Archiving from Below: The Case of the Mobilised Hawkers in Calcutta

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Abstract

In the last two decades or more, critical scholarship in the human sciences has been commenting on different aspects of the 'archive'. While much has been said on the archive of the state, especially in the historiography of colonial South Asia, very little is known about the archival functions of political parties, movements, grassroots community organisations, and trade unions that are involved in the governance of populations in the post-colonial state. The paper argues that archival claims lie at the heart of negotiations between the state and population groups. It looks at the archival function of the Hawker Sangram Committee (HSC) in Calcutta to substantiate the point. Following Operation Sunshine (1996), a move by the state to forcibly evict hawkers from some selected pavements of Calcutta, in order to reclaim such 'public' spaces, a mode of collective resistance developed under the banner of the HSC. The HSC has subsequently come to occupy a central position in the governance of the realm of pavement-hawking through the creation and maintenance of an archival database that articulates the entrepreneurial capacity of the 'poor hawker' and his ability to deliver goods and services at low-cost. The significance of the HSC's archive is that, it enables the organisation to form a moral and rational critique of the exclusionary discourses on the hawker, mostly propagated by a powerful combination of a few citizens' associations, the judiciary and the press. The paper also documents how the successful mobilisation of a population group like the hawkers is marked by the virtual destruction of a pre-existing archive on the other group of 'encroachers' of the pavement space, the pavement dwellers.

Keywords: Archive, Informality, Hawkers, Pavement Dwellers

Introduction

1.1 The title of the paper introduces a term: 'archiving from below'. The paper excavates the meaning of the term through an exploration of the present dynamic of operation of the mobilised hawkers in Calcutta. The archival acumen of the colonial state - as repositories of cartographic, linguistic, ethnological, ethnographic, religious, economic and historical knowledge in various forms - has received critical attention in the last couple of decades in South Asian historiography[1]. If, at one level, this recent spurt of literature on the nature of the colonial archive reflects the growing influence of Foucault's notion of the knowledge/power problematic within South Asian historiography, it is also a product of the 'statist turn' in recent reflections on the South Asian past. This concern with the history of the state in South Asia has been driven both by the so-called Cambridge school and the Subaltern Studies collective - a common analytical interest shadowed by hostile polemical exchanges between the two 'schools'. Within the former cluster, scholars like Bayly, have drawn their intellectual trajectories from Castells's (1989) model of the 'informational city' and Harold Inns' (1950) classic work on 'social communication' to reflect on knowledge-communities and communication networks. Bayly, in his influential work, *Empire and Information*, talks about the dynamics of information gathering and dissemination with the rise of the British power in South Asia (Bayly 1996). The Subaltern Studies group, influenced by Foucauldian and Saidian reflections on knowledge production, on the other hand, has provoked us to imagine archive not as a store of transparent sources but as a veritable site of power, a body of knowledge marked by the struggle and violence of the colonial past. As Spivak has emphasised, the archive of colonialism was itself the product of the 'commercial/territorial interest of the East India Company' (Spivak 1985).

1.2 These works on colonial archive unanimously and justly perceive the process of colonial governmental knowledge formation (archiving) as something thrust upon from 'the above'. While much research in this direction has been done on the politics of archives (Joyce 1999), little is known about the production of governmental knowledge in the context of a post-colonial democracy by political parties, trade unions,

community groups and locality-based-committees on populations - the ways in which they gather a pool of knowledge and negotiate with the state and developmental agencies by providing selective information from their database, thereby participating in the governance of populations. To mark the contradistinction of these processes of governmental knowledge-formation to the perception of the process of archiving in the aforementioned works (though I share with much of their contributions on the politicised nature of archive), I call this 'archiving from below'. The paper seeks to establish the fact that there are discontinuities in the production of governmental knowledge between the colonial era and the post-colonial era. It also tries to read the archive as a site of negotiation between the state and the electorally mobilised population groups, between hegemonic bourgeois aspirations and counter-hegemonic claims, and between cases of successful and failed mobilisations.

1.3 In Calcutta, footpath hawking is an everyday phenomenon and hawkers represent one of the largest, more organised and more militant sectors in the informal economy. In 1996, following Operation Sunshine (OS) which was a move by the Left ruled Municipal Corporation and the state government to forcibly remove hawkers from selected pavements in the city of Calcutta, one of the four largest cities of India, a very new mode of collective resistance developed and very quickly organised itself under the banner of the Hawker Sangram (struggle) Committee (HSC). In the post- OS phase, the HSC has been the most powerful defender of the hawkers' cause. More than 32 street-based hawker unions with affiliation to mainstream political parties other than the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist), better known as CPI (M)[2], constitute the body of the HSC. CPI (M)'s labour wing, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)[3] has a hawker branch called 'Calcutta Street Hawkers' Union' that remains outside the HSC.

1.4 The paper documents how the HSC, by arrogating to itself a certain archival function that had hitherto been the prerogative of the state, has become an important counter-hegemonic political force in the city. It supplies information on hawkers to the state and non-state agencies which displays the organisation's capability to govern its own realm, thereby increasing its participation in policy-deliberations. I call this a certain 'archiving from below' as it intervenes in the classical command-execution mode of state-ethnography. The term, thus, refers to a certain reversing of how governmental knowledge is produced. To put it differently, the term seeks to demonstrate how everyday archival negotiations between the state and mobilised groups produce public discourses, and governable subjects. A glance at the archival function of the HSC provides the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the specific histories of archive formation in the context of a post-colonial democracy.

1.5 The paper documents parts of my ethnographic and archival research, of the last three years, on the politics of the informal sector labour in contemporary Calcutta.

A Brief History of the HSC

Politics of Hawking Prior to OS

2.1 During the sixties and seventies of the last century, the city pavement provided space for refugees from East Pakistan, unemployed city youths and migrants from the wide catchment area of the city on which they started vending. They settled in rows of shabby kiosks, spilling almost on to the roadway itself, and they used municipal services such as water supply and electricity, evading taxes. The state government and the Corporation took attempts to evict hawkers. But, the drives were, as I have argued elsewhere, mostly guided by the localised interests of the established retail chain and the electoral compulsions of local leaders (Bandyopadhyay 2009b). Organised in large and small unions, the hawkers mobilised supports among citizens and political parties by arguing how they provided essential commodities at low cost to ordinary people[4].

2.2 In the mid-1990s, however, 'the tide turned. Eager to regain the support of the urban middle classes, the communist-led government of West Bengal sought to make the state an attractive and safe investment destination. As a part of urban restructuring, in 1996, over a period of two weeks, in a well-planned and coordinated action called 'Operation Sunshine', municipal authorities and the police demolished all street-side stalls in Calcutta. But, within a few months the hawkers, mobilised by their unions, opposition party and even by the smaller constituents of the ruling Left Front, began to reclaim their previous positions.(The Statesman, 26 November, 1996). The state had to think again of 'regulation' of hawking as opposed to eviction and rehabilitation.

2.3 Just before the official declaration of Operation Sunshine, the non-CITU hawker unions (thirty two in number) decided to form an umbrella federation named Hawker *Sangram* (struggle) Committee (HSC). The Calcutta Street Hawkers' Union being an offshoot of CITU (CPM labour union) remained away from the federation. HSC and CITU took two different strategies to counter the operation. For obvious reasons CITU could not directly confront the state. Its leaders used to make intimidating comments against the transport minister (The Telegraph, October 4, 1996). Again when they found it threatening as the top leadership backed the operation they used to flatly deny the charge[5] (The Telegraph, December 24, 1996).

2.4 The HSC on the other hand took a confrontational path. As the operation progressed, the HSC staged daily protests stopping traffic at key intersections, burning buses, 'gherao'ing police posts and moving to the Court seeking redressal[6] (HSC 2006:1-7).

2.5 OS was followed by selective rehabilitation of the evicted hawkers. This rehabilitation process was thoroughly controlled by the CPM leaders and marked by personalised calculations of local power by regime functionaries (Anandabazar, 23 January, 1997)[7]. Still it was seen that hawkers had come back even in those streets which the government had banned as non-hawking zones. The HSC had been thoroughly successful in projecting this come-back as the victory of its *sangram*.

HSC in the Last Decade

2.6 In the decade following OS, which saw no major eviction-operation, the HSC's '*sangram*' has transmuted into a new form in which the organisation has become a political manager of informality on the pavement. Keeping administrative and electoral necessities in consideration, the state and the ruling party have come close to the organisation. The HSC, today, is to be kept in full confidence before the implementation of any regulation on hawkers (Bandyopadhyay 2009a). It now enjoys enormous authority in managing the informal labour market and other informal transactions related to hawking. It has gradually taken the shape of an organisation of the employer or original hawkers (those who informally own the plot and invest), something which has an understandable impact on the labour hawkers. The HSC, however, provides a range of essential services to its clients which include the following activities:

- Ensuring credits from informal bankers.
- Negotiating with the lower rung of the city administration to settle the weekly bribe that a hawker is to pay to run his business.
- Settling conflicts among hawkers themselves and other informal groups on the pavement[8].
- Regulating the number of hawkers who can operate in a given area[9].

2.7 The specific operation of the HSC in the market and in the governmental space requires it to undertake a massive process of documentation. Let me cite an example. In a credit market, there are typically asymmetric information between a borrower and a lender, where the borrower has full information about his productivity and his risk types, but a lender lacks this information. Borrowers differ in their risk types and lenders do not possess complete information by which to perfectly distinguish between loan applicants. The ability to repay depends on the scale of activities of the borrowers and also on their accumulated wealth. Given such asymmetric information, borrowers may engage in opportunistic behaviour, creating 'moral hazards problems' for lenders. In their effort to overcome this, lenders find that it is costly to make sure that borrowers take actions that make repayment more likely. Moreover, after the loan is granted, circumstances may change the borrower's ability and willingness to repay. The lenders have to take recourse to costly action in order to observe these changes in the probability of default and induce borrowers to take corrective action. It is difficult to compel repayment, particularly when the institutional and legal infrastructures are incomplete and the court procedures too costly. Traditional collateral, even when it exists, may not guarantee repayment. Given this, the credit market is segmented along ethnic lines. The migrant hawkers find it easier to establish contact with the wholesaler or the mahajan (informal banker) through friends, relatives and middlemen. The wholesaler finds it easier to monitor the activities of the borrower through the channels of personal relation. On the other hand, the non-migrant Bengali hawkers find it difficult to earn a credit from the mahajan. In such a situation the union is the hinge organisation between the lender and the borrower. The lender depends on the union for risk minimization, information and enforcement while the aspiring borrower depends on it because he can hardly manage a credit without his affiliation to the union.

2.8 Thus, by virtue of its preexisting knowledge on the operation of informality at multiple levels, the HSC can govern its own affiliates and can offer information to the state for a policy. In 2006, it came up with an elaborate socio-economic survey and presented the document to the Corporation for policy intervention in the sector. The HSC is extremely conscious of the nature of the facts that it gathers and can make strategic selections so as to make its presence felt in policy discussions. This means, the HSC has the ability to keep some documents in its private holding and initiate a public debate on the rest.

HSC and its Self-enumeration

Census of the State

3.1 Michel Foucault's (1991) governmentality-perspective has initiated scholars to peruse the ways in which political regimes since the 17th century have used enumerative techniques or censuses to count, classify and thereby govern populations. Constituting the core of the state archive, the census provides not only the key governmental machine of intervention, but also the state's ethical justification to have a certain kind of author-function. The state-ethnography involves a top-down mechanism and acts as a veritable means of political subjection where the state's own inscription of the subaltern is more important in the archive formation than the subject's own self-representation. In the colonial archive, for example, the insurgent subalterns had been portrayed as unreasonable subjects. Only a subject lacking political potential to represent itself could be inscribed in the archive. Historians of the Subaltern Studies wrote in opposition to the archive as a result 'by reading across and against the grain of various documents to find the voice of those who are unrepresented in the archive. Guha means by the 'prose of counter insurgency' not only the record contained in the 19th century colonial archive, but also the use of that archive in constructing bureaucratic and academic discourses that claim to represent peasant insurgency in the narratives of state formation. He is concerned with the ways in which 'the sense of history (is) converted into an administrative concern' in these narratives. Since the subaltern is conceptualised and experienced in the first place as something that lacks the power of self-representation, 'by making the security of the state into the central problematic of peasant insurgency', these narratives (of the perfection of the state, of lawlessness, of transitions between historical stages, of modernisation), necessarily deny the peasant rebel 'recognition as a subject of history in his own right even for a project that was all his own' (Guha 1983: 3).

3.2 As Partha Chatterjee (2004) tells us, governance, in the post-colonial situation, is no longer solely dispensed by the state. It has become dispersed across the social body as the twin effect of democracy and development. A complex ensemble of parties, movements, various non-party formations, community groups, trade unions have come to mediate between the state and population groups. The case of the HSC

shows how enumerative and archival techniques deployed by various organisations become central in the mediation between the state and populations. Governmental knowledge is formed in the crucible of such negotiations.

Archiving from Below

3.3 Let me document my 'discovery' of the archive of the HSC. This has much to do with my changing perceptions on archival research. Being a student of history, I had a preoccupation with the archive and also with the ways in which the Subaltern Studies group has sought to re-read the archive 'against the grain'. Having started with my project on the footpath-hawkers of Calcutta, I first completed a historian's routine set of visits to the State Archives. But, to my utter frustration, I could gather very little material relevant to the subject. I started my field research very soon with a long questionnaire in my hand. Another wave of frustration was awaiting me in Gariahat where there was the highest concentration of hawkers in South Calcutta. I spent days on the footpath observing brisk transactions of saris, ready-made garments, fast food, tea, pirated CDs, DVDs, electronic goods, and fruits. But, I could not fill in the bulk of my questionnaire. Whenever I asked the hawkers about the nitty-gritty of their business, the source of credit or even some simple demographic queries like their family composition, average consumption, etc, they used to gaze at me. One of them even asked me to produce before him the documents supporting my university affiliation. Having examined my documents, he asked: 'What do you want from us? Why should we spare time to help you fill in this questionnaire? Who will ensure us that you will not distort information in your report and not submit it to the Corporation to facilitate another 'operation sunshine'. The person also told me that he did not harbour any personal animosity towards me and he was willing to support my work if I could manage to have a permission from 'Shakti-da' (*Shaktiman Ghosh*. In Bengali 'da' refers to the elder brother), the leader of the HSC. I began to realise that the person was questioning the legitimacy of somebody not belonging to his community to form a database on the hawkers. The HSC has reserved all archival rights to itself. It has created an inner domain where the entry of the 'other' is subject to the conditions imposed by the leader. Being curious, I went to the office of the HSC at College Street. It was extremely difficult to talk to Shakti-da, as he, really is a globe-trotter. He was one of the most important leaders of the National Alliance of People's Movements and an active participant in National Movement for Retail Democracy that successfully organised massive Anti-Walmart Campaign in many Indian cities in the recent past. When I first visited the office of the HSC, Shakti-da was in Chile to attend a conference. But, two of his trusted lieutenants who actually managed the office, Sudipta Maitra and Murad Hussain, willingly talked to me and gave me access to a room filled with thick files. Murad told me that there was another store where there were confidential documents such as the everyday notes of the leaders of each street that could not be displayed as 'they would expose the inner contradictions of the committee. Those documents could only be made public if we resolved to document our history in future'.

3.4 I started my archival research in the office of the HSC in July 2006. Apart from political pamphlets, letters to different organisations, and petitions, I could locate a systematically documented reservoir of information on the informal credit market. With a gradual politicisation of the sector since the late sixties of the last century (See Bandyopadhyay 2009b), the unions penetrated into the heart of the sector and completely institutionalised the informal credit mechanisms leading to a partial de-ethnicisation of the credit market. The unions maintain necessary information (social, economic, political and household) on the hawker that can satisfy a lender. Often the unions receive commission from both the parties as remuneration. The HSC, being at the head of 32 local unions, centrally preserves and monitors this huge demographic data. This was the traditional archival function of the HSC, I understood. But, since the publication of the National Policy of Street Vendors in 2004, this preexisting database of the HSC began to assume a political purpose. The National Policy recommended a certain imposition of 'numerical limits on access to public spaces by discretionary licenses'. For this, the policy-makers felt it necessary to 'conduct surveys of street vendors and their location by competent professional institutions'. The National Policy also asserted that the drive to form such a database would be 'sponsored by the Ministry of Urban employment and Poverty Alleviation/concerned department of state governments/ municipal authorities'. Again, reflecting on the National Policy, the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector suggested in 2006 that 'city-wise census for street vendors should be carried out, followed by regular updating of the database'. Invoking the Supreme Court ruling that 'if properly regulated according to the exigencies of the circumstances' the street hawkers 'can considerably add to the comfort and convenience of the general public, by making available ordinary articles of everyday use for a comparatively lesser price', the National Policy placed the hawkers' question in the realm of case-sensitive management (evident in the invocation of the terms like 'exigencies of circumstances') that required a constant upkeep of database.

3.5 The HSC did not take much time to offer a baseline survey of a sample of 2350 hawkers (which came out in public in 2006) to the governing agencies that would enable it to assume a more meaningful role in policy formulation in the sector. In a pamphlet circulated in a conference organised by the HSC, in September, 2008, it was stated that 'the National Policy has recommended the local governments to conduct socio-economic surveys on the hawkers. The HSC takes the opportunity to employ its own expertise to conduct such a survey. This survey is the first of its kind in the city'.

3.6 Conducting massive socio-economic surveys and submitting them to the state agencies serves three purposes. First, it enables the organisation to formalise its archiving. Second, it makes the organisation very prominent and influential in policy discourses. Third, it shows the organisation's ability to act like a state in its own domain. The HSC is also collaborating with the city corporation to extend this documentation all over the city in which all the hawkers in the city are minutely mapped[10].

3.7 A public display of the hawker's contribution to the urban society and economy in statistical language has also enabled the HSC to participate in the official policy-making bodies. The preface to the report asserts:

'.this study objected to identify one of the most essential service providers of contemporary fast growing ultra modern hi-tech urban areas with a sense of legitimacy of right to livelihood and struggle of survival through unique and most affordable essential services to the urban poor and low income group populations and making a space for coexistence of large number of dying home based, cottage and small-scale industries along with marginalised farmers. The necessity of the present study arose in response to the urgent need to bring out their social and economic contribution to urban economy and society (HSC 2007).

3.8 To make the study acceptable to a wider cross-section of readers, the HSC has involved eminent academicians from the very beginning. The preface writes:

From the beginning of the study we have decided to involve expert academic skills with computerised data compiling and analysing system for the best survey result. In this we have the great opportunity to get help from Dr. Subhendu Dasgupta, Head of the Department, South and South East Asian Studies, CU, and Prof. Dipankar Dey' (HSC 2007).

3.9 Another important thing, that I must point out with regard to the survey under review, is the role of Sujit Mukherjee of Pratibandhi Udyog in making the survey possible. We come to know from the preface again, that he has 'extended his kind infrastructural support to conduct the vast field survey - with a sensitive notion of understanding of the union's economic condition and done this great job with a very low cost budget'. But who is this Sujit Mukherjee' Why was he given the responsibility of conducting the study'

3.10 Sujit Mukherjee, popularly known as Naughty-da in Kasba-Bosepukur region, had been a hawker in his early days. He is a member of RSP and close to the Kshiti Goswami- faction of the party which maintains a 'rebel' image within the Left Front. Naughty-da is a distant nephew of the incumbent Mayor of the Corporation and a well-known figure in his office. He is known for his close relation with the HSC as well. Apart from conducting the field research, Naughty-da had mediated between the Mayor's office and the HSC. Without a Naughty-da, it was hardly possible to conduct the study. Naughty-da has a unique identity which made him a key person in the survey. He had been a hawker and is now a social worker, a Leftist but not a CPM. Yet he is close to the CPM Mayor, a Mayor who is not a prominent figure in the main-stream hierarchy of CPM.

3.11 I argue that the reversing of the process of archiving is one of the defining features of post-colonial subaltern movements. As I explain in the next section, the success of a 'political society' crucially depends on how much ability it acquires in regulating the flow of information. Those who fail to resist the state ethnography and also fail to offer a counter-ethnography, will be preserved in the state archive as a frozen entity'as a voiceless relic of the past.

Outsourcing of Archiving

3.12 In 2007, the Corporation took the initiative of creating an official database on the hawkers operating in the public spaces of the city. But without taking much pain to search for any 'competent professional institution' the Corporation outsourced the task to Naughty-da's NGO, Pratibandhi Udyog. Gariahat Road and Rashbehari Avenue had been chosen as a preliminary site for the pilot project. The preface of the pilot project writes: 'A survey was carried on for 636 hawkers at Gariahat Road and 1627 hawkers at Rashbehari Avenue, between May 27 and June 16, 2008, between 10.30 am and 8.30 pm each day'.

3.13 This survey has been a case-specific and more rigorous deployment of the questionnaires of the HSC's survey. Yet, the name of the HSC is absent in the survey report. It rather maintains an 'objective' image sometimes by praising some unions for their support and sometimes by stating how difficult it was to collect data from hawkers who belonged to the unions that were not favourably inclined to share information.

Claims of the Archive: Hawkers are Entrepreneurial Poor

3.14 The survey of the HSC covered the most of the city while the survey of the Corporation done by Naughty-da's Pratibandhi Udyog concentrated on one particular location'the surroundings of the Gariahat junction (Gariahat Road and Rashbehari Avenue)'the heart of South Calcutta. As both of the surveys had been conducted by a common team of field workers with a common set of questions, the latter one was bound to be a location-specific replication of the HSC's survey. Let us look at the salient claims of the surveys in consideration:

Claim 1: Hawking is the only possible means of livelihood to the majority of the hawkers:

3.15 According to the survey of the Corporation, 63.7 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 55.7 percent hawkers at Rashbehari Avenue have started earning as hawkers. Nearly 93 percent of hawkers in aggregate in the concerned streets started their present business due to unemployment. Most of them have remained in this economic activity for a long period of time. 63.7 percent of hawkers at Gariahat and 56.2 percent of them at Rashbehari have been in this business between 5 and 20 years which is quite at par with the scenario of the entire city calculated by the HSC (56.5 percent). This indicates that far from being a transitory phenomenon, hawking is a permanent space for employment generation. This is more evident when one finds that, to approximately 61 percent of hawkers, hawking has been the principal hereditary business and that they are the second generation in such trade (in HSC's survey, this figure comes to 68.16 percent of the total sample).

Claim 2: The Hawkers' Question involves the livelihood question of many:

3.16 According to the Corporation-Pratibandhi Udyog survey, most of the hawkers (84.7 percent at Gariahat and 85.5 percent at Rashbehari) are sole earners in their families. 65.3 percent of hawkers at Gariahat and 67.9 percent of hawkers at Rashbehari provide livelihood to the families of 4-7 members. In most of the cases the family members (64.9 percent at Gariahat and 56.2 percent at Rashbehari) are actively involved in the trade. Moreover, a substantial number of hawkers generate employment in their shops. At Gariahat, for example, 42.2 percent hawkers employ one or more than one labourer(s) to assist them. HSC's survey, however, says that 80.52 percent hawkers of its total sample employ two helpers and 1 percent of the sample employs even more than 2 helpers in their shops. The claim that one might make from this data is that, hawking generates income for the survival of a large section of population in and around the city and that it is a labour-intensive sector.

Claim 3: Hawkers are Poor:

3.17 Though hawkers provide livelihood for a significant number of people, the amount they earn-consume-invest, is meagre. The category of monthly earning up to Rs. 4000 (USD80) includes 80.5 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 89.1 percent hawkers at Rashbehari. Since they earn very little their monthly family expenditure is also meagre'72 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 58.6 percent hawkers at Rashbehari spend Rs. 2000-3000 (USD40-60) per month for their families. Again, as most of the hawkers can afford to save little, they invest very little in their business-69 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 65.5 percent hawkers at Rashbehari, according to the survey, spend less than Rs. 2000 (USD 40) per month on their business. To sum up, most of the hawkers belong to the low-income, low-expenditure group as hawking is basically a low-income-generating business. Yet, a large section of people is engaged in this economic activity, as the alternative-employment-and-income-generating spaces are limited. In other words, the existence of hawkers on the streets indicates the state's failure to generate adequate employment opportunity.

Claim 4: Hawkers are self-reliant businessmen who lessen the state's burden:

3.18 The survey under review points out that 58.5 percent hawker at Gariahat and 65.4 percent at Rashbehari have started their business through self-financing (in HSC's survey, 71.59 percent hawkers in the sample started their business through self financing). That does not change even after that 71.9 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 80.5 percent hawkers at Rashbehari (while 74.84 percent hawkers in HSC's survey) maintain their business with internal capital. In sum, the survey makes the claim that hawking is an economic activity that generates income for a significant number of people (far exceeding the number of hawkers operating on the streets and pavements) without causing any pressure on state finance.

Claim 5: Hawking is at the heart of the economy of small people:

3.19 According to the survey, a large number of hawkers (59.4 percent in Gariahat and 76.6 percent in Rashbehari) purchase their goods from small suppliers. Moreover, most of the hawkers (74.7 percent in Gariahat and 68.25 percent in Rashbehari, and 64.87 percent in HSC's survey) pay their suppliers in cash so that the small suppliers find it easier to collect goods. This reciprocal understanding between hawkers and suppliers constructs a viable economy of the small people. This concept of small economy again gets prominence if we calculate the data provided by the survey under review on the linkages between the hawkers, the small sellers and small buyers'70.1 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 74.1 percent at Rashbehari sell their goods to poor and middleclass buyers. 61 percent hawkers at Gariahat and 64.8 percent at Rashbehari are of the opinion that small buyers have 10 to 20 percent benefits if they purchase goods from them.

Claim 6: Hawkers contribute to the economy of the state:

3.20 The survey under review claims that hawking contributes to the economy of West Bengal in two ways. First, it generates income for the local people'90 percent of hawkers at Gariahat and 93.7 percent at Rashbehari are from the state. Second, the majority of the hawkers (86.8 percent at Gariahat and 98.27 percent at Rashbehari) sell commodities produced within the state.

3.21 Citing data, the survey concludes:

> This long standing and stable economy that contributes to the state development do not get any support from the state government' in this context it has been expressed by all the hawkers that they are ready to pay the Government revenues if the state legally recognises their economic activity. The survey provides the statistical support to the opinion that a long standing viable small economy 'should get legal recognition and infrastructural support from the Government.

3.22 We must not forget that the preface to the HSC's survey, we have already quoted, also laid emphasis on the 'need to bring out their social and economic contribution to urban economy and society'.

3.23 The presence of the voice of the HSC is thus present in a study which has been financed by the Corporation. This discourse of the HSC has been developed in opposition to another set of discourses mostly propagated by the city newspapers.

Hawkers, Pavement Dwellers and the Discourses of the Middle Class

Media and the Image of the Hawker

4.1 The local press appears to be remarkably united in taking sides with the seemingly 'class-less' common-man-pedestrian, who is the citizen and the 'taxpayer', and has the legitimate claim over the public

space of the pavement, as against the 'hawker', epitomising 'illegality' and 'disorder' (Dutta 2007). This media also condemns the politics around the hawkers' issue ('Elections near, so hawkers dear', The Telegraph, 27 July, 2005); not only should the future landscape of the ideal city be free of this hawker-'menace', but also these 'illegitimate', 'corrupt' elements are to make no choice in this regard. Thus, as Dutta (2007) has aptly pointed out, hawkers are excluded from the debating citizenry and they are posited as external/hostile to the projected city itself ('cancerous growth' of hawkers on city footpaths' reported in 'Take-it-easy twist to hawker trouble', The Telegraph, 16 June, 2006), having nothing to do, it seems, with the micro-economic organisation of urban space.

4.2 While judicial action is usually supported over political action, in doing so, as Dutta (2007) shows, some reports even over-reach the actual scope of the court orders or directives. The report 'Free roads or court trouble - Hawkers like cancer, says chief justice' (The Telegraph, 20 May, 2006) highlights a court directive to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation 'to submit reports within a month on what steps they have taken regarding hawker congestion and traffic chaos on city streets'. Though hostile, the court directive does not ask outright for eviction (as suggested by the direct threat 'free roads or court trouble') and, in fact, indicates several other factors that also contribute to blocked roads, like the absence of automatic traffic signals and rule-breaking by public buses, which are not emphasised at par in the article. Neither does the article provide any statistics or concrete evidence of the supposed hawker-induced accidents (any cases? which roads? which group of hawkers? etc.). But the hawkers, as disagreeable, extraneous agents, 'choke' the important thoroughfares, commonly referred to in these reports as 'arteries'.

4.3 Coupled with this, there is a pervasive vagueness about the real demographic composition of hawkers. This indistinct, mob-like entity, a 'perennial scourge', 'afflicting' the city's pavements, may be 'several thousand' or 'at least 1.5 lakh' or 'two-lakh-odd' and they are, of course, swelling and in need of authoritarian control. Another article in The Telegraph (13 May, 2006), also mentioned by Dutta (2007), reported a specific alleged incident where a court-survey-team was mobbed by a group of hawkers; the headline escalated this incident, involving a few hawkers, into a general chaotic state blamed on all hawkers.

4.4 In all the afore-mentioned representations, the contest over pavement-space is primarily imagined as a clash of interest between the hawker and the pedestrian. Other encroachers like those who sleep on the pavement and inhabit it do not figure anywhere in the middle-class verbal battle.

4.5 The second argument I propose is that these essentialist constructions of the image of the hawker are due to the fact that hawkers have been able to maintain a domain where the entry of the 'outsider' is denied.

4.6 The media's stance against hawkers is not prompted purely by considerations of a 'civic order', which may be, naively or deviously, seen as in the interest of all 'citizens'. It is, of course, an image-cleansing exercise toward a globalised metropolitan model ('visions of a gleaming, international-class city' in the report 'Not Again' in 'Corner', Outlook, 23 June, 2006). For instance, note the light/darkness binary in the titles of two interconnected reports on the mayor's shifting stance on hawkers. The report 'So long sunshine, hello hawkers' (The Telegraph, Feb 23, 2006) derides the mayor's circumstantial support for hawkers with an allusion to the decade-old eviction drive, and its follow-up, 'Sunshine' –'The rising: Buddha frown prompts mayor U-turn on Hawker comeback' (The Telegraph, 25 February, 2006) extols the mayor's turnaround, upon pressure from the chief minister, just as dramatically (Dutta 2007).

4.7 Heritage areas are to be removed of hawkers and the associated filth and squalor. The approval is evident in reports like 'Hawkers shut out of BBD Bag' (The Statesman, 31 May, 2006) and 'Heritage look for BBD Bag' (The Statesman, 19 June, 2006), where we read that the 'State government, in its endeavour to lure foreign and domestic investment, has decided to render the area a heritage look.' Mention must be made here of the fact that the Dalhousie area is not only a heritage zone that could be decked up for investors, but the main office area of the city with thousands of office-goers and labouring class people who are regularly seen lining up beside hawkers' stalls for their cheap workday lunches.

Archiving from Above and the Pavement Dweller

4.8 Discourses on 'hawker problem/menace', prompted by the pressure of a negative post-colonial image of the city, have intensified with the aspiration for 'global' standards, as well as an urge to consolidate middle class agency and identity vis-à-vis the city space. But the discourse powerfully floated by organisations like the HSC in statistical language, claiming to represent the 'authentic voice' of the 'ordinary', 'poor', 'industrious', 'self-reliant', 'productive' hawkers rendering crucial services to the poorer sections of the city at low cost, ultimately homogenises the pavement as a site where others cannot exist.

4.9 Up to the late 1980s, one of the persistent themes of social science research in Calcutta had been to comprehend the rural-urban migration. This kind of research had been initiated by a group of anthropologists who started writing about the impact of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 on the cityscape. In those works the pavement-dweller represented the unmistakable image of a destitute 'migrant' who needed to be studied. In his path-breaking ethnography, titled 'Bengal Famine 1943' that came out in 1949, Tarak Chandra Das wrote:

> Many of these families had a fixed place for passing the night. During day time the adult members moved individually, or with one or two children, in different parts of the city. But at night they all assembled at these fixed places in order to keep contact with one another. It was not unusual to find groups of twenty to thirty persons lying on the pavement, side by side, sleeping under the open sky... Even during day-time when rest was needed, to this corner they assembled. Often this place of refuge was nothing better than the pavement of the street. (Das 1949: 57).

4.10 'Beside the dwellers of the pavement', writes Das, 'there were others who occupied the air-raid shelters and railway shades'. Between 1975 and 1987, three massive socio-economic studies were undertaken on pavement dwellers by Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) and Indian statistical Institute (ISI). The survey results were published in widely circulated journals. City newspapers were also enthusiastic about publishing interesting survey findings. The first survey came out in 1975. The noted anthropologist Sudhendu Mukherjee conducted the study on behalf of CMDA. The title of the survey was: 'Under the Shadow of the Metropolis: They are Citizens Too'. The title itself suggests the note of romanticism that was associated with it.

4.11 These surveys sought to map the world of pavement dwellers and experimented with the category called the 'pavement dweller'. The socio-economic survey of Jagannathan and Halder (1987) on pavement-dwellers says that it would focus on the 'truly shelterless'. Referring to the earlier initiatives of the same kind, the study asserts: 'Another notable difference is that earlier studies considered the population living under unauthorised shacks and hutments as pavement-dwellers while this section of population has been kept outside the purview of the present study'. As the above statement shows, in the city's administrative circle there had been a lack of unanimity about the definition of the pavement dweller until the publication of the survey under review.

4.12 However, with the publication of Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centre (SPARC)'s survey on pavement dwellers in Bombay, and of Jagannathan and Halder's study in four successive articles in EPW, there had emerged a consensus on the formal connotation of the term.

4.13 CMDA's involvement in the surveys on pavement-dwellers shows that the governmental stand with regard to that particular social group was welfarist. Releasing the survey of Sudhendu Mukherjee, BN Sen, the PWD minister told the reporters that he would send the copies of the report to the UN to earn some money for the rehabilitation of pavement dwellers. (The Statesman, 12 June, 1974).

A Story of Forgetting

4.14 But this trend would change its course in the late 1980s. In accordance with the earlier studies the study of Jagannath and Halder (1987) established the fact that a majority of pavement dwellers were from West Bengal and that they were the landless groups in the Left ruled *sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). If this was the case, then the entire justification of the Left rule would be in jeopardy as the study implicitly or unwittingly questioned the very success of the land reform programme. Since then in the official papers, the pavement dwellers are hardly recognised. They have the voter ID card but hardly any place in the list of the city's counted citizens.

4.15 During operation sunshine, the pavement dwellers were thoroughly evicted, but they did hardly get any media-coverage anywhere. The publicity volume of OS, sponsored by the state government, introduces itself as 'an anthology of articles on the removal drive of the illegal encroachers from the pavements in Calcutta'. But not a single piece in the volume refers to the pavement 'dwellers.'

Conclusion

5.1 To summarise, let it be said that the paper explores the relationship between population groups, governmental agencies and the question of the 'archive'. In brief, I argue that by arrogating to itself a certain archival function - which is conventionally associated with the state - sections of population can become successful in their endless negotiations and tussles with the government. In this context, I compare and contrast the case of the organised hawkers with that of the unorganised pavement-dwellers on whom the state used to have a good database in the 1970s and 1980s. The state seeks to manage populations by mapping them in every possible way and the successfully mobilised groups intervene in the process by way of acting as a crucial filter. I have considered it as an intervention in the classical command-execution mode of archive formation. In the context of post-colonial democracy, the archive has turned out to be a contested field of political negotiation and subjection. Hawkers have come out successful. Pavement dwellers have failed. Having discussed this, we may ask: Is the archive of the HSC the missing parcel of the state-archive, entirely analogous to the latter's logic? Does it just fill in the gaps of the state archive? Or, is the archive under consideration expressive of some essential incommensurability that is not reducible to the formal logic of the state archive? In other words, what are the terms and tenures of the putative autonomy of this kind of 'archiving from below'? The paper deliberately positions the problematic of archive with the processes of everyday survival of forms of informality. There is a significant paradox which makes the case of the HSC different from the archival purpose of the state. Most of the mobilisations in the informal sector which make demands on the state are founded on a sidestepping, suspension and violation of the law (Chatterjee 2004). And yet, archive is law: as Foucault says, it is the law of what can and cannot be said (Foucault 1969). It is the place from which order is given to pasts and presents, where - as Derrida (1998) says - men and gods command, where violence institutionalises itself as law. It represents a principle that in Derrida's words is 'in the order of commencement as well as in the order of commandment' (1998: 2). If archive represents the 'order', the 'principle' and the 'law', then does an 'archiving from below', in an intermediate space between 'formality/legality' (when all laws and regulations are complied with) and 'criminality' (when acts are performed clearly against official laws, basic morality, and the public interest), bring with it the notions of an alternative ordering, law or principle?

5.2 The archive of the HSC provokes us to contemplate the two, rather conflicting, registers of law. The pivotal function of the archive of the state is to establish, protect, preserve, and classify public and individual 'rights' over property and resources. On the contrary, if one function of the archive of the HSC is to maintain some regularity in the operation of the informal economy, its other function is to forge a rational-political language to justify, precisely, the violation of the bourgeois law and the sanctity of public

property.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Nicholas Dirks, in his foreword to Bernard Cohn's *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge* tells us in 1996: 'It has not been sufficiently recognised that colonialism was itself a cultural project of control. Colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it; in certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about. Cultural forms in societies newly classified as 'traditional' were reconstructed and transformed by and through this knowledge, which created new categories and oppositions between colonisers and colonised, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East. Ruling India through the delineation and reconstitution of systematic grammars for vernacular languages, representing India through the mastery and display of archaeological memories and religious texts, Britain set in motion transformations every bit as powerful as the better-known consequences of military and economic imperialism' (1996:ix).

[2] CPI (M) is heading a multi-party communist-socialist coalition in the state of West Bengal that has been ruling the state of West Bengal since 1977.

[3] According to provisional statistics from the Ministry of Labour, CITU had a membership of 3,222,532 in 2002. See <http://www.labourfile.org/superAdmin/Document/113/table%201.pdf>. It runs a monthly organ named as 'Working Class'.

[4] In 1975, the Bengal National Hawkers' Association affiliated to the ruling West Bengal Pradesh Congress (labour cell) gave a memorandum to the Chief Minister protesting against the removal of the hawkers from the pavements of the Brabourne Road in central Calcutta. In that document, the association explained how it served the Congress Party 'during the time of political unrest - for strengthening progressive movement in the heart of West Bengal'. The document also asserted that the evicted hawkers 'had been carrying on business within a very short and limited space without causing obstructions in public streets' and that the eviction operation would 'destroy not only the livelihood of thousands of hawkers, but also a wider network of rural-urban economic exchange' (GOWB 1975). I have found out hundreds of such memoranda submitted by several hawkers' associations to the state government between 1972 and 1975. For details, see Bandyopadhyay (2009b).

[5] There were tensions and contradictions within CPM as well. The city mayor alleged that one of his council members Kanti Ganguly got himself involved in the operation without informing him. Many CPM veterans belonging to the Calcutta district committee considered it an imposition of the dictum of the North and South 24 Parganas district committees on them after the disastrous performance of the party in the city in the last assembly elections (The Telegraph, August 3, 1996), as two of the main architects of the operation, Subhas Chakrabarty, the state transport minister and Kanti Ganguly, the member of the Mayor's council in charge of the conservancy department of the Corporation, belonged to the North and South 24 Parganas district committees respectively. The city intelligentsia however welcomed the move with mild criticism of the way in which things were done (Lahiri 1997). The media mostly celebrated the move. Not a single opinion survey had been conducted among the poorer sections of the city.

[6] Mobilised by opposition-leaders like Mamata Banerjee, its members also tried to return to the sidewalks with baskets of goods. Some Left Front veterans belonging to the other constituting parties also mobilised their own men to reclaim the lost pavement (The Statesman, November 26, 1996). There were contradictory responses from different corners. Prominent Congress leader Somen Mitra expressed his view in favour of eviction while criticising the harsh stand taken by the government (Mitra 1997:8-10). Leaders loyal to Mamata Banerjee openly charged the government for concluding a 'hidden pact' with transnational agencies for building the city's infrastructure at the cost of the livelihood of thousands (WBLA proceedings 1997:45-48).

[7] Thus Kanti Ganguly gave rehabilitation to hundreds of hawkers at Santoshpur in South Calcutta, one of his strongholds (Anandabazar, January 23, 1997). To contain its own clientele CPM now began to distribute resettlement plots to the CITU affiliated hawkers. The rehabilitation sites were chosen in the areas where CPM functionaries had considerable control. Schemes of operation and rehabilitation were drawn so as to break the resistance (even within the party) into several insignificant pockets.

[8] Hawkers negotiate amongst themselves for specific square metres of public space. These negotiations evolve into complex, protective and almost always strictly oral obligations to one another, maintained by a system of verbal confirmation by witnesses to those agreements. These agreements are recognized as

long as that person is alive or the witnesses are around. The HSC codifies these negotiations through minute mapping and auction off space among new entrants to the business.

[9] While it prevents the entry of newcomers in order to ensure that business-profitability is not endangered, it also accommodates fresh entry if business is doing well in a particular area. The state can also use the HSC to check fresh encroachment. Commenting on the fresh encroachment in Rabindrasarani, Shaktiman Ghosh, the GS of HSC said: 'We believe occupancy on pavements, and not the street which causes traffic congestion. We restrict our occupancy in only the one third of the pavement. We strongly oppose any further encroachment violating the municipal laws'. Again, in Park Street, where there was enough scope of accommodating fresh entry, the HSC fought against the municipal move to evict hawkers who started business in the recent past.

[10] However, as Shaktiman Ghosh, general secretary, HSC, discloses, such enumerations take those hawkers into consideration who possess stalls on the pavement (excluding those who work as labourers in the stalls). Ghosh believes that such enumerations will enable the Corporation to issue proper licenses to the 'legitimate' hawkers. 'As you might have read, this has been a long term demand of our association', says Ghosh (Interview with Shaktiman Ghosh recorded by the author on 7th May, 2007).

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