounds strange and foreign. Perhaps the best title would be 'Keeper of the Imperial Archives'...I have called the attention of the government to the point, and they will think of some short and possible title". (C.R.Wilson's Note on Imperial Record Office, 21.5.1904, Home, Public Branch, September 1904, no. 98). The government did and the designation came to be known as 'Keeper of Records' till 1944.(Thereafter he was re-designated as Director of Archives in 1944; this was when the eminent historian Dr. Surendra Nath Sen was holding this office. On 30 August 1947 the department itself was re-named the National Archives of India).

In the years from the foundation of the Record Dept. in 1891 the significant developments and policy trends were as follows:

**Programme of the Record Department:**

(1) The first head of the department G.W.Forrest submitted to the GOI a programme for the preparations of a catalogue and press lists of old documents and upon approval began that work on 'Proceedings Volumes' and the 'Original collections'. In his dispatch of 3

June 1897 the secretary of state for India instructed that while press lists were to be prepared in India, the Calendars of Documents were to be prepared in England; further, that the GOI "might occasionally sanction the compilation of official publications based on records". (Home, Public, October 1896. nos. 200-08; April 1897, nos. 220-28). Since difficulties were encountered calendaring work was given up in England and from 1903 Calendaring work was began in India at the Imperial Record Dept. (Home Public, April 1903, nos. 47-48; R.Nathen's note of 25 May 1904, Home, Public, Sept. 1904, no. 98).

**The English Model**

(2) On the whole there is a notable tendency to look to English models and procedures as well as a lack of confidence in native Indian staff. Advice was solicited by the GOI from the Master of Rolls in England as well as the head of the English Record Office, one Mr. Maxwell Lyte. However, judging by the statements of Sir Henry H.Risley, then Home Secretary, controlling the Imperial Records Department, it seems that those consultants' advice was not acted upon,. (Memo by H.H.Risley, 23 July 1904, Home, Public, Sept. 1904, no. 98). Risley writes that calendaring involves writing a précis and the English officer like Wilson "might depute a native clerk to draft a précis", but Risley was skeptical whether "any numbers of his staff are capable....the tendency would be along to copy rather than abstract, and the proportion which the editor [the English Officer] will have to reject or re-write would be extremely large." (Risley, *ibid.* Para no. 2). The distrust of native subordinates slowed down all process of calendaring and cataloguing of records. Although Wilson, at the head of the Records Department did not recommend appointment of archival experts from England, that was strongly advocated by his superior, in the Home Department, R Nathan and H H Risley who had great faith in the efficacy of getting even "one good officer from home", i.e. from England, trained in the Record Office in London. (Note by R Nathan, Deputy Secretary, Home Dept., 25 May 1904, in Home (Public) September 1904, p. 9). That plan, however, never worked out, due to, *inter alia*, financial stringency and the non-availability of suitable personnel. Archiving as a profession backed by systematic training was yet to develop and thus the Imperial Records Department in India depended on staff trained in the department and on



officers who were recruited from among educationists or some exceptional civil servants who had historical interests.

#### **Denial of Public Access to Records:**

(3) A distrust in respect of Indian loyalty to the Raj was also evident in the policy of denying Indians access to the government records. Although a professional historian, C.R. Wilson, heading the Imperial Record Dept., was willing to allow that R. Nathan, Deputy Secretary, Home Dept., wrote in a policy note that "it would probably be considered very undesirable to allow the public such free access in the records as Mr. Wilson appears to contemplate". (R. Nathan, File noting dt. 25 May 1904, Home, Public, September, 1904, no. 98). Risley, the Secretary in Home Department, gave the reasons for this attitude: "I am absolutely opposed to turning people loose to rummage in our records.... There would, in my opinion, be very great danger of the materials thus obtained being unfairly used for political purposes". (ibid, Risley's note, dt. 23 June 1904). Risley thought that a selective reading and citation of the records was dangerous and it would be better if the entire record cited was made available in published form. As we shall see later, due to the British Indian government's attitude in this regard Indians did not obtain access to records of their own country's history till the last decade of British rule. And yet a policy statement of the GOI in their dispatch to the Secretary of State (No. 313 of 1904, in Finance and Commerce Dept., dt. 1 September 1904, in Home, Public, Sept. 1904, no. 98) stated that it was a matter of regret that "we find that up to the present time very little has been done to render the records accessible to students" and the GOI was actively considering "the question of the facilities offered to the public for research". The inconsistency between this concern and Risley's policy statement quoted above can have only one explanation: the students of history and researchers the Govt. of India mentioned in their dispatch to London were not Indians but European. The programme for preparing press lists and calendars and for putting the records in appropriate order was for the aid of foreign researchers, Indians were to be excluded from that privilege.

**Re-location of Records Department:**

In 1896 there occurred a series of consultations in the Home Department, Public Branch, regarding the problem of accumulation of old records in Calcutta and Simla, the capital cities where the government of India functioned. As one of the secretaries put it: "there are vast files of ancient records which must be kept but are practically never referred to, and which might without the slightest inconvenience be housed in the suburbs, in substantial but inexpensive buildings. We have at present nowhere to keep them but the valuable space provided in Calcutta offices". (J. Westland, Memo dated 6 March 1896, Public Works Department, Home (Pub.), October 1896, No. 227). Secretary of Public Works Department proposed the construction of a suitable building in the suburbs and "creation of an inexpensive department for looking after" records no longer in active use. At this time Secretaries in other departments were also considering the drastic measure of destroying unimportant (Part-B papers) to save space. (Vide correspondence between 6-3-1896 to 8-6-1896 in Home (Public), October 1899, No. 227).

In accordance with the above discussions and in consultation with G.W. Forrest of the Record Dept., the Public Works Department planned in January 1897 "the construction of buildings in the suburbs of Calcutta for the storage of old records" as well as "proposals for the reduction and destruction of useless records". The proposal was to make "a partial move" towards creating a Central Record Office, excepting two departments because "the Military and Foreign Department would be unwilling to have the records sent away". It was then estimated that the Home and Public Works Department alone would require eight thousand square feet and other departments would need eight thousand square feet each. (Unofficial Memorandum from the Public Works Department, GOI, No. 21, January 1897, Home (Pub.), October 1899, No. 227-28). However, the disadvantage of having to procure records, when needed, from a distance as well as the unwillingness of G.W. Forrest to move from Central Calcutta to the suburbs were obstacles and thus no special building was erected for the records right up to the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911, or more accurately, the construction of the present NAI building in 1926.



**Conclusion:**

Towards the end of the present phase, 1891-1911, the Imperial Record Department was a poor relative of the family of important government departments in Calcutta. The head of the department was merely of a rank equal to an Assistant Secretary, he had a temporary and uncertain hold over premises in the Secretariat in Dalhousie Square in Calcutta, and his staff numbered less than one hundred. (C.R. Wilson, Officer in charge of Records of GOI, to Secretary, Home Department, 20 May 1904, and Annual report on Imperial Record Dept., Home, Public, September 1904, no. 98, pp 12-15). However, as we shall see later, in the period following this phase, due to the transfer of the office to a central place in New Delhi along with the capital (1911-1926), the recommendations in respect of Indian records in the Report of the Royal Commission of Records in England (1914), the appointment of the Historical Records Commission (1919), and the warming up of the political environment during the nationalist agitation, the Imperial Records Department began to acquire importance. That will form the subject of the next stage of project work.

*S. S. Bhattacharya*  
Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

**Third Report on Project Work, July 2013 to December 2013**

**Project Title: Colonial Archiving Policy, 1858-1947**

by  
**Sabyasachi Bhattacharya**

The previous reports by me on this project covered the periods 1858 to 1872 (Report no. I), and 1872 to 1911 (Report no. II). The present report is concerned with the period 1911 to 1926.

The major issues in this period which are addressed are the following:

- (1) the policy decision announced in 1911 to transfer the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi;
- (2) the construction of a building for the Imperial Record Department (now the NAI building) in New Delhi, as planned by Sir Edwin Lutyens, and completed in 1926;
- (3) the transfer of the Imperial Record Department from Calcutta to the new building in New Delhi (November 1926) and completion of the separation of the Govt. of India records from those which remained with the Govt. of Bengal;
- (4) the course of development in the Imperial Record Department and the policy implications of the Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records in England (1914);
- (5) the opening of access for researchers to historical records in the Imperial Record Department (1925), against the long-standing opposition of the imperial bureaucracy to allowing non-officials and native Indians access to such records;
- (6) the appointment of the Indian Historical Records Commission (1919), which led to the induction of experts and historians into the role of advisors to government on archiving.

I will try to sum up my findings seriatim as above in the following pages.

**1. Policy Decision to transfer Capital from Calcutta to Delhi, 1911, and consequential actions.**

The transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi obviously meant transfer of the Imperial Record Dept. (IR Dept. hereafter) from Calcutta to New Delhi. On 25 August 1911 the Governor-General in Council wrote to the Secretary of State for India in London: "That



the Government of India should have its seat in the same city as one of the chief Provincial Governments, and moreover in a city geographically so ill-adapted as Calcutta to be the capital of the Indian Empire, has long been recognized to be a serious anomaly. *The peculiar political situation which has arisen in Bengal since the partition makes it eminently desirable to withdraw the Government in India from its present provincial environment*, while its removal from Bengal is an essential feature of the scheme we have in view for allaying the ill-feeling aroused by the partition amongst the Bengali population. On geographical, historical, and political grounds, the capital of the Indian Empire should be at Delhi, and the announcement that the transfer of the seat of Government to Delhi had been sanctioned should be made by His Majesty the King-Emperor at the forthcoming Imperial Durbar in Delhi itself....The Bengalis might not, of course, be favourably disposed to the proposal if it stood alone, for it will entail the loss of some of the influence which they now exercise owing to the fact that Calcutta is the headquarters of the Government of India. But, as we hope presently to show, they should be reconciled to the change by other features of our scheme which are specially designed to give satisfaction to Bengali sentiment." That other feature was the revocation of the Partition of Bengal 1905) against which the *swadeshi* agitation had raged in Bengal for several years. In England there was considerable criticism of the shift of capital and the revocation of the Partition of Bengal. For example in the debates in Parliament, reported in *Hansard*, Lord Curzon was very critical: "I dare say the Secretary of State will try to console me by saying that partition has not been revoked. But to all intents and purposes the old partition has been reversed. Perhaps the best judges whether partition is reversed or not will be found in India herself. Directly after the announcement was made at Delhi the Congress Committee met and passed a vote of thanks to the Government for the fulfillment of the political aspirations; and subsequently, at the meeting of the Congress, the President spoke of the annulment of partition as a triumph in the most momentous constitutional struggle in modern times. Nor in any part of India is there any doubt that agitation has won the day." However, the decision, once made and announced by the King Emperor himself, was irrevocable. Consequential action was the beginning of the vast process of shifting the departments of the Govt. of India from the Imperial Secretariat in Calcutta to their new location in the new capital. The Imperial Record Dept

which had been located in the Imperial Secretariat (commonly called Writers' Building from the days of the East India Company) from the inception of the Department in 1891, began to arrange records for relocation. The Keeper of Imperial Records was at that time E. Denison Ross.

## **2. Construction of Imperial Record Dept. (presently NAI) Building 1912-1926**

An obvious consequence of the transfer of capital in 1911 was the transfer of the record room, but where would it be housed in New Delhi? In 1912 two things happened which decided that question. First, Viceroy Hardinge who was a major proponent of the idea of shifting the capital, proposed in a memorandum dated 12 October 1912 that a building should be constructed "to hold all the records of the GOI with the exception of the years' current records, which will be left with the concerned Departments and to provide for expansion". (Minute by Viceroy Hardinge, Home Dept. Public Branch, Deposit, January 1914, no. 27, p.45). This promised a great improvement upon the past experience of the Imperial Record Department – it had stayed in a little corner of the Writers' Building in Calcutta since its birth in 1891. Secondly, a man with a grand vision about New Delhi came on the scene. Edwin Lutyens, a relatively junior architect 43 years of age was appointed to lead the New Delhi Planning Commission; he had never been to any school or university but had designed houses for many aristocratic families. He had married Emily Bulwer-Lytton, daughter of Lord Lytton the former Viceroy of India, and thus he had friends in the highest circles in India and in England. Lutyens seems to have been aware of the historical importance of the archives and he personally planned for it a building of red sand stone with imposing classical pillars. The building was originally planned to be like a hollow square, but actually only one side was completed – the façade presently facing Jan Path. Though the building Lutyens left behind was smaller than his original design, its location signalled its importance in his conception; the Record Department building was located at the crossing of the Queen's Way (Janpath) and the King's Way (Rajpath). It is interesting to reflect on the fact that Jawaharlal Nehru chose a similar spot, diagonally opposite to that of the Imperial Record Department or National Archives, to erect the National Museum. At any rate, the upshot was that the Imperial



Record Department was to shift for the first time to a special building of its own. This perhaps reflected a new appreciation of the importance of the archives of the Imperial government.

### 3. Shift of IRD and Transfer of Papers

The collateral consequence of the shift of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi was the transfer of the Imperial Records to New Delhi. This seems to have taken place over a long time. In the present West Bengal State Archives I saw many files relating to this transfer which also involved the separation of Bengal Presidency records from the Government of India records. There are files which indicate a series of turf wars between the claims of the Imperial Record Department and the claims of the provincial government to certain papers, e.g. disputes in 1918-1919 between "A.F.Scholfield, M.A., Keeper of Records, GOI" and Chief Secretary, government of Bengal. The officers of the latter were unwilling to transfer some papers to Scholfield's office on the ground that as regards some files, "In no case can we say with certainty whether they belong to us [i.e. Bengal Government] or the Imperial Record Department". (Govt. of Bengal, Pol. Dept., Record Branch, F.no. 4R/1922). It is interesting to observe that the record departments, Provincial and Imperial i.e. Central, depended heavily on native clerks, 'Satis babu' and 'Hari babu' and the like to search for and classify and catalogue records.

The transfer of records from Bengal government to the GOI Imperial Record Department continued to generate a huge correspondence (e.g. Govt. of Bengal, Pol. Dept., Records Branch, B, August 1920, no. 56-60; F.no. 7D/1920, re. transfer of records of Inspector General of Registration, Calcutta, of deeds registered between 1780 and 1834, to the Imperial Record Department; Govt. of Bengal, KW file GR/T/1922, nos. 12-34; Govt. of Bengal Pol. Dept., Records Branch, F.no. 72/1922 re. transfer of Records of the ceded and Conquered Provinces, Board of Commissioners, Behar and Benares, Board of Revenue, N.W.Provinces, and Board of Revenue, Central Provinces to the I.R.Department. All the above records are in West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta). A typical communication may be reproduced here to show what was involved in dividing the archives and transfer of records from Govt. of Bengal to the Imperial Record

Department. This is a letter from the latter to the former: "This office [i.e. IRD, GOI] has in its possession only the Public [Dept.] set of consultations, but there seems no doubt that all the papers belonging to the Revenue and Judicial Consultations, should be with the government of India". (From J.M.Mitra, Keeper of Records of the GOI, Imperial Record Department, to Secretary to Govt. of Bengal, Political Department, 2 September 1922, Government of Bengal, Pol. (Record Branch), F.no. 72/1922). To sum it up, my research in the records of the West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, indicate that a very complex process of classification and separation of records occurred as a necessary part of the separation of the Imperial Records and the records of the Govt. of Bengal in the 1920s. This was a part of the evolution of the NAI archives as we know it today.

Shifting the papers of IR Dept. to New Delhi significantly progressed in 1926. Keeper of Records, AFM Abdul Ali reports in 1927: "In accordance with the orders conveyed in the letter of the Department of Education, Helath and Lands, no. 1134-General, dated 28 September 1926, the Crown records from 1899 onwards ....were transferred to New Delhi, together with a staff consisting to two Assistants, 4 Clerks, 6 Sorters and *dafiries*, 3 Peons and 4 Dusting Bearers. The Record Office at New Delhi [in the new building] was opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1926" (AFM Abdul Ali to Secretary, Education, 21 April 1927, Bengal Government, Pol. (Records) 2R/27).

#### 4. Course of development in IRD administration, 1911-1926

In the beginning of the period under review a famous Persian scholar E. Denison Ross was the Keeper of Imperial Records. Ross, in office from 1905 to 1914, had among his predecessors Sir G.W.Forrest (1891-1900), the historian of Bengal S.C.Hill (1900-1902) and the historian of East India Company and Calcutta city C.R.Wilson (1902-1904) and a temporary head of the office N.L.Hallward (1904-1905). In 1926 when the shift from Calcutta to New Delhi was completed the head was AFM Abdul Ali. Between Ross and Abdul Ali there were some relatively undistinguished Keepers of Imperial Records.

I have examined the documents in the Imperial Record Department's departmental files (i.e. files not transferred to the NAI till now); these are accessible only upon getting special permission from the D.G., NAI, and I obtained that permission to



consult the departmental records. These files pertain mainly to the inner working of the departmental administration, e.g. transfer of old records from various departments to the IRD (Feb. 1909, no. 22, July 1916, no. 109); compliance of provincial governments with instructions regarding preservation of records in district Collectorates (August 1910, no. 165); permission given to some individuals like W.K.Firminger or Rev. H.Hosten to access specific records (October 1908, nos. 1-2, June 1912 no. 16); William Foster's comments on records in India (August 1917, no. 65); C.R.Wilson's comments on the working of IRD (May 1903, no. 214); administrative action against clerks of IRD accused of divulging information from records (March 1904, no. 23), etc. The only important files are regarding researchers' access to records which was proposed in 1914 and rejected. (April 1914, no. 53; December 1914 no. 224). The rest of the files are generally about administrative trivia, unrelated to archiving policy.

However, two things are noteworthy. First, On the whole, the IRD was a small department and remained so till the 1930s. Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records in England (1914) drew attention to the importance of the records preservation but thereafter the World War I caused financial stringency. The very small staff employed in the IRD shows that no great importance was accorded by the government to it. The first head George Forrest began with a small staff and in 1892 these were made permanent employees: they numbered only 5 clerks, 4 *duftries*, and 8 unskilled workers. (Home, Public Branch, March 1895 nos. 130-135). There is a great deal of correspondence between successive heads of the IRDept and the Finance Secretary dealing with requests for expansion of staff. C.R.Wilson complained that IRD "has been starved of staff always". (C.R.Wilson's note of 27.04.04, Home (Public) September 1904, no. 98). The staff remained small till the 1930s. Secondly, we shall also see in the next phase that there was an interesting development in the 1930s, the expansion of records related employment in different government departments, and the trade unionization of the lower grade employees, i.e. 'Record sorters', 'Record Lifters' and *Daftries*, in different GOI departments leading to their "recognition by the GOI Home Department". (Home, Public Branch, F. no. 16/1/33 of 1933, C.F.V.William, Under Secretary, Home Dept. to S.Hussain, Secretary of "GOI Attached and subordinate Office Record Sorters, Record Lifters, and Duftries' Association," 4 July 1933). It seems that the Imperial

Record Department staff did not join that association, but they memorialized the government to demand pay rise etc. along with the record workers' trade unions elsewhere in government departments. (Home, Estates Branch (S), F.no. 48/18/45). All these activities were, needless to say, restricted by the GSC or General Service Conditions which debarred government servants from engaging in political activities (Note by CFV William, dt. 23.6.1933 citing Auditor General's observation regarding 'GSC', *ibid*).

### 5. Opening the archives to historical research

There was a strong bureaucratic resistance to opening the archives of the government. As I mentioned in my earlier reports on my project, in an earlier period Sir W.W.Hunter opposed the idea of opening the records to non-official native Indians. He thought that unlike Europe, in India there was "no class of man of letters and leisure" capable to using the archives; the Home Secretary E. Clive Bayley also said in 1872 that "there are records even of the last century which it might cause inconvenience [to the government] to throw open to the public". (Home, Public Branch, December 1872 no. 647, 649). As in 1871 again in 1904 there was the same opposition to opening the archives. Sir H.H.Risley pointed to the case of N.N.Ghosh who had in a book on Navakrishna, Dewan of Clive, used published records to show the British in an unfavourable light; Risley observed that to open the archives was to open the possibility of "unscrupulous students of history" misusing records for purposes of anti-British propaganda. "I am absolutely opposed to turning people loose to rummage in our records". (H.H.Risley, note dated 23 June 1904, Home, Public, September 1904, no. 98, p. 12).

However, there was pressure from England to allow historical researchers access to Indian records. More than one Secretary of State desired such a policy and in 1904 the government of India admitted to the Secretary of state that regrettably "very little has been done to render the records accessible to students". (Governor General in Calcutta to the Secretary of State, 1 September 1904, Home, Public, Sept. 1904, no. 98). Nevertheless, status quo was maintained, although C.R.Wilson, Keeper of Records 1902-



1904, was in favour of opening the archives. In 1914 the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records finally forced the hands of the Indian Government. In 1918 the government, after having considered the Royal Commission recommendations for a long time, resolved that “steps were to be taken to ensure and to make known the accessibility of the records to genuine students”. (Education Dept., General-A, April 1918, F.no. 1-17). In consultation with the Historical Records Commission, appointed in 1919, the Government of India framed certain rules allowing historical researchers access to records under certain conditions and surveillance. The new rules became effective from 1925. (*A Handbook to the Records of the Govt. of India 1748-1858*, Appendix).

In the Annual Report for 1926 from the Keeper of Records it is recorded that there were a number of researchers who used the archives. Among them were the following historians: R.B.Ramsbotham of ICS, G.S.Sardesai of Bombay, J.C.Sinha of Dacca University, J.P.Niyogi of Calcutta University, A.Aspinall of University College, Rangoon, Brajendra Nath Banerjee of Bengal Literary Academy or the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, G.E.Harvey of Rangoon, G.Yazadani of Hyderabad, Khuda Baksh of the Oriental Public Library in Patna, and the future Professor of Indian History at the University of London Mr. H.Dodwell. The above list decisively shows that the claim made by W.W.Hunter or H.H.Risley that there was no historical research worth the name in India was untrue. (Annual Report, Imperial Record Department, by AFM Abdul Ali, Keeper of Records, 21 April 1927, Govt. of Bengal, Political Dept., Records Branch, F. 2R/2/27, West Bengal State Archives). The IRD Report also records that a search fee was paid by these researchers as the price for accessing records. (Rs. 275 was collected from search fee levied on “private parties”, while officials were provided records free of charge, *ibid*, p.3).

The substance of the story is that only in the last two decades of British, from 1925, non-official Indians had access to the records; moreover, till Independence only pre-1880 records were open to researchers. We have focused upon the British policy here, but we must also bear in mind the role of Indian nationalists in gaining for Indians right of access to government records. Particularly M.G.Ranade (1842-1901) fought hard to gain access to Peshwa Daftar Records while writing his *Rise of Maratha Power*

(1900). Those records were in the possession of the Government of Bombay Presidency and Ranade was denied access for years and eventually allowed limited access, subject to censorship on records copied. Ranade's colleague in this struggle against the closed-door policy in the archives was V.K.Rajwade (1863-1926) who, having been denied access to Maratha records by the government, started an archival collection project of his own through the institution he founded, Bharatiya Itihas Sansodhak Mandal. These activities, known as the 'archives movement' were inspired by a nationalist spirit which, of course, provoked British suspicion and hostility.

#### **6. The policy advisory role of the Indian Historical Records Commission, from 1919**

An important outcome of the Report of Royal Commission on Public Records in England (1914) was a proposal from the Government of India to the Secretary of State in 1918: a Historical Records Commission to be appointed to advise the government regarding archiving, provision of facilities for research, the publication of records, etc. (Education Dept., General A, April 1918, nos. 1-17). Another proposal made by the GOI was that district records may be collected in a Provincial Record Office in each province and that older provincial records may be collected in the Central Record Office. This latter proposal was rejected by the Secretary of State for India who thought that centralizing all older records in the Central Record Office was undesirable: "local sentiment [i.e. provincial civil servants' sentiment] will probably be strongly opposed to the proposal" of centralization. (Education Dept., General- A, August 1919, nos. 1-21). Perhaps the surmise of the Secretary of State was correct, but the proposal to collect district records in the provincial record rooms was a sound idea; in fact it originated with Sir George Forrest when he gave his views in a memorandum to the Royal Commission in England and it was also supported by William Foster, an expert in Indian factory records. (Education Dept., General- A, October 1915, nos. 19-21). But this suggestion was not acted upon by the Imperial Record Office and thus district records remained grossly neglected. However, the Historical Records Commission in their annual sessions in different Provincial capitals began to bring to light local records and in the long run this led to the organization of Regional Records Commissions which published some selected district records and local documents.



The Historical Records Commission was originally intended to be a meeting ground of officials in the business of archiving but it exceeded that agenda in various ways. Sir Jadunath Sarkar recalled later how it developed: "In 1919 the Government of India created a small consultative body under the name of the Indian Historical Records Commission. It was composed of the Keeper of the Central Records and the record officers of the three Presidencies, together with three historical experts from outside this department – among whom I happen to be the sole survivor. Its function was to advise the Government of India on the preservation, sorting, listing and calendaring of the records in its possession and to make suggestions about printing them and giving the public access to the manuscripts. We soon discovered that under the medieval conditions which had obtained in India until recently, many historical documents of a public character were in private possession and that these surpassed in volume, antiquity and value the documents in the public record offices. We also realized that Government funds could not provide the cost of editing and printing the imperial records with the desirable speed and efficiency and that it was absolutely necessary to enlist the aid of voluntary *non-official* workers in this task. Hence, in the second year, the Government of India expanded our Commission by adding to the limited and purely departmental original body a number of outside scholars under the names of corresponding and co-opted members." (Speech of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, President, IHRC, on 13 December 1937 at its Fourteenth Session at Lahore).

The IHRC played an important role in framing the rules under which researchers began to be given access to records from 1925. The other contribution of this body was that it brought together historians from different parts of India and thus provided an all India forum long before the Indian History Congress (1935) was founded. Further development of interaction between official archivization and professional historians will be the subject of my next Report on Phase IV of this project.



Sabyasachi Bhattacharya  
Tagore National Fellow.

Annex No. II

**The Methodology**

1. In this phase of the history of the archives, 1911-1926, I obtained a good deal of data from the West Bengal State Archives because this was the phase when the capital and the Imperial Record Dept were shifted from Calcutta to New Delhi by stages, the process being almost completed in 1926. I found more data on the transfer of records to the new location of the Record Dept in the State Archives in Calcutta than in NAI, New Delhi.
2. The method of data collection I have followed is the one usually followed in archival research: to scan the Index volumes (mainly of the Home Department, Public Branch; in some years the Education Dept when the IRD was relocated there), to identify files needed for purposes of my research project from among files I obtain from the stacks, and to requisition digitized or xeroxed photo copies of records I select. I have paid the usual charges for the copying service.
3. The procedure I have followed in NAI is to have digital or photo copies made of records I select, and to work on them elsewhere with secretarial assistance. The NAI Research Room has provided me excellent facilities for collection of my documentary sources. However, for purposes of analyzing and writing the history of the archives the NAI Research Room is not ideal because a dozen or more persons sit in that room and secretarial assistance is not possible there.
4. The books I need for purposes of this project, published in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, are available in the National Library of India, Calcutta.

*S. Bhattacharya*



### Tagore National Fellowship for Culture Research (Template for Six-monthly Report)

- 1. Institution : National Archives of India.
- 2. Name of Tagore National Fellow : Sabyasachi Bhattacharya
- 3. Fellowship Tenure : From 4 June 2012 to 3 June 2014.
- 4. Report for the period : Jan 2014 to June 2014.
- 5. Six-monthly report : No. IV
- 6. Project Title : Colonial Archiving Policy, 1858-1947, and Early Modern Historiography in India.
- 7. Brief Note on Research Work : **Vide Enclosed Note (Annex I)** /Report on research during the period, Jan 2014 to June 2014.
- 8. Methodology : **Vide Annex. II** of this report.
- 9. None, because publication will be feasible only after the data collected during the tenure of the present Fellowship will be put together and written up as a book for publication by the NAI.
- 10. As above; at the invitation of the DG of NAI, I delivered on the subject of this Project the Foundation Day Lecture on the occasion of the NAI Foundation Celebrations, 2014; the text of another public lecture is ready and I am prepared to deliver lecture when called upon.
- 11. Note on field work : **Vide item 8 above.**
- 12. Highlights/Progress of Project : This Report No. IV completes the project undertaken.
- 13. Difficulties, if any : Working conditions in the NAI are excellent.
- 14. Other academic work : Oxford University Press has published in May 2014 a historical work written by me on the period 1920-1947.

*S. Bhattacharya*

Signature of Fellow/date 30 June 2014.

**Remarks of the Head of Institution, signature/date.**

**ANNEX. I**

**Report No. IV on Project Work, January 2014 to June 2014**

**Project Title: Colonial Archiving Policy, 1858-1947**

by

**Sabyasachi Bhattacharya,**

**Tagore National Fellow.**

The present Report No. IV on the period 1926-1947, was preceded by three Reports written earlier. Since this is the last report of this project, prior to the publication of its findings in the form of a monograph, it will be useful to review initially the earlier reports and to reiterate the major points.

**The Background**

In Report I on the phase 1858 to 1872 the focus was on (a) the Indian government's endeavour, upon the termination of the East India Company's rule, to reorganize the record system and the deliberations of the Record Committee towards that end from 1858 to its dissolution in 1872. (b) It was noted that the government was unable to decide on the creation of a central record office, or a 'muniment room', which would cost money and man power. (c) We also noted the important role played by historians or archivists who contributed to organizing and publishing records, e.g. Rev. James Long, J.Talboys Wheeler, W.S.Seton-Karr, and Sir William Hunter. In the second phase, 1872 to 1891, the subject of Report No. II, we pointed to two policy trends: (a) After dithering over the questions of creating a central Imperial Record Department for many years, in 1891 the idea was finally accepted by the government, (b) and this decision was qualified by a strong resistance in the bureaucracy to allowing non-officials access to the records. In Report III we identified three trends in the phase 1891 to 1911: (a) The English model recommended by the Master of Rolls in England, and the Keeper of the English Record Office was accepted by the Indian Government, but that remained an unattainable ideal due to the low position given to the head of the Imperial Record Department (equivalent to position of Assistant Secretary) as well as financial constraints on developing the archive. (b) The policy of excluding non-officials, i.e. researchers and the general public, from access to the government records continued. From 1911 there begins a new phase, with the announcement of the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi, and thus the relocation of the Imperial Record Department from Calcutta. I have outlined the chief developments in this phase 1911-1926: (a) The architect of the new Imperial Record Deptment building on Queen's Way, now Janpath, was Sir Edwin Lutyens. The building was completed and began to function in 1926. (b) The recommendations of the Royal Commission on Public Records in England in 1914, as well as exhortations from secretaries of State for India created an awareness in the Indian bureaucracy that the Record Department was important. (c) The formation of the Indian Historical Records Commission in 1919, suggested by the above mentioned



Commission, created a forum for inter-action between the record department's officials, and academic historians who pressed for the opening wider access to the archives.

In the following pages we address the major issues and developments in the last phase of the evolution of archival policy, from 1926 when the Imperial Record Department began to function in Delhi to 1947, i.e. the attainment of Independence and the re-designation of the Record Department as 'National Archives of India'. Before we enter into the details of this phase, 1926-47, let us sum up and reiterate the major policy trends which emerged in our earlier Reports.

**Archives: A Systemic Necessity in Imperial Governance**

What were the basic objectives in the archival policy of the Government of India from 1858? Research on the present project suggests that archiving was a systemic necessity for the imperial government. The reasons were as follows. First, the archives served as the remembrancer of precedents. Given the British habit of mind of founding action on conventions and precedents and also the fact that courts of law created law through interpretative judgements on cases which came before them, it was vitally important for the British Indian administrators to draw upon precedents of administrative action in the process of considering action contemplated.

Secondly, imperial records served also as means of establishing claims to territory and various entitlements of the East India Company and later the Government of India under international law. No doubt, as Warren Hastings had said, the British had taken over the Indian possessions by the sword and could keep it by the appropriate use of the same instrument. But the British Indian government was also anxious to justify coercion by means of a legal rationale. It is therefore not surprising that the first set of records to be classified and archived were the Foreign Department records. In 1889 Professor G.W Forrest was commissioned by the government to do that. (Home (Public) March 1891, nos. 24-42, NAI, re. G.W. Forrest's appointment). The same impression of the prime importance of Foreign Department records will be formed if you glance at Aitchison's collection of treaties and engagements with princely states - called earlier 'country powers', 'native states' etc., - as well as with neighbouring foreign powers. (C.U. Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, Calcutta Government Press, 1892-93, vols. I-XI). Even the post-independence Indian government used these archived data oftenest in dealing with integration of princely states, or the MacMahon line, or India's relations with states on or beyond the Himalayas.

Thirdly, the British Indian government desiderated the preservation of documents not only for purposes of external relations, but also for internal policy-making. For example, how to deal with the North Western Frontier Province tribal groups (who were as difficult for the state to manage as they are to Pakistan today), or which ethnic groups to recruit as sepoys for the army (this depended on racial stereotypes developed in the officers' mess and in old records), or how much land revenue was to be collected (this was based upon land revenue settlement operations made thirty or more years ago). All policy considerations of that sort drew upon what the British had learned in earlier times. Here a common

error in historical narratives needs to be questioned. Many historians define policy in terms of policy declarations from time to time; actually policy is the trend that develops in a series of small actions by the government, not necessarily stated as policy. (This was my argument in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya *The Financial Foundations of the British Raj*, New Delhi, 2005, 'Introduction'.). When a British Indian civil servant looked into records of earlier times he rarely found declarations of that kind, but he saw actions which collectively constituted a line of thinking which was the policy.

Finally, it may be surmised that the British Indian government created an archive as a memorial to themselves, as a means of claiming their place in history. This again was not a declared policy, but the outcome of a series of apparently isolated and unconnected actions. No doubt pragmatic reasons, such as those I have mentioned earlier, predominated. It seems that in 1861 the Civil Auditor, Sandeman, first suggested a 'Grand Central Archive' and his reason was that too many old records burdened the shelves of the Departmental Record Rooms. (Sandeman's memo, Home (Public), December 1872, no. 647, NAI.). In 1862 a committee in Calcutta recommended the separation of records "of practical official usefulness" from the older ones of "purely historical and statistical interest". But the Calcutta Committee's work came to naught, as it often happened, due to reasons of financial stringency. Moreover, at this time the view prevailing in the highest quarters of the government of India was that publication of selected records of the Indian government was more useful than setting up an Imperial Records Department; that was the view of Viceroy Northbrook. (Govt. of India to Secretary of State for India, no. 95, 13 December 1872, NAI). In 1889 G.W.Forrest was commissioned to organize Foreign Department records. In 1891 when the government at last decided to set up the Imperial Record Department, the initial motive was to ensure easy access to Foreign Department records. After some more years in 1897 the Secretary of State for India decided to instruct the Indian Government to prepare press-lists of documents which made different departments' and subordinate governments' records accessible. (subordinate governments were the provincial governments with record rooms in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras). Thus with press-lists and calenders of documents the Imperial Record Room begins to look like an archive in the accepted sense of the term. These seemingly unconnected administrative events of 1860, 1862, 1889, 1891, 1897 created the Imperial Record Office. A sense of the historical was in action here. And it is possible that the Public Records Act passed in England Parliament in 1838 (placing records in the custody of the Master of the Rolls) was not unconnected with this line of thinking.

To sum it up, for pragmatic reasons of their own, the colonial state brought an archive into existence. A sense of the historical also played a role. One may recall James Mill's assertion, in his famous *History of British India*, that Indian civilization lacked a sense of the historical and produced no work of history. (James Mill, *History of British India*, (London, 1844, reprint, Delhi 1972) vol. I, pp. 370-373.). The British took pride in their historical consciousness and the archives would be their historical memorial.

**Access to Records: Colonial Bureaucracy against Opening the Archives**



The concept of archive implies that it is the custodian of the memory of the nation. The archives policy we have outlined in this Project suggests that in colonial India it was primarily a byproduct of colonial governance. Let us recall the fact the term archive first came into currency in France, while the British term for it was Record Room. Let us recall the fact that the French Revolution of 1789 witnessed the establishment of the French national archive and the institutionalization of public right of access to archived records. (Michel Duchein *Obstacles to Access, Use and Transfer of Information from the Archives* (UNESCO, Paris, 1983) and 'The history of European Archives and the Department of the Archival Profession in Europe' in *American Archivist*, vol. 55, Winter 1992; Katherine L. Cox, 'Ideology, Practicality and Financial Necessity : the creation of Archives Nationales 1789-1801', Florida State University, Ph D dissertation, 2007). Let us also recall that as late as 1938 the Imperial Records Department did not allow access to bona fide researchers who wished to see records. In 1939 when the ban was lifted the limit on public access was that only records prior to 1880 could be seen by researchers. Thus, although from 1919 the Indian Historical Records Commission (including Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar) made some gestures towards admitting and helping researchers, open access came only in 1939 and that too limited to documents more than sixty years old. It is important to reflect on the fact that archive was open for access only in the last eight years of British rule in India. In many other countries the national archives were open to the public, but not in colonial India.

There is plenty of evidence that the colonial bureaucracy was unwilling to regard the Imperial Records Department as anything other than what that title suggested. An episode illustrating the opposition of the civil servants in India to opening the archives to researchers or the Indian public has been studied by A. R. Kulkarni and others. (A. R. Kulkarni, ed., *History in Practice : historians and sources of medieval Deccan-Maratha*, Delhi, 1993). In 1897 the Deccan Vernacular Society requested the Government of Bombay for permission to print extracts of documents in the Peshwa daftar in government custody. The permission was granted after much delay provided, the government said, the introductory essay by M G Ranade was removed from the publication. In 1904 C. R. Wilson, heading the Imperial Records Department, wrote : "What facilities have the public at present for studying the records of the govt. of India. Practically none". (C.R.Wilson's Memo., 29.3.1904, Home (Public) September 1904, no. 98, N.A.I). In 1910 when the Secretary of State suggested preparation of calendars of documents the question of public access to records came up again. H G Stokes of Foreign Department, Government of India, pointed to the "unwisdom of providing material which may be used against the government, politically or otherwise". (H. G. Stokes' Note dt. 24.2.1910, (Public) A Progs, April 1919, Nos. 1-5, National Archives of India). A. F. Scholfield of the Department of Education pointed to "the encouragement and opportunities which the opening of the records would afford to frivolous and impertinent writers, unscrupulous journalists and the like", and consequences "disastrous to the government". (Note by A. F. Scholfield, Department of Education, 28.4.1914, General, A Progs, June 1914, N.A.I). He also held forth on the difference between

India and England: "There is in India no aristocracy of education, no school of history, historical research, scientific use of evidence," etc.

In fact even earlier to this, when the idea of simply preparing calendars and press-lists was under discussion, there was opposition from the ICS. H. H. Risley had written of his opposition to "turning people loose to rummage in our records with the guidance of the press lists," since there was danger of "materials thus obtained being unfairly used for political purposes." (H. H. Risley's note 23 June 1904, Home, Public, A Progs, September 1904, no. 98, N.A.I). My former colleague at St. Antony's College at Oxford, Johannes H Voigt has surveyed this trend of opinion. He argues that there developed a new approach to the opening of the archives in the 1920s for a political reason. Whereas earlier the civil servants in British India stoutly resisted opening the archives, in the 1920s the new approach was to argue that knowledge of true history from the records would be good to stem the tide of anti-British sentiment among the Indian educated middle-classes. According to Voigt it was Professor Ramsay Muir, famous as an historian of the British empire, who almost persuaded the government. Muir believed that promotion of "a spirit of historical enquiry and criticism" was needed "if educated India is to attain full political sanity." (vide J H Voigt, 'British Policy Towards Indian Historical Research and Writing 1870-1930', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. III, 1966, pp 137-149; citing Muir's letter to E D Maclagan, 7 Dec. 1917, Edu. Progs, April 1918, nos. 1-17).

It is open to question whether Muir, a mere academic author, influenced the civil servants' lobby. For twenty years after he wrote the Imperial Record Room remained closed to researchers. An important factor that served to open the archival records was the 'archives movement' started initially by the historian Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade, the prominent public spokesman K.T. Telang, and the nationalist intellectual M.G. Ranade. (A.R Kulkarni in a collection of essays, *Practice of History*, and Prachi Deshpande in her thesis published in 2007 draw attention to this movement; Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: historical memory and identity in Western India, 1700-1960*, Delhi, 2007). It was an effort to persuade the government of Bombay Presidency to open to researchers the Peshwa Daftar records; this pressure did not immediately produce result but its productive outcome was the unofficial archiving of private records by Maratha historians like Rajwade. The Historical Records Commission pressured the government to liberalize archives regulations and in 1939 researchers' access to public records was at last granted. Was it another sign that the British were losing their grip on India? Or did sense dawn on them that history in the records cannot be kept locked up for ever? Significantly this liberation of the archives happened in the last days of imperial rule. It reminds one of Hegel's aphorism that the owl of Minerva flies in the dusk.

**Major Developments in the phase 1926-1947**

The years 1926-47 witnessed the following major developments. First, this phase begins with the transfer of the archives from Calcutta to New Delhi. Second, in this phase there took place extensive reorganization of the departmental structure of the Indian Government and consequential reorganization of records in the



archives; this reflected the expansion of the activities of the government, the changes brought about by the Govt. of India Act of 1935, and the Second World War. Thirdly, these years also saw the increasingly salient role played by the new Indian Historical Commission in shaping archival policy. Finally, we see the fruition of a long term trend, the impact of availability of archived records on historiography, i.e. history writing and methodology.

#### **Transfer of the Imperial Record Department to New Delhi, from 1926**

There is a file of the year 1927 in the West Bengal State Archives in Calcutta which records the exact date when the present NAI building was inaugurated after the partial transfer of records from the former capital of British India, Calcutta, to New Delhi. The head of the Imperial Record Department, then designated as Keeper of the Records of the Govt. of India, wrote from Calcutta: "The building of the Imperial Record Office at New Delhi was completed during the year (1926)...the Crown Records from 1899 onwards were transferred to New Delhi, together with a staff consisting of two assistants, 4 clerks, 6 sorters and daftaris, 3 peons and 4 dusting bearers. The Record Office at New Delhi [in the present NAI building on Janpath, then known as Queen's Way] was opened on 1 November 1926." (West Bengal State Archives, Pol. Dept., Record Branch, F.no. 2R2/27, A.F.M. Abdul Ali to Secretary, Dept. of Education, Health and Lands, 21 April 1927). This letter, which also gives us an idea of the small staff which served the relocated department of records, marks the beginning of a long process of transfer that took at least twelve years. The head of the department, the Keeper of Records remained in Calcutta and slowly the records were transferred in installments until in March 1937 the transfer of the oldest, the "Pre-Mutiny records", was completed.

It is not generally known that the Imperial Record Department building, i.e. the old wing of the present *NAI building*, is only one-fourth of the building originally contemplated by the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. He had planned a hollow square of which only one side, the front facing the road, was actually built; the other three sides planned earlier were left out because of financial reasons as well as the huge delay in construction. The First World War, the frequent absence of Lutyens, and cost factors caused delay; from start to finish construction took fifteen years, from 1912 to 1926.

The building was just about adequate for the records transferred from Calcutta; twenty years later space began to be inadequate when the volume of documents suddenly increased, as approximately one million files were transferred from Simla to New Delhi in 1947. By the end of the 1950s the collection in New Delhi, according to a report by the Director of the department, exceeded 5.1 million files and 103 thousand bound volumes of records, not counting the printed government publications in the library.

#### **Reorganization of Departments of the GOI and the Records, 1923-1947**

Between 1923 and 1947 the records were reorganized several times, reflecting the changes which occurred in the imperial secretariat as a result of altered division of functions between departments. There were three factors which brought about reclassification and reorganization. First, expansion and diversification of the functions of the government of India. Second, the effect of the Govt. of India Act of 1935 creating division of functions and consequent record keeping by the central government of India and the provincial governments under elected ministries with some measure of autonomy. Third, the impact of the World War II which gave importance to departments hitherto insignificant.

The first factor is in evidence in the reorganization of records from the 1920s onwards. In 1923 the increasing importance of industries and labour was recognized in the creation of a new Department of Industries and Labour. (This was partly a result of the administrative reorganization recommended by the Incharge Commission). In 1923 this along with other older departments like Home, Finance, Legislative, etc. formed a set of 9 departments in total; by 1947 the departments numbered 18, as a result of bifurcation and new creations. The important changes were the following. The creation of a department of Information and Broadcasting in 1941 followed the creation of All India Radio in 1936 (earlier called Indian State Broadcasting Service, and still earlier a private company called Indian Broadcasting Co.; this was one of the earliest instances of 'nationalization'). The Department of Industries and Labour, due to increase in volume of work, was bifurcated into two separate departments in 1937. There was an unwieldy omnibus Department of Education, Health and Lands which was trifurcated into separate Department of Education, Health, and Agriculture (1945). In 1936 one of the oldest departments, known from the East India Company days as Military Dept., was renamed Defence Department. These and other administrative changes need to be noted due to the consequential change in archival organization of papers generated.

The second factor mentioned above, the consequences of the Govt. of India Act of 1935 was in evidence in the following way. There used to be a combination of two functions in the Foreign and Political Department – the conduct of the relationship with the Princely (or Native) Indian States, as well as with other states beyond British Indian borders, the League of Nations, etc. In 1935 the latter functions were separated and assigned to the new Dept. of External Affairs, while the Political Department was given the residual functions including relations with the Princely States. A new statutory authority was created to handle the latter function, the Crown Representative. The Governor-General or Viceroy became the Crown Representative. In the archives today all the papers regarding the Princely States ranging from Kashmir or Hyderabad to the smallest principality are to be found in a totally separate series known as Crown Representative records. Further, after 1935 many departments of the central government of India ceased to generate records relating to subjects transferred by the government of India Act to provincial governments.

Thirdly, World War II impacted administration and consequent organization of records in many ways. To carry out war propaganda, broadcast by air, and to control publication of news the new Dept. of Information and Broadcasting (1941) played an important role. To meet the exigencies of war some new and sometimes temporary departments were created, e.g. War Department (separate from Defence Dept.),



War Transport Dept., Dept. of Food to control prices and supplies, Dept. of Civil Supplies, etc. The most important of these new departments was perhaps the Department of Planning and Development to take care of post-War reconstruction; this was the predecessor of the post-1947 Planning Commission.

The overall result was that at the time of Independence there were 18 departments, whereas in 1923 there had been only 9 departments, and in 1843 only 4 departments. Thus departments and records multiplied, necessitating elaborate reorganization and indexing of records generated.

### **The Role of the Indian Historical Records Commission**

The Public Records Commission of England in 1914 suggested, *inter alia*, the formation of a Historical Records Commission in India, but other preoccupations during the First World War prevented any action on those lines. Eventually in 1919 the contemplated Commission was formed by the Govt. of India. It began as a meeting ground of low level officials handling records. Sir Jadunath Sarkar was associated with it from its early days and he reminisced later: "This Commission originated in a very small body of official Record Keepers and historical experts formed by the Government of India to advise it and the local Governments as to the best treatment of their records, the proper method of caring for, preserving, weeding out, listing and editing them and deciding the problems that arise from time to time regarding the work of Government Record Offices." (*Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, Lahore, 1937, Speech by Sir J. N. Sarkar, p. 8). It was soon realized that it would be useful to associate some professional historians from the universities in order to elicit their expert advice; further it was also realized that, as Sarkar pointed out, "not all historical records even of the British period are in government's hands....many private persons, specially representatives of historical families possess documents of first-rate importance." Therefore, in 1920 the Records Commission took an important step. The number of members as well as co-opted members was greatly enlarged to include not only the officials and professional archivists but also academic persons at the universities interested in historical research. The Commission continued to include government archivists and officials, but they were outnumbered by the academics representing universities. For example the Thirteenth Session of the Commission at Patna in December 1930 had the following members: H.G.Rawlinson and H.L.O.Garrett, both of the Indian Education Service (at that time consisting mainly of persons of British origin appointed to Indian Education Service, a government service allied to the ICS). Sir Jadunath Sarkar, S.Krishnaswami Aiyangar and Surendranath Sen represented the academic establishment and A.F.M. Abdul Ali, keeper of records of the government of India, were members of the Commission. The co-opted members included many eminent historians from universities: K.P.Jayaswal (Patna), K.A.Nilakanta Sastri (Madras), S.Khuda Bukhsh (Calcutta University), R.C.Majumder (Dhaka University), Subimal Chandra Sarkar (Patna), Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar (Dhaka University), Radha Kumud Mookerjee (Lucknow), A.B.A.Haleem (Aligarh Muslim University), D.V.Potdar (Puna), S.K.Bhuyan (Gauhati), T.G.P.Spear (Delhi), Stella Kramrisch

(Calcutta University), et.al. (*Proceedings of the Ind. Hist. Records Commission*, Patna, 1930, pp. 1-4) Thus the list of participants in the Commission was almost a 'Who's Who' of prominent historians of India.

That apart, the Commission invited members from princely states to obtain information on private papers in their possession. Sir Jadunath Sarkar declared in his Inaugural Speech at the meeting of the Commission in 1930 : "I am glad to have noticed in our sessions as well as in the course of my frequent travels a keen awakening in the Indian States as to the need of exploring the past achievements of their ruling dynasties and the history of their territory by rising above the stage of legends and bardic eulogies and securing an authentic basis of facts that would be acceptable to historians abroad. Nearly all the great States now send their delegates to our annual meeting." (*Progs. of I.H.R.C.*, Patna, 1930, pp. 7-8) It was hoped that the government records would be supplemented by records from 'Native States' and that the latter would start "organizing their record offices on modern lines, arranging and cataloguing their papers, and throwing them open to genuine research workers of all provinces under the safeguards usually observed in the British Record Offices". (ibid., p.8)

Although the formation of the Records Commission in 1919, the opening of a 'Public Session' open to non-officials in 1920, the invitation to university teachers and an Exhibition of records at each session of the Commission, etc were positive steps, the bureaucracy was not easily won over. From 1931 the government ceased to hold meetings of the Records Commission. The ostensible reason was financial stringency; but it is my surmise that this decision was not unrelated to the political climate since the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement by the Indian National Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi. Whatever the reason, there was no meeting of the Commission from 1931 till 1937. When it did meet in 1937 there was an outburst, though expressed in mild language, against many aspects of the government's approach to the archives. The most important issue was restriction on access to records and a Resolution was passed: "That the Government of India be requested to give the public unrestricted access to the records up to the year 1800" . (*Proceedings of the IHRC*, Patna, 1937, p.164). This was a compromise, because many members wanted free access to later records. Among those who spoke for the resolution were veteran historians like K.A.Nilkanta Sastri, Bal Krishna, Radha Kumud Mookerji, Nandalal Chatterji, and Sri Ram Sharma. Apart from this pressure to liberalise access to records, contrary to a long-standing bureaucratic opposition to opening the records, there were also protests against high charges levied for searching for and copying from records. Even Sir Jadunath Sarkar remarked that "it was much easier to get copies of records from the India Office [in London] typed than to get them from Mr Abdul Ali's office." (*Proceedings of IHRC*, Patna, 1937, p.161; Mr Ali was the Keeper of Record, at the head of the Imperial Record Dept.) The members of the Commission resolved to request the government to reduce the charges on non-official scholars who were allowed restricted access. On the whole the Commission's non-official members were openly that, contrary to contemporary European practice, the Indian government was pursuing an illiberal policy, hostile to scholarly research and public access to records.

The advice of scholars in the Historical Records Commission had no immediate effect, but two years later, in December 1939, there was a major policy announcement regarding access to records. Bona



fide researchers, duly certified, were allowed to see government records up to 1880, but copies from records remained subject to censorship or scrutiny by the Imperial Record Department.

Thus a restricted freedom to access governmental records was slowly won against the opposition of British officialdom just eight years before Independence. We may also note that the induction of Indians into the position of head of Imperial Record Dept in the last three decades of British rule. Not one native of Indian was considered for the position till 1920 when a civil servant in Bengal Provincial Civil Service, Rai Bahadur Jamini Mohan Mitra was promoted to the position of Keeper of Records. He was succeeded by Mr A F M Abdul Ali of the same Provincial Service and he had a long tenure from 1922 to 1938. The induction of Indians into the job of archiving as the head of the Imperial Record Department was a welcome development but it was probably the consequence of the low grade accorded to it so that European officers ceased to show interest. A university professor, Dr Surendra Nath Sen succeeded Abdul Ali. During Sen's tenure from 1938 to 1949, the designation 'Keeper of Records' was changed to 'Director Archives' (1944) and the Imperial Record Department was renamed from August 1947 as the National Archives of India.

**Modern Historiography and and the Archives**

Although the Imperial Record department was set up basically as a source of precedents and information relevant to the administration of the Indian empire, there was a contrary stream of opinion in the bureaucracy and the higher decision-making levels of the British Indian government. In a sense the archives were a part of the European knowledge enterprise from late eighteenth century onwards to collect and preserve knowledge about India. Along with the government's other agencies like the Survey of India, the Geological Survey of India, the Anthropological Survey of India, or the census operations from 1881 onwards, the government's archives also played its role in this process. No doubt, as Edward Said has argued, European knowledge about imperial possession was cast in a prejudiced Orientalist mould. No doubt Bernard Cohn and others are correct in pointing to the aggrandizing drive to acquire power at the core of the government's scheme of collecting and preserving and using information. Nevertheless, in that vast endeavour to generate knowledge there dwelled an enquiring spirit which touched the historical mind.

The early colonial historians of India had to do without archival documentation. The most well-known of them was James Mill (1773-1836). His *History of British India* in the early editions of 1820, 1826 and 1840 contained many errors which were pointed out by the editor of the 1844 edition, H H Wilson; some of those errors were due to Mill's unfamiliarity with sources and, of course, with India. His high reputation and influence was not due to authenticity but the selection of his book as a text for ICS trainees at Haileybury. Mounstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859) drew upon his personal experience in administration and diplomacy as well as some documentary sources in his *History of British Power in the East*; it became a required reading in the newly founded Indian universities . Sir Alfred Lyall's (1835-1912) *The Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India* in its many editions from 1893 to 1911 underwent expansion and addition from sources; in his times access to sources, due to publication of

selected sources, made the task of documentation easier. Use of unpublished sources was rare in his times because Capt Joseph Cunningham had been reprimanded by the Govt of India for having done so. Apart from these most eminent colonial historians of India on a large scale, there were more narrowly focused histories or biographical works, more firmly founded on sources; biographies of Anglo-Indian empire builders, written and edited by Sir William Hunter were specially well-documented because of the British authors' access to private papers of individuals of high rank in the empire – this privileged access to private papers to supplement public records was denied to authors of Indian origin. Despite this and many other advantages, the colonial ideology of the Anglo-Indian historians blinded them to the bias and limitations of their sources. At the same time it must be recognized that among them historians like S.C. Hill or C. R. Wilson or G W. Forrest attained mastery over the methodology of documentation in historical research.

At the same time in the last decade of the nineteenth century, as indigenous interest in writing history developed, so did the urge to consult the archival documents. This process involved the development of “archives movement” in Western India, a new drive for recovery of history in Eastern India, and generally the rise of historical consciousness among educated Indians from late 19<sup>th</sup> century and hence an interest in opening the archives to research. Denied access to records, M G Ranade (1842-1901) and K T Telang among others led an agitation to get access to Peshwa Daftar records, captured and kept for official use by the Bombay Govt. In 1897 Ranade’s Deccan Vernacular Society asked permission to make and publish extracts, after long delay permission was given, provided Ranade’s Introduction was removed. Thereafter, government permission to natives to see Peshwa records was given, under official surveillance and censorship. Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1863-1926) founded a movement to collect and preserve non-government documents; Bharatiya Itihas Samsodhak Mandal of Puna played an important role in this regard in Maharashtra. In Bengal Akshay Kumar Maitreya’s (1861-1930) research to answer British denigration of the Nawab of Bengal (in his book *Sirajuddaulah* published in 1898), and in his refutation of the myth of Black Hole Tragedy (research published in 1890), etc. used modern methods of documentary research, and likewise M G Ranade in his history of the *Rise of the Maratha Power* (published in 1900). In the early decades of the twentieth century a later generation of historians continued to develop research into archival collections in India and England, e.g. Sir Shafaat Ahmed Khan, Bal Krishna, V. Narayana Pillai, R V Oturkar, Kali Kinkar Datta, Tarachand , et al. in British Indian history, and Jadunath Sarkar, G. S. Sardesai and others in pre-British history, all striving to lay the basis of sound methodology of archival research. Thus in the 1930s a good number of Indian historians were anxiously awaiting and demanding access to the Imperial Records Dept archives, Jadunath Sarkar and other Indian historians in the Indian Historical Records Commission gave voice to that demand, and thus the government was persuaded to open the Imperial Record Department to researchers in 1939. Independence was less than a decade away and a Nationalist interpretation was developing in the archival research of Indian historians, in contestation with Colonial historiography.



In conclusion it will be appropriate to point out in this Report that in the process of transition to Independence and the emergence of the Indian Republic one aspect has not received the attention it deserves. In course of my research in the collection of papers of the Constituent Assembly at the National Library, Calcutta, I found that the Constituent Assembly addressed the issue of archiving and preserving records, to assign responsibility in this regard both to the Central Government and the State Governments. The makers of the Constitution inserted the words 'Ancient and Historical Monuments **and Records**' under item 60 and put it on the Concurrent List. (*Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. IX, 31 August 1949). This was an improvement upon the law that had been enacted by the British Indian Government. In 1904 the Govt of India was given the responsibility with regard to preservation of historical monuments by the Monuments Preservation Act (Act VII of 1904), -- but historical records were not mentioned in that Act. In following that Act, the Constituent Assembly initially left out historical records in the Federal Legislative List where Item 60 mentioned only Ancient Monuments. (*Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. V, 5 July 1947, 21 August 1947). It appears that later it was thought desirable to include historical records along with monuments and therefore Dr. B R Ambedkar moved an amendment **to include records** as well as monuments in the Concurrent List. (Amendment moved by B R Ambedkar, *Const. Assembly Debates*, vol. IX, 31 August 1949). The Constituent Assembly adopted as item no. 67 the Seventh Schedule, First List, a resolution adding 'records' to the list of powers. (*Const. Assembly Debates*, vol. XI, 16 Nov. 1949). Further, The Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution specified that it would be the obligation of the State to protect 'monuments or place or objects of artistic or historical interest'. In the Constituent Assembly the question arose whether this provision adequately addressed the objective of preserving records. And it was clarified that historical records came under the term 'object' in this article. (*Const. Assembly Debates*, vol. IX, 31 Aug. 1949, speech by H V Kamath). The attention given by the Constituent Assembly of India to the issue of preserving historical records and monuments is not surprising because that approach reflected the Nationalist vision of history as a constitutive element in the formation of Indian civilization and Indian nationhood.



Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

Annex No. II

**The Methodology**

1. As reported earlier, the method of data collection I have followed is the one usually followed in archival research: to scan the Index volumes (mainly of the Home Department, Public Branch; in some years the Education Dept when the IRD was relocated there), to identify files needed for purposes of my research project from among files I obtain from the stacks, and to requisition digitized or xeroxed photo copies of records I select. I have paid the usual charges for the copying service.
2. The procedure I have followed in NAI is to have digital or photo copies made of records I select, and to work on them elsewhere with secretarial assistance. The NAI Research Room has provided me excellent facilities for collection of my documentary sources. However, for purposes of analyzing and writing the history of the archives the NAI Research Room is not ideal because a dozen or more persons sit in that room and secretarial assistance is not possible there.
3. The books I need for purposes of this project, published in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, are available in the National Library of India, Calcutta. I found in the West Bengal State Archives a good deal of on the transfer of records from the old location of the Imperial Record Dept in Calcutta, to its new location in New Delhi. I found more data on the transfer of records in the State Archives in Calcutta than in NAI, New Delhi.

*S. Bhattacharya*