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Paper, Public Works and Politics: Tracing archives of corruption in 1940s-50s Uttar Pradesh, India'

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In moving away from older linear narratives around the costs and benefits of 'corruption' to development and democratic processes, social scientists have tended to down play temporality in their work on the phenomenon in the global South. Historical research however offers a different kind of nuance around moments in which corruption becomes important in political and administrative discourse. Examining archives on corruption in detail and comparatively, poses different questions about the operation of the everyday state. It also provides alternative means for exploring the nature of citizenship, national belonging in India and how the disempowered are often unevenly affected by corrupt acts. Using two case studies in the Public Works Department during state transition in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, this article examines how archives convey multiple and contingent meanings to early postcolonial discourses of 'corruption'. Such archives present the phenomenon as a vehicle or symbolic resource for larger political processes over the period. This potentially challenges our perspective on some of the larger questions surrounding the early postcolonial state, the nature of civil/political society in that period for India, ideas of national belonging and the relationship between India and Pakistan.

Introduction: Corruption, history and the archive

Speaking about his postings in the 1950s and 1960s over a cup of tea in his lounge in Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh, J.N. Chaturvedi (Indian Police Service-IPS, retired), described the peculiar cases he had had with people coming to his office for apparently unimportant discussions and timepass.ⁱ

They would come to you, make some informal discussion about the weather and then they would say they had seen the officer... and have made some money in the process... it has been my experience that generally 50% of the jobs just get done, even if nobody has approached you... But these people create an impression... Now it is a regular business.ⁱⁱ

Chaturvedi was describing the quite familiar character of 'tout' or 'middleman', otherwise known as 'fixer' who sometimes made contact with an officer to arrange a contract for someone, or to get some other kind of favour, either large or small. The key point about this person's role was its intangibility on the one hand and its subversion of anticipated human interaction on the other. The tout's power lay in this uncertainty of action, in an expectation that documents had ⁱⁱⁱbeen produced and deals struck. They may not have been, but either way he would collect.

The role of the tout epitomises, arguably, one of the key problems faced by social scientists studying the phenomenon of corruption (Khanna Johnston, 2007; Oldenburg, 1987; Reddy and Haragopal, 1985). Unlike other functions of governance or public administration, corruption often defies metric analysis because of its inherently uncertain boundaries. The simple example above, suggests that its effects are non-linear, largely unpredictable, mobile and sometimes contradictory. This article explores how these corruption complexes of the kind described by Chaturvedi, can be read in a way that moves us beyond existing analyses of 'corruption' as a problem of governance, by examining a range of (comparable)

government archives in north India. Looking specifically at two case studies in the Public Works Department in a moment of state transition in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, I argue that the archive itself conveys multiple contingent meanings to 'corruption'. The article also explores how such archives allow the historian to view the phenomenon as a vehicle or symbolic resource for larger political processes over the period. This potentially changes or challenges our perspective on some of the larger questions surrounding the early postcolonial state, the nature of civil/political society in that period for India, ideas of national belonging and the relationship between India and Pakistan.

In some ways the slippery nature of corruption for those researching it is reflected in its contemporary analyses. Moving beyond the moral condemnations of modernization theorists, economists have concerned themselves with the balance sheet of rent-seeking, but there is no clear consensus about how far its illegal forms either damage growth or play a key role in encouraging development (Khan, 2009; Leff, 1993; Nye, 1993). Political scientists on the other hand have been largely interested in clientelism as a function of democratic participation and mobilisation. Rather like questions of economic development and growth, the background assumptions in this work are those of democratic accountability. Some argue, directly or indirectly, that corruption can enhance forms of political participation and have differential effects on growth (Johnston, 2013; Khan, 2002; Chatterjee, 2004). , while others see it as damaging accountability (Brass, 2011). Finally, anthropologists have more recently explored the extent to which corruption might be viewed as a form of structural violence, which, as a discourse, modulates everyday experiences of the state (Gupta, 2012). Recent work on patronage in South Asia has developed this literature further, arguing that what has been traditionally described as political corruption, might more be more sensibly explored, in its own context, as functions of everyday patronage (Piliavsky, 2014).

Recent work on corruption in the global South then, has questioned the extent to which corruption should still be coupled to linear analyses, either a straight modernisation thesis, or models of economic growth and democratisation. Yet as such, it moves away from considerations of temporality in how corruption develops and changes over time and in relation to context. This has led to several unanswered questions about the moments and contingencies when corruption becomes important or changes in political discourse. Historical work on the phenomenon of corruption is less developed than in the social science literature, and apart from indirect processes in studies of factionalism (Washbrook 1981; Chandavarkar, 1998), has only recently begun to explore how corruption can be properly historicised and how it might be approached, methodologically, in historical archives (Saha, 2013; Pierce, 2016; Gould, 2012). Using some direct case study files from archived government departments, this article argues, however, that there are some key ways in which the temporal and textual approaches and contextual insights of the historian can potentially overcome and develop some of the lacunae thrown up by social scientists' studies of corruption in politics and administration. Firstly, historical research allows us to interrogate the ways in which the larger concerns of social scientists about growth and democracy are themselves historical processes in which perceptions of corruption in governance are dynamic. As Steven Pierce has argued for Nigeria, corruption is best understood as a culturally contingent array of political discourses and historically embedded practices (Pierce, 2016: 4-7). This is particularly central to a (post)colonial context such as India in which the moral order of government undertook a dramatic shift from colonial authoritarianism to a democracy, but also to a political order in which forms of authoritarianism were still contained. The British colonial view of the intrinsic corruptibility of Indian society was a key function of the state's power in India before

1947 (Gould, 2012: 8-10), which in turn could entail the acquiescence in illegality as a function of colonial order (Saha, 2013). As a result, particular customs of governance at an everyday level allowed colonial officers to both tolerate and in some cases encourage forms of administrative interaction which would be later, after independence, termed as 'corruption'. This included the ethnicisation of administrative power, around caste. The circumstances of the transition to independence both allowed these customs to generate new kinds of political-administrative interactions on the one hand, and a new politics of anti-corruption that grew out of it on the other. In other words, the discourse of corruption described by anthropologists and political scientists is partly a function of a colonial inheritance and the ways in which state and society come to terms with that inheritance and history.

Secondly, as this article will explore in detail, temporality interacts at a micro-level with the production of documents and information, to produce an information order around individual corruption scandals. As I will argue below, analysing this information order not only allows us to pose different questions about the operation of the everyday state via corruption. It also provides more nuance in how we explore some of the larger questions surrounding the nature of citizenship, national belonging in India and how the disempowered are often unevenly affected by corrupt acts. Here, the archive plays an active role in delineating how corruption allegations and scandals 'produced' by the paper that appears in files, via long-term narrative sequences and how are these processes themselves form corruption as a performance. The archive not only structured the definition of 'corruption' but was itself structured by practices of corruption. In her work looking at the manipulation of paper records during the sterilisation campaign of the Emergency Emma Tarlo (2013) notes, that in the modern state, the written word reigns supreme. This would lead us to believe that the Weberian stress on process, order and the duties of office, driven by the pen, underscored the basic foundations of colonial administration in India, as the British used scribal bureaucracy and methods as an aspect of colonial power. Yet far from simply fixing and inscribing, colonial files helped, this article argues, to recreate *alternative* and internally competing forms of order that constantly bordered on or tipped over to, apparent disorder. Paperwork was essential to governance, but very often fictive, unreliable, and sometimes deliberately so. At the same time, documents were also valorised in the everyday state: as Akhil Gupta (2012) has shown the production of documents continued to be a means of engaging with, and making sense of the state, especially where the relationship between literacy, paper and power were complex.

Another significant outcome of historical work on corruption, therefore, takes us away from metrics and measurement of the phenomenon, towards a discussion of how, when and where the idea of 'corruption' becomes politically significant. The late 1940s and early 1950s was such a period precisely because it was one in which, following independence and partition for India and Pakistan, all manner of questions about the citizen were being tested and rehearsed (Chatterji, 2012). Here, social perceptions of time are crucial. People are rarely unhappy all of the time but levels of dissatisfaction can be triggered by sudden changes in circumstances, or the failure of a promised better future. The idea of corruption is a social means of critiquing larger failures of governance in a psychological comparison between periods of time. In a wider sense then, this affected the role of corruption in public discourse about government, democracy and citizenship. Through the period of 1948 to 1952, there were a number of areas of local governance – from food and civil supply, to housing and utilities in which public complaints became routinely rehearsed in the press, not only in UP, but also in other parts of India and Pakistan (Ansari, Gould and Sherman, 2013). More specifically, a discourse of corruption could be triggered by annoyance or excitement with prices changes. Since 1942, governments had been occupied with the control or

decontrol of essential goods – a specific hangover from the days of wartime rationing and controls. This created a context of change and uncertainty in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and ubiquitous discussions about prices, price changes and availability of goods, from the assembly to the streets. In early 1948 in UP for example, the anticipation of decontrol of goods led to the hoarding of goods and the growth of black markets. These new opportunities for profit mapped onto both bureaucratic structures and networks of political patronage. But such networks were also now open to new kinds of public critique.

This article therefore examines one of the ways into this politics, via internal departmental corruption investigations in the period of transition, and in an area that was particularly important in the building on the new nation state in a material sense – the Public Works Department. In this area of administrative ethnography, contemporary corruption in the period of the 1960s to the 1980s begins to serve as a frame for historical records. Robert Wade's early 1980s work on the Irrigation Department in South India for example, although not unique (Corbridge and Kumar, 2012), is perhaps the most detailed account we have of how systematic corruption networks operated within a department, and therefore signals what we might look for in other departments. Wade shows how, traditionally, the remedies for corruption within departments were erroneously viewed as a matter of rooting out a 'rotten apple'. Instead, Wade unearthed a series of widespread and systematic business operations with officers often under intense pressure from above. Wade argued that Executive engineers in Irrigation might pay up to ten times their annual salary for operating a canal system – posts often auctioned. They would finance this by selling, in their turn, posts, or getting payments from subordinates who get rake offs from maintenance contracts. If the lower level officers failed to live up to this system, they too could be subject to transfer (Wade, 1982). For Wade, similar patterns could be seen in any department that had regulatory functions, subsidised goods or had public works contracts to allocate. Officers were, therefore, under intense pressure from above to act corruptly. In the police, this could include the auctioning of posts and transfers, which force the transferee to spend the next few years collecting what they paid, over and above their salary (Wade, 1982: 291).

Wade's work on the Irrigation Department is important to late colonial and early postcolonial India in another way: He unravels the notion, contemporary to the 1930s-60s, that corruption was concentrated in the 'lower ranks' and therefore a dynamic of incomplete modernisation, or the perpetuation of a form of administrative primitivism. Such an idea was common to the major formal commissions of enquiry into corruption across the late colonial and early independence periods, and was a function too, arguably, of a colonial conceit about administrative power. In 1938 for example, the United Provinces Congress Ministry, set up a Commission of Enquiry into administrative corruption and its key recommendations involved a focus on rooting out corruption at 'local' levels.³ For the 1938 report, corruption was largely a matter of identifying long-standing 'customary' practices, in which the low incomes of administrators were enhanced via petty rent-seeking. Some of the older work on early post independence India, for example Gunnar Myrdal, related the problems of 'corruption' to the perpetuation of bureaucratic 'folklore' and custom, in which the state had incompletely overcome the traditional structures of customary exchange (Myrdal, 1968). The idea that the state acted as a modernising force, breaking down the corrupting norms of traditional and medieval societies, also characterised the Santhanam Committee report on corruption in India in 1964 (Santhanam, 1964: 3). The recognition of corruption as corruption then, was viewed as part of modernisation – a shift from the primitive or medieval, exemplified by the much quoted Arthashastra by Kautilya, of normalised rent seeking- to the modern development of 'the rule of law and the evolution of a large, permanent public service' (Santhanam, 1964: 7).

In Wade's work by contrast, we get to see this supposed change in administrative relationships and integrity up close and to measure the purchase of notions such as 'the rule of law' in one of the most important developmental functions of the state - irrigation. What his research showed is a systematic and almost total subversion of bureaucratic rules themselves. 'Petty' corruption in the irrigation research was aggregated in a systematic way to benefit revenues for those in high office, but crucially without the officers in question having to get their hands dirty. Therefore, in order to survive in a good post, and to support his family adequately, an officer was practically forced to be corrupt. It was therefore inadequate, Wade concluded, to attribute the phenomenon to lack of 'moral fibre'. Wade boldly described what is in effect an alternative political economy that operates according to its own internal logic - an almost perfectly formed perversion of bureaucratic accountability and integrity. Yet in order to be viewed as 'corruption', Wade's systems must still have been formed around an older attachment to an idealised Weberian procedure, a set of rules adhered to, and standards of integrity that still somehow survived. This notion of older traditions of integrity and 'rules' is also crucial to our understanding of the movement of paper in historical files surrounding corruption cases as we will see later.

A second approach of relevance to historians examining archives, comes from political science and concerns the inter-relationship between corruption and anti-corruption and connections between administration and party politics. If these forms of corruption are driven by complex administrative networks which ultimately link up to powerful political patrons, it is not enough to simply explore the mechanisms of influence and payment within a department itself, but to examine the changing relationship between paper in files and political processes. Paul Brass in his recent book on Chaudhuri Charan Singh, explores how networks of political corruption link to administrative action, and are based on a tension between corruption and anti-corruption lobbying against rivals. The latter is never, for Brass, about rooting out corruption. It is about either irritation about not having successfully gained access to resources for your own party - not having successfully corrupted. Alternatively, it is driven by *schadenfreude* as political opponents experience miseries and accusations. Finally, it could be driven by the promotion of ethnic or caste particularism - the need to corrupt, to promote the interests of your community. For Brass, one form or another holds true for most UP Congress leaders in the period he examines, including, importantly, the central leader of the early 1950s, C B Gupta, although Brass is keen to assert the anti-corruption credentials of Charan Singh himself (Brass, 2011).

Brass then sees in the early 1950s, some of what Wade observed in the early 1980s - that corruption is in many ways a political struggle around patronage, rather than principally a moral decision or dilemma, a problem of broken integrity or incomplete modernisation. I am going to suggest in this article however, that these approaches have not accounted for the *historical* moments in which questions about state and societal development, or political change created the conditions for this emergent patronage politics. We need therefore to examine, closely, periods in the transition to democracy in India, and the conditions in which new forms of bureaucratic accountability were being discussed and tested. To some extent, the need for these historical treatments were set out in the 1980s: Wade suggests that the adversarial and 'political' nature of administrative corruption comes about as a result of a deep long-term institutionalisation of systematic networks. In other words, we need to work out how to arrive at the historical movement between Brass and Wade's work.

If corruption is about the politics underpinning patronage, it is also, at some level, about performance. Anthropologists and historians have so far explored this as habitual everyday contact with a local officer, the need to establish a title to a plot of land, or to

organise an electricity supply via the payment of a bribe, or other form of leverage. But here too, each performance has a backstory. The archive, again, is important and shades the ethnographies of anthropologists sitting in land record offices in a different way: Corruption performance can be seen in complex and temporal detail within the interaction of paper documents in dept files themselves. The clearest contemporary approach to this phenomenon is probably the work of Akhil Gupta centred on ethnographies of the state, looking in particular at its 'everyday' levels, and its 'performative' nature. Gupta looked at how people physically interact with officials in day-to-day business, and how that reflected back on, not just how large state projects might affect them, but also how they imagine they can negotiate with the authorities (Gupta, 1995). For the purposes of this article, in a different way, file development became itself a form of performance, in which the access to, production of, loss, forging or destruction of papers was part of the exercise in creating or challenging corruption networks. The archives awaken us to the point that paper texts are material items of information, which can be possessed, viewed, or used for or against individuals. Paper narratives moreover, give us a different sense of how corruption networks develop at particular moments, when they break down around these productions and destructions, or are challenged over time. Power hierarchies evident in texts were reinforced by postcolonial preoccupations about order, paper and metrics, and as in other areas so in corruption – numbers became part of an illusion of the state's control (Appadurai, 1993).

Public Works and the paper narratives of corruption

In early postcolonial India, and particularly in large and political important states like Uttar Pradesh, the phenomenon of 'corruption' was a key point of public and official discussion, finding its way from assembly debates, to newspapers and the streets.⁴ Indeed, as a subject it was a common subject of discussion for those interested in what the developmental functions of the state would be on the one hand, and how political morality operated in the new context of democracy.⁵ As well as a national level 'Anti Corruption Act' in 1947 to complement various local enactments, and the formation of a 'Special Police Establishment',⁶ the central government sought to locate 'corruption' as a problem of inadequate modernisation in key commissions of enquiry. Although here we might explore the A D Gorwala report on Public Administration (1951), or Paul Appleby's report of 1953, the most rigorous public analysis of 'corruption' in governance as a whole came about in the mid 1960s. In its report on 'The Nature of the Problem' the Santhanam Committee report on Anti-Corruption of 1964 set out the areas where corruption 'was prevalent in considerable measure' in India – 'amongst revenue, police, excise and Public Works Department officials.' It is significant, that the report also made a clear point about how the scale and development of the problem related to the postcolonial moment, and not just in terms of the idea of a modern 'accountable' bureaucracy. There was a material basis too: The 1940s were considered significant as a time in which increases in public expenditure accompanied expansion in administrative responsibility and reach during wartime provisioning: 'the sudden extension of the economic activities of the Government', Santhanam wrote, 'with a large armoury of regulations, controls, licenses and permits provided new and large opportunities...' (Santhanam 1964, 7-8). For the report writers, this created a situation in which administrative power and discretion were vested at different levels of the executive, and that the 'absence of a machinery for redress of grievances contributed to the growth of an impression of arbitrariness on the part of the executive. Consequently, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of pedlars of influence.' (Santhanam 1964: 9)

In this area the Public Works Department, or PWD, was particularly significant as a node in the new material developmental regime of India, with its plans for urbanisation and modernisation on the one hand, and contacts between government and business on the other. State expansion in this respect was impressive: In UP by late 1951, as well as rehabilitating around half a million refugees, spending around 2 crore/year on food procurement, expenditure on education almost compared to 1946, and over the same period the number of health dispensaries also tripled and the overall welfare budget more than doubled. Activity in the area of Public Works was also extensive, although there were complaints in early 1950s about developmental under spending:⁷ In September 1951, 1.5 lakh acres of land had been reclaimed, and the amount of 'metalled' roads for public transport increased to the extent that the numbers of passengers carried trebled to 38 million in 1950-51 when compared to 1947-8.⁸ When we look at Santhanam, we can see the precursors to what Fuller and Benei (2001) have described as the porous 'everyday state' – one that is already ambiguous in its purchase around new administrative and developmental functions in the 1940s: In an area in which building goods were supplied, and contracts tendered, the question of where influence and power lay in the process of building a road or a bridge was made ambiguous by the inter-relationship between two processes – firstly, the multiple figures (including touts) involved in the relationship between PWD officials and contractors supplying work and materials; and secondly, the hierarchical levels within a department itself which were based on commissions passed between officers. This was also noted by Santhanam in 1964:

We were told by a large number of witnesses that in all contracts for construction, purchase, sales and other regular business on behalf of the Government, a regular percentage is paid by the parties to the transaction, and this is shared in agreed proportions among the various officials concerned. (Santhanam 1964: 9-10)

Although little work has been done specifically on the PWD to explore how this operated in files themselves, we know generally from Wade's work on Irrigation in the early 1980s, that corruption networks in these departments link hierarchies of officials back up to political leadership and often a minister. Today in India, the PWD is often thought to be one where opportunities for rent seeking are not only rife, but in which organisations such as 'road mafia' control access to contracts and effectively force contractors to include mafia taxes in their costs. A recent report in Eastern UP has suggested that this has raised costs by 40-50% on average above actual estimated costs, and that each mafia gang has connections to specific MLAs (Mishra, 2005). In a survey of Politicians, Departments and Bureaucrats carried out by Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra in Uttaranchal in 2004, PWD was considered, in a citizens' survey to be among the most inefficient, inaccessible and corrupt departments in the state (Kaushal, 2004: 22).

Given this long-term reputation with the public, it might seem unlikely that detailed cases in government departments recording the incidence of corruption in departments like PWD, to get a sense of the roots of these phenomena. Yet the PWD in the UP state archives do in fact contain a range of corruption investigations for the period between 1946 and 1952, some contained in thick or multiple files, involving connections between members of the department, usually engineers, and contractors involved in public works. Without doubt, these cases were unique as 'forms' of corruption, in the sense that they had a clear material basis in the movement or control of goods. PWD was a relatively large department, and given the huge developmental functions of the state following independence was bifurcated to focus on particular functions. Unlike comparable departments such as Revenue, government's (and media's) focus on the problems of 'blackmarkets' in goods in the 1940s and 1950s, brought more urgency to the investigation of PWD cases. Comparable to the Food and

Civil Supply department (Gould, 2012: 104-136), malfeasance involved not simply internal departmental networks (as was seen in the Railway Departments),⁹ but also connections between officials, engineers and contractors. In this sense, risk of exposure, especially given the public and tangible nature of infrastructural change, was more likely than in other parts of the state's government. The existing corruption investigations were internal investigations, which usually involved the intervention of a district magistrate, and correspondence with the highest levels of the UP government before independence and afterwards, usually involving the Chief Minister. Files dealing with administrative misdemeanours are much less common for the mid to late 1950s and almost non-existent by the early 1960s. This is not simply a function of contemporary archive policy in Uttar Pradesh. It is also evident that fewer files/cases were retained as a record.

This begs the question of how and why such materials have themselves survived as part of the archive for the first three or four years following India's independence. This not only tells us a great deal about the data collecting information order of the early postcolonial regime in states like Uttar Pradesh. It is also instructive in terms of the material that departments felt the need to preserve. We get some sense of the scale of this data collection, and what it perceived as 'corruption', within which PWD played a part, in a specific government internal file which listed government servants 'debarred' from service over each year.¹⁰ This archival data does not however tell us anything substantive about the extent, in any real sense, of corruption scandals in this or other departments, which is not the purpose here. This particular folder of cases was held in the Public Works Department section of the state archive in Lucknow itself, which suggests that the process of record keeping had determined the importance of such data to that particular department. The reports tabulated individual cases, not all of which were directly related to 'corruption', but in which such misdemeanours could be mixed up with such problems as 'wilful absence' of Muslim officials around the time of partition, or membership of a banned political organisation. For those debarred in the year ending 31 December 1948, there were 214 cases in total, 25 of which were related to 'financial' misdemeanours, 12 of which were directly or indirectly related to PWD cases.¹¹ It is not the figures that are significant here, but the fact that such cases were, at some level, 'quantified'. However, the fact that just under half of the financial misdemeanours were in PWD, does suggest that a relatively large number of corruption cases were detected in this department.

Clearly the prosecuting regime increased its intensity as, from 1950, half yearly reports were produced with a total of 165 cases for the first half of 1950 alone, around 25 of which were linked to PWD.¹² The report for the period between June 1950 and June 1951 was a little more detailed and contained specific names of officers and misdemeanours – for example, 'M P Kapoor, Allahabad, Ex-Temporary Asst. Engineer, Lucknow. Corruption and Misappropriation. S.P. Singh, Ex-Overseer, B and R, PWD. Corruption and Misappropriation.'¹³ From this report we also find a record of how L. N. Ladley, Ex-temporary Overseer in PWD (B and R), UP, was dismissed for 'committing serious irregularities in the Banda temporary division of the PWD, and an array of other UP PWD officers removed for 'unsatisfactory work'.¹⁴ Through 1950 and 1951, the reports show that cases within the PWD occurred in block or groups of officers, again suggesting that dismissals were rarely isolated instances of misdemeanour, but more systematic and extensive. This is clearly the case in the report from 30 June 1951 to 30 June 1952. Not only do we have more detail on individual cases – that of Chandra Prakash Mital, an ex-temporary Assistant Engineer, PWD who was 'dismissed from service as he caused serious irregularities, paid false muster rolls and caused loss to government'; we also see blocks of officers involved in dismissals, such as series of cases in the Kanpur Provincial Division B and R Branch, PWD.¹⁵ As we will see in our detailed case studies below, these fuller

narratives reflected official concerns to identify patterns in forms of PWD corruption. They also signalled a notion of corruption as an 'obstacle' to develop, perhaps measurable in terms of financial loss.

Overall, the PWD archive in UP holds a range of files for the late 1940s and early 1950s which corroborate some of this data, ranging from individual personnel files which contain 'annual reports' on the performance of individual officers,¹⁶ to specific reports and files on large scale misdemeanours and problems within appointments,¹⁷ and finally to larger and detailed files on the progress of corruption investigations. It is in the latter that we get a detailed sense of how scandals unravel via multi-linear narratives. Such files tell us much more of course, than simply the internal workings of the department – we get a sense of forms of relationship developed between political leaders and bureaucrats, and the development of local anti-corruption movements.¹⁸ I am going to focus, however, on two particular medium scale corruption cases in the PWD in UP in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to explore four particular features of these scandals: firstly the ways in which corruption scandals were often about the production and movement of data and information, in this case around evidence, quantitative measures, letter/reports of support, or their absence. This movement of information was made complex and sometimes obscure by the existence of touts and middlemen. Secondly, I am going to look at the ways in which the temporality of scandals was important in terms of how accused officers mobilised counter-accusations and explored defence with political agents. Thirdly, I am going to look at a case in which the hiding or withholding of documents and files was pivotal to the case. Finally, by way of overall conclusion I will ask what these detailed files tell us about how the material of anti-corruption investigations were generated in government archiving. I will further explore how this reinforced some of the popular anxieties about the early-postcolonial state, especially around blackmarkets and the 'loyalty' of Indian civil servants.

The first case involved the selling of 900 bags of cement on the black market by a contractor involved in the construction of a section of the Allahabad-Banda road around 1948-9, by the name of Duleep Singh.¹⁹ Cement was arguably a key symbol of India and Pakistan's postcolonial modernity. Not just a symbol though - given the need for new housing with the refugee crisis, cement and its supply was a product constantly discussed in the press. The integrity and safety of buildings and roads was something that directly affected the daily lives of citizens. The Banda case was representative of a spate of other similar corruption scandals. For example, in the late 1940s and early 1950s UP newspapers were exercised by the misappropriation of large quantities of building materials across other cities of the province, including Agra, Kanpur, and Allahabad. Police raided the Kanpur Development office and found registers of cement sold to the board's contractors.²⁰ What followed were a series of raids, transfers and investigations reported fully in the press,²¹ leading eventually to arrests and the recovery of several thousand tons of cement retrieved from their warehouses.²²

The sale of the Banda cement in this scandal had taken place via two touts (named Harichand, Srichand and Ramantur) with connections to Duleep Singh and to PWD officials, who, the file on the case stated, had some knowledge of and profited from the business.²³ The investigation into this scandal led to the uncovering, over time of a range of other irregularities by staff within the Banda PWD, who had entered into various agreements with the touts in arranging for the cement to be sold on the black market. But the delays in the initial investigation (over a year passed before initial investigations took place), were thought to be held up by the complications of tracing activities around the touts.²⁴

In the immediate aftermath of the scandal's outbreak, in about May 1949, one Iqbal Bahadur Asthana, who worked in the Banda PWD as a work supervisor in the Subdivision of Karari reported what he described as systematic 'robbery of government money', on the basis of the a list of accusations:

1. Overseers and engineers preparing false muster rolls for thousands of rupees.
2. Duplicate payments for the same work
3. Making weak cement
4. Charging govn with false receipts
5. Keeping at least one private servant chargeable to the govt
6. Accepting a system of commission²⁵

Commissions for a range of PWD staff were set out by Asthana in percentages – 5% went to overseers, 5% to engineers for example, from the total amount paid to the contractor.²⁶ Asthana then went on to detail the exact amounts paid for false muster rolls, with names attached to amounts. For example, Rs 2360 was to be paid by the Executive Engineer to false labourers, collected and trained by the overseer and Engineer of Banda. The labour was delayed for no clear reason and in the end, Asthana claimed, the money made its way into the pocket of the Overseer and Executive Engineer.²⁷

Immediately apparent in this file is the desire by the officer making the accusations within the department, to provide as much detail as possible. This production of information was quite a common feature of corruption accusation in this period, in which large amounts of quantitative data was produced in an attempt to tie officers to particular 'scales' of misdemeanour. For example, over the late 1940s to early 1950s, another aspect of the 'black market' scandals of the period, this time in the political papers of the Congress party, involved accusations against candidates for elections and their ties to unscrupulous businessmen.²⁸ The implication was that the scale of misappropriation could be measured in terms of a balance sheet loss to development budgets, and in terms of the consequent enrichment of the accused. Asthana had only released this information however, because he had decided to give evidence about the activities of the contractor Duleep Singh in Banda. A huge case of black marketing of cement was discovered by C M Nigam, IAS against the same contractor, Duleep Singh and sons in August 1949, in which Asthana was asked to give evidence on 29 August 1949.²⁹ In other words, the departmental accusations came out as a result of court evidence, which had inadvertently opened a can of worms.

Delving more deeply into the letters on the file and their inter-relationship, other kinds of narratives emerge which complicate the idea of a trustworthy and 'honest' officers attempting to call out a corrupt department. It was clear that the full extent of Asthana's allegations had come out, largely as a result of on-going disputes with the Executive Engineer in Banda, about which the prosecution of Duleep Singh had only been the tip of a larger iceberg. There were repercussions to the production of this evidence and its placing on the file: In letters on it, Asthana explained how, in the spring of 1950, he had been 'whipped out of the department' (ie. transferred) for his allegations, claiming that a further 400 supervisors over his time had been similarly dismissed for 'not going along with' looting.³⁰ He claimed, in a petition to the UP government, addressed to P.D Tandon himself on 9 July 1950, that the Executive Engineer had failed to mould him in their favour, had transferred him to office work in Banda, and had made the remark 'unreliable' in his service book. He also detailed that the total loss to government amounted to around Rs. 10,000.³¹ The character records and integrity of officers are inscribed in these files involved issues of reputation and straddled the formal rules surrounding integrity here, and the projection of internal punishment. Asthana himself depicted these files of 'punishment' on his character roll as the result

of his having decided to give evidence back in August 1949. Here again paper records held significance in the entire scandal – the idea of a poor character record being placed on file was allegedly used as a form of intimidation by officers involved in the malfeasance.

Throughout Asthana's correspondence, if it is to be believed, and let's assume for the moment it can be, we see evidence of the problem of supplying information and evidence in these kinds of cases, and the pressures they created for personnel in departments like PWD. Here is an example of what Wade outlined in the 1980s in South India – the obligatory working of departmental networks, and importantly, the use of transfer (Wade, 1981: 324); also the power and risk games looked at by Akhil Gupta (2012), with internal complaints against established structures of rent-seeking. But irrespective of the account's veracity, the archive itself gives a sense of what happens when an officer attempts to break out of the system. We also get to see the material and temporal effects that has on the narrative. In the Banda cement case, Asthana's allegations led to a range of other medium to longer term campaigns of defence, which involved the mobilisation of scientific evidence and powerful patrons, - themselves part of the corruption performance: Through 1951, this performance involved the collection and analysis of forensic or technical material to set up the idea of a scientifically driven investigation– a sample of the cement mix was analysed and found to contain a ratio of water to solids of 12:7 rather than the recommended 3:2. This then allowed the defence to suggest that over time, because the samples had not been taken correctly, water had seeped into the mixture.³²

It was the next, arguably more interesting letters on the file, however, which show how the performance broadened out to involve figures well beyond the investigation in Banda. On the file we also find a letter from Sri Prakash to Hafiz Mohammad Ibrahim, both of the them leading Congress figures in UP, in which Prakash attempted to persuade the latter (who was Irrigation Minister at the time) to help the Assistant Engineer being accused, one Jagdish Prasad, on the basis of political relations he had with the family. Prakash wrote that 'my interest in him is due to the interest of the friends who approached me about him. I of course, do not know the merits of the case at all, but since these friends whose judgement I value... I am venturing to send these papers to you.'³³ The brother of the engineer had been mobilising this support for him among powerful political patrons in the state, who invoked the need to consult the Public Services Commission (PSC) on his reversion in rank. What followed well into 1953, were a series of legal wrangles about the constitutional legality of his reversion. And as a result of lobbying on behalf of the Engineer, Jagdish Prasad's reversion was eventually cancelled and he was allowed to work again as an Assistant Engineer.³⁴

Here then, in the form of letters of recommendation are documents critical to the launching of a defence by the PWD officials. And it is clear from the file that the mobilisation of this data was crucial in the decision by the officers to spend as much time delaying proceedings as possible. We also see a kind of interaction between the informal production of letters of recommendation and formal, legal reference to the PSC, the paying of lip service to Weberian bureaucratic structures. Overall the file gives us a sense of how the narratives surrounding this corruption investigation played out over time, through the files themselves. In this case, the semi-formal involvement of high level officers and politicians leads, clearly to a much more complex legal wrangle about administrative punishment– a paying of lip service to the rule of law. The passage of time, and its use, is critical too in these documents. The letters of representation for Prasad from significant UP leaders came through in May 1952, almost two years after Asthana's allegations and three years after the case was first brought to light.³⁵ Another six months passed before the department started to legally decide whether the PSC should have been consulted,³⁶ and a further 6 months before

the file was closed and Prasad's reversion in rank was cancelled.³⁷ In total, the investigation took 4 years. Part of this delay was down to the courts themselves. But the delay was also caused, sometimes directly and strategically inside the department: On 8 March 1951, Prasad and two other officers were summoned to attend the dept enquiry committee. They missed the session however, on the excuse that it was near the end of the financial year and they had more pressing business to attend to.³⁸

The importance of short, medium and long-term series of events within a corruption scandal also characterises a second case study. But in this scenario, as we shall see, it is the existence, non-existence or anticipated appearance of paper records that determined the narrative. A contractor by the name of Damodar Dass Attra was chosen by the Etah PWD to do earthworks, again on three roads, this time between Etah and Amanpur (12 miles), between Amanpur and Sidhpur – a distance of about 10 miles and a smaller road of about 5 miles in length. During the payment process in February-March 1948, suspicions arose in the mind of the Deputy Engineer and Assistant Engineer that the contractor had been overpaid and that the overseer had made false measurements of the length of the road by enlarging it by around 80%. This, allegedly, led to an overpayment of around Rs 32,350.³⁹ The main officer involved in the measurements was no longer in service and it so happened that (as was common in other files around corruption), many other officers involved had migrated to Pakistan.⁴⁰ Although the case went to independent arbitration, Attra, who was considered to 'wield considerable influence' brought a range of counter-allegations against departmental officers and subordinates in February 1949. It is in these that we get a sense of the importance of information and data (Mathur, 2016). Alongside the general allegations of corruption, drawing of false bills, and embezzlement, Attra claimed that there had been 'manipulation of official records submitted to the Arbitrator – original papers were replaced with forged ones.'⁴¹

The experience of actually reading this particular file then, involves the palpable re-living of information and misinformation that underpins the scandal itself. The first experience comes in Attra's own letters of subsequent complaint in which he claims, when asked for 'substantiation of his allegations', that he had done so in 'previous letters'.⁴² None of these letters exist on the file. Instead, Attra's letter argues that the officers had 'taken pains to harass me at the instigation of Sri Moti Lal Das MLC who is deadline opposed to me...'⁴³ And part of this larger conspiracy around the destruction of documents itself provided a pretext for holding back information for fear of its use. In March 1952, Attra went into more detail about what he saw as the complex misappropriation of information:

When I looked through the files sent to the arbitrator from your department, I was astonished to find that even in your own office file some two hundred documents having material effect on the case have either been destroyed or removed, or purposely withheld.⁴⁴

Attra used this as a strategy for changing the timings of the investigation itself, perhaps to buy himself time. In a letter of May 1952 to the PWD, he wrote:

On looking carefully at the envelope containing your memo I feel that the envelope has been tampered with making me to presume that there is someone in your office having undue interest in my case... consequently I fear that it will not be safe for me to give you every particular minute detail to enable the offenders to manipulate their cases and hence the above request for allowing the time to represent the case personally.⁴⁵

As we read through the file, which does not always follow a uniform chronological sequence, we discover from a press cutting that in May 1951, Attra had actually filed

and application for contempt of court against the Etah PWD for non-production of papers.⁴⁶

What is revealing about these cases from the archive, and there are others like it in administrative departmental files, is not so much the connection of the apparently mundane with broader networks of politics, but four other considerations: First is the sense of temporality emerging from the archive itself. Many contemporary accounts of administrative and political corruption tend to present a set of arrangement and networks in stasis. But officers reacted, strategically, to the changing conditions of a corruption investigation in such a way that allowed anti-corruption measures and forms of corruption to interact in temporal and strategic ways. Second is how the paper trail also allows us to juxtapose the narratives of different parties surrounding a corruption transaction, which reveals the performative means in which corruption and anti-corruption in this period were entangled. In this connection, thirdly, these episodes reveal, I would argue, a fetish of the written word, of evidence in the building of a documentary complex that was instrumental to how corruption was portrayed and understood to operate. In the first case, this was about the collection of different kinds of data, and the production of case letters from powerful patrons. In the second, it was about the complex withholding, delaying or absence of information. Fourthly and finally, we have the larger reflection on the importance of the 'material' factors of corruption (in this case around cement), which were especially pertinent to wider political issues and changes in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

What these cases show us in the round, not only in their existence in the archive, but their link to other media such as newspapers, is the means by which 'corruption' was a frame for thinking about and resolving other political concerns: In the Etah and Kanpur cases from the newspapers (mentioned above) for example, it was significant for public views of this corruption that officers themselves were found to be complicit, and part of extensive networks linking cities across the state. Again, similar to Banda and Asthana's allegations, one of the officers involved- the Town Rationing Officer in the city of Kanpur during the scandal, K B Misra, mobilised political assistance and the newspapers, moving backwards and forwards to Lucknow to court leaders.⁴⁷ It was also significant that 'Muslim officers' were considered to be part of the reason for the irresolution of the problem. In all three cases, we see an increasing tendency to measure and account for losses, via specific quantitative analyses – a means of documenting the cost and benefit of developing schemes of anti-corruption in the larger development of the state. The idea of corruption too, then, was meeting the new scientific paradigms of the modern developmental state. Perhaps most strongly of all, both of the cases in Banda and Etah illustrate anxieties about the functioning of politics in newly independent India: Most of the officers under enquiry, and in the case of Etah, the contractor Attra are presented as particularly malevolent where their motivations relation to political influence and intrigue. Here, the underside of the political process involves the wielding of influence, the 'moulding' of bureaucrats in the favour of powerful patrons and the larger problems of political interference in a supposedly neutral civil administration.

Conclusion

Paper - the physical contents of the archive, this article has argued, becomes an important material element in both official and public understandings of what constitutes corruption. The archive is simultaneously the repository of legal or administrative case files, a collection of documents for future internal reference, and an account that depicts the multivocal and multi-directional nature of corruption scandals. The historian is uniquely positioned to explore in detail the contingent and

temporal aspects of corruption as both a practice and a discourse, and to examine the many kinds of performance that are contained within such events. Colonial preoccupations with order and procedure were illustrated in these documents too, but in corruption cases we see the intricate manipulation of that order via documentary production, destruction, and movement.

The historical archives relating to administrative and political corruption in places like India are also a reference point for exploring the different forms of temporality that play out in such events. At a larger level, we can examine this in relation to the particular moments or contexts in which administrative corruption becomes important. This article has suggested that moments of significant state transition – for example, the late 1940s and 1950s, represented a moment in which governments of all kinds were keen to explore corruption as a ‘problem’, and to therefore collect information about it in new ways. This was the beginning of a new phase in the discipline of Public Administration and the setting out of a particular kind of social science research paradigm that characterised the first Five Year Plan, extending into other areas such as demography. Equally, this period was one in which older networks of patronage operating within or across administrative departments were shaken up, renewed or reinforced at a new pace: In the archives in areas such as PWD, we see a struggle to comprehend things that are rapidly changing, catching up with what is emergent, and working through a process of making sense of rules that are themselves being quickly being undermined.

We can extend this argument about transition further as integral to how the shape and forms of corruption changed in South Asia: In the late 1940s and 1950s, not only was the older colonial order itself under stress and in greater uncertainty than ever, new documentary methods were being used to both generate and challenge networks of corruption. Many forms of inscription, sat precariously across one side or the other of this divide of corruption and anti-corruption - Entries in character rolls or service books were both methods of ensuring integrity, and mechanisms for disciplining the intransigent *incorruptible* officer. Correspondence between the state government, PWD, and PSC set out rules of the game, but also became means of delay and influence. The emergent anti-corruption mechanisms themselves, internal and external were themselves often populated by these practices. Paper (or its absence), more than anything then, illustrated the complex interaction then between corruption and anti-corruption. These paper representations served too, to influence later and on-going discussions of and perceptions of administrative corruption. Files lived on as a semi-permanent record of the temporal narrative of corruption and anti-corruption, and were a physical testament to the importance of political influence, internal cooperation and the need for scapegoats.

Explored in relation to each other, these files on corruption cases then, seem to present moments in which other kinds of political conflicts are playing out or finding resolution: At a regional level, corruption carried a range of political struggles in provinces such as UP – the references in the PWD files to political patrons and factions suggested that discussions of the ‘corruption of the state’ were going to be part of a larger political landscape of factional conflict. The idea of corruption in this period was important at broader and more profound levels, surrounding questions of national belonging. The scapegoating of Muslim officers, who in so many cases were targeted as the guilty *in absentia* in some of these PWD cases, took place just as governments at all levels were implicated in the process of refugee rehabilitation. It was also a function of the political struggles around ‘Muslim loyalty’ and ideas of national belonging,⁴⁸ as the idea of the Muslim government servant as potentially undermining the state, coloured reflections on corruption. In 1950, the Sindhi Hindu Refugee Panchayat, for example, provided lists for P.D. Tandon of Muslim government servants who had retained

properties but migrated, or who had “deceived refugees”.⁴⁹ This was also a part of the larger political struggle taking place between Tandon and Nehru around the Presidentship of the Congress.

Finally, the idea of corruption playing out in these files also allows the historian and political scientist to explore some of the crosscutting anxieties around early postcolonial ‘development’, civil society and the exclusions that they entailed. The well known work of Partha Chatterjee (2004) setting out the idea of ‘political society’-communities who are objects of biopolitical governance and inscribed and categorized as such, were also elements of this early postcolonial record. The PWD files are also characterised by absences: Although concerned with roads, bridges, irrigation channels and other kinds of infrastructure, there is almost no reflection on the impact of the material failures of public works for communities using them. The archive of corruption then is also one in which struggles within civil society as a whole – whether manifest as factional conflicts, or business interests – take priority over the end user. The ‘scandal’ is always about winners and losers in the district board, the PWD office, or the organisation set up to expose malfeasance. Chatterjee has argued for contemporary India that those excluded from the institutions of state and civil society, routinely use paralegal forms of mobilisation: negotiating squatters rights on encroached land, getting control of unmetered water or electricity, via community leaders. In the 1940s and 1950s, such movements rarely make it to government files, suggesting that the archive itself, and arguably, the very playing out of the corruption scandal through them, is a function of their exclusion.

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ⁱ The phenomenon of 'timepass' as a form of underemployment and the politics of 'waiting' in India is discussed in Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010)

ⁱⁱ Interview with J N Chaturvedi, IPS (1951), Dehra Dun, 25 October 2005.

³ Report of the Anti-Corruption Committee', General Administration Department (hereafter GAD), Box 594, File 70/1938, Pt. I of file.

⁴ This public fascination with the subject was largely driven by the extent to which price controls and controls on movement of goods had generated discussion around the phenomenon of the Black Market. It was however, also a longer-term development from Congress Party drives to set up 'anti-corruption' agencies from 1938, which found their final form shortly after independence in 'district anti-corruption committees'. See 'District Anti-Corruption Committees', Home Police (A), Box 76, File 402/55 Uttar Pradesh State Archives.

⁵ Perhaps the clearest example of this is provided by the preoccupation of Jawaharlal Nehru in his correspondence with the UP Chief Minister through the late 1940s and early 1950s, around the political morality of the UP Congress, and 'corruption' therein.

⁶ On the formation and work of the SPE, see 'A Short Note on the History of the Police', MSS.EUR.F161/126. Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library.

⁷ 'Govt. Neglecting Development Work. General Debate on State Budget in Assembly. People Groaning Under High Prices', *National Herald*, 9 March 1950, p. 7.

⁸ 'Achievements of UP Govt - Pant's Review: Report to State Congress', *National Herald*, 16 September 1951, p.2.

⁹ For detail on this for the 1950s, see *Railway Corruption Enquiry Committee. Report*. Delhi, Government of India, 1955

¹⁰ The reports can be found in 'Exclusion from Government Service of persons on account of misconduct'. PWD (B) file 9EG/1948, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (hereafter UPSA).

¹¹ 'List of persons debarred by the Central or a Provincial Government during the half year ending 31 December 1948', *Ibid.* UPSA

¹² 'List of persons debarred by the Central Government or a State Government Service during the half year ending 30 June, 1950'. *Ibid.* UPSA

¹³ 'List of persons debarred from Government service for the period from 30 June 1950 to 30 June 1951', *Ibid.* UPSA.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ 'List of persons debarred from Government service for the period from 30 June 1951 to 30 June 1952', *Ibid.* UPSA

¹⁶ For example, 'Annual Reports', PWD 10B/1948 Box 933 UPSA.

¹⁷ In this connection, see 'Officials charged for taking part in RSS and other unlawful movements', PWD (B) file 167B/1948 Box 931 UPSA.

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- ¹⁸ An example of the latter can be found in 'Complaints against Government Servants – Sri Brij Raj Bahadur', PWD (B) File 76B/1949, Box 927, in which a number of petitions set up a petitioning movement against some employees of the Bara Banki Canal Department.
- ¹⁹ This case can be found in the lengthy file, 'Inquiry into a conspiracy between Duleep Singh Contractor and Certain PWD officials of Banda in connexion with black-marketing in cement' PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
- ²⁰ 'Cawnpore Development Board Office Raided: Huge Quantity of cement believed sold in the Black Market' *National Herald*, 5 January 1948, p. 3.
- ²¹ Inquiry into Cement Misappropriation: Cawnpore Police Make Surprise Raids and Seize Records', *National Herald*, 6 January 1948, p. 4.
- ²² 'Huge quantity of cement seized', *National Herald*, 9 January 1948, p. 3.
- ²³ I.J. Johnson, ICS to A.D. Pandit ICS, Secretary to Government, PWD 15 October 1949 in PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
- ²⁴ A.D. Pandit to A. C Mukherji, Chief Engineer, B and R Branch, PWD UP n.d., in PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
- ²⁵ Letter of Sri Iqbal Bahadur Asthana to the Chief Minister, UP, 25 September 1950, PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, note of 11 January 1950, PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
- ²⁸ See for example, the accusations against C B Gupta, in 'Appeal of Balkrishna Sharma' in 'Representations against Sri Chandra Bhan Gupta for selection to the State Assembly Elections', AICC Papers, File 4079 1951 Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- ²⁹ 'Petition of Iqbal Bahadur Asthana', PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
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- ³⁸ Chief Engineer's Office to the Magistrate, Banda, 8 March 1951. Re: Summons of M A Mirza, Jagdish Prasad, G P Goel to attend the course on 12 March. PWD (B) File 122 BBR/1949 Box 915 UPSA.
- ³⁹ 'Extracts from notes on pages 9-11 of PWD(A) file no. 6C/48 Reg. Claims of Sri D D Attra, contractor of Etah', in 'Alleged contempt of court by officials in connection with the claims of D.D. Attra, Contractor', PWD (E) File no. 136 EBR/50, Box 954 UPSA
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- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* PWD (E) File no. 136 EBR/50, Box 954 UPSA
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- ⁴⁴ Letter of Damodar Dass Attra, 14 March 1952, PWD, UP, 23 October 1951, PWD (E) File no. 136 EBR/50, Box 954 UPSA
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⁴⁷ Food and Civil Supply Box 21, File 790/45 Personal File of Sri K.B. Misra, ARO UP SA

⁴⁸ For example, Vallabhai Patel's famous declaration that Muslims should demonstrate their 'loyalty' which can be found in *National Herald*, 8 January 1948.

⁴⁹ From representatives of the Sindhi Hindu Refugee Panchayat, Jaipur, Durgapur Camp, Gopaldas H Ladhani, Congress Social Worker, to Tandon. 29 January 1950, Tandon Papers, File 301 NAI.