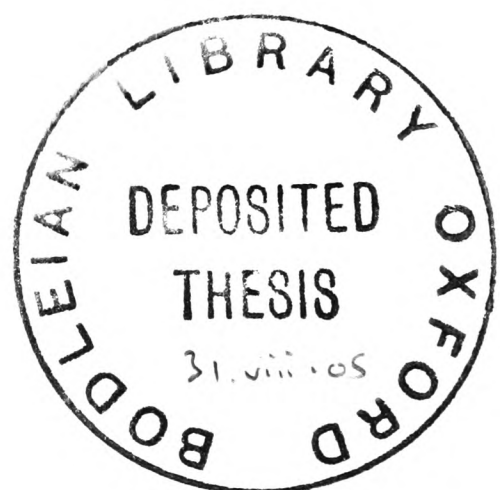
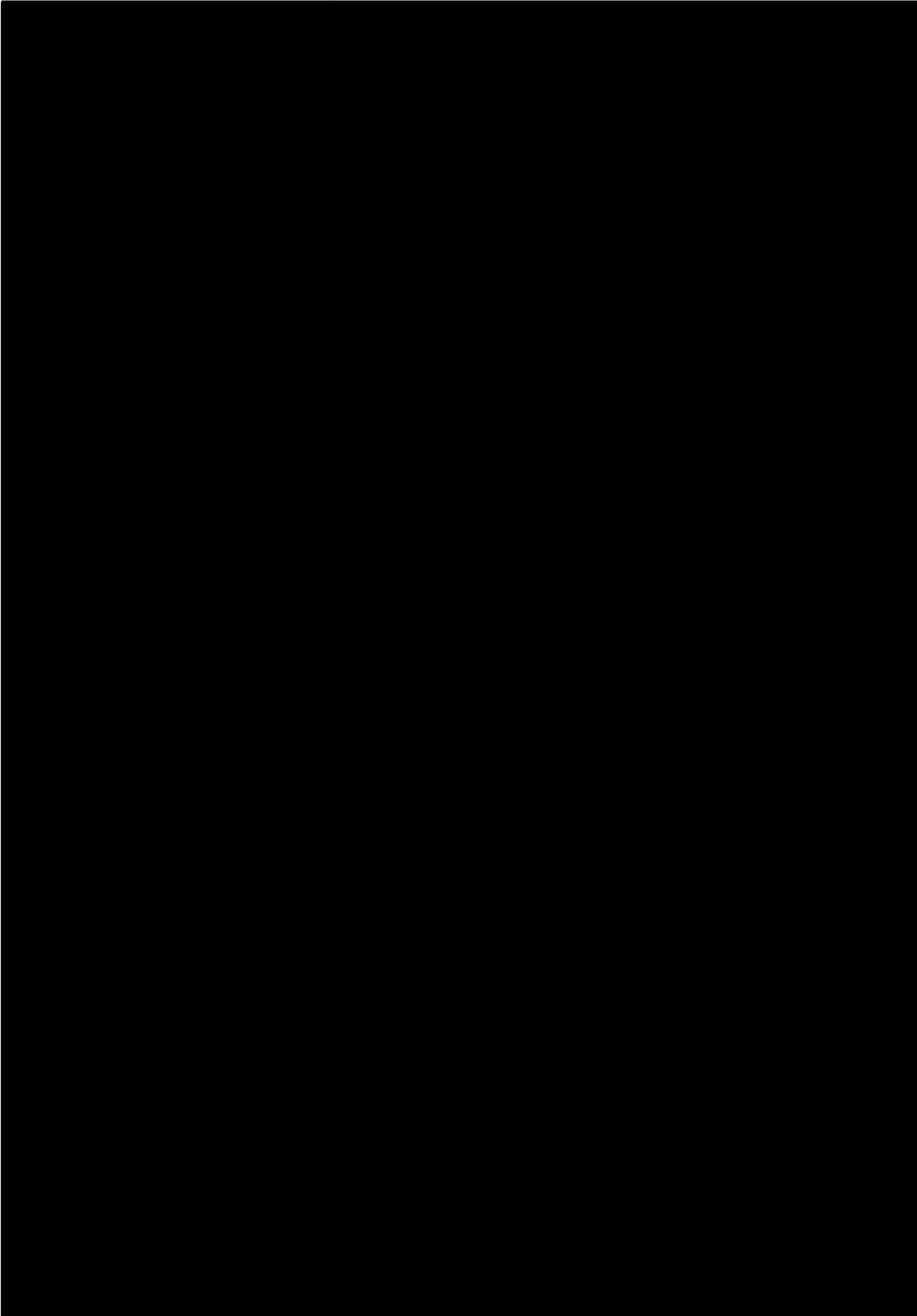


**The Experience Of Four Famines In The
NWP&O (1837-8, 1860-1, 1868-9, 1896-7):
The Gainers and The Losers.**

**Seema Srivastava
St.Peters College,
Oxford University.**



**Thesis submitted for the degree of D.Phil in Modern History,
History Faculty, University of Oxford: Michaelmas Term 2005.**



**The Experience Of Four Famines In NWP&O (1837-8,1860-1,1868-9,1896-7);
The Gainers And The Losers**

**Thesis submitted for degree of D.Phil,
Modern History Faculty, University of Oxford:
Michaelmas Term, 2004. [i.e. 2005]**

**Seema Srivastava
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Oxford.**

Abstract

This study focuses on four famines (1837-8, 1860-1, 1868-9, 1896-7) that afflicted the North Western Provinces and Awadh, the present day Uttar Pradesh, but no longer including the hill districts.

This study looks at the discourse, responses to and perceptions of famines by certain groups in NWP & O society. The study argues that while famines were disasters for some sections of affected people, they proved significantly beneficial to others. It argues that long-standing social, economic and political imbalances caused the impact of famines to fall on already vulnerable and poor sections of society, while the rich and powerful derived important political, economic, social and religious benefits. The policies abetting these and the mechanisms by which these benefits were derived are examined.

Besides poverty, fragmentation and breaking up of community and family structures and more importantly, lack of political accessibility and inadequate political

representation added to the woes of the victims. The perceptions, discourse and responses of famine victims have been detailed.

At the same time the use of power and political accessibility to derive important gains- political, economic and religious is emphasized. The activities of beneficiary groups extended famines in space and time. Their perception and responses to famine have been highlighted, and the varying fortunes of victims and beneficiaries compared and contrasted.

Relief policy largely failed to alleviate even immediate famine distress. A generous and liberal relief policy taking into account the needs and cultural susceptibilities of the affected people was required. But such a policy was not evolved even till the end of the nineteenth century as strategic, bureaucratic, cultural and ideological priorities took precedence over the sufferings of the needy. Officials largely ignored or failed to take into account that relief was being exploited for important economic, political and religious gains.

The issues and problems discussed in the present thesis are relevant for modern times, especially in the case of India. If modern- day relief policies remedy these shortcomings and adopt realistic long-term measures to redress socio- economic and political imbalances that afflict society in India, then the negative impact of famines can be contained.

Acknowledgements

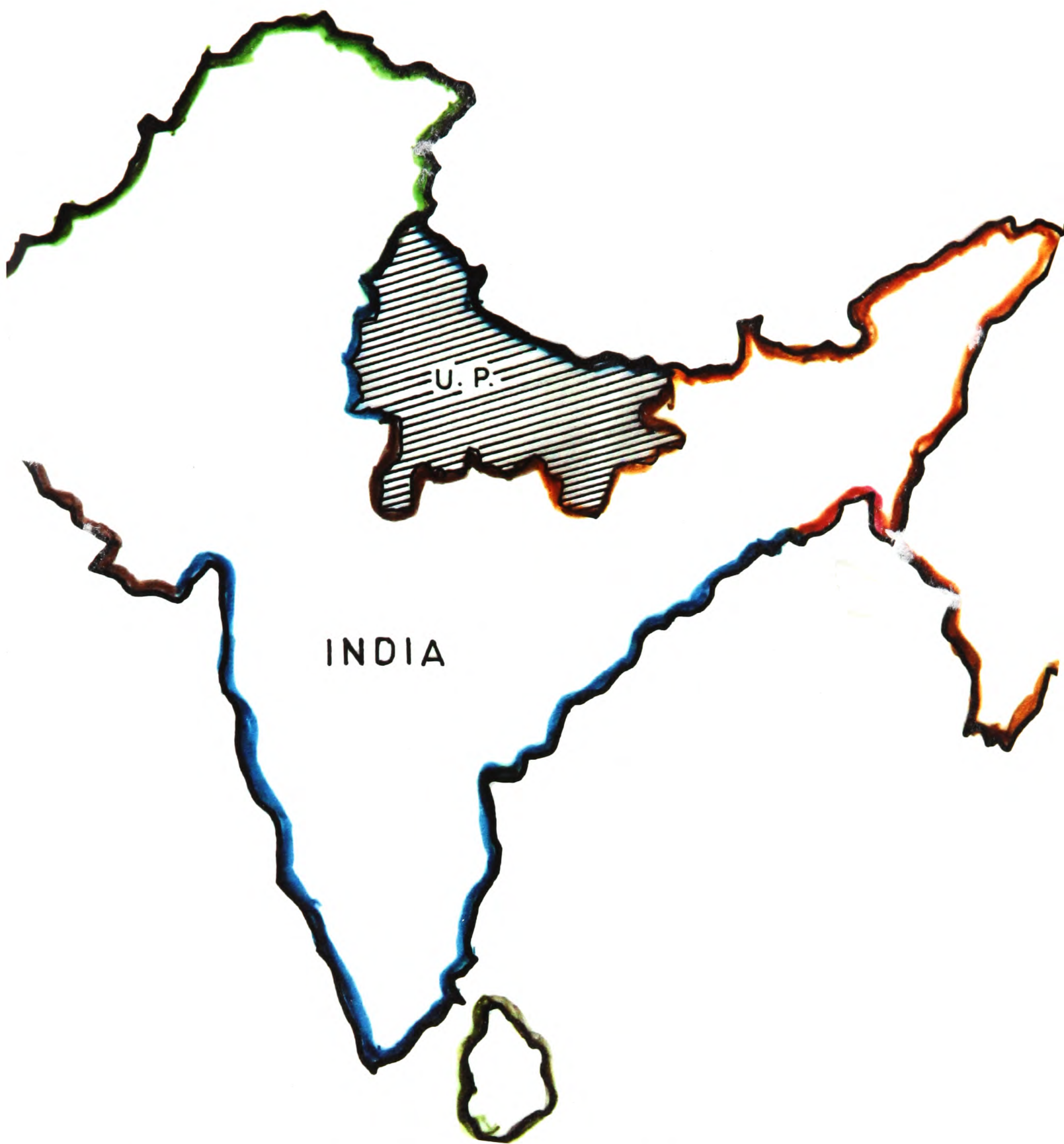
This thesis has benefited from the advice and suggestions of Dr.A.A.Powell, who briefly supervised my work. I am particularly indebted to my Graduate Tutor, Dr.Mark Moloney for his immense help and support. Without his motivation and encouragement this thesis could not have been successfully concluded. My academic interactions with Dr. Mark Harrison has been a enriching learning process. His academic advice has been invaluable. I thank Dr.R.M.Tripathi (G.B.Pant Institute, Allahabad) without whose help the maps could not have been readied. Reena Ghosh helped with maps also.

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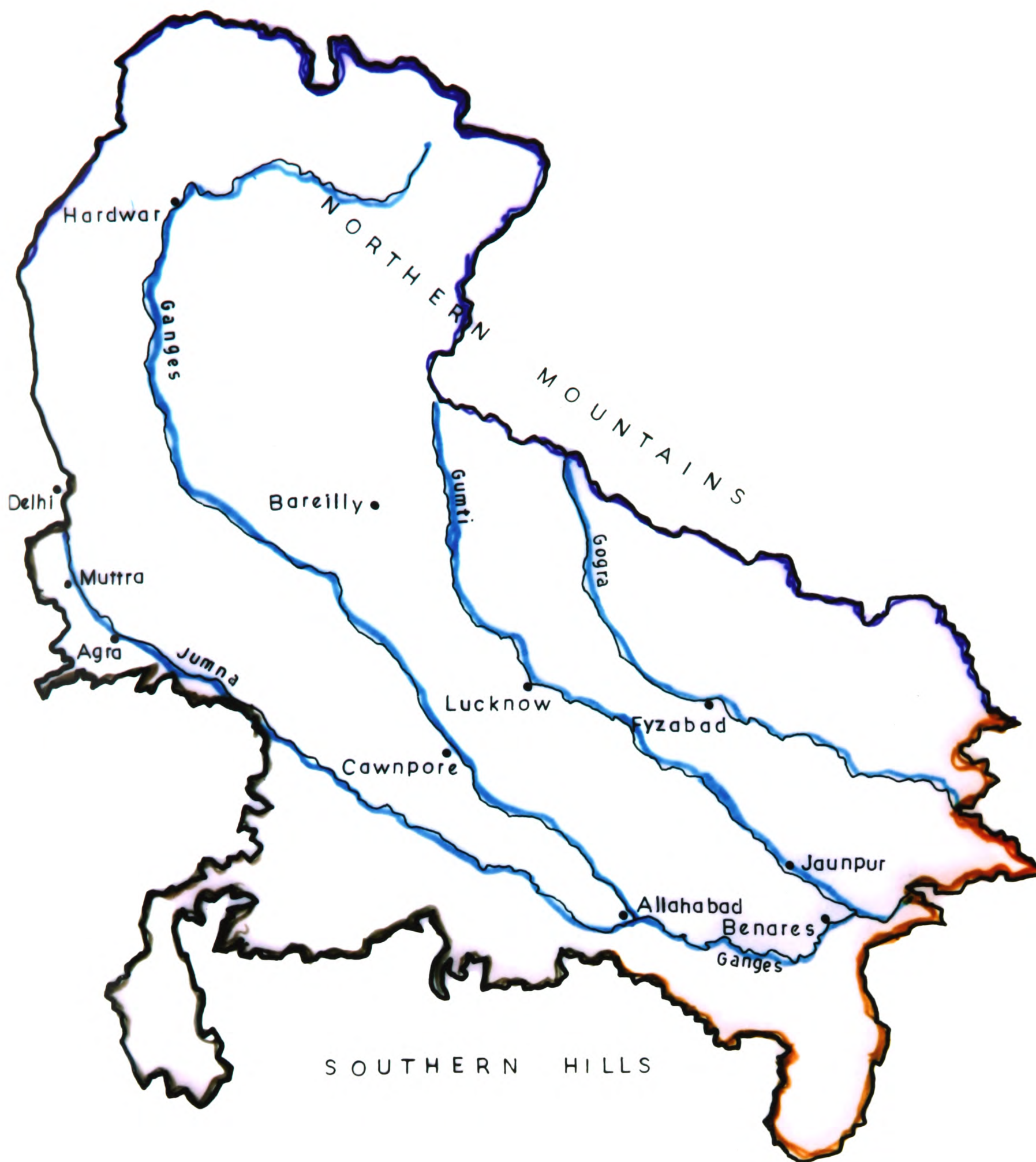
I would also like to thank the staff of various libraries and repositories in India and UK where I worked. Their co-operation has been crucial. I would particularly like to thank the staff of Allahabad Regional Archives, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh State Archives Lucknow, National Archives, New Delhi, Nehru Memeorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Sandhya Nagar (U.P. State Archives) and Ms.Rekha Trivedi (Allahabad Archives) for their help. The ladies of the Indian Institute Library were always co- operative and helpful. I am indebted to Mrs. Elizabeth Krishna for her help with transliteration- I could not have done it

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Map-1: United Provinces on the map of India



Map 2: The United Provinces: Geographical features



Map 3: districts and divisions in United Provinces, 1900.

**The Experience Of Four Famines In NWP&O (1837-8,1860-1,
1868-9,1896-7) The Gainers And The Losers.**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of D.Phil
Modern History Faculty,Univesity Of Oxford:
Michaelmas term,2004.**

**Seema Srivastava
St.Peters College
Oxford.**

Abstract

This study focuses on four famines (1837-8,1860-1,1868-9,1896-7) that afflicted the North Western Provinces and Awadh, the present day Uttar Pradesh inclusive of the hill districts which have recently been formed into a separate state of Uttaranchal.

This study has moved away from the established discourse in which famines are largely perceived as ‘disasters’ or sudden events with starvation and mortality as their defining features. Such studies centred on production patterns and their relationship with population growth. The work of Amartya Sen changed that to the extent that studies began to focus on the factors affecting an individual’s ability to command food wherever food might exist. The primary emphasis was on the way trends in the market could affect this ability to command food. This was an important advance on studies attributing famines solely to climatic, demographic, impersonal market forces, and cultural factors.

This thesis argues that famines had a mixed impact. It situates the impact in long-term political, social, and economic imbalances and the uneven pattern of development that caused the impact to fall forcefully on already vulnerable sections of society, further dispossessing and pauperizing them. The inducement to grow cash

crops and market them in order to pay high land revenue in cash was a particular source of rising indebtedness and consequent impoverishment. This was reinforced by the near non- existence access of poorer sections of society to political authority. At the same time superior power groups like landlords, moneylenders, merchants, and petty bureaucrats used their power position for direct expropriation of coveted assets like land, implements, and cattle. The paltry and restricted relief and the malfunctioning of traditional support structures further added to the woes of the victims. The vulnerable sections tried to hold on to their income generating assets, while the superior power groups exploited their vulnerability and need for subsistence to control these assets and ultimately deprive them of the assets. This generated widespread tension and conflict in society that further intensified the impact of famine temporally and spatially. This struggle over scarce resources was most visible in the steep rise of crime, lawlessness, landlessness and the fragmentation of the 'moral economy'.

This thesis draws attention to an important aspect that has not been emphasized so far. It investigates the perceptions, response and discourse of famines, not only of the powerful and beneficiary groups of society but also those of the victims. It looks at the economic, political and also the religious agendas of those who were in a position to influence the course of famine and in turn relief operations; in detailing these, this thesis brings to light a wealth of data that has till now remained virtually untapped. In demonstrating that famines were actively manipulated for a variety of purposes, an argument has been advanced which has important implications for relief policy.

In addition this thesis goes into a detailed investigation of victim strategies and understandings of famine countering the argument that victims remained passive and

fatalistic during famines. This would be specially true of women whose perceptions and responses to famines has been highlighted. Moreover, it emphasizes the ways in which relief operations assisted or impeded these strategies. It has been argued that, had the government-central and state, paid adequate attention to the victims perceptions and responses to famine and moulded relief policy accordingly, relief would have served at least to protect the immediate entitlement loss of the victims and moreover, won their much needed appreciation and gratitude, widening and strengthening the support base of British rule.

Relief policy in effect remained subservient to unrealistic notions and ideologies-economic, political, cultural and moral- prevailing in nineteenth century Victorian England and also India. Bureaucratic and institutional pressures, personal leanings and influences of officials and missionaries, were other important factors that moulded relief. These pressures have been discussed.

The crux of the argument is that important religious, economic, political and social benefits were extracted by beneficiary groups from the four famines examined; the study investigates the processes by which these benefits were extracted and the processes by which entitlements of the poor were corroded and lost altogether, reflecting the varying fortunes of the rich and poor.

Methodology

This study of famines is socio- historical in approach and not statistical. It combines socio-economic-historical analysis and highlights the perceptions, responses and

discourse of significant groups in society to subsistence crisis. It highlights the reasons why certain sections of NWP&O society benefited and at whose cost. In the process it attempts to provide important insights into the dynamics of famine and relief. This combined analysis highlights the impact of economic processes and changes, which influenced political decisions. Political changes in turn influenced approaches to famine and relief. No less significant were social factors like class, caste and religion in shaping official and popular attitudes to famine and relief.

Contents of the thesis

Chapter one situates famines in the context of the salient characteristics of NWP&O- its geographic features, demography, and the broad socio-economic framework. Without some understanding of this, it would be difficult to understand why certain groups suffered, and others benefited, and who were they. Chapter two discusses the impact of socio- economic policies on NWP&O society, especially in the context of famines. It discusses the factors that influenced socio-economic policies, and political decisions which largely buffered the interests of the well off widening the already existing cleavages in society. Chapter three examines the ideological influences, which shaped the relief policy and determined its aims and outcome. It focuses particularly on laissez-faire and its tremendous influence on relief policy. Chapter four looks at the actual implementation of relief policy, the lacunae between ideology and practice of relief, changes in the pattern of relief, and aims and co-ordination of relief, at various levels of administrative hierarchy. Chapter five highlights the nexus of interests of the landlords, petty bureaucrats and the government, the interdependence of interests of these groups and how they aided and manipulated famine crisis and relief for consolidating their power, social, moral, economic and

political. The Indian National Congress, for instance, used famines for political mobilization rallying and nurturing nationalist sentiments around them. Chapters six and seven analyze the perceptions of, responses to, and discourse on famines, amongst religious groupings, mainly Christian missionaries. The nature and consequences of mission activities especially during famines in NWP&O are highlighted. Chapters eight and nine, examine the indigenous-popular understanding and perceptions of famine and hunger, and the complex, but rational, strategies famine victims forged for their survival. Strategies involved calculated, rational and skilful management choices for preserving their resources, land, implements, cattle and home and hearth, on which their future well being depended. The thesis that the people of India did very little to help themselves during famines, being ‘fatalistic’ and ‘lazy,’ is put under critical scrutiny. These chapters examine and detail the responses of the ‘victims.’ to famine. Their constitutional and unconstitutional responses have been detailed and their expectations and demands of their patrons, community and government, is discussed in Chapter nine. Particular attention has been focused on women-their plight, their perceptions of self, and their responses to prolonged subsistence crisis has been highlighted in sub-section of this chapter. Chapter ten, analyzes the differential and positive impact of the four famines, on the richer sections of society, that is, landlords, moneylenders, *baniyas* and other merchant groups, how they exploited famines to consolidate their interests, economic, social and political, often at the cost of those dependent on them for moral and material support.

Sources:

The sources for this study are rich and diverse. Official documents have constituted the main basis. Scattered references on famines may be found in revenue, judicial, general and political proceedings, (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow and Uttar

Pradesh Regional Archives, Allahabad) records, memoirs of district officers, and travel literature pertaining to the period. These records are easily available but are virtually untapped; they reflect the official mind and convey official biases, perceptions and discourse on famine, but also Indian society. Famine reports like those of Baird Smith, Girdlestone, Henvey, Roberts, Bennett, and Pitcher and the 1880 Famine Code and later the Indian Famine commission Report 1898, recorded the general condition of the people in NWP&O, the socio- economic and infrastructural conditions prevailing. These record the difficulties and dislocation of normal life with the onset of famine and the activities of the affected people, their requirements and the nature of relief. These reports are heavily impressionistic, and statistical information regarding the numbers who migrated, the extent of mortality, and other matters is, at best, sketchy. Yet if this material, imperfect though it is, is carefully collated, analyzed and supplemented with other data, it is possible to present a comprehensive picture of the four famines in NWP&O. Such information which is of immense value to the present study can be obtained from various Decennial Enquiry Reports that the Government conducted from time to time. Most important of these being,

The Board of Revenue proceedings (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow) give a fairly accurate picture of famines in the province, detailing the extent of area afflicted, duration of different famines, need for revenue suspension and remission, prices of food grains, impact of free trade, suggestions for governmental action, and responses thereto. Judicial proceedings, (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow) focusing on the law and order situation, contain correspondence between the Sudder Board of Revenue and district officials, who highlighted the effects of famine at the local level,

the vulnerability of the majority of people, their expectations, responses, as well and contain suggestions for appropriate administrative measures to deal with the crisis. Some statistical data can be obtained in regard to crime, mortality and migration, and conveys an impression of the suffering of the people. Police and Criminal reports give comprehensive accounts of the suffering and dislocation caused by famine and the resultant deterioration in the law and order situation, which the administration sometimes found difficult to contain. These also provide view of the official mind-why they considered certain categories of people as dangerous and criminal, and the ways to contain them.

The accounts of Jesuits and other missionaries from sixteenth century onwards, are worth considering as they give insights into inherited traditions of attitudes to famine. Missionary sources such as Church Missionary Society (located at Birmingham University Main Library) and Society for the Propagation of Gospel (located at Rhodes house library, Oxford) give elaborate accounts of the social, economic and religious, cultural conditions prevailing in the NWP&O society; famines and the degree of their impact, the resulting condition of the people, their reactions, the inadequacy of official response and importantly their own efforts at relief. Though missionary comments and observations need to be treated with caution and reserve yet these source are of immense value.

Then there are literary sources, in which famines find prominent and significant mention. Even ancient and medieval chronicles such as the Arthashastra, Rajtarangini, writings of Ferishta, Badauni discuss the impact of famines and relief rendered. Bankim Chandra Chatterjis's influential novel *Ananda Math*, is based in a

famine setting. and give a graphic account of the death, dislocation and devastation it brought. It particularly highlights the greater suffering, pragmatism, adaptive capacity and resilience of women in comparison to men during famines, is a unique contribution of this work. This novel is particularly significant as it gave a tremendous impetus to nationalism. The call of '*Vande Matram*' (Hail motherland) became the rallying call of the national movement. The song '*Vande Matram*' is the national song of independent India.

Travel literature is a valuable source material for famine studies. Eye witness accounts of famines such as those of Emily Eden, William Sleeman, William Crook, Vaughan Nash and Francis Merewether have been extensively referred to in the present study. These highlight the migration. Mortality and overall devastation of famines; the strategies the affected people devised to tide the crisis, the activities of officials and importantly of powerful constituents of NWP&O society such as *banias*, moneylenders, merchants, landlords. The value of these sources primarily lies in the fact that they are unofficial and therefore unbiased sources and pay attention to aspects which officials would not; However, account has to be taken of cultural misperceptions and perpetuation of inherited myths. Finally, there are the oral traditions- sayings, folklore, myths and even songs- in which the memories of famine are incorporated in legendary references to the event, a notable example being the '*Ath Sera*' (grain being sold at eight *sers* for a rupee). These oral sources are of great value as they reveal the unvarnished realities of famine: who suffered most, who gained and how diverse segments of society, responded.

Contents

	PP.
Imageries of Famines	i
Acknowledgements	ii-iii
Brief Abstract	iv-v
Long Abstract	vi-xiii
Maps see list	xx
Tables see list	xxi-xxii
Abbreviations	xxiii
Glossary	xxiv-xxvi
Introduction	1-26
Appendix 1: Incidence of Famines	17-21
Contents of thesis	22-23
Sources	23-26
ChapterI: The Agrarian Setting	27-60
Climate and soils	27-33
commmercialization of agriculture	33-36
Double cropping	36-41
Traditional irrigation systems	41-44
Communications	44-47
Population and literacy	47-49
Agrarian structure and tenurial arrangements	49-59
Conclusion.	59-60
 Chapter II: The Impact of Colonialism on the Agrarian Classes	 61-101

Government policy and its impact: the issue of inequality and famine	61
Changing British attitudes towards landlords and peasants	61-67
Taxation and its impact	67-68
Economic change and its impact	69-78
Development of infrastructure and communications	78-87
(a) Canals	78-83
(b) Railways	83-87
Commercialization of agriculture	87-92
Price rise	92-94
Indebtedness: Beneficiaries and losers	94-97
Landlessness and its impact	98-99
Conclusion	99-101
.	
Chapter III: Famines and the Ideology of State	102-37
Introduction	102
Malthusianism, Social Darwinism and Poor laws	102-110
Economic priorities: Laissez- faire	110-136
The 1837-8 famine	114-118
The 1860-1 famine	118-122
1868-9 famine	122-124
1873-4 famine	124-126
1880 famine code	126-129
1896-7 famine	129-136
Conclusion	136-137
Chapter IV: Relief in Practice	138-190

Introduction	138-192
Mechanics of decision making: central, provincial, district	138-148
Evolution of relief policy: relief policy till 1880	148-151
Relief policy 1837-8-1880	151-155
Small and casual relief	155-156
Gratuitous relief	156-157
Poor houses	157-159
Wages	158-163
Disease and mortality	163-169
Suspension and remission of revenue	169-172
Relief committees	172-176
Famine policy codified	176-180
1896-7 relief: A reflection of the code	180-89
Conclusion	190-192

Chapter V: Landlords, government and the consolidation of interests 193-223

Introduction	193-194
Famine and consolidation of state power	194-195
Government, landlords and famines	195-202
Attitudes towards the poor	202-207
Famine and nationalist mobilization: The Indian National Congress	207-214
Famines, profit and petty officials	214-221
Conclusion	221-223

Chapter VI: Missionaries and Famines	224-253
Introduction	224
Historiography	224-228
Christian missions	228-230
Expansion of missionary activity in the NWP&O	230-233
Missionary goals, perception of India and Indians	233-238
Missionary perceptions and discourse on famines	238-245
Gains: Consolidation of Christian ideology	246-251
Conclusion	251-252
 Chapter VII: Famines: Conversion and Controversy	 253-285
Orphans, orphanages and Christian villages	253-262
Controversial incidents concerning famine orphans	262-265
Abductions and conversions	265-269
Official reaction	269-271
Popular backlash	271-281
Changes in missionary strategies	281-284
Conclusion	284-285
 Chapter VIII: Perceiving and Confronting Famines	 28-327
Popular perceptions of famines	286-291
Propitiation strategies	298-300
Religious and cultural adaptations	300-306
Dietary changes	306-312
Resource resistance	312-314

Cattle mortality	314-318
Migration	318-326
(a)1837-8	320-322
(b)1860-1	322-323
(c)1868-69	323-326
Conclusion	326-327
 Chapter IX:Perceiving and Confronting Famines - A Moral Dimension	 328-389
Introduction	328-331
-	
Constitutional responses	331-337
Crime and the moral order	337-360
(a)1837-8	342-352
(b)1860-1	352-353
(c)1868-9	353-35
(d)1896-7	354-360
conclusion	360-363
 Section II: Women-famines and the moral order	 364-389
Introduction	364-368
Decision makers	368-370
Relief	370-373
Breakdown of family and community structures	373-375
Women as provisioners	375-380
Desertion and sale of children	380-82
Women as commodities	382-383
Women- victims and victimizers	383-385

Patron-client relations	386-388
Conclusion	388-389
Chapter X: Famines: Power and Profit	390-422
Introduction	390-393
Vulnerability to famines:areas and groups	393-400
Hoarding	400-404
Exports	404-408
Malpractices	408-409
Price-rise.	409-411
Withdrawl of credit and indebtedness	411-416
Land alienation	416-421
Conclusion:	421-422
Conclusion	423-431
Appendix:1	432-433
Appendix: II	434-438
Bibliography	439-453

List Of Maps

- (a) **Map1:**United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) on the map of India
- (b) **Map2:**Divisions and districts of the United Provinces
- (c) **Map 3:**Broad Physical Features of the United Provinces
- (d) **Map 4:**Famine, Scarcity and Unaffected Districts during 1837-8 famine
- (e) **Map 5:**Famine, Scarcity and Unaffected Districts during 1860-1 famine
- (f) **Map 6:**Famine, Scarcity and Unaffected Districts during 1868-9 famine
- (g) **Map 7:**Famine, Scarcity and Unaffected Districts during 1896-7 famine

(h) **List of Tables**

	P.
Table 1: Shows the total area and the numbers of people affected during th four Famines.	21
Table 2: shows the main kharif crops and the number of sowings, hoeings and waterings required.	37-8
Table 3: Shows the main rabi crops and the number of sowings, hoeings and waterings required.	38-9
Table 4: shows the caste holdings in Banda district	57
Table 5: shows different rates of taxation for Rae bareli district.	68
Table 6: shows the area irrigated by wells, canals ponds in NWP&Oin1880	80
Table 7: shows average prices of cleared cotton per maund between 1828-73 in Aligarh district	93
Table 8: shows subsistence for labour	161
Table 9: shows age and sex starvation deaths in thirty-four villages of Agra district	168
Table 10: shows the amount disbursed in rupees by charitable societies in the Agra division	174
Table11: shows mortality figures from October 1896 to September 1897	185
Table 12: shows mortality due to bad sanitation facilities, plague and malarial fever	186
Table13: shows figures for malarial fevers for four years	187
Table14: shows medical facilities available	189
Table 15: shows loss of cattle by death and sale during 1868-9 famine	316

Table 16: shows crime between 1867-69	354
Table 17: shows numbers of persons brought to trial and convicted between 1895-98	359
Table18: shows the caste distribution of inmates at the Moradabad poor house between April and may 1861	395-398
Table 19: shows land transfer in Aligarh district during 1839-68	418
Table 20: shows net loss and gains of the principal castes in Jalaun district	420
Table 21: shows per centage of land held by different castes during nineteenth century at Kanpur	421

Abbreviations

IESHR	Indian Economic and Social History Review
IESR	Indian Economic Social Review
JAS	Journal of Asian Studies
MAS	Modern Asian Studies
Lt.-Gov	Lieutenant-Governor
Gov.-Genl	Governor-General
Judl.	Judicial
Mgt.	Magistrate
Misc.	Miscellaneous
Procds.	Proceedings
Revd.	Reverend
Sud. Bd. Rev.	Sudder Board of Revenue
OIOC	Oriental and India office Collection
UPRAA	Uttar Pradesh Regional Archives, Allahabad
UPSAL	Uttar Pradesh State Archives,Lucknow

Note: The word government used throughout the thesis denotes NWP&O government, unless otherwise stated.

Glossary

Agahan	December
Amavasya	moonless night
Bajra	small bulrush millets.(Holcus spiatus)
Bhaichara	villages owned by descendants of a common stock.
Land	is owned by a proprietary brotherhood
Bhur	sandy soil; 75 percent sand over clay
Begar	forced labour
Bigha	area measure
Chana	gram
Chaitra	march
Crore	100,00,000
Deohra	1/2 or 50 percent
Domat	sandy loam soil
Gaon Kharch	collective village charges
Goji	wheat and barley grown together
Hal	plough
Haq zamindari	right of a zamindar
Haq taluqadari	right of a taluqadar
Juar	large millets (holcus Sorghum)
Kabar	light clay soil found in Bundelkhund
Khudkhast	a proprietary cultivator
Khandsari	small -scale sugar refinery
Kolhu	bullock- driven cane crusher
Lakh	1,00,000

Mahajan	trader; also moneylender
Mahal	estate; territorially defined right of a zamindar
Mahalwari	the system of village land revenue settlements in which the demand as levied on the mahal or mauza
Matar	peas
Matiyar	clay soil well adapted for rice
Mar	black clay soil suitable for cotton production found pre - dominantly in Bundelkhund
Mokuddum Malik	headman of cultivators
Moong	phaseolus raditus
Mothi	phaseolus aconitifolius
Maund	37.5 kilograms
Nazarana	compulsory offering of gifts usually to a superior
Pargana	administrative sub- division of town consisting of a number of villages
Parwa	administrative sub-division of a village
Patwari	village accountant or record keeper
Pattidari	lands are divided and held in severality by different persons, and being jointly responsible in the event of a sharer not fulfilling his engagements especially revenue
Pus	January
Qanungo	subordinate official in the Mughal /British revenue administration
Rabi	spring crops
Reh	land impregnated with impure carbonate of soda
Ryot	cultivator
Sawaiya	one- fourth or 25 percent

Taluqadar	this is in Awadh to show proprietary rights vested in one person holding feudal privileges
Tarai	swampy land
Tehsil	administrative sub-division of a district
Tehsildar	revenue official in charge of a tehsil
Tinpawaiya	three-fourth or 75 percent
Tehsil	administrative sub -division of district
Urd	phaseolus radiatus
Zamindar	a person recognized as possessing proprietary right

Introduction

Section:1

The closing decades of the twentieth century witnessed famines that ravaged the lives of millions in many parts of the world. The study of famines has, therefore, historical and contemporary relevance.

The study of famines acquired a place within the framework of social and agrarian studies in Europe, where excellent studies on demography, climate, migration, mortality, market control, gender and cultural biases, and socio- economic responses provided fresh insights, leading to changes in official as well as popular perceptions of food supply and control. However, in the case of India famines were, until recently, studied mainly within the paradigm of agrarian history though independent studies have since been undertaken with famines as their central theme. Studies focusing on the relationship between scarce food resources, social structure and adjustment and population characteristics have been few, as in the case of the North Western Provinces and Awadh.¹ However these aspects have been examined in anthropological studies in some regions of India, notably Rajasthan, Bengal and southern India.²

Famines left a lasting effect on the socio-economic structure of India, and even came to be regarded as having the potential to destabilize British rule. Their contemporary relevance and importance and the existence of rich untapped empirical data motivated me to undertake the present study.

¹ S.K.Sharma, *Famine, State and Society* (London University, Ph.D thesis, 1997).

² N.S.Jodha, 'Famine and Famine Policies: Some Empirical Evidence,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, X, 2 (11 October 1975), pp.1609-23; P.R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44* (Oxford, 1982), pp.215-36; S.S.Epstein, 'Productive Efficiency and Customary Systems of Rewards in Rural South India,' in R. Firth (ed), *Themes in Economic Anthropology* (London, 1967), pp. 229-52.

The focus of this study is the area that constituted the North Western Provinces and Awadh, renamed the United Provinces in 1901, and the present day Uttar Pradesh, and four major famines that afflicted the province: those of 1837-8, 1860-1, 1868-9 and 1896-7.³ The study takes a socio-historical approach. The objective is to provide an insight into perceptions of, and responses to the four famines and analyze the discourse relating to them among social groups in the NWP&O. Closer attention to the differential impact of famine on diverse groups and their varying responses will contribute to an improved understanding of the famines of that period, as well as offer material to facilitate comparison with similar phenomena in other regions.

Comments on famines and related analysis, both in nineteenth-century India and in subsequent scholarship, have concentrated on the nature and causes of famine rather than 'responses' and 'perceptions.' Thus past analysis of famines cited unfavourable weather as the main cause of such phenomena. This was probably because, to officials, Indian agrarian life was a gamble dependent on the monsoon; besides, climatic vagaries could be more easily presented to, and accepted by, people than the more complex forces at work. C.E.R. Girdlestone, who compiled the 1868 famine report, recorded: "The famine of 1860-1 was the natural result of the dry weather which the North West had experienced since the middle of 1858."⁴ In a similar vein, the Famine Commission of 1880 stated:

³ In 1775, Banaras division and, in 1801, the whole of the Awadh dominions in the lower Doab, together with Rohilkhund, were ceded to the British. In 1803 Upper Doab and Bundelkhund were annexed. In 1815 Kumaun was annexed as a result of the Anglo-Nepalese war. Together these constituted the Ceded and Conquered Provinces and remained for thirty years after their annexation, part of the Bengal government. In 1835 the Lieutenant Governorship of the North Western Provinces was established. Awadh, was annexed in 1856, but remained a separate administrative unit until 1876, when it was amalgamated with the NWP and brought under a common government. In 1901, they were renamed the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh. See D. Bhanu, *History and Administration of the North Western Provinces, 1803-1858* (Agra, 1957), p.2; The districts of Kumaun, Gharwal, Moradabad, Bareilly, Deharadoon, Hardwar were reconstituted into the separate state of Uttaranchal which formally came into existence on 9 November 2000, *Times Of India*, 9 November 2000, p. 1.

⁴ C.E.R. Girdlestone, *Report on the Past Famines in the North Western Provinces, 1868* (Allahabad, 1868),

The devastating famines to which the provinces of India have from time to time been liable are in all cases to be traced directly to the occurrence of drought, the failure of customary rainfall, leading to the failure of food on which the subsistence of the population depends.⁵

Social scientists like Cox and Dando, continue to give primary importance to climatic factors in famine causation.⁶ This is reflected in Dando's warning of the probability of climate- induced famine in the twenty-first century.

For the past 50 or 60 years, the inhabitants of the earth have experienced a period of benevolent weather. Unfortunately many climatologists contend that the earth is entering a period of climatic change. Ramifications of such a change may produce the greatest single challenge humans will face in the coming years...massive food shortages as a result of climatic change would have a grim effect on the world economy, world politics, and the chance of world war and peace.⁷

A large body of famine literature, however, distinguishes between long-term, structural, socio and economic causes of famine and the immediate precipitating cause which most often is unfavourable weather arguing that there are many instances of drought in several countries which are not followed by famine. For example, in 1976, California was hit by a severe drought and suffered agricultural losses amounting to \$450 million, but there was no famine, no suffering and no mortality due to starvation.⁸ Britain, France and other Western countries have suffered famines in the past, but no longer do so, even though climatic and meteorological conditions in the West have remained more or less the same. In contrast, whenever drought afflicts some part of Africa, it often leads to famines and

p.71. Henceforth, Girdlestone, *Report*.

⁵ *Indian Famine Commission Report, 1880*, i, pp. 34-5. Henceforth *IFC, Report*.

⁶ G.Cox, 'The Ecology of Famine; An Overview,' in Robson (ed), *Famine, Its Causes, Effects and Management* (London, 1981), p. 7.

⁷ W.A.Dando, *The Geography of Famine* (London, 1980), p.104.

⁸ G.Cox & W. Atkins, *Agricultural Ecology: An Analysis of the World Food Production System* (London, 1979), p.186.

there is immense suffering and mortality. This, some authors have argued, is consequent on the manner in which society exercises control over natural resources and food supplies thus discounting the effects of drought;⁹ they contend that unless the Food Availability Decline (FAD) theory holds true, drought itself cannot result in famine.¹⁰ Nigel Twose, for instance, points out that during the Sahel famine in the 1970s there was seldom a shortage of food; the problem was one of distribution not production. Similarly, according to Meillassoux the Sahel famine was the result of a policy of agricultural exploitation, pursued for the benefit of the great powers.¹¹

Another important and influential strand in the older literature on famine stresses the causal link between demographic growth and the demand for and production of food. Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) tied the phenomenon of famine to the incidence of rising population outstripping supply of food, hence the inevitability of mass death through starvation. Malthus thus saw increasing population as the cause of all economic retardation. Famines, therefore, became useful mechanisms of control and natural population checks.¹²

This explanation of the causes of famine appears to have exercised a particularly strong hold on the official mind in nineteenth-century India. Thus, Couper's memorandum on

⁹ R. Bush, 'Drought and Famines,' *A Review of the African Political Economy* (August 1985), pp. 59-63.

¹⁰ S. Devereux and R. Hay, *Origins of Famine: A Review of Literature*, i (Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, unpubl monograph, 1986), pp. 30-1.

¹¹ Devereux and Hay, *The Origins of Famine*, ii, pp. 202-3; C.C. Meillassoux, 'Development or Exploitation: Is the Sahel Famine Good Business,' *Review of African Political Economy*, I (August-November 1974), pp. 27-33.

¹² S. Commander, 'Malthus and the Theory of Unequal Powers: Population and the Food Production in India, 1800- 1947,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 4 (1986), p. 661-701.

famine expenses explicitly viewed famines in the Malthusian context.¹³ W.H.Moreland, an influential economic historian with considerable experience as a district officer, asserted that scourges occurred as a 'cure' to restore the natural balance. More recently Seavoy interpreted famines in peasant societies, including India, within the Malthusian framework.¹⁴ Similarly Greenough analyzed the 1943 Bengal famine along Malthusian lines and described it as:

The most intense phase of decade-long periods of food scarcity and rural distress reaching back to the middle of the nineteenth century. While the nineteenth century population growth was to a certain extent, a sign of underlying prosperity ... subsequently a classic Malthusian situation of population outstripping food production resources developed leading to scarcities of food and land, but without any abrupt diminution of population.¹⁵

However, no famine in India was officially attributed to rising population. Between 1872 and 1921, the population of the NWP&O grew at the annual compound rate of 0.4 per cent, and the population growth rate from the late eighteenth century to 1872 was no higher than that registered between 1872 and 1921, which meant a gentle upward movement.¹⁶ The Malthusian argument was officially used to justify the immense mortality that characterized the first three famines examined in this thesis rather than being cited as the reason for famine occurrence. Simon Commander says that nowhere in the world has there been an instance of famine being caused by overpopulation.

Another important aspect of colonial discourse on famine was its preconceptions of cultural values. This approach explained the persistence and frequent occurrence of

¹³ See below pp. 108-9.

¹⁴ R.E.Seavoy, 'The Indian Famine of 1876-9: An Analysis of the Causes of Periodic Peace Time Famine', in *Famine in Peasant Societies* (Connecticut, 1986), p.261.

¹⁵ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 62.

¹⁶ Commander, 'Malthus and the Theory of Unequal Powers,' *MAS*, 20, 4 (1986), p. 676.

famines, including high mortality rates, within a framework, which emphasized the historic poverty of India, an abiding tradition of famines, illiteracy, superstition, a crippling caste system, and, above all, the slothful and indolent nature of the majority of Indians; these were presented as being responsible for the limited social, economic and cultural reserves available to combat famines. Moreland argued that India had an abiding tradition of famines and for him, therefore, the crucial question was not the frequent occurrence of famines under British rule, which he considered an exceptional circumstance of secondary importance. Instead he highlighted the crippling poverty and exploitation of the medieval Indian peasant under Mughal 'misrule,' in terms of high land revenue, which left the peasant without resources to cope with famines. This explains Moreland's bold and sweeping comment that, in the seventeenth century, famines were essentially food famines, while under British rule famines denoted lack of work not food. Implicit in this argument was the belief that the risky system of agriculture based on unstable monsoons made famines inevitable.¹⁷

Seavoy has argued that famines occurred with greater frequency and ferocity in certain parts of the world because of the slothful and improvident nature of the majority of inhabitants in these parts. The main thrust of his thesis is that, due to the unwillingness and the inability of the Indian peasant to work hard, he is only able to produce a bare subsistence, even in normal years. "The low social value of physical labour that is needed to produce food, is one of the principal reasons, Indian peasant societies have marginal levels of food safety."¹⁸ This laziness of the Indian peasants was legitimized by the religious cultural values of Indian society. Torry, reinforcing such cultural misperceptions,

¹⁷ W. H. Moreland, *The Revenue Administration of the United Provinces* (Allahabad, 1911), pp. 156- 7.

¹⁸Seavoy, 'The Indian Famine of 1876-79,' in *Famine in Peasant Societies*, p. 261.

argues that the adjustment and response of the peasants in India was conditioned by the moral framework of the philosophy karma (deed) which provides a rationale for accepting suffering passively. Such fatalism and passivity are interpreted as active responses, which ensure the continuance of the existing hierarchical order.¹⁹ Implicit in this notion is the reasoning that the Indian peasant is deprived because he is depraved.

Greenough, examined the 1943 famine in Bengal from an anthropological perspective, gave a crucial place to the functioning of the moral economy in his evaluation of famine. He emphasized that suffering and victimization during famines proceed in accordance with the socio-cultural priorities of societies. He argued that suffering during the 1943 Bengal famine depended on the degree of access different social groups had to paddy, at the level of family and community, as also to the response of landlords, moneylenders, and other prosperous members of the community. Wherever the patrons (*korta*) abandoned their duty of feeding and sustaining their dependents (*posiyas*), or where male members of the family deserted their women, children and the elderly, destitution, starvation and death prevailed. Greenough viewed the famine essentially as the collapse of the moral economy, of socio-cultural arrangements, and in this context dealt with the response of the abandoned people. He, too, emphasized the fatalism and passivity of the Indian peasant in contrast to the European example, citing the great upheavals and food riots that characterized situations of hunger and dearth in England and France. Recent studies have, however, exposed the 'myth of the lazy native;' notably, David Arnold's findings have contested the view of the powerless and incapable poor peasant, unable to

¹⁹ I.W. Torry, 'Mortality and Harm: Hindu Peasant Adjustments to Famine,' *Social Sciences Information*, 25, 1(March 1986a), pp. 125-53.

secure his own survival during famines.²⁰

In contrast, contemporary observers, British and Indian, related the poverty of the masses and the frequent occurrence of famines to high land revenue and the exploitative economic policies of the colonial state; monsoon failure was seen only as the precipitating cause of famines.²¹ Earlier, Warren Hastings had been one of the first to attribute the occurrence of famines to misrule and oppression by the ruling agencies. Many provincial district officials as well as famine administrators, like Baird Smith and Girdlestone, emphasized that the areas most afflicted by famines were those suffering from overassessment of revenue.²² Baird Smith recorded that the drought was most severely felt in Bundelkhund, here as elsewhere overassessment had its share in impoverishing the people.²³

This argument was central to the critique of the later nationalist writers and was an important aspect of the overall colonial critique. Dadabhai Nauroji, the proponent of the drain theory, argued that due to the massive 'drain' of resources from India, a steadily increasing number of people were being pauperized, and the ruin of indigenous industries was leaving craftsmen without employment or subsistence. According to R.C.Dutt this, "...reduced India to a land of famines, more frequent, more widespread, more fatal than any other known before in the history of India, or in the world."²⁴

²⁰ D. Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 58-9, 83-5.

²¹ W. Digby, *The Famine Campaign in South India*, ii (London, 1878); W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (London, 1868), pp. 37-64.

²² R.B. Smith, *Report On The Famine Of 1860-1*, 1A, 25 May 1861, pp.18-21; Girdlestone, *Report*, pp.32, 40 -1.

²³ B. Smith *Report*, 1A, pp. 23-5

²⁴ R.C. Dutt, *Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, i (London, 1904, reprinted N.York, 1970), p. 420; *Famines and Land Assessment in India* (London, 1900), pp. X-VI. The proponents of drain theory were both British and Indian. Cornwallis in his minute of 1790 specifically referred to the 'heavy drain of wealth,' as had Sir John Shore in his testimony of the fifth report (1787). Saville Marriot, a commissioner

Similarly Loveday argued: “ It is not the lack of skill upon the part of the cultivator, but the smallness of his holdings, the scarcity of capital, the decay of domestic industries, which have caused his incapacity to withstand the strain of famine, and which have hampered the one great industry in India.”²⁵ This change in the perception and discussions of famines gradually led to acknowledgement that famines were preventable. It was with this in mind that official famine inquiries were instituted from 1860 onwards, to investigate the causes of famines, compile agrarian statistics, liberalize revenue policies, and formulate famine codes and a scientific relief policy.

More recently Bipan Chandra, Raychauduri, Matasui and the German economic historian, Dietmar Rothermund, have similarly emphasized, that long-term economic or structural changes could be linked to long-term changes in entitlements which were associated with monetization of the economy, cash cropping, expansion of markets, high taxes, high rents and interest payments; this, coupled with the ruin of indigenous industries and the immense drain of wealth, brought about adverse changes in the resource base and entitlement command of the majority of people, increasing their impoverishment and making them vulnerable to starvation and famines, leading to further destitution.²⁶ The worst effected were the poor cultivators, landless labourers, artisans, craftsmen and weavers during an era when the tax burden fell heaviest on them. Bhatia, in an important contribution to the debate, indicted the policy of free trade, especially the continuance of

of revenue in the Deccan, said in 1857, “most of the evils of our rule in India arise directly from and may be traced to the heavy tribute which, the country pays to England: quoted by B.N.Ganguli, ‘Dadbhai Nauroji and the Mechanism of External Drain.’ *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 11,2 (April 1865), pp. 85-102.

²⁵ A. Loveday, *The History and Economics of Indian Famines* (London, 1914), p.8.

²⁶ T.Matasui, ‘ On the Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History,A Review Of A"Reinterpretation," *IESHR*,V,no.1 (March 1968),pp. 17-34; B.Chandra, 'Reinterpretation Of Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History,' *IESHR*,V,1, 1968, pp.35-76; T.Ray Chaudhuri, ‘A Reinterpretation Of Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History,' *IESHR*, V,1 (1968), pp. 77-100; B. Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (New Delhi, 1966), pp. 736-53; D. Rothermund, 'Government, Landlords

exports from famine afflicted areas. This changed the character of famines from localized food shortages to great inter-provincial famines, characterized by high food prices and the consequent collapse of already fragile purchasing power of the majority.²⁷ This shift in modes of explanation, from climate and demography to the very structure of society is important, as it tells the story of how the uneven impact of capitalism on Indian society brought into question the authority systems, production and distribution of food resources, who commanded what resources and who and what determined distribution and production patterns. The relevance of this shift will become apparent, in this study of famines in the NWP&O.

The contention that British economic policies of the period were responsible for both the increasing impoverishment and the frequency of famines in India is disputed.²⁸ McAlpin's influential study of famines in western India, between 1860 and 1920, argues that the latter half of the nineteenth century saw improvement in the economic life of India and defends British economic policies. According to her, land taxes fell, food prices rose, and the extension of irrigation and railway networks helped to create access to an expanded market, which reduced the dependence on agriculture providing cultivators alternate avenues of employment.²⁹ Indeed both McAlpin and Dreze have argued that famines at end of the nineteenth century, were qualitatively different from earlier ones, having lost much of their fatal character.³⁰

And Tenants, 1875-1900,' *IESHR*, i part 4, (1969), pp. 352-3.

²⁷ B.M. Bhatia, *Famine in India. A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India, 1860-1865* (N. Delhi, 1967), pp. 103-110, 182-4, 208, 288.

²⁸ M.D. Morris, 'Towards A Reinterpretation of Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History,' *IESHR*, V, no. 1 (March 1968), pp. 1-16

²⁹ M.B. McAlpin, *Subject to Famine: Food Crisis and Economic Change in Western India, 1860-1920* (Princeton, 1983), ch. 4, pp. 84-143.

³⁰ J. Dreze, 'Famine Prevention in India,' in Dreze and A. Sen (eds), *The Political Economy of Hunger* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 24-5.

Klein attributes this change primarily to the development of infrastructure, the modernization of Indian life, and a planned relief policy. They [famines] despoiled human life less because modernizing policies provided some means for reducing famine ravages.”³¹ Klein observes that many of these facilities were available well before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but the political will to contain famine suffering and evolve comprehensive measures of relief was lacking at all times, conditioned as it was by Malthusianism, Darwinism, and laissez-faire ideologies which frowned on financial liberty and direct interference by the state. Famine conditions could thus be exacerbated or contained by the actions, policies and political will of the rulers.³²

This apart, critics of the modernization theory argued that the benefits accruing from modernization were loaded in favour of the already rich and privileged, and against poor peasants, labourers, artisans and weavers, who were the first to fall below the subsistence level with any fluctuation in the agrarian cycle.

Despite these variations in approach most have accepted that the primary variable was unfavourable weather, which leads to scarcity of food and eventually famines. At its simplest, the food availability decline (FAD) theory argues that people face starvation and death when food is not available to them at the aggregate level, be it local, regional, national or global. The most vocal exponent of the FAD theory is Browbick who, endorsing the views of the Famine Inquiry Commission of 1945, argues that the Great

³¹I. Klein, ‘When the Rains Failed: Famine, Relief and Mortality in British India’ *Indian Social and Economic Review*, 21, 2 (1984), p.188.

³²Iliffe argued that political will is crucial in explaining the failure of relief policies, even when methods to contain famine are available. J.Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890 -1960* (Harare,1990), p. 9.

Bengal famine of 1943 occurred because of overall food shortage resulting from two main causes: firstly, Japanese forces occupied Rangoon in 1942 and cut off export of rice from Burma to India; and, secondly, a cyclone accompanied by tidal waves and torrential rains hit west Bengal destroying thirty per cent of the crops, further compounding the scarcity. Acute food shortages prevailed and starvation followed.³³ Similarly Firth concludes that the famine in Tikopia, resulted from the population outstripping their food supplies, a Malthusian argument. The immediate cause was a hurricane that destroyed the already scarce crops. Firth, therefore, supported the FAD explanation of famine in Tikopia.³⁴ His evaluation has been refuted by Amrita Rangasmi.³⁵

Amartya Sen argues on the basis of evidence from four recent famines- the Great Bengal famine of 1943, the Ethiopian famine of 1972-4, the Bangladesh famine of 1971, and the Sahelian famine of 1973-that famines can occur without any sharp fall in food output or availability. In all the famines cited availability of food was not the determining variable as, wherever affected people had purchasing power, food was always forthcoming but, wherever purchasing power collapsed, destitution, starvation and mortality followed. Accordingly, Sen argues that famines were caused not by a fall in production of food, but rather by deficiencies in its distribution. He expounds the exchange entitlement theory, which envisages that individuals are endowed with a set of entitlements or rights-moral, social, economic and legal-to command, exchange, acquire, and lose the use of resources and other material benefits. The loss of the ability to command and exchange resources, including the ability to labour for food, over a period of time results in famine. These

³³ P. Browbick, 'The Causes of Famine: A Refutation of Professor Sen's Theory,' *Food Policy* (May 1986), pp. 105-9.

³⁴ R. Firth, *Social Change in Tikopia: A Re - Study of a Polynesian Community After a Generation* (London, 1959), p.105

³⁵ A. Rangasami, 'Famine: the Antropological Account: An Evaluation of the Work of Raymond Firth,'

entitlements, Sen emphasized, were determined by an individual's position within the larger framework of society, of food production, distribution and control. His essential point of departure from the FAD thesis lies in the distinction between the aggregate availability of food supply and individual access to and ownership of food.³⁶

In this context, he also examines why certain social groups suffer and others do not, and the reasons for the varying swings in fortunes. This class analysis of famines is of particular relevance to the NWP& O, because of its highly differentiated and stratified agrarian society; and will be of central concern to this study.

Sen has greatly enriched famine theorizing. Even so, critics argue that his work concentrates mainly on the development of famine once the process has been set in motion, and on who is worst affected and why. They do not agree that starvation and mortality are the necessary and defining characteristics of famine, for there are famines that kill and others that do not. Still others criticize Sen's approach for its over-emphasis on purely legal entitlements, which tends to somewhat skew perspective. Others point out that the essence of entitlement reasoning is to be found in the reports of famine administrators like Baird Smith, Girdlestone, Henvey, and Etheridge, and the Famine Code of 1880. These argue that the famines were famines of work rather than of food; that wherever work was available, food could be obtained. It was in keeping with this perception that the government sought to restore people's entitlement to purchase food by creating avenues of employment, usually on large public works. These reports also recognized why certain sections of society suffered the deprivation of entitlements during

Economic and Political Weekly, xxi (6 September 1986), pp.1591-1600.

³⁶ A. K. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford, 1981).

the famines, while others gained from the crisis.

Recent scholarship has extended the entitlement argument to the realm of age and gender relations. Megan Vaughan examined the differing fortunes and entitlement variation of various segments of society including gender relations during the 1949 Nyasaland famine, and concluded that women suffered more than men.³⁷ Greenough, Epstein and Whitcombe have likewise emphasized the greater suffering of women during famines, who were malnourished, starved, abandoned, deserted or sold into prostitution, and have identified them as the 'chief victims.'³⁸ The literature on four famines in NWP& O, also highlights the greater adaptiveness and resilience of women, and their lesser mortality, and will be examined in what follows.

Reflecting the entitlement debate, most recent discussions argue that famines can be viewed as a collapse of social and moral values of trust and obligation that ordinarily characterize societies, giving rise to epidemic starvation and excess mortality.³⁹ Here again, age and gender bias emerges as central to analysis, relating to the class character and discriminating impact of famines. Once the moral nature of entitlements was lost, or eroded, there was what could be termed famine. In the context of this cultural discourse the question is: how did affected people during famines in NWP&O perceive and respond to famines? Was there a complete breakdown in social and moral values?

³⁷ M.Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine. Gender and Famine in Twentieth Century Malawi* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.119-47.

³⁸Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 215-36; Whitcombe, 'Famine Mortality,' *Economic and Political Weekly*,xxviii, 23 (5 June 1993), pp. 1169- 1179; Epstein, 'Productive Efficiency' in Firth (ed), *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, pp. 229-51.

³⁹ P.Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs* (Gainsville,1975),pp.135-50; M. Alamgir, *Famines in South Asia. Political Economy of Mass Starvation* (Harvard,1980), pp. 177-89; J.C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (Yale,1976); M. Watts, 'Heart of Darkness: Reflections On Famine and Starvation in Africa,' in R.E.Downs, Donna O' Kerner and Stephen P. Reyna, *The Political Economy of African Famine* (Amsterdam, 1991), p. 36.

Increasingly, the argument is that no single variable explanation can be cited for the occurrence of famine. Some social scientists have argued for the processual nature of famine, as opposed to it being an 'event.'⁴⁰ They view famines as a complex socio-economic process of deprivation and dispossession of assets, especially land, which cannot be defined by death and starvation alone. "Famine [is] a process, during which pressure or force [economic, military, political, social and psychological] is exerted upon the victim community, gradually increasing in intensity, until the stricken are deprived of all their assets, including the ability to labour. This, as the Akamba tribe of Kenya has noted is famine: the "pressing down", (*mayua*).⁴¹ Here famines are termed 'Nagambu,' meaning thieving, stealing, or more specifically land grabbing. This argument is particularly relevant to the NWP&O will be discussed later. Before the occurrence of any famine, there was widespread transfer and acquisition of land, which only accelerated during and in the aftermath of famines. Famine reports and the Famine Commission took serious note of this. Baird Smith suggested that the occurrence of the famines and the resulting suffering was clearly linked to land. His report deals with the movement of proprietary rights from 1802 to 1861, and concludes that the areas most severely afflicted were those which, as a result of overassessment, saw large-scale displacement of proprietors, such as Bundelkhund, where '*bhaichara*' communities were displaced by commercial classes.⁴² Thus, the structural context for the processual argument of famine is rooted in the problem of poverty and marginalization, is shaped by the processes of

⁴⁰ Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis*, pp. 6-8; Rangasami, 'Failure of Exchange Entitlements. Theory of Famine: A Response', *EPW*, 20, xx, 41(12 October 1985), pp.1747-52; A.De Waal, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan 1984 -5* (Oxford, 1989), pp.9-32.

⁴¹ Rangasami, 'Failure of Exchange Entitlements,' *EPW* (1985), pp.1747-52.

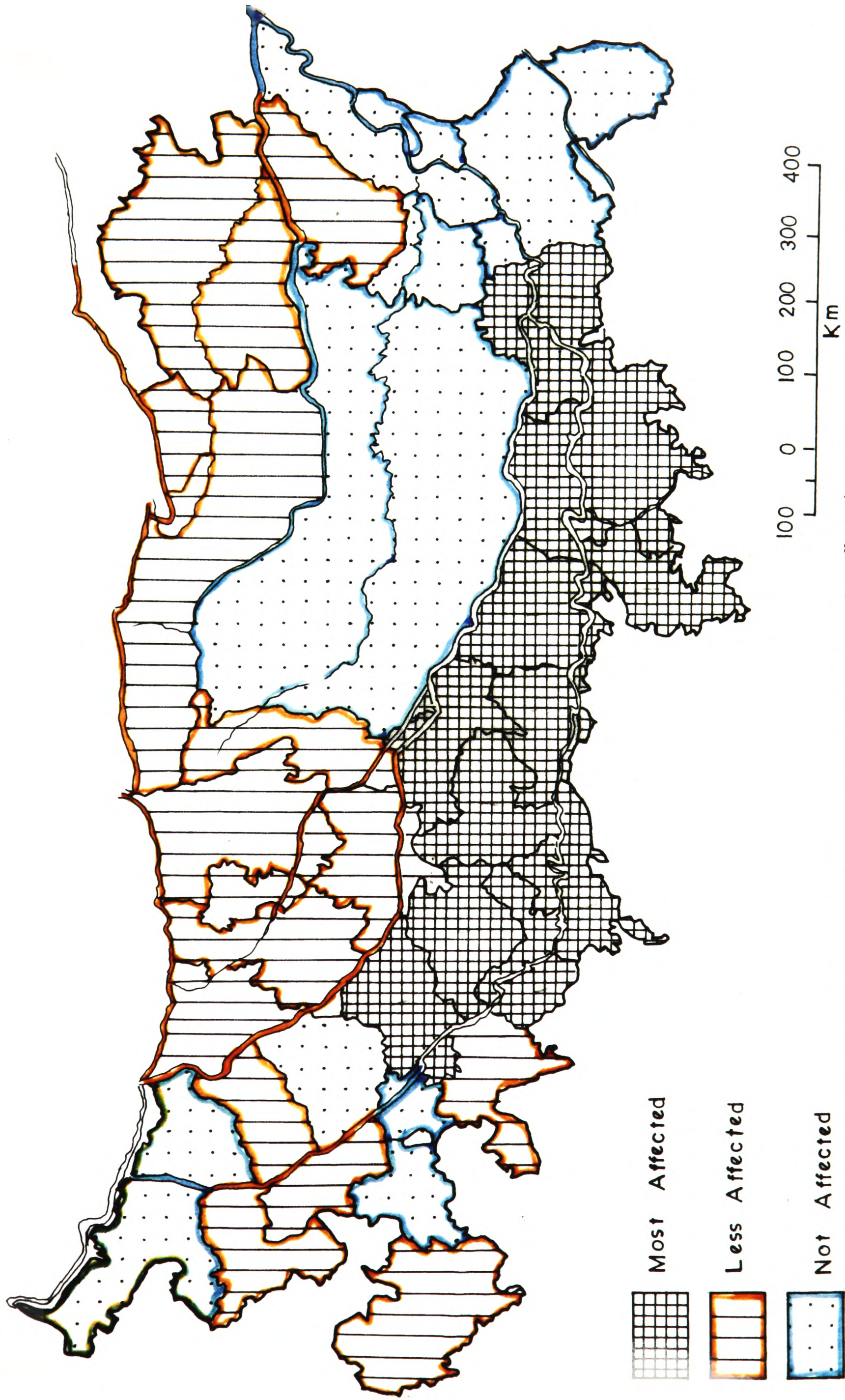
⁴² B. Smith, *Report*, IA, pp. 20-2; 33-6.

development and underdevelopment, and is linked to the development of capitalism, through monetization, commercialization, and development of markets and to taxation by the state which set in motion, long-term patterns of entitlements change.

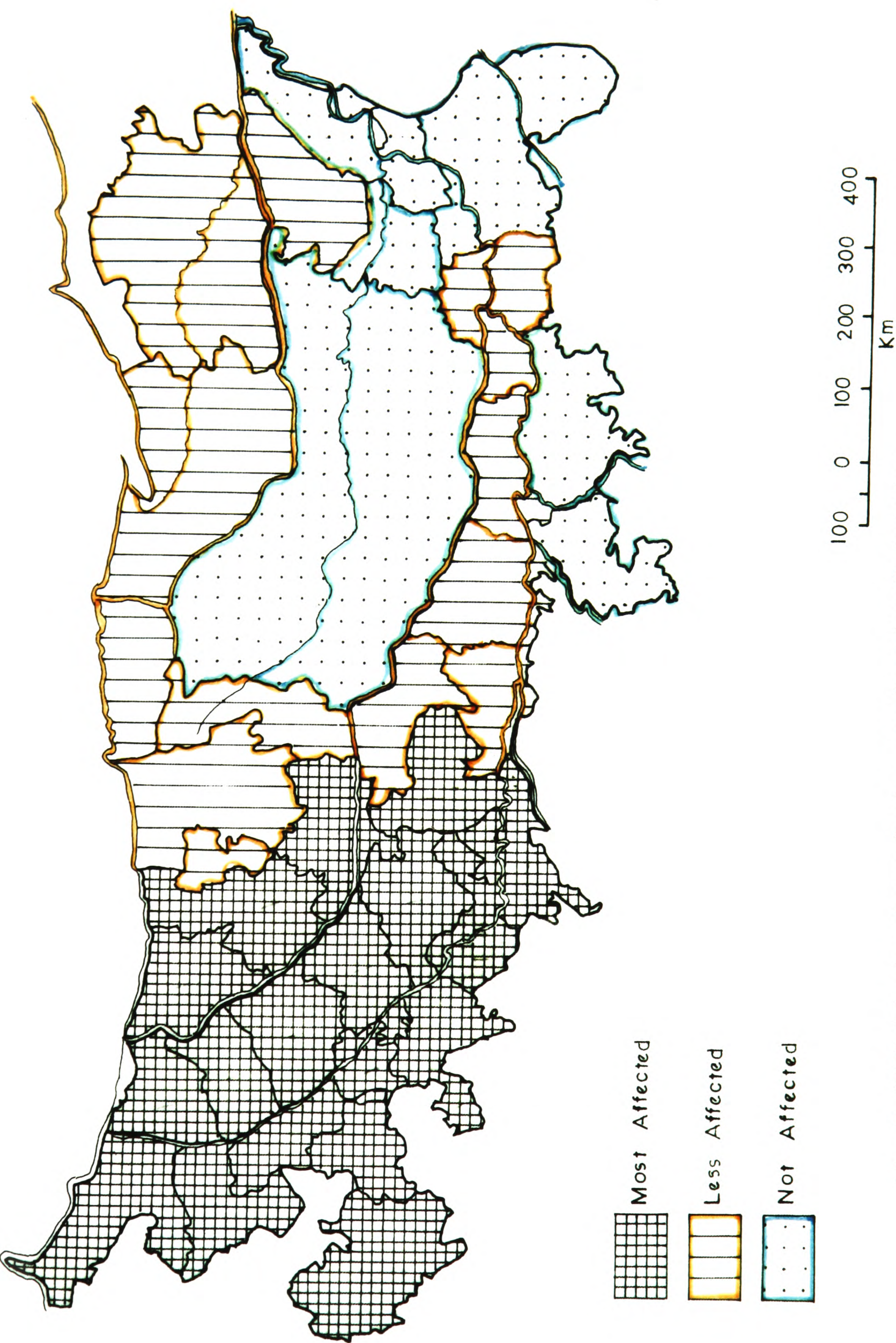
Recent literature is based on the premise that famines are the culmination of processes, not only of deprivation and dispossession, but also of gain and consolidation of interests, and that power groups benefited because they had the ear of the government of the time. Political access and entitlement, therefore, are of central importance in the game of benefits and interest consolidation. This argument, in its most comprehensive form, has been presented by Keen, on the basis of a study of the 1988 famine in Sudan.⁴³

My study, while taking famine to be the culmination of a process in which there are victims and beneficiaries, identifies and examines the perception of, discourse on, and response to famine, of diverse social groups in the NWP&O. It seeks to underline who gained and why in various significant ways during the four famines studied.

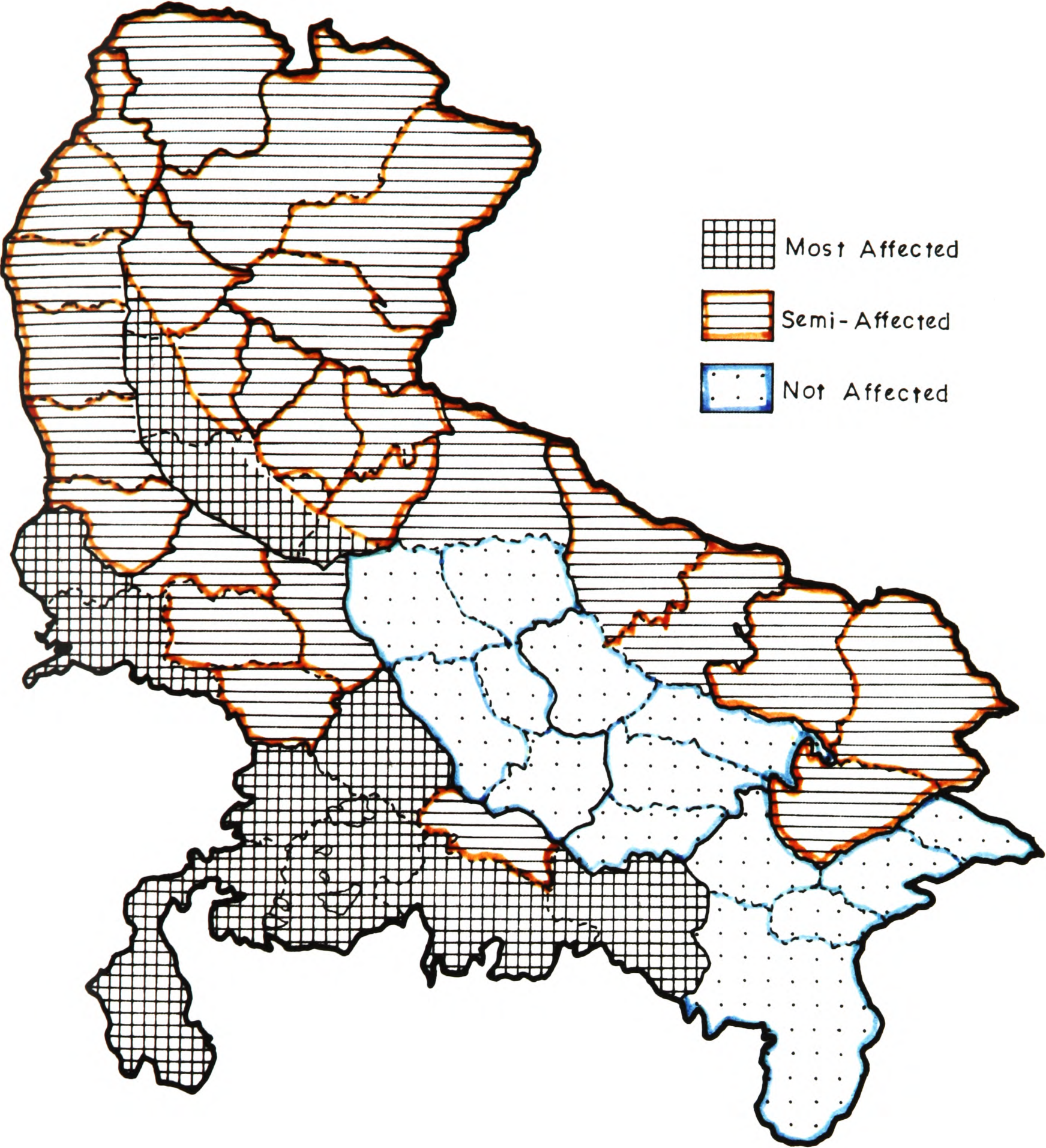
⁴³ D.Keen, *Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in South -West Sudan, 1983 - 89*. (Oxford Univ. D.Phil, 1991).



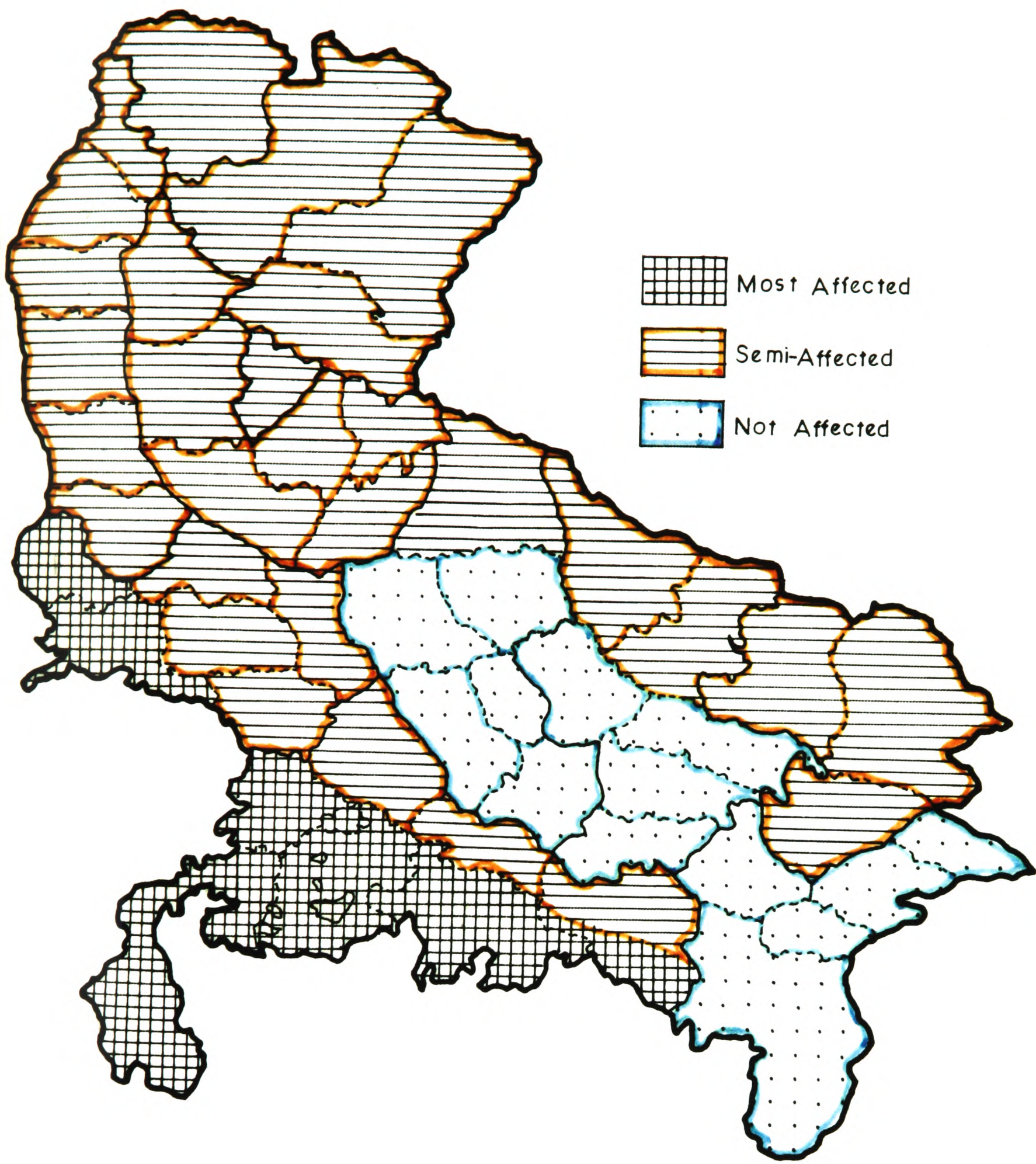
Map 4: 1837-8 famine: shows: famine, scarcity and unaffected areas



Map 5: 1860-1 famine shows: famine, scarcity and unaffected areas.



Map 7: 1868-9 famine shows: famine, scarcity and unaffected areas.



Map 6: 1896-7 famine shows: famine, scarcity and unaffected areas.

Section:II The Incidence of Four Famines in the NWP& O

Before indicating the approach adopted in this thesis towards examining responses to famine, it is necessary to clarify precisely both the locations of four famines, and their relative severity. Leaving detailed analysis to the body of the thesis, some basic geographical and statistical characteristics of the four famines on which the study focuses, are briefly discussed here.

Several eyewitness accounts exist of the 1837-8 famine, later considered to be the worst of that century. Official explanation was that scanty precipitation during successive monsoons from 1832 onwards resulted in drought conditions in the Bundelkhund region. Initially, the resultant distress was confined to this tract, but the almost total failure of the monsoon in 1836 led to famine through most of the province.⁴⁴ This famine affected an area of 113,000 sq. miles, of which 56,000 sq miles were in British territory, with a population of twenty-eight million.⁴⁵ The population affected was estimated between eight and nine million, and the population of the districts where the intensity of suffering was the greatest and mortality highest, was about five million.⁴⁶ The regions severely affected were the southern tracts of the province lying astride the Yamuna tributary of the Ganga from Allahabad in the east to the Doab in the west, and including the lower and the middle Doab (the tract lying between the Ganga and Yamuna). The southern extension of the province known as Bundelkhund, was particularly severely hit.⁴⁷ (See Map 4). In Kanpur, “not a vestige of cultivation was to be seen within twenty miles of the Yamuna

⁴⁴IFC. Report, 1880, i, p. 14; F.Henvey, *A Narrative Of The Drought And Famine Which Prevailed In The NWP During The years 1868-1869 and beginning of 1870*, p.1. Henceforth, Henvey Report.

⁴⁵IFC. Report, 1880, i, p. 14.

⁴⁶B.Smith, *Report*, IA, p.28.

⁴⁷Girdlestone, *Report*, pp. 44-5; *Gazetteers Hamirpur*, xxii (Allahabad, 1909), p. 47.

and whole villages became depopulated by famine and emigration.”⁴⁸ The northern part of the province, notably the upper Doab, the Rohilla lands to the east and also the kingdom of Awadh, which was subsequently annexed by the British in 1856, suffered relatively lightly compared to the south. Differences in topography and social structure between these regions will be clarified in subsequent chapters.

Significantly, although the pattern of famine differed considerably in 1860-1, during subsequent famines, notably during 1896-7, the same sub-regions again suffered most heavily, particularly Bundelkhund, and the city and hinterland of Agra.(See Map 7). In 1860-1, however, the pattern had been reversed, with the regions which had got off lightly in 1837-8, namely the Upper Doab, and the adjoining districts to the east (in Rohilkhund), and to the west (spilling into the neighbouring province of the Punjab), suffering heavily along with the riverine tract between Agra and Delhi.⁴⁹ Yet Bundelkhund, the black spot during the other three famines, was relatively famine-free in 1860-1 (Map 5). In 1868-9, the pattern was more even across the province, with all districts suffering heavily.(Map 6).

The discussion of responses in this thesis concentrates particularly on those sub-regions of the province, among them Bundelkhund and Agra, where famine was very severe, though data will be drawn, for comparative purposes, from regions less affected. As there was no census in this province until 1865, statistics relating famine incidence to district and total provincial population are at best impressionistic. Government officials, however, frequently made estimates about the population of their districts and, in times of famine,

⁴⁸*Gazetteers Kanpur*, xix, p. 62.

⁴⁹H.S.Srivastava, *History Of Indian Famine And Development Of Famine Policy, 1858-1918*(Agra, 1968),

about mortality and migration rates and about various forms of relief. On the basis of such sources, compilers of reports, while reiterating the ‘defectiveness’ of such statistics, later attempted to assess the comparative ‘severity’ of particular famines. Mortality rates, though acknowledged to be difficult to ascertain at any time and impossible at the height of famine, were considered the chief indicator of the severity of a famine. Colonel R.Baird Smith, the first of a line of analysts appointed by the NWP&O, government to investigate and report on famines of the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, estimated that 800,000 out of a population of approximately eight million in the affected tract had died in the famine of 1837-8.⁵⁰ Girdlestone, following in Baird Smith’s footsteps after severe famine had hit the province in 1860-1, estimated the mortality caused by starvation as at least 200,000, significantly lower than 1837-8.⁵¹ This figure of 200,000 was repeated in an estimate for starvation mortality in the famine of 1868-9,⁵² but was regarded as a considerable underestimate by the Famine Commission Report of 1880.⁵³ Mortality figures for the famine of 1896-7, in a period when the colonial government was in much firmer control of statistical information yet more conscious of the confrontational uses to which it could be put, have varied wildly from an implausible twenty-five deaths from starvation to hundreds of thousands. Clearly, ‘improved’ methods of data collection did not necessarily lead to more reliable conclusions. Attempts to estimate migration rates were similarly flawed.

However, some other types of statistics can be used with more confidence. Efforts were made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly in the provincial and

p.30; B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.28.

⁵⁰ B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.31.

⁵¹ Girdlestone, *Report*, pp. 86-7.

⁵² Henvey, *Report*, pp.125-6.

⁵³ *IFC, Report*, 1880, p.88.

district gazetteers, to compare statistics drawn from earlier government returns, which reflected the social impact of the four major famines. In 1908, for example, the Imperial Gazetteers for the 'United Provinces of Agra and Oudh' recorded the sums spent on relief and the amount of land revenue remitted during 1837-8, 1860-1, 1868-9 and 1896-7 indicating that overall expenditure on relief, initiated for the first time as a matter of government policy in 1837-8, actually decreased from a total of Rs 23.5 lakhs that year to 14.5 lakhs in 1860-1, before moving up again to Rs. 29.2 lakhs in 1868-9, and finally soaring to Rs. 167 lakhs in 1896-7. Such statistics will prove useful in this thesis in relating the changing ideology of 'famine relief,' to actual practice in sub-regions of the province studied. Parallel sets of figures can be obtained from the same sources, and in detail from the revenue records for remission of land revenue during each of the famines. Even so, as a number of studies, such as that of Barrier,⁵⁴ have recently warned, that statistics compiled and published under the aegis of the empire, including the decennial censuses, must be treated with caution. The object of this thesis is not to make more reliable estimates but rather to put flesh on the bones of otherwise unreliable and meaningless official reporting, by attempting to unravel the repercussions on, and responses of various social groups in a number of contrasting sub-regions during the course of each of these famines.

Table: 1 the total area and numbers of people affected during the four case study famines:

⁵⁴N.G.Barrier, *The Census In British India, A New Perspective* (New Delhi, 1981), pp.v-xiv.

Table.1

	Total area in sq. miles. ⁵⁵	Area in the NWP& O	Total Population.	Population in the NWP& O.
1837 –8	1,13,000	56,000	28,000,000.	9,000,000
1860 –1	48,000	10,000	19,000,000 .	5,500,000
1868 –9.	300,000	44,3000	45,000,000	1,67,00,000
1896 –7.	2,24,828	50,813	62,4,00,000	21,9.81000

Source: Baird Smith, *Report*, IA, pp.28,31; Girdlestone, *Report*, pp.44-5,86-7; IFC, *Report*, i, 1880-5, p. 14; Srivastava, *History Of Famines*, p.30; Henvey , *Report*, pp.1,125-6.

Contents of the thesis

Chapter one situates famines in the context of the salient characteristics of NWP&O- its geographic features, demography, and the broad socio-economic framework. Without some understanding of this, it would be difficult to understand why certain groups suffered, and others benefited, and who were they. Chapter two discusses the impact of socio- economic policies on NWP&O society, especially in the context of famines. It shows that government buffered the interests of the well off widening the already existing cleavages in society. Chapter three examines the ideological influences, which shaped the relief policy and determined its aims and outcome. Chapter four looks at the actual implementation of relief policy, the lacunae between ideology and practice of relief's changing nature, and aims and co-ordination of relief, at various levels of administrative hierarchy. Chapter five highlights the nexus of interests of the landlords, petty bureaucrats and the government, the interdependence of interests of these groups and how they aided and manipulated famine crisis for consolidating their power moral, economic and

⁵⁵ Area in British India. It excludes the area and population of native states.

political. The Indian National Congress, for instance, used famines for political mobilization rallying and nurturing nationalist sentiments around them. Chapters six and seven analyze the perceptions of, responses to, and discourse on famines, amongst religious groupings, mainly Christian missionaries. The nature and consequences of missionary activity in NWP&O are highlighted. Chapters eight and nine, examine the indigenous understanding and perceptions of famine and hunger, and the complex, but rational, strategies famine victims forged for their survival. Strategies involved calculated, rational and skilful management choices for preserving their resources, land, implements, cattle and home and hearth, on which their future well being depended. The thesis that the people of India did very little to help themselves during famines, being 'fatalistic' and 'lazy,' is put under critical scrutiny. These chapters examine the responses of the affected people-the 'victims' to famine. Their constitutional and unconstitutional responses have been detailed and their expectations and demands of their patrons, community and government, are discussed in Chapter nine. Particular attention has been focused on women-their plight, their perceptions of self, and their responses to prolonged subsistence crisis have been highlighted. Chapter ten, analyzes the differential and positive impact of the four famines, on the richer sections of society, that is, landlords, moneylenders, *baniyas* and other merchant groups, how they exploited famines as opportunities to consolidate their interests, economic, social and political, often at the cost of the poor who were dependent on them or moral and material support.

Sources:

The sources for this study are rich and diverse. Official documents have constituted the main basis. Scattered references on famines may be found in revenue, judicial, general

and political proceedings, (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow and Uttar Pradesh Regional Archives, Allahabad) records, memoirs of district officers, and travel literature pertaining to the period. These records are easily available but are virtually untapped; they reflect the official mind and convey official biases, perceptions and discourse not only on famines, but also Indian society. Famine reports like those of Baird Smith, Girdlestone, Henvey, Roberts, Bennett, and Pitcher and the 1880 Famine Code and later the Indian Famine commission Report 1898, recorded the general condition of the people in NWP&O, the socio- economic and infrastructural conditions prevailing. These record the difficulties and dislocation of normal life with the onset of famine and the activities of the affected people, their requirements and the nature of relief offered. These reports are heavily impressionistic, and statistical information regarding the numbers who migrated, the extent of mortality, and other matters is, at best, sketchy. Yet if this material, imperfect though it is, is carefully collated, analyzed and supplemented with other data, it is possible to present a comprehensive picture of the four famines in NWP&O. Such information which is of immense value to the present study can be obtained from various Decennial Enquiry Reports which the government central and State, commissioned. Notably, A Collection of Papers Connected with An Inquiry made Into the Condition Of The Lower Classes Of The Population, NWP&O, 1887, Knox Report On Bundelkhund, Decennial Report On The Material Condition Of the People of the United Provinces Of Agra and Oudh, 1901-2 and several others. These analyze the patterns of continuity and change in the socio- economic scenario, the ailments and the solutions, the regional imbalances and correctives required to socio- economic policies.

The Board of Revenue proceedings (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow) give a fairly accurate picture of famines in the province, detailing the extent of area afflicted, duration

of different famines, need for revenue suspension and remission, prices of food grains, impact of free trade, suggestions for governmental action, and responses thereto. Judicial proceedings, (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow) focusing on the law and order situation, contain correspondence between the Sudder Board of Revenue and district officials, who highlighted the effects of famine at the local level, the vulnerability of the majority of people, their expectations, responses, as well and contain suggestions for appropriate administrative measures to deal with the crisis. Some statistical data can be obtained in regard to crime, mortality and migration, and conveys an impression of the suffering of the people. Police and Criminal reports give comprehensive accounts of the suffering and dislocation caused by famine and the resultant deterioration in the law and order situation, which the administration sometimes found difficult to contain. These underline the perceptions of the officials- why they considered certain categories of people as dangerous and criminal, and the ways to contain them.

The accounts of Jesuits and other missionaries from sixteenth century onwards, are worth considering as they give insights into inherited traditions of attitudes to famine. Missionary sources such as Church Missionary Society (located at Birmingham University Main Library) and Society for the Propagation of Gospel (located at Rhodes house library, Oxford) give elaborate accounts of the social, economic and religious, cultural conditions prevailing in the NWP&O society; famines and the degree of their impact, the resulting condition of the people, their reactions, the inadequacy of official response and importantly their own efforts at relief. Though missionary comments and observations need to be treated with caution and reserve yet these source are of immense value.

Then there are literary sources, in which famines find prominent and significant mention. Even ancient and medieval chronicles such as the Arthashastra, Rajtarangini, writings of Ferishta, Badauni discuss the impact of famines and relief rendered. Bankim Chandra Chatterjis's influential novel *Ananda Math*, is based in a famine setting and, give a graphic account of the death, dislocation and devastation it brought. It particularly highlights the greater suffering, pragmatism, adaptive capacity and resilience of women in comparison to men during famines, is a unique contribution of this work. This novel is particularly significant as it gave a tremendous impetus to nationalism and demonstrates how famines were used for nationalist mobilization. The call of '*Vande Matram*' (Hail motherland) became the rallying call of the national movement. The song '*Vande Matram*' is the national song of independent India.⁵⁶

Travel literature is a valuable source material for famine studies. Eye witness accounts of famines such as those of Emily Eden, William Sleeman, William Crook, Vaughan Nash and Francis Merewether have been extensively referred to in the present study. These highlight the migration, mortality and overall devastation of famines; the strategies the affected people devised to tide the crisis, the activities of officials and importantly of powerful constituents of NWP&O society such as *banias*, moneylenders, merchants, landlords. The value of these sources primarily lies in the fact that they are unofficial and therefore unbiased sources and pay attention to aspects which officials would not; However, account has to be taken of cultural misperceptions and perpetuation of inherited myths. Finally, there are the oral traditions- sayings, folklore, myths and even songs- in which the memories of famine are incorporated in legendary references to the event, a notable example being the '*Ath Sera*' (grain being sold at eight *sers* for a rupee). These

⁵⁶ B.C.Chatterjee, *Anand Math*, (1882),English Translation,B.K.Roy (3ed.New Delhi,2003).

oral sources are of great value as they reveal the unvarnished realities of famine: who suffered most, who gained and how diverse segments of society, responded.

ChapterI:

The Agrarian Setting

This chapter provides an overview of aspects of the monsoon-dependent agricultural economy which lay at the roots of famines, in the NWP&O. It acquaints the reader with a range of variables that contributed towards poverty and hunger, determining who suffered and who benefited, which parts of the province suffered more and why.

Climate and Soils

The NWP&O, comprising an area of about 113, 000 sq. miles, was one of the largest provinces in India, and part of the Hindi heartland of the sub-continent.¹ For administration, this vast province was under a Lt.-Gov; he was aided by the Sudder Board of Revenue, which dealt with matters relating to revenue and land.² The province was broken into nine divisions, each headed by a commissioner, which were further divided into forty-nine districts each under a district magistrate. The districts were further subdivided into *parganas*, *tehsils* and villages. This administrative framework constituted the basis for the administration of famine relief. Each collector had charge of an area as large as Norfolk and population as large as New Zealand.³ The district and the district officer remained the key unit of relief administration and the memoirs of several officers record the insufficiency of this administrative unit to cope with prolonged and recurrent famines.

¹*Census of India, 1891, The North Western Provinces and Oudh*. xvi, i, p.74. In extent of territory the NWP. nearly equalled England, Wales, and Ireland, put together: C.H.T Crosthwaite, *Notes On the North Western Provinces, by a District Officer* (London, 1870), p. 2; W.C. Bennett (ed.), *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh* (Lucknow, 1877), p. i.

² Crosthwaite, *Notes*, pp. 2-3.

³ E.H.Blunt, *The Indian Civil Service* (London, 1939), pp.91-2.

Famines, and the intensity of their impact on various classes and regions may be linked to the varying ecology, immense disparities in soil fertility, agricultural tenures, population density, communication, and irrigation facilities. Conditions of the peasantry varied in different regions and their vulnerability and immunity to famines were largely determined by these crucial variables.⁴ There was, for instance, considerable contrast between Doab, and Bundelkhund, Awadh and the eastern parts of the NWP&O. On the basis of these variations the province may broadly be divided into four distinct physical divisions.

In the extreme north of the province, lay the Himalayan tract, comprising the districts of Almora, Dehradun, Nainital, and Mussoorie.⁵ Below this was the sub-Himalayan tract, between the rivers Ganga and Sarda, comprising the area called ‘*bhabhar*,’ (porus) and ‘*terai*’ (swampy). Saharanpur, Rampur State, Bijnor, Bareilly, and Pilibhit are in the *terai*, and Kheri, Bahraich, Gonda, Basti, and Gorakhpur, in the *bhabhar*.⁶ Rainfall varied between fifty and hundred inches, and the soils were poor. Barley and some assortment of garden crops grew on the forest edges. For the *kharif* (autumn crops) sowing took place June-July and harvested in September-October. On the hillside, millets and rice were grown, while wheat and barley for *rabi* (Spring crops; sown in October-November, harvested between April- May);⁷ in the valley, wheat, barley and lentils were grown for *kharif*.

⁴ *A Collection of Papers Connected With An Inquiry Into The Condition Of The Lower Classes of The Population Especially In the Agricultural Tracts in North Western Provinces And Oudh*, Instituted In 1877-8, p 6. UPSAL.

⁵ *Imperial Gazeeteers, United Provinces*, i (1908), p.2.

⁶ *ibid.* pp. 2-3

⁷ W.H. Moreland, *The Agriculture of the United Provinces* (Allahabad, 1912), pp.22-3.

The area between the river Yamuna in the north and north-east, and the Vindhya hills to the south, covering 10,400 sq. miles, was the famine-prone Bundelkhund tract. It comprised the districts of Banda, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Jhansi, and Lalitpur.⁸ It was more intimately connected with Dhar, Malwa, and Gwalior than with the Doab, from which it had marked differences. This tract remained mainly agricultural throughout the nineteenth century, despite inferior ecology, soils, irrigation and communication facilities, and was considered to be the poorest part of the province.⁹

The climate of Bundelkhund was exceedingly hot and dry; rainfall was erratic and varied from twenty-five and thirty inches in Jalaun to thirty-fourty inches in Lalitpur and Jhansi, with the subsoil water lying generally at great depth.¹⁰ The population, which, was scattered and sparse, suffered acutely during famines. Within Bundelkhund, the soils differed widely in composition. In the north, the soils included the black, cotton-growing '*mar*,' comparatively infertile, usually sandy, with large amounts of minute *kankar* nodules and a high proportion of organic matter.¹¹ The inherent weakness of the black soil was that excessive rains led to over-saturation. It was liable to be overrun by the pestilent weed called '*kans*,' which put extensive tracts of land out of cultivation for long periods.¹² Though the soil was retentive of moisture, a deficiency of rain led to rapid drying up of the surface, which was then, liable to crack up. The soils lighter variant was the '*kabar*,' containing exceptional quantities of lime and sulphuric acid. It was a stiff impracticable soil, drying up and caking quickly on the surface, heavy and difficult to cultivate. It was also very

⁸ *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p.4

⁹ *Census of NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, p.76.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 76.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.76.

¹² W.Raw, *Final SR, Hamirpur* (1908), p.2.

susceptible to *kans*, rust and blight. In seasons of drought, this soil was the first to fall out of cultivation, and the last to be ploughed. It was considered inferior to '*mar*.' Another variety of soil found in the region was '*parwa*,' a light loam, fertile when manured, worked and irrigated. It was much less susceptible to the weather than '*mar*' and '*kabar*.' In the ravines was '*nankar*' or '*rakar*,' a gravelly soil, affected by erosion, with large *kankar* nodules. This particular soil had two sub-varieties, '*moti*' and '*patli*,' the former being broken down by '*mar*' and '*kabar*', and the latter by light soil.¹³ Both were considered inferior.¹⁴ Heavy soils like *mar* and *kabar* covered one-third of the cultivated area in Banda; in Hamirpur, nearly half; in Jalaun, three-fifths; in Jhansi proper, more than half, and in Lalitpur about a third. Lalitpur and Jhansi also possessed a red moram soil, sometimes classified as '*rakar*,' or '*patli*.' This was an infertile soil, which in its natural condition yielded a few rain crops, but when irrigated grew *rabi*; it was estimated that this red soil covered fifty-six per cent of the cultivated area in Lalitpur and twenty-eight per cent in Jhansi.¹⁵

Bundelkhund, with its inferior soils and deficient irrigation, remained predominantly under subsistence crops, cash cropping being minimal. *Kharif* was the main staple comprising millets, pulses, oilseeds; cotton was the only cash crop cultivated in regions, with the black *mar* soil. Due to lack of irrigation and communication facilities well upto 1890's, Bundelkhund was particularly dependent on periodical rains and hence sensitive to famines.¹⁶ This was the region where suffering was acute and symptoms of famine first became manifest, during three of the famines, under

¹³ K. N.Knox, *Notes On Bundelkhund*, serial no. 3, f.no.22 (37-38),31 August 1934, p.13. UPRAA.

¹⁴ *Imperial Gazetteers*,i (1908), p. 52.

¹⁵ *Konx, Notes*, p. 14.

¹⁶ W.H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, i (London, 1844), p. 193.

study.¹⁷

The Indo-Gangetic plain, lying between the Ganga and the Yamuna and the outer Himalayas, is alluvial plain. It comprises an area of about 53,776 sq. miles.¹⁸ In contrast to Bundelkhund, the Doab, along with Awadh, and Rohilkhund was uniformly fertile. It was referred to by British observers as the Mesopotamia of the East.¹⁹ It was formed from the alluvium of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, and could be divided into *kahadar* lowlands, lying alongside the rivers, and *bangar* uplands, lying between the rivers, comprising ‘*bhur*’ or sandy soil and ‘*matiyar*’ or clay on which rice was usually grown.²⁰ In the west of the Doab wheat was the dominant crop, although subsidiary crops like millets, pulses, and oilseeds were also grown. In the eastern region, rice predominated along with barley, pulses, oilseeds and millets, and some wheat was also grown. Sugarcane was cultivated all over, but was dominant in the eastern region and Rohilkhund.

Of the three segments of the Doab, eastern,²¹ central²² and western,²³ the western and central Doab were more developed and prosperous, ten of the thirteen districts being protected by canals. The standard of living was distinctly higher than elsewhere in the province.²⁴ The fertility of soil, and crop diversity made this region’s economy

¹⁷ *District Gazetteers, Jhansi*, xxiv, p. 61.

¹⁸ *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p.3.

¹⁹ W. Crooke, *The Native Races of the British Empire: Northern India* (London, 1907), p. 10.

²⁰ Moreland, *The Agriculture*, p. 30.

²¹ Includes Ballia, Jaunpur, Benaras, Azamgarh, and Ghazipur, all lying between the rivers Gogra and the Ganga: *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p.4.

²² Comprising Kanpur, Allahabad, and Fatehpur. *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p.3.

²³ Comprised 13 districts Muzzafarnagar, Bulandshahar, Aligarh, Mathura, Agra, Farrukhabad, Mainpuri, Etawah, Etah, Badaun, Moradabad and Shahjehanpur. See *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p. 3.

²⁴ *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p.3.

naturally buoyant. Differences in the growth of commerce and industry, cash crops cultivation, wage rates, and the proportion of people dependent on agriculture were not as great as in the east of the province. Some observers attributed its relative prosperity, to the developed infrastructural facilities such as railways, roads, irrigation especially, canals. This facilitated expansion of agriculture, especially cash crops cultivation, which led to greater commercialization and industrialization which, in turn, varied the avenues of employment, thereby reducing dependence on agriculture, and therefore vulnerability to famine.²⁵ This, however, is a controversial subject, which will be discussed in Chapter two. Another factor, exaggerated by British observers, was the superior energy and capacity for hard work of the ‘sturdy’ *Jat* peasant, who, it was considered, exploited better material and natural conditions to their best advantage.²⁶ Such views reflect the stereotyping of the peasantry into ‘lazy’ and ‘energetic’ categories, which has been criticized in the introduction.

Awadh in the north-east of the province,²⁷ a semi-autonomous ‘princely state’ until annexation in 1856, had a predominantly (two-thirds) loamy soil, a mixture of sand and clay, known in vernacular as ‘*domat*’ or ‘*doras*.’ Much of the remaining soil was stiff clay ‘*matiyar*’ and a light sand, ‘*bhur*.’²⁸ However, although endowed with a relatively favourable climate, fertile soil and infrastructure, Awadh was not as prosperous as the western Doab, but was better off than the eastern Doab and Bundelkhund. Nonetheless, Awadh was never seriously afflicted by any of the

²⁵ I. Stone, *Canal Irrigation in British India. Perspectives on Technological Change in a Peasant Economy* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 213-27; I.D. Derbyshire, ‘Economic Change and the Railways in North India, 1860-1914’ *MAS*, 21:3 (1987), p. 537.

²⁶ W. Crooke, *The North Western Provinces of India, Their History, Ethnology, And Administration* (London, 1897), pp. 289-90..

²⁷ It included Lucknow, Unnao, Rae Bareilly, Hardoi, Fyzabad, Sitapur, Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Barabanki. See *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p. 3.

²⁸ H.C. Irwin, *Garden of India; or Chapters on Oudh History and Affairs* (London, 1880), p. 20.

famines under study.

In the NWP&O, the *kharif* crops generally comprised millets, pulses, *bajra*, *jwar*, and maize, and constituted the staple food of the bulk of the population. Rice and wheat was consumed only by the rich; indeed, as much as sixty per cent of the wheat was consumed by the richest ten per cent of the population, leading some district officers to remark that wheat was grown “mainly for the *bania* and revenue collector.”²⁹ The pattern of diet reflected the comparative degrees of poverty, as also ecological conditions. If monsoons failed and *kharif* crops were destroyed, the great mass of poor peasants were reduced to starvation. The chief *rabi* crops were wheat, sugarcane, barley, gram, linseed, sarson (mustard), goji, and peas. The most valuable cash crops were wheat, cotton, indigo, sugarcane, and tobacco. The cultivation and expansion of these received a boost around the mid-nineteenth century with the development of irrigation system and communication facilities, which made possible a significant increment in the multiplicity of crops and facilitated their marketing. However, the kind and number of crops raised differed according to the class and resource-base of the cultivator, the area under plough, accessibility to agricultural implements, nature of animal wealth, and other variables.

Commercialization of Agriculture

The process of commercialization was well under way from the Mughal era. The works of Bayly and Siddiqui have stressed the expansion in production and export of cash crops like cotton, indigo, sugarcane and opium, and the linkage of regional

²⁹ S. Bose (ed.), *Credit Markets, and the Agrarian Economy of Colonial India* (Oxford, 1994), p. 15.

production to an expanding home as well as overseas market in the first-half of the nineteenth century.³⁰ The pattern shows that from the 1820s, in the fertile and irrigated central and western districts of the Doab, cultivators showed a preference for remunerative cash crops like cotton, indigo, sugarcane, wheat and poppy, in place of subsistence crops like *jwar*, *bajra*, millets, *moong*, *urd* and *mothi*, on which the majority of the *ryots* were dependent. District officers interpreted this to be a sign of agricultural progress, even though the profits went to those with surplus resources. Such a tendency, by 1833, can be illustrated by examples of districts like Aligarh, Kanpur, Meerut and Farrukhabad; here, increasingly, cash crops such as cotton, indigo, sugarcane, and wheat were grown and subsistence crops were imported from upland districts like Agra.³¹

Till 1826, there was a boom in production and export of indigo and cotton, after which there was a slump. The province experienced an agrarian depression, the effects of which were further aggravated by the two famines of 1833-4 and 1837-8. Kanpur, Farrukhabad, Bareilly, and Allahabad flourished because of their position as wholesale markets for cotton and indigo. Bundelkhund, which thrived on cotton production and exports till this time, was badly hit. An indication is that, till the 1820s, the East India Company's investment in Bundelkhund in cotton, was Rs four million annually and private investment was Rs.1.8 million. By 1842, private investment had dwindled to Rs 700,000, a decline in income of Rs five million

³⁰ A. Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change in Uttar Pradesh* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 158-67; C.A. Bayly, ' The Age of Hiatus; The North Indian Economy and Society 1830-58,' in C.H.Phillips and M.D.Wainwright (eds), *Indian Society and Modernisation, 1830-50* (London, 1976), pp. 90-4.

³¹ Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change*, pp. 159-67.

annually. Factors responsible included the sharp fall in cotton prices, the expansion of cotton cultivation and production especially in the Agra and Meerut division which were much better connected by railways than Bundelkund, the customs barrier of 1861, took away the advantage from Bundelkhund as the cotton growing mart. “ Kalpi was replaced by Kanpur, the trade of Samthar Gwalior and Dattia no longer comes to Koonch; ... Rath is left high and dry, and Mahoba and Banda have to compete with half a dozen small stations on the railway line.”³²

Indigo production and export was expanding considerably, from the turn of the century, and peaked between 1802-27; it was concentrated mainly in the Doab. In 1826-7, indigo production reached twenty-nine thousand maunds in the districts of Agra, Allahabad, Bareilly, Farrukhabad and Kanpur, in contrast to the 1825-6, figure of twenty thousand maunds.³³ Remittances to Britain from indigo cultivation were substantial. Mercer and Co, owning two companies in Aligarh in 1810, extended its trading operations by the 1820s to most of the Doab districts. By the 1890s, there was a decline in indigo cultivation by twenty-seven per cent, compared to the 1880s, attributed to a fall in prices. Poppy production increased by as much as forty per cent, indicating that, enormous benefits accrued to those cultivating it. *Til* (gingelly), also increased substantially.³⁴

A flourishing market for sugarcane products from the NWP existed till 1802. Sugarcane cultivation and export of its final products was concentrated in places in

³² Knox, *Notes*, p.10.

³³ Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change*, pp. 159-67.

³⁴ Scarcity deptt, f. 488, August, 1902, *Decennial Report On the Material Condition of the People of*

Rohilkhund, such as at Shahjehanpur.³⁵ Azamgarh, Ballia and Gorakhpur emerged as centres of sugar production, and benefited from sugar exports to England. However, there was a fall in production and exports of finished products from the late 1820s. But, unlike other cash crops, the slump in overseas demand did not effect domestic markets which remained steady, and cultivation registered an increase by eight per cent over 1880s.³⁶

Double cropping

The spurt in cash cropping tempted agriculturists to take recourse to double cropping. By 1850, Sleeman reported extensive double cropping in the Doab; and by the end of the nineteenth century had spurted to thirty-seven per cent of the total cultivated area.³⁷ This, led to deterioration in soil fertility.³⁸ In Aligarh, in 1870, 165, 569 acres were double cropped; by 1890, this had risen to about 215, 424 acres- a 23.26 per cent rise.³⁹ In Kanpur in 1840, double cropping was non-existent but, by 1880, 79,707 acres were double-cropped.⁴⁰ In Agra, 9.5 per cent of the cultivated area was double cropped in 1885-95, by 1899, it was seventeen per cent.⁴¹ In Meerut, double cropping increased from 4.5 per cent in 1865-70 to twenty-two per cent in 1895.⁴² In places like Rai Bareilly, the area under double cropping increased six-fold within a few

the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh, pp. 13-14.

³⁵ L.Brenan, 'Social Change in Rohilkhund, 1801-1833; The Formation of a Zamindari Class,' *IESHR*, vi, 4 (December, 1970), pp. 461-2.

³⁶ Scarcity deptt, f. no. 488, August 1902, *Decennial Report*, pp. 13-14.

³⁷ *Returns of the Agricultural Statistics for British India, 1884 - 85* (Calcutta, 1886), pp. 24 - 5.

³⁸ E. Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India, The United Provinces Under British Rule, 1860 - 1900* (California, 1972), i, pp. 67-79.

³⁹ Nevill, *Gazetteers, Aligarh*, vi, p. 34.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* Kanpur, xix, p. 34.

⁴¹ *ibid.* Agra, p. 30.

⁴² *ibid.* Meerut, iv, p. 39.

years.⁴³ The 1891 Census Report noted, that in the NWP, two crops were grown, on twenty per cent of the cultivated land, while in richly fertile areas like the Doab, three crops were grown year after year without respite.⁴⁴ In Awadh, the proportion of double-cropped land was still higher, exceeding forty per cent of the total cropped area in some districts.⁴⁵ The rise in double cropping was attributed to population pressure and enhanced irrigation facilities, which increased cultivation, range of crops cultivated, though benefits accrued to the rich cultivators.⁴⁶

Table 2 shows the main *kharif* crops, and the number of sowings, hoeings and waterings required .

Table. 2

KHARIF

Kind of crop	No. of ploughings	No. of waterings	No of hand hoeings	when sown	When reaped
Sugarcane	14 to15	16 to 25	4 to 6	Phagun	Maghar
Cotton	4 to 6	Uncertain	4	15th H'ar to 16th Sawan	Assarh to end of Maghar
Maize	3 or 4	6 or 7 in Chahilands	2	H'ar	Assarh or Kartik
Jwar	3 or 4	3 or 4	For Corn once	H'ar	Kartik

⁴³ Nevill,*Gazetteers, Rai Bareli*,,xxxix, p.28.

⁴⁴ *Census of NWP&O*,1891,xvi, i, p.82.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.82.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Bajra	2	2 or 3	1	Sawan	Assarh or Kartik
Moth	1	None	None	Sawan and Bhadon	Maghar
Mu'ng.	2	Ditto	Ditto	H'ar	Maghar
Til	2	Ditto	Ditto	Sawan	Maghar
Mash	3	Ditto	Ditto	Sawan	Kartik and Maghar
Rawan	3	Ditto	Ditto	H'ar and later	Kartik
Rice	Vide details	Of cultivation	In the sequel	Under 'rice'.	
Saw'ank	2	3 or 4	None	H'ar and later	Bhadon, Assarh and Kartik
Mustard	5 or 6	5 or 6	1 or 2	Bhadon	Kartik

Source: Eliott,H.M. *Memoirs of the History, Folklore And Distribution Of The Races Of The North Western Provinces Of India*(London,1869),pp.204-5.

Table 3 shows the main rabi crops,and the number of waterings, sowings and hoeing required.

Table. 3

RABI

Kind of Crop	No. of Ploughings.	No. of Waterings	No. of hand hoeings	When Sown	When Reaped
Wheat	4 to 8	4 to 8	None	Rabi, Kartik, and Maghar	Baisakh
Barley	4 to 8	4 to 8	Ditto	Ditto	Chaitra
Goji	4 to 8	4 to 8	Ditto	Ditto	Baisakh
Gram	2	None	Ditto	Bhadon	Baisakh
Flax or Linseed	2	Sown in Sail'abi	Ditto	Assarh	Baisakh
Mustard	8	3 or 4	1	Assarh	Chaitra
China	6 rabi, 4 kharif	10 to 16	None	Phagan and Sawan	Baisakh, kartik or Maghar
Kangni	5, 6, or 7	5 or 6	1	Chaitra, Sawan and Bhadon.	Bhadon, Assarh
Tobacco	4 or 5	15	3 to 5	Kartik,	Jeth and

				transplan ted in Magh or Phagun	Ha'r
Onion	4 to 8	16	3	Planted out in Magh	Ditto
Carrot	4 to 6	3 or 4	None	Assarh	Chet
Turnip	5	3 to 5	Ditto	20 th Bhadon to 10 th of Assarh	Maghar to Magh
Methi and Sinji		2 or 3	Ditto	Kartik	
Poppy	10 to 12	Every 4th or 5th day	10 or 12	Assarh	Chaitra

Source: Elliott,H.M. *Memoirs of the History, Folklore And Distribution Of The Races Of The North Western Provinces Of India*(London,1869),pp.204-5.

These tables show the resources, labour and the time required for cash crops cultivation. Use of canal irrigation, which was not always within reach additionally, involved payment of a heavy cess which, ordinary cultivators were not usually in a position to pay. Further additional labour was required for persistent ploughings and hoeings for the remunerative crops such as sugarcane, cotton, wheat and, indigo. Another pre-requisite was ready availability of bullocks, ploughs and implements, which were not always owned by ordinary *ryots*. Hiring these involved extra

expenditure. Therefore the cultivation of cash crops would not have been easy or remunerative for majority of the cultivators.

Traditional irrigation systems

Rain was the most crucial factor in crop cultivation and production, as its fluctuation and variation effectively undermined agricultural output. Its failure was the officially cited reason for the occurrence of the four famines studied. The average rainfall of the province was thirty-six inches,⁴⁷ with areas proximate to the Himalayas getting heavy rainfall, and those furthest from it low rainfall. Annual precipitation was 30-36 inches in the western Gangetic districts, thirty-six -forty inches in districts lying to the east, Rohilkhund and Awadh, and thirty-forty inches in Bundelkhund.⁴⁸ But it was not simply the amount of rainfall, which made the difference, but also its regularity and effectiveness in providing adequate moisture to the soil. Failure of rains could turn even fertile and lush areas into forlorn and dreary tracts with stunted and scanty crops, while plentiful and well-dispersed rainfall ensured rich vegetation and lush crops, as noticed by Baird Smith, during the 1860 famine.⁴⁹ In Banda, in 1860, rainfall averaged only sixteen inches, but it was so well distributed in most *parganas* that “in marked contrast to the districts of the upper Doab, the year was one of prosperity in the district.”⁵⁰ Excessive rainfall was a more insidious enemy than lack or early cessation of rainfall in places like Bundelkhund where heavy clayey soils predominated. Keeping in mind the vagaries of monsoon, and its vital bearing on

⁴⁷ Bhanu, *North Western Provinces*, p.77; *Census of India, NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, p.77.

⁴⁸ Henvey, *Report*, pp. 28, 59, 65; *Imperial Gazetteers*, i (1908), p.4.

⁴⁹ B. Smith, *Report*, i, pp.4-6; Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, i, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Knox, *Notes*, p. 12.

agrarian life, administrators stressed the development of irrigation facilities. Recurring famines further underlined its necessity.

Despite the official emphasis on development of irrigation works, especially canals, traditional irrigation systems like wells and tanks predominated well into the 1850s.⁵¹ Habib's work highlights the centrality of irrigation, especially by wells and tanks, in the agrarian economy of the Mughals.⁵² Canal irrigation was not significantly developed, apart from the Western Yamuna Canal, dug by Firuz Shah Tughluk, and later excavated by Shahjehan.⁵³ The two canals drawn from it irrigated between them about 400,000 acres, which though locally of great value, was of limited influence.⁵⁴ In Rohilkhund, ground water was quite near the surface, so wells and tanks had always been dug without much effort or expenditure. Notwithstanding the emphasis on irrigation development, even as late as 1880, out of an area of 4.5 million acres, 850,000 or about twenty per cent was irrigated, by traditional means, like ponds, wells and streams.⁵⁵ Even in the 1890s, the province was pre-dominantly under well irrigation, as reflected by the fact that in dry years three acres were irrigated by wells for every acre irrigated by canals.⁵⁶ Wells were the preferred mode of irrigation as these could be speedily sunk at little cost. By October 1896 as famine conditions loomed MacDonnell urged the sinking of *kuccha well* with government aid to meet the situation. He proposed to advance ten lakhs as loans for the purpose, advising that interest on loans be totally waived. Further, the commissioners, district officers,

⁵¹ Stone, *Canal Irrigation*, pp. 13-15.

⁵² I.Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (London, 1963), pp.26-36.

⁵³ *ibid.* pp. 32 & 42.

⁵⁴ B.Smith, *Report*, 1860-1, i, p.21.

⁵⁵ *IFC Report, 1880-5, ii, 'Measures of Protection and Prevention,'* p.72.

⁵⁶ Scarcity deptt, August 1902, f. no. 488, *Decennial Report*, p.14.

taluqdars, and *zamindars* be enlisted to dispense the loan and oversee the making of *kuccha wells*. With ten lakhs of rupees and assistance of landlords MacDonnell hoped to sink 100,000 wells by mid- November 1896 to circumvent famine.⁵⁷ Canal irrigation in Bundelkhund remained almost non-existent until 1878, when the Sarda canal project was proposed.

The Doab, from Mughal times had, been better served by irrigation, than any other part of India. Here water was found at depths ranging from 15 ft. to about 40 ft. Wells were easily dug at little cost. A *kaccha* well could water four to five acres, while a large, *pukka*, bountifully supplied well could irrigate fifteen to twenty acres, and were good as supplementary watering mechanisms, when rains were erratic.⁵⁸ In 1860, there were approximately 70, 000 masonry wells and about 280, 000 *kaccha* wells.⁵⁹ In Meerut district the best tract for wells was the level portion of Hindun-Yamuna-Doab, as well as the tract between the Hindun and Kalee nudee.⁶⁰ The cultivated area in the Doab, in 1880, was about nine million acres, of which 2, 220,000 acres were irrigated by wells, 272,000 acres from streams and ponds, and augmented since the mid- nineteenth century by 1,500,000 acres from the Ganga, and the Eastern-Yamuna canal. Thus a total of 3,712,000 acres, or more than forty per cent of cultivated area had access to irrigation. In Awadh, out of a cultivable area of 8.25 million acres, 3.25 was or nearly forty per cent, could be irrigated in good years, the primary irrigation source for half the area being wells.⁶¹

⁵⁷ MacDonnell to Cadell, 3 October 1896, pp. 1-2. (Ms. Eng. Hist. C 352. Bodleian library, Oxford)

⁵⁸ B. Smith, *Report*, 1A, p. 51.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 53.

⁶⁰ Forbes, *Meerut SR* (1865-70), p. 7.

⁶¹ *IFC. Report*, 1880-5, ii, p. 7.

In Bundelkhund, where water was found at depths of fifty to sixty feet, wells and tanks were expensive, and consequently, were neither widespread nor popular. Until 1868-9, the area watered by tanks in Hamirpur barely exceeded 1,000 acres, predominantly in Mahoba; and out of 752,532 cultivated acres here, 738,791 acres, were recorded as “dry,” in the statistical returns of the NWP. Here, even by the end of the nineteenth century, the area protected by irrigation was less than 3.1 per cent of the cultivated area.⁶² It was noted that “in times of severe drought, Hamirpur, or at least a part of it must collapse, because the country is without irrigation.”⁶³ Benaras and Gorakhpur divisions also appear to have been entirely without canals, and here irrigation was mainly from wells, rivers, swamps and lakes.⁶⁴ Baird Smith estimated that, by 1860-1, out of a total cultivated area of some 24 million acres in the NWP&O, about three -four million acres were watered by wells.⁶⁵ By 1891-2, 29.3 per cent of the total cultivated area of the province was under irrigation.⁶⁶ By 1900, of the total cultivated area of 33,026,912 acres, as many as 10,929,875 acres were irrigated, of which canals served 1, 987,065 acres, tanks 2,192,077 and wells 6,121, 685 acres.⁶⁷

Communications

Right from the 1830s, official discussions, famine reports and the 1880 Famine Code itself emphasized the development of roads, railways and irrigation networks, as these

⁶² *Hamirpur Final SR* (1908), p.1.

⁶³ Henvey, *Report*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ *Census of NWP&O*, 1901, xvi, i, pp.12-13.

⁶⁵ B.Smith, *Report*, p.81.

⁶⁶ B.Chandra, ‘Reinterpretation of the Nineteenth Century Indian History,’ *IESHR*, v, 1(March 1968), p. 50.

⁶⁷ *Census Of India, NWP&O*, xvi (1901), i, p.13.

were considered necessary not only for military purposes and expansion of trade but also as the best preventive of famine.⁶⁸ It was with this in view that in 1854 a Public Works Department was created. The department was to look after and construct roads, canals, jails, treasuries, court-houses, and other public buildings, and also aid in laying of railways and telegraph lines.⁶⁹ The 1857 Mutiny further underlined the need for infrastructural development, which came to constitute a valuable area of investment.

A major hindrance to the development of private trade and prevention of famines was underdeveloped means of communications, especially roads. Till the 1840s, roads and bridges were few, and railways not even contemplated, as is reflected in Fane's complaint in 1836 of having nearly every bone in one's body broken by the jolting of the palanquin over execrable roads.⁷⁰ Contemporary officials noted during 1837-8 "The great navigable rivers...were the only lines of communication with the lower and between many parts of the upper provinces...the Grand Trunk road was in its infancy..the district roads now existing are the result of a special appropriation which formed part of the new system of settlement."⁷¹ It was pointed out that in districts with well-developed communications, especially roads and later railways, export and import were affected by prices ruling in distant grain depots. For example, the commissioner of Agra, pointing out the inadequacy of existing communications, suggested improving existing roads and building new ones:

⁶⁸ *IFC Report*, 1880, Appendix, iv, ch. iii, note of Col. A. Fraser, Chief engineer, NWP&O, p. 92; Girdlestone, *Report*, p.109.

⁶⁹ Bhanu, *North Western Provinces*, p.328.

⁷⁰ H.E.Fane, *Five Years in India*, i (London, 1944), p. 99; J.Strachey, *India: Its Administration and Progress* (London, 1911), p. 9.

⁷¹ B.Smith, *Report*, 1860-1, i, ,p.21.

Had good and open communication existed for wheeled carriage between Agra and Malwah, the grains which is abundant there, and is selling at fifty and sixty sers of the rupee might have reached its market.⁷²

Lord Lake faced problems in mobility during his visit to Aligarh and this spurred the government to take steps for repairing existing roads, the responsibility for its upkeep being on the local *zamindars* who from 1839 had to pay a special cess for its maintenance; By 1850 there were 141 miles of metalled roads, which had by 1875 increased to 191 miles, and all roads included 520 miles.⁷³ The main highway remained the Grand Trunk road, which traversed Aligarh from south-east to north-west, passing through Sikandra Rao, Akrabad, Aligarh and Somna.⁷⁴ The Mutiny further underlined the need for these. Work on the first railway line connecting Calcutta and Raniganj commenced in 1852, and opened to traffic in 1854. By 1891, the total length of railway line in India was 2,699, miles.⁷⁵ One of the foremost achievements of the Public Works Department was the construction of the Grand Trunk Road that connected Calcutta to Benaras, then to Allahabad and Kanpur, and through the Doab, to Delhi.⁷⁶ The work on the Grand Trunk road connecting Calcutta to Peshawar, commenced in 1836, followed by construction of the Bombay-Agra road in 1840, a total length of 734 miles. Construction of roads connecting Mirzapur with Jabalpur and the Doab, with Sagar via Kalinjar, also commenced during this time.⁷⁷ Road construction, as with canals and railways, was concentrated in districts that were commercially and agriculturally viable or had military importance. McAlpin has argued that expansion of the railroad networks lowered transportation costs, thereby

⁷² Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 53.

⁷³ Nevill, *Gazetteers, Aligarh*, vi (1909) p.66.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* pp.66-7.

⁷⁵ *Census of India, NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, i, p. 84.

⁷⁶ Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, i. p. 92.

⁷⁷ *Calcutta Review*, 1882, xxi, p. 494, as cited by Bhanu, *North Western Provinces*, p. 324.

improving the terms of trade; it led to expansion and penetration of markets in rural areas, creating greater avenues for employment and flow of cash and grain, which strengthened the ability of the peasants to withstand famine.⁷⁸ This theory conveniently fits with the overall thesis that the British rightly achieved famine containment by technological development.

Population and literacy

The NWP&O, was a thickly populated region with a steadily rising population. The first official census in the province was undertaken in 1865. It showed the population as 30, 110,615;⁷⁹ by 1891, it increased to 47,69,576. The female population was persistently much below the male: in 1865, there were 86.49 females to every 100 males,⁸⁰ and the disparity in the sex ratio was well marked during the 1891 and 1901 censuses. Population density varied, and was steadily on the rise; from 373 persons per sq. mile in 1872 it went up to 420 per sq. mile in 1891, but this was in the entire province with wide regional variations.⁸¹ The hill districts of Kumaun and Gharwal were scantily populated (56-72 persons per sq. mile), as also was Bundelkhund, where population ranged from 128 persons to the sq. mile in Lalitpur, to 200 per sq. mile at Hamirpur.⁸² The bulk of the people lived in the Gangetic plain, where the density was as high as 913 persons per sq. mile as in Benaras district, and 441 and 457 persons per sq. mile in the districts of Saharanpur and Muzzfurnagar respectively.⁸³ Obviously,

⁷⁸ McAlpin, 'Railroads, Cultivation Patterns, and Foodgrain Availability: India 1860-1900,' *IESHR*, xii (January - March, 1975), pp.53-8.

⁷⁹ *Census of NWP, 1865, i, General Report and Appendices, A, B, C, & D*, p.8.

⁸⁰ *Census of the NWP, i, 1865*, p.37.

⁸¹ *Census of the NWP&O*, xvi, 1, 1901, p.14.

⁸² *Hamirpur, SR* (1908), p. 1.

⁸³ *Census of the NWP&O*, 1901, xvi, p.14.

the landholdings were larger where the density was less, and vice versa; for example, at Jaunpur, the average cultivable holding was 3.5 acres, as against 7.8 in Meerut. In Deoria sub-division, in the east, the density of population was 1,100 to the sq. mile, the average cultivable holding was 0.65 acres only.⁸⁴ The thickly populated regions felt the impact of famine more severely as resources were less, for example, during 1837-8, and 1896-7, Agra, Kanpur, Farrukhabd, and Bundelkhund districts were most severely affected by emigration, mortality and disease.⁸⁵ The backwardness, impoverishment and consequent proneness of the eastern parts of the province to famines was frequently attributed to overpopulation; here the severity of suffering from famine was pronounced.

The increasing population pressure on arable land, together with increasing indebtedness of cultivators, and a growing tendency among them to assert individual rights, led to fragmenting of land. This gained momentum in the later decades of the nineteenth century. This meant that the per capita output was consistently falling. In Aligarh, as early as 1852, the subdivision of property had been carried to extreme lengths, so that in most villages there were numerous small proprietors whose possessions were inadequate to maintain them in the rank to which they aspired to belong.⁸⁶ In Bijnor, the number of estates trebled between 1872 and 1939.⁸⁷ Muzzafarnagar recorded an eight-fold increase in the number of proprietors, between 1860 and 1921. The collector of Azamgarh observed in 1854 that due to the great

⁸⁴ J.K.Mathur, 'The Pressure of Population:Its Effects on Rural Economy in Gorakhpur district,' *U.P.Agricultural Bulletin*, no. 50 (Allahabad, 1931), as quoted by Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*; p. 235.

⁸⁵ See *Introduction, section II*, pp. 17-19.

⁸⁶ *Aligarh Gazeteers*, vi, p. 135.

⁸⁷ Stokes, 'The Structure of Landholding,' *IESHR*, xii, 2(April-June 1975), p. 116.

subdivision of landed property, “ the number of sharers is enormous, the complication of rights great.”⁸⁸

Of particular significance was illiteracy. In 1872, the total number of literate men was 1,332,683; by 1891, the figure had only increased to 1,495,590.⁸⁹ Female literacy was even lower: in 1891, there were approximately 47,000 women who could read and write, as against 15,500 in 1872, an increase of 0.21 per cent.⁹⁰ Before 1900, the benefits of education were mostly confined to the rich, who could move into avenues of employment other than agriculture, thereby creating diverse sources of entitlements. This would cushion them against the adverse implications of famines, and indeed add to their economic, political, and social resources during famines.⁹¹ Education could have helped public action during famines; to put pressure on government not only to protect their basic entitlements to food, but also demand easy access to medical facilities, clean drinking water, living space, and sanitation. Illiteracy also left the masses open to exploitation in market transactions, and in their interactions with moneylenders and bureaucrats. It ill-equipped them to voice their everyday grievances and sense of exploitation.

Agrarian structure and tenurial arrangements

The NWP&O remained overwhelmingly agrarian throughout the nineteenth century.

Land ownership was of central importance, being an income-bearing asset and

⁸⁸ G.Campbell, offg. Collector, Azamgarh, 29 November 1854, *Selection Records. Govt NWP*, iv (Allahabad, 1868), p. 350.

⁸⁹ *Census of NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, p. 257.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p.261.

⁹¹ The creation of diverse occupations and employment opportunities was specified as one of the

signifying power over people, crops and credit. The material well being of *ryots*, and their ability to withstand famines was dependent on land ownership, and their rights and relationship with the land-owning elite, be they *taluqdars*, *pattidars* or *zamindars*. Often these were also the moneylending segment, and thus the crucial determinants of the *ryot's* well being. The structure of society was shaped by the inter-relationship among these major constituents. The politico-social status and power of these constituents, depended on their economic resources, derived mainly from land. Therefore, a brief discussion of tenurial arrangements is essential.

The province had three distinct tenurial arrangements, - *zamindari*, *mahalwari*, and *talukdari*. In the eastern parts of the NWP, mainly Benaras and its adjacent areas, permanent settlement was made with individual landowners, called *zamindars*, similar to the system in Bengal. A key factor of this system was that, once determined, the land revenue assessment was fixed forever, thus preventing the government from raising the demand. There were intermittent proposals that the 'permanent settlement' should be extended to the NWP&O, but these were resisted. Instead, most of the province was under various forms of temporary (usually thirty years) settlement. In Agra division, the *mahalwari* system prevailed. Under this system, tenurial arrangements were made with co-sharing *zamindari* groups, rather than with any single individual. The *mahal* or estate, was taken as the unit of settlement, and was jointly held by the co-sharers. Sometimes tenurial arrangements were made with landed magnates of the region. In Bundelkhund, the system of *bhaichara* largely prevailed.⁹² The proprietary community who were also the cultivators were related to

principal preventives to famine. *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, ii, p.175.

⁹²Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 82-3; at Hamirpur of the total cultivated area 13.8 per cent was held in single and 23.4 per cent in joint. *zamindari*, 14 per cent in perfect and 33.6

each other by blood, being descendants from a common ancestor. There was thus a caste homogeneity. Sleeman noted,

The Rajput landholders of the Bundelkhund, are linked to the soil, in all their grades from the prince to the peasants, as the highlanders of Scotland were not long ago.⁹³

In Awadh, tenurial arrangements after the Mutiny were made with the landed magnates of the region, the taluqdars.⁹⁴ About 272 taluqdars were granted *sanads*, which conferred on them the right of land ownership and revenue collection. They held estates varying in area from 50,000 to 500,000 acres. Two-thirds of the soil of Awadh, was held by 300 taluqdars.⁹⁵ Many of them held minor jurisdiction over criminal, civil and revenue suits. These *talukdars* were considered more powerful than the *zamindars* of NWP and were, as a matter of policy, favoured politically, socially and economically by the government which viewed them as its allies and the “natural leaders of the people.” Indeed such was the patronage of the government that, through the Taluqdar Relief Act of 1870, it even undertook to rescue any taluqdari estate that had fallen into debt or arrears.

A rough categorization of landowners and peasants is discussed on the basis of land revenue, which reflected the size of landholding throughout the province. Evidence suggests that the pattern was very uneven. Whatever the nature of settlement, at the apex of the landholding hierarchy were a handful of landlords- *zamindars*, *talukdars*

per cent in imperfect pattidari, and 15.2 per cent in *bhaichara* tenure; Raw, *Final SR.* Hamirpur (1908), p.5.

⁹³ Sleeman, *Rambles* i, p. 239.

⁹⁴ After the annexation of Awadh in 1856, Dalhousie wanted tenurial arrangements be made directly with the *ryots*. This would free the cultivators from the tyranny of the taluqdars, whose power the administration wanted to curb. See J. Raj, *The Mutiny and British Land Policy in North India* (London, 1965), pp. 12 -19.

⁹⁵ Crooke, *The North Western Provinces of India*, p. 288; he described Awadh as “The land of great

and *pattidars*, in possession of vast tracts of land; they constituted the aristocracy, and controlled society socially, politically and economically.⁹⁶ They belonged to the upper castes and were *Brahmins*, *Kayasthas*, *Rajputs*, *Thakurs*, and *Ashraf* (if Muslim). They usually paid land revenue of above Rs 10,000, and earned their fortunes from their extensive lands, the numerous cesses they were entitled to, and, often, through usury. For example, Raja Rampal Singh, taluqdar of Kurri Sidhauri estate, in Rae Bareilly district, paid an annual revenue of about Rs 35, 000, and earned almost Rs 500, 000 annually from moneylending alone.⁹⁷ Rai Manik Chand, the landlord of Phulpur, acquired notoriety as one of the hardest usurers ever known, and the worst of landlords.⁹⁸ It has been observed that the relationship of the rich landlords with their tenants was primarily that of creditor and debtor.

Next came a more sizeable class of upper caste landowners, paying land revenue ranging between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000. They seldom worked on their fields personally, because of their social and political prominence and the restrictions on upper castes touching the plough, and therefore employed labour. Some of them, such as the *mukaddams*, *quangoes*, *chauduris*, *tehsildars* and *patwaris*, were customary holders of superior rights, and were incorporated into the revenue collecting machine. They often engaged in money lending and usury as well.

The peasants were divided into many segments, their social and economic

landlords and depressed peasantry.” p.288.

⁹⁶ J.R. McLane, ‘Peasants, Moneylenders, and the Nationalists At the End of the Nineteenth Century,’ *IESHR*, i, no. i (July - September 1963), pp. 66-73.

⁹⁷ Nevill, *Rae Bareilly Gazeeteer*, xxxix (Allahabad, 1905), Appendix, xxxvi.

⁹⁸ P.J. Musgrave, ‘Landlords and Lords of the Land’, *MAS*, vi (1972), p. 266.

differentiation arising primarily from differences in size of holdings, their nature (whether occupancy, fixed rate tenants, special tenants or expropriator tenants), agricultural produce obtained, and the level of their resources.

The intermediary, or middle-ranking peasants, paid land revenue ranging between Rs1,000 and Rs 5,000, worked on their fields, and occasionally employed labour. They usually owned their own bullocks and ploughs, and often engaged in petty moneylending. They usually had enough resources to tide them over famines. Government did not target them as requiring relief and hence did not take steps to strengthen their existing entitlements. However, evidence suggests that it was from this group that large-scale mortgaging and transfer of assets, especially land, took place, leaving them indebted, impoverished and more vulnerable to future famines.

A larger body of lower category peasants paid land revenue of Rs 250 to Rs 1,000. They worked on their fields, and relied on family labour; most often they did not own bullocks and ploughs and had to hire them. Usually *Ahirs*, *Kurmis*, *Gujars*, *Gureriyas*.⁹⁹ They suffered during famines due to erosion of their fragile economic, social and moral entitlements.

Then came the more numerous body of the poor peasants, possessing meagre resources in terms of land, agricultural equipment and cattle, paying revenue ranging between Rs 25 and Rs 250 and nearly always hiring bullocks and ploughs to cultivate their fields. They were officially categorized as 'yeoman farmers',¹⁰⁰ and were *Ahirs*,

⁹⁹Irwin, Garden Of India, pp.53-4.

¹⁰⁰ This category of yeomen farmer' was officially proposed in 1896. Stokes, 'The Structure of Landholding,' *IESHR*, xii, 2 (April- June 1975), p. 114, fn. 3.

Kacchis, Kurmis, and Gujars.¹⁰¹ Their resources from their lands were not enough for survival even in normal times. They, therefore, worked as field labourers and domestic help for rich landlords to generate additional income. During famine their services were dispensed with, thus eroding their resources and ability to gain a subsistence livelihood. The impact of famines was often disastrous on them.

Then came the vast majority of poorer peasants, paying revenue under Rs twenty-five. They formed 85.5 per cent, of the total cultivators and accounted for 17.6 per cent of the land revenue.¹⁰² Usually *Kurmis, Chamars, and Pasis*, most of them were tenants at will, and nearly always worked as field labourers and domestic help. Their crippling poverty was such that in 1919, about half a million of them paid land revenue of Re one or less.¹⁰³ They were the first to need relief during famines.

Then came the landless, unskilled labourers who earned their living by hiring out their physical labour, usually for agriculture related work. In 1887-8, they formed eighteen per cent of the agricultural classes.¹⁰⁴ They were also at the bottom of the social scale, being *Chamars, Pasis, and Koris*.

For them it appears certain, that two full meals a day is a luxury enjoyed only in years of prosperity. They are those who become most promptly dependent on the government for a bare livelihood in times of famine.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹This discussion of the classification of the *zamindars* (proprietors) in the United Provinces, is taken from the *Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee*, ii (Allahabad, 1948), pp.12-17.

¹⁰² Stokes, 'The Structure of Landholding,' *IESHR*, xii, 2 (April -June 1975), p. 114.

¹⁰³ *ibid* p.115.

¹⁰⁴ *A Collection of Papers Connected with an Inquiry into the Condition of the Lower Classes of the Population especially in the Agricultural Tracts of the North Western Provinces and Awadh, Instituted in 1887 -8*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Census of NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, p. 334.

According to Famine reports and more recently Amartya Sen, “ The majority of famine victims in this century and the last has come from this group.”¹⁰⁶ Yet Crook observed that the position of the field day labourer was much better than that of a cultivator with a small piece of land.¹⁰⁷ This point of view was endorsed by some district officers such as Rose of Ghazipur district, who agreed:

In a great many cases these people (field labourers) have a small holding of land .. there is very largely no actual want of food, and passing through the village the general condition of this class, strikes one as being on the whole satisfactory.. I am disposed to negative in its entirety the assumption that this class of the community either wholly or partially suffers from an insufficiency of food.¹⁰⁸

Although there may not have been marked material difference between the landless labourer and the small landholders, the possession of the plot of land gave a sense of independence and helped the owner tide over famine crises, as land was the much-needed guarantee that got subsistence loans. It was, therefore, a valuable resource, which the proprietor fought till the last to hold on to, and the moneylender/ landlord used every possible means to acquire. This is reflected in Benette’s assertion that there were few deaths from hunger amongst even amongst the poorest landholders.¹⁰⁹

The gazetteers and settlement reports, emphasized the caste and class-nexus. This approximation acquires significance as NWP&O which, remained overwhelmingly agricultural; ninety-three per cent of its population lived in rural areas. In 1891, the

¹⁰⁶J.Dreze and A.Sen, *Hunger And Public Action* (Oxford, 1989), p. 6.

¹⁰⁷*A Collection of Papers*, p.16.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 17.

¹⁰⁹*Report On The Scarcity And Relief Conditions In The NWP&O, During The Years 1877-78&1879* (Allahabad, 1880), Report by W.C. Benette, p. 348.

sole occupation of 74.2 per cent of the population was agriculture. The rich landholders belonged to the higher castes, holding the bulk of the land; whereas, the more numerical inferior castes had very little land. This exposed them to great suffering and risk during famines.¹¹⁰ For example, in Bijnor, nearly eighty-six per cent of cultivable land was owned by the influential upper caste zamindari families of Sherkot, Tajpur, Haldaur, Saharanpur, Seohara, and Kiratpur; the bulk of the population was compressed into fourteen per cent of the land which was divided in various forms of *pattidari* tenure.¹¹¹ Here, while the large *zamindars* were generally prosperous, the condition of the smaller proprietors was one of constant struggle for bare subsistence. Most of them supplemented their income by various kinds of services.¹¹² Such a trend is reinforced by table 4 showing the area held by each of the principal castes in the Banda district at the inception of the twentieth century. *Brahmins* and *Thakurs*, though numerically insignificant, were economically dominant and formed the bulk of the proprietary body; the area held by the *Kurmis* was less than three percent, of the cultivable land;¹¹³ while the *Chamars*, who in 1901 constituted sixteen per cent, of the population, held even less.¹¹⁴ Caste and class-nexus may be gauged from the fact that *Chamars* were usually agricultural labourers, and, in 1881, comprised fifteen per cent of the population; agricultural labourers, too were cited at fifteen per cent.¹¹⁵

Table 4 shows the area held by principal castes at the turn of the twentieth century.

¹¹⁰ *Census of the NWP&O, 1891*, xvi, i, p. 331.

¹¹¹ F.J.Pert, *Final SR, Bijnor* (1899), p.13.

¹¹² *ibid.* p.14;

¹¹³ E.de. M. Humphries, *Banda SR* (1909), p.11.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹¹⁵ S. Commander 'The Demographic and Economic Growth in Uttar Pradesh; 1800-1900, in T.Dyson (ed), *India's Historical Demography; Studies In Famine, Disease and Society* (London, 1989), p.55.

Table. 4

Principal castes	Total area	Cultivated area	%of the total area of the district
Brahmins	798,305	356,902	18.32
Thakurs	488,978	288,973	13.72
Musalmans	173,084	88,281	4.67
Kayastha	123,244	55,508	2.94
Kurmi	101,064	53,485	2.83
Bania	88,226	46,45	2.46
Bairagi	36,099	16,536	.88
Goshain	15,814	6,252	.33
Khatttri	6,630	3,796	.20
Lodha	5,470	3,694	.19

Source : E.de. M. Humphries. *Final Settlement report on the revision of the settlement of the Banda district*, 1909. p. 11.

The objective of approximating caste in terms of class is to show that even if traditional vocations were resumed once famine was officially declared over, the services of the majority of lower cultivating castes, poor farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans, did not pick up; and they continued to lack purchasing power. About 11.4 per cent, of the population was engaged in manufacturing and selling goods;¹¹⁶ 7.9 per cent, in commercial occupations serving, as shopkeepers, bankers and merchants.¹¹⁷ About 5.5 per cent, were dependent on 'community services'-barbers, washermen, sweepers, water carriers, domestic servants, and scavengers.

¹¹⁶ *Census of NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, i, p. 332.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 333.

They frequently worked as field labourers too, and were as dependent on good harvests as the cultivators. They were usually paid in kind with foodgrains.¹¹⁸ During famines their services were usually dispensed with and they were the first to fallback on state relief.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was some progress in commercial enterprise, most notably in Meerut, Agra, Aligarh, Kanpur, Benaras, Fatehgarh, and Bijnor. Industries of glass, leather, metals, textiles, sugar, and paper expanded. The benefits were largely confined to traditional commercial castes and classes like *Agarwals*, *Khatris* and *Marwaris*, as the majority of the entrepreneurs belonged to them.¹¹⁹ The 1891 census noted:

Trade beyond doubt is greatly increasing, and whilst it may be believed that pressure of population and the sub-division of land is injuriously affecting the circumstances of the landholders and cultivators, there can be no hesitation in believing that the trader is in the provinces yearly advancing in wealth and importance, and while the Thakur, may be falling into the background the bania, steadily increases his wealth and importance.¹²⁰

Even during famines there was augmentation of their resources. In Meerut, the proportion of agriculturists fell, thanks to urbanization, diversity of occupations, and the growth of a service sector, which also retained its links with the agricultural sector.¹²¹ Here in 1901, forty-two per cent of the people were agriculturists, twenty-one per cent, were supported by industry, and six percent by commerce.¹²² In

¹¹⁸ *ibid.* p.332.

¹¹⁹ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, p.445.

¹²⁰ *Census of NWP&O*, 1891, xvi, 1, p.333.

¹²¹ *ibid.* p. 331. In 1901, it was found that in Jaunpur 75.7 per cent of its population was classified as agricultural land in Meerut only 52.2 per cent. By 1932 this gap widened. 76 per cent of the Jaunpur population was agricultural, 10 per cent was supported by industry, and 5 per cent by commerce.

¹²² Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, pp. 230 -1.

comparison, Kumaun and the eastern divisions of Gorakhpur, Awadh, and Benaras, were almost exclusively agricultural.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to identify the geographical and climatic characteristics of this province, to distinguish between resources and organization of the agrarian economy from the 1830's, before the impact of colonization became intensive. This chapter identifies the areas most prone to famines and details the reasons for this. It has been demonstrated that distinctions based on geography, physical attributes, climate, demography, and fertility of soils are important influences affecting the frequency, impact, and duration of famine.

We must resist over-simplified suggestions that famine and hunger, arise solely from declines in food output and supply. While undoubtedly these are important determinants of food entitlements, other factors such as development of infrastructure, irrigation facilities, development of non-agricultural industries, expansion of education, accessibility to medical facilities, and easy accessibility to food by importing from non-affected areas, which could be facilitated only by developed means of communications are equally significant. This is illustrated by comparing the experience of famines in Bundelkhund and the Meerut region. The western region too experienced sharp reduction in food crops output and came in the grip of famine, but without experiencing acute starvation, mortality, and migration as Bundelkhund and the east of the province. Importantly, subsistence agriculture was not the only source of entitlements here. There was development of industries, leading to non-agricultural

economic opportunities, and better educational facilities. The population density here was less. It was because of these factors that the fortunes of families broadly belonging to the same class, but living in different regions of the province may move in divergent directions.

However, the most important factor determining the level of suffering during famines was undoubtedly land ownership, and diversity of entitlements. Those owning substantial land and also involved in money lending and other commercial activities benefited during famines, because they could loan surplus resources to the needy at exploitative terms.¹²³ They not only controlled affected people's resources, but also their industry, even when normal conditions resumed. These substantial landowners usually belonged to upper castes. The social and economic degradation and dependency of the lower castes/ classes became more pronounced during and in the aftermath of famines.

In the next chapter, some aspects of the colonial impact are examined to ascertain the relationship between the consequent commercialization and monetization of agriculture and attendant changes in land ownership, access to assets, and the impact of the four famines under study.

¹²³ See chs. II, X.

ChapterII: Colonial Impact on the Agrarian Classes

Government policy and its impact: The issue of inequality and famine

The persistence of famines in the NWP&O was related to the extreme socio-economic inequalities discussed in the previous chapter. This link between inequality and hunger is significant especially in the Post-Mutiny era, when the recurrence of famines was viewed as politically, morally, and socially reprehensible. Analysis shows that structural causes like the nature and degree of stratification in land ownership, incidence of taxation, and changes in trends of production, as well as manipulations and interference in market mechanisms, withdrawal of credit, and artificial price rises played an important role in altering the implications of famine. With the development of infrastructure, especially communications, economic relations throughout the NWP&O and the country became linked and interdependent. Relief as well as the actions of the dominant and poorer groups were conditioned by these factors.

Changing British attitudes towards landlords and peasants

Pre-Mutiny British policy towards landlords was complex and ambivalent in NWP. Some like Henry Welsby aware of the necessity of having the goodwill of the landlords, rightly perceived as the controlling authority in the countryside, instructed his subordinates “In all possible cases the settlement is to be made with the zamindars... provided that they offer a fair and equitable jumma.”¹ However, many others like Holt Mackenzie and R.M. Bird were anti-aristocratic and hostile to perpetuating the interests of landlords, whom they perceived to be over-privileged

¹ Proclamation of 14 July 1802, Home Miscellaneous, box 582:2464. UPRAA.

parasitic rent receivers, appropriating more than their fair share of resources, a burden on the state and society.² In many instances, under the influence of the Ricardian theory of rent, revenue settlements were made with village communities, instead of the local landlord.³

The reverse, however, was true in princely Awadh, where the weakening of the Nawabi power created conditions for the enhancement and strengthening of taluqdars, who were known to be refractory. Dalhousie, after the annexation of Awadh, was keen to curb their power and preparing to make revenue settlements with village proprietors, rather than with local landlords.⁴ But the Mutiny changed the situation, in that it demonstrated the unquestionable authority-moral, social and material-which the landlords wielded. Post-Mutiny, it became a matter of policy to befriend and strengthen the interests of the aristocratic classes, who were seen as influential and therefore potential threats.⁵

Accordingly, revenue settlements were made with landlords, and proprietary rights conferred on them. This political policy became almost institutionalized, finding its clearest expression in Harcourt Butler and his 'Awadh Policy.' The arming of the landed aristocracy with magisterial powers, and utilizing their services and advice in relief policy, was a tangible proof of the government's concern to strengthen their

²E. Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford,1959), pp. 115-16; P.D. Reeves, *Landlords and the Governments in Uttar Pradesh; A Study of Their Relations Until Zamindari Abolition* (Oxford,1991), pp.10-17.

³T.E.Metcalf, 'Laissez Faire and Tenant Right In Mid - Nineteenth Century India,' *IESHR*, no.i.i (July - September 1963),pp.76-7.

⁴Reeves, *Landlords and the Government*, pp. 9-11.

⁵Metcalf, *Land, Landlords And The British Raj:North India In the Nineteenth* (California,1979), pp.186-99; S.H.Butler, *Oudh Policy Considered Historically and With Reference to the Present Political Situation* (Allahabad, 1896), pp. 46-9; S.Gopal, *British Policy In India* (Cambridge,1965),pp.7-8.

interests. Mutual sympathy and benefit were the key to this policy. The Englishman and the taluqdar were to stand 'as brothers before the altar of the Empire.'⁶

This policy paid dividends. During famines, the services and advice of the landlords was widely utilized in relief delivery, controlling the countryside. Landlord support, contributed towards strengthening imperial interests in NWP&O. The concern of the British authorities in protecting the interests of the landlords is reflected in the inconsistent policy followed Post-Mutiny. In keeping with the notions of a paternalistic state, they never ceased to profess that the welfare of the peasantry was their prime object, but failed to take any concrete steps to strengthen the position of the weak and oppressed peasantry. In keeping with the spirit of free enterprise, they felt that any intervention on their behalf was " ..an invasion of the right of property and a clog to enterprise and improvement."⁷

By the 1860s, the position of the landlords was very strong and "the landholders were able to mount a successful attack upon the traditional tenant rights."⁸ Increasing indebtedness, consequent land alienation and forced eviction of resourceless peasants assumed endemic proportions by the 1870s. Officials sympathetic to peasants argued for remedial measures, forcing the government to pass tenancy legislation to stem arbitrary enhancement of rent and forced ejection of the *ryots* from their holdings. In NWP&O, Act X of 1859 was passed which made a distinction between tenants on the basis of whether they had, or had not, cultivated lands continuously for twelve years, and for the enhancement of rents of occupancy tenants on certain specified grounds

⁶ Butler, *Oudh Policy; The Policy of Sympathy* (Lucknow, 1906), p.40.

⁷ Metcalf, 'Laissez Faire,' *IESHR*, i, i (1963), p. 79.

⁸ *ibid.* pp. 75-7; B.B. Mishra, *The Central Administration of the East India Company* (Manchester, 1959), pp. 191-6.

by a rent court.⁹ In 1873 an amended Rent Act prescribed stricter rules for enhancement of rent and ejection of tenants.¹⁰ Tenancy legislations were passed in Awadh in 1886 and Agra in 1873, 1881, and 1901. But such measures were half-hearted, offering meagre palliatives to the poorer peasants.¹¹ The measures initially aimed to give substantial relief to such peasants but, under organized opposition from landlord groups, as well as, officials espousing a staunchly pro-landlord policy, such relief was filtered down so as not to compromise landlord interests.¹² A good example is the Awadh Rent Act of 1886 which awarded occupancy rights to a few proprietary tenants but left the authority of the taluqdars unimpaired over the bulk of the peasantry.¹³ The primary intention was to avert any major agrarian and social upheaval.¹⁴ The measures took place in a context of the shift to commercial agriculture, and the demand for payment of high land revenue in cash, increasing pressure on scarce land and increasing indebtedness. The landlords and moneylenders got legal support for eviction of resourceless peasants, generating results that proved controversial.¹⁵ During the 1896-7 famine Lt.-Gov. MacDonnell cautioned

I think it will be our fault if most of the Hindu population is alienated from us; and this should certainly not occur if the landlords are on our side....our policy in this regard must be considerate and lenient, and we must so far as possible avoid interference between landlord and tenant.¹⁶

⁹ *IFC, Report, 1880-5, ii, p.116.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.116.

¹¹ The Act passed in 1886 provided that all ordinary tenants were entitled to remain in possession of their land for a period of seven years, on a fixed rental. At the end of this period the landlord could eject him or enhance rent by not more than 6 1/4 per cent. Metcalf, 'Laissez-Faire', *IESHR*, i (1963), p.79.

¹² W.C.Neale, 'Economic Change in Rural India. Land Tenure and Reform in U.P.' as quoted by Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, p. 274.

¹³ *ibid.* p.288; Metcalf, 'Laissez-Faire', *IESHR*, i (1963), pp.77-9.

¹⁴ F.C.R. Robinson, 'Consultation and Control in the United Provinces; Government and its Allies, 1860-1906', *MAS*, 5,4 (1971), p.315; Metcalf, 'Laissez faire', *IESHR*, pp.77-9.

¹⁵ M.D.Morris, 'Towards a Reinterpretation', *IESHR*, v, i (March 1968), pp.1-16; Matasui, 'On the Nineteenth-Century', *IESHR*, v, i (March 1968), pp.17-34; Chandra, 'Reinterpretation of Nineteenth Century', *IESHR*, v, i (March 1968), pp.35-76; Ray Chaudhuri, 'A Reinterpretation of', *IESHR*, v, i (March, 1968), pp.77-100.

¹⁶ MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 July 1897, pp.171-2. (Eng.Hist.C.353, New Bodleian Library, Oxford).

Some scholars argue that these changes did not affect the basic structure of society, leading in fact, to improvements in the material condition of the masses. This is refuted by other scholars who argue that changes in the social structure which were pre-colonial but were accentuated during the course of the nineteenth century, served largely to strengthen the position of landlords, moneylenders, or anyone with surplus resources and undermined the position of the poor peasants. As an index of this, they cite the increased inter-class transfer of assets, especially land from poor and middling peasants to the rich, the increased eviction of tenants from their landholdings and the sale of land for arrears, this being facilitated by the law courts. These developments were hardly compatible with the rights and interests of the lower peasantry.

In pursuance of this argument, it is worth noting that in medieval times, poor peasants could bring cultivable wasteland under use and also had free access to fuel, pasturage, forest produce, and other subsistence resources, which were communally owned or freely supplied.¹⁷ As the nineteenth century progressed, colonial restrictions on land and forest produce, increasing emphasis on private ownership and growing population pressure contributed towards the narrowing and near elimination, of these privileges. For instance, in 1839, Tyler, the magistrate of Mathura, wrote to Hamilton, the commissioner of his division, highlighting the deteriorating position of scavengers in the district. He pointed out that at the time of the cession of Mathura to the British, scavengers claimed the filth taken from private houses, converted it to manure, and made some income out of selling it. Tyler found that this privilege had been taken away by *zamindars* who claimed it as a perquisite appertaining to their *zamindari* and

¹⁷ S.Chandra, *Society, Jagirdari Crisis and the Village* (New Delhi, 1982), p. 65.

appropriated the proceeds for their own benefit. Tyler argued that, as the *zamindars* had no legitimate right to do so. But, instead of restoring this right to the scavengers, he felt that the government should step in as “The proceeds of the sale of manure may with great advantage be appropriated to municipal purposes.”¹⁸ Elite groups, backed by the government and the law courts, were able to ignore local and communal norms and the traditional rights and privileges of the poor *ryots*.

By the 1870s, exploitative conditions of indebtedness and dependency compelled the administration to institute an enquiry into the economic conditions of the lower peasantry. Despite minor variations, reports from all over the provinces, especially central and eastern, emphasized their poor condition,¹⁹ their chronic servitude and their dependence on superior landlords, moneylenders and petty bureaucrats, like the *qanungo*, *patwari* and *tehsildar*, for agrarian and subsistence loans, even in normal years; these power groups were able to extract an increasing social and economic price for less reciprocal obligations.²⁰ The collectors of Allahabad, Banda and Bijnor reported that the majority of the poor peasants were habitually ill fed.²¹ The greater part of the lives of these *ryots* was spent in contracting loans, paying them and the interest and, since the majority could never repay their debts, their liability passed on to their sons after their death. Reports from Meerut division struck a more optimistic note. Here the cultivators had the means of satisfying their bare wants; labourers

¹⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, Mathura, judicial, 129, S. no.3, list 1; from Tyler, magistrate of Mathura, to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div, 15 March 1839.

¹⁹ The use of the term lower peasantry includes in its category yeomanry farmers, occupancy tenants as well as tenants at will, land owners possessing below twenty-five acres or less, and field labourers. See pp. 52-4.

²⁰ *A Collection Of Papers, 1887-88* pp.6-19 especially 18-19.

²¹ *Precis of the Reports Received on the Enquiry made Into The Condition of the Lower Classes of the Population*; Revenue Scarcity deptt, 1888, f.16, Appendix A, pp. 16, 18; Similar were the views of Harrington of Fyzabad, and Irwin of Rai Bareli; *North Western Provinces Gazetteers*, v, p.331.

were occasionally hard-pressed.²² The Famine Commission report showed the universality of the situation, noting that

from evidence collected from all parts of India, about one-third of the land holding class are deeply and inextricably in debt, and that at least an equal proportion are in debt, though not beyond the power of recovering themselves.²³

Taxation and its impact

The state's dependence on landlords and moneylenders/traders led them to continue the pre-colonial taxation policy even though this discriminated amongst cultivators on the basis of economic position, caste, and nature of crops grown. The *pargana* variations notwithstanding, what stands out is the low payment of land revenue by rich upper caste cultivators, the tax being most regressive and heavy on lower-castes, poor peasants. Here again, caste reinforced class. Not only state revenue and salaries of officials, but also the luxurious ways of the aristocracy, and the concessions enjoyed by superior peasants, accrued from the surplus taxes appropriated from the lower-caste poor peasants. In Moradabad, Mathura, Agra and Rai Bareli, *Rajputs* and *Brahmans* paid much less rent than the general average of the lower-castes tenants and, in Lucknow, they were exempt from taxes like *Sawai*, *Gaon Kharach* and *Mokuddum Malik*.²⁴ In Rai Bareli district itself, *Thakurs* paid a rate 21.4 per cent lower than the low-caste rate, and 16.6 per cent lower than the general rate, while in the Tiloi estate (in Rai Bareli) *Brahmins* and *Rajputs* paid rents nearly one-fourth of what was paid by tenants in general.²⁵

²² *Precis*, p.16.

²³ *IFC, Report, 1880-5*, ii, p.131.

²⁴ Brockman, *Gazetteers, Mathura*, vii (1911), p.131; *Gazetteers, Agra*, viii (1905) p. 97; H. Butts, *Lucknow SR* (1904), pp.74 -5; H.J.Boas, *Moradabad SR* (1909), p.7.

²⁵ S.H.Freemantle, *Rai Bareli SR*, *Oudh* (1897), pp. 56-7.

The following table shows the different rates for Rai Bareli district:

Table. 5

Thakur	All high castes	All low castes	General
Rs A . P.	Rs A. P.	Rs A. P.	Rs. A. P.
3, 5, 5.	3, 8 , 10 .	4 , 4 , 2 .	4, 0, 1

Source: *Report on the Second Settlement of the Rai Bareli District*, 1897, p. 57.

Besides this discrimination, there were other cesses and commissions that landlords could extort as their right or ‘*haq*,’ such as ‘*nazrana*’ from the craftsmen and artisans, in the form of shoes, blankets, utensils, hides, and other articles. They compelled *ryots* to render ‘*begar*’ (forced labour) for purposes not sanctioned by custom or government, seized their bullocks and ploughs, even extorting a house tax, when it was being constructed, and a commission, if major alterations were carried out. Even petty officials like the *patwaris*, *qanungoes*, and *tehsildars* benefited from such practices. In Rohilkhund, during the years of British rule, petty revenue farmers, known as *thekedars* were successful in acquiring extensive tracts of land for themselves, and in time became a distinct group of landowners by resorting to malpractices and misusing official position for personal gain.²⁶ All this left very little for the ordinary cultivator’s subsistence. This generated another form of rural tension, not only between victims and dominant groups, but also among members of the elite. The extent of the gap between different peasant groups, resulting from this customary and officially induced stratification, was most manifest in the size of peasant holdings, number of crops sown, and cattle possessed.

²⁶ Brennan, ‘Social Change,’ *IESHR*, 7, no.4 (1970), pp. 443-65.

Economic change and its impact

The decision to collect land revenue in cash was not new, as the pre-colonial Indian economy was by no means a natural subsistence economy. From as early as the thirteenth century, it was not unknown to collect revenue in cash.²⁷ From Akbar's reign under the *zabti* system of revenue assessment, land revenue was collected in cash.²⁸ By the turn of the nineteenth century, the cash nexus was well established and pervasive.²⁹ This, and the encouragement and preference given to cash crops, it has been argued, had a striking impact on the economy of the NWP&O. The spread of money economy meant the exposure of even the poorest *ryots* to the uncertainties and fluctuations of often inaccessible markets, driving them into the hands of usurers, or anyone with surplus resources, for loans. This further perpetuated existing inequalities.³⁰

Much has been written about the land revenue system in NWP&O, which by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, had 'settled' the districts, comprising the Ceded and Conquered Provinces. Land surveys and revenue assessments had been carried out, a secure land-owning class identified, and revenue settlements made with them usually for a period of thirty years. It is clear that initially this revenue demand was unrealistically assessed and excessive; officials acknowledged that this was because "No rights of records existed, no knowledge of prevailing tenures was available ..no standard of reference possessing any authority that commanded respect could be made

²⁷ S.Chandra, 'Some Aspects of the Growth of a Money Economy in India During the Seventeenth Century,' *IESHR* (December 1966), iii, no. 4, pp. 322-4.

²⁸ *ibid.* p.326.

²⁹ *Moradabad SR.* (1909), p.5; C.Hope, *Final Barabanki SR* (1899), p.4; Irwin, *The Garden of India*, pp. 39-40.

³⁰ R.C.Dutt, *The Economic History Of India In the Victorian Age* (London, 1904), pp.348-50; Rothmund, 'Government, Landlords,' *IESHR*, 1,4 (1969), p.352; C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen And Bazaars; North Indian Society In the Age Of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, 1983), p.48.

use of.”³¹ District officials protested that settlements were destructive and therefore be moderated. They emphasized that subsistence needs be prioritized, and asked for concessions in accordance with local circumstances. In principle the revenue rates were to be fixed, according to the fertility of soil and proportion of produce per acre. In practice, revenue demand was fixed on the basis of average yields, based on optimistic official forecasts of the impact of cash cropping and commercialization. Such averages were calculated on the higher side, overlooking the basic reality that, even if yields were according to assessments, they did not yield high profits, given that prices would fall, especially in the aftermath of famines. Thus, even in good years, the *ryots* were hardly able to make any profits. This would be especially true of areas where irrigation facilities were scanty and rainfall capricious, as in Bundelkhund and in the east of the province.

Famine administrators and several officials linked the frequent occurrence of famine to high revenue assessments rigorously and punctually collected.³² They underlined that overassessments, reduced the subsistence margin of the *ryots*, impoverishing them, increasing their indebtedness, and making them vulnerable to famines. Further, in order to meet high revenue demands on time, peasants were compelled to resort to cash cropping, mortgaging and, selling their land, cattle and agricultural implements, leaving them indebted and resourceless to cope with subsistence crises.³³ In 1855, Mayne, the collector of Banda, wrote of the impact of high revenue assessment:

And when the jama is only collected by means of extensive private transfers and mortgages of the land, by the sale of agricultural cattle and implements of husbandry, by the cutting down and sale of village orchards for timber, and by the sale of tiles on their houses, and in some instances by the sale of their

³¹ B.Smith, *Report, 1860-1*, ii, p.19.

³² Metcalf, *Land landlords*, pp. 55-7.

³³ Brennan, 'Social Change,' *IESHR*, 7,4 (1970), p. 450.

children, where the people are completely poverty stricken, their houses deprived of ordinary household furniture, and the houses falling into ruins, their clothes threadbare, and themselves weak and emaciated by hunger: where the cultivators are reduced to depend for their support on the wild berries of their jungle, and water, .. an absolute necessary of life - owing to the non repairs of tanks and wells, is not procurable within several miles, where land is year by year falling out of cultivation, and agricultural population diminishing, it is very good proof that a district is overassessed, and requires some radical measures of relief.³⁴

Despite these protests, the administrators could not bring themselves to make more generous revenue settlements even in the 1870s, because of the government's need for cash, and the careful application of the principles of political economy, which seemed to make these settlements appear inherently rational and fair.³⁵ The revenue system was, thus, not designed, to be considerate of the vulnerability of the *ryots*. Recent scholarship including Stokes, has endorsed this view.³⁶

Apart from the high revenue assessment, there were other factors which threatened the fragile subsistence livelihood of the *ryots*, in ways that fit the conception of famine as a process. The insistence was on full collection of revenue on time, and the threat of eviction and sale of land by the court meant that those who were unable to pay lost their land; this became particularly endemic during famines. Thus, under pressure to meet their basic revenue obligations, there could hardly be any accumulation of resources to strengthen their entitlements and cushion them against calamities even in fertile tracts. This difficult situation was further compounded, when subjected to prolonged and severe fiscal shocks, such as famines. An example of this was Aligarh and its adjacent areas like Mursan and Hathras. These were great trading

³⁴ E.de.Humphries, *FinalBanda SR*, p. 17.

³⁵ Brennan, 'Social Change', *IESHR*, 7,4 (1970),p.450.

³⁶ Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, pp.10-14, 125-9-; Metcalf, *Land, landlords*, pp.106 –15.

marts, blessed with a congenial climate, soil fertility, and relatively well-developed infrastructural facilities; yet this tract was famine prone, and suffered severely during the 1837-8 and 1860-1, famines. What could be the reason for this?

Here, the revenue settlement made in the period 1833-7, was fixed at an all- time high of about Rs nineteen lakhs.³⁷ *Ryots* unable to meet it sold off their land. Between 1838-52 in all 1,005,269 acres or 83.6 per cent of the land was alienated. As many as 110 estates were sold for arrears of revenue, while 210 were farmed out, or transferred from similar causes; 352 estates were voluntarily alienated, and 657 auctioned by decree of the civil court. Between 1838-48 alone, nearly seventy-nine per cent of the land was alienated because of overassessment.³⁸ Atkinson observed that land lost its value, because of the severity of the assessment:

Between 1839 and 1852, land fetched only one and a half times the government demand, and the percentage of transfers to area show that the purchasers only held the land for a short time, and gladly allowed the speculators to come in.³⁹

During the 1871-2 settlement, land revenue was further enhanced by 16.2 per cent of the previous demand, and was fixed at nearly twenty- two lakhs.⁴⁰ This accelerated the transfer of land by private agency, as well as the decree of courts.⁴¹ In the period 1872-98, 346,118 acres were transferred, 9,29,311 acres sold, and 133,768 acres mortgaged, comparatively less than the figures cited above. In Mathura, the revenue demand in 1833 was fixed at a high of approximately fourteen lakhs. This district

³⁷ *Gazetteers, Aligarh*, vi (1909), p.132.

³⁸ *ibid.* p.134.

³⁹ Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive* (1875) p. 560.

⁴⁰ *Gazeetteers, Aligarh*, vi, (1909), p.136.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.136.

suffered acutely during the 1837-8 famine, and suffering people unable to meet the high revenue demand migrated in such large numbers that the district could not recover its prosperity for many years to come. Between 1842-72, a period which saw two major famines, roughly one-third of Mathura district changed hands; these transfers, especially in the trans-Yamuna tracts, were attributed to the severity of revenue demand.⁴² Land lost its value, and was sold between 1837-8 and 1848-50, at Rs 3.44 per acre. From 1880 to 1900, land paying a revenue of Rs 3,07,207 in the aggregate changed hands by private sale at Rs 13.98 per acre, and after this the price of land rose still further.⁴³ In contrast, during the 1896-7 famine, Mathura scarcely suffered and this was primarily attributed to liberal remissions and suspension of revenue to the tune of Rs 1,23, 904.⁴⁴

In British Bundelkhund, overassessment was general before the Mutiny, resulting in widespread displacement of the *bhaichara* communities, especially in Banda and Hamirpur.⁴⁵ In the Doab and in Bundelkhund the revenue assessment in 1805 totalled Rs thirty-six lakhs, which by 1818 increased to Rs 118 lakhs.⁴⁶ In Hamirpur the revenue demand was fixed at Rs 14,18,421 in 1815 a steep rise of forty-six per cent in the eastern parganas and of twenty-one per cent in Rath and Panwari.⁴⁷ Despite

⁴² *Gazetteers, Mathura*, vii (1911), p.151.

⁴³ *ibid.* p.134.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 55.

⁴⁵ Stokes, 'Peasants, Moneylenders, and Colonial Rule: An Excursion into Central India,' in S. Bose (ed). *Credit, Markets*, pp. 60-3.

⁴⁶ Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, p. 89.

⁴⁷ *Gazetteers, Hamirpur*, xxii, p.100.

collector Forde's protest at the arbitrariness of the demand, it was not revised in the 1821 and 1826 settlements.⁴⁸ Hamirpur suffered grievously in all the four famines, and was the worst afflicted, even within Bundelkhund, during the 1833 and 1837-8 famines. Despite this the greater portion of the revenue was exacted, remission and suspension of taxes being meagre.⁴⁹ Balances increased as a matter of course. Proprietors resigned their estates, or absconded in large numbers, leaving the tract desolate and deserted. The government, in sanctioning the 1842 settlement, considered the distress in the district to arise as much from seasons as from the effects of overassessment of revenue, and noted that ungrudging and liberal remissions were urgently called for.⁵⁰ The settlement officer, Allen, reduced the revenue demand in parganas Maudha, Sumerpur, Rath, and Panwari by 19.6 per cent. Muir, his successor, followed suit, reducing the revenue demand in Hamirpur and Jalalpur by 9.5 per cent of the previous demand.⁵¹

In Banda, the revenue demand was fixed at Rs 19, 52, 955 involving an increase of 26 per cent.⁵² Campbell, the collector, protested that the settlement was "unbearable." Estates defaulted but found no purchasers. During the five years of Warring's settlement, no less than fifty-four villages were sold annually in the district. Land lost its value to the extent that of the eighty-four villages assessed at Rs 2,33,862 in Banda and put up for sale, only fourteen assessed at about twenty-three thousand rupees found purchasers.⁵³ This generated a great deal of official concern, and led R.N. Cust to sum up the position in Banda thus:

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.100.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.102.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.104.

⁵² *Gazetteers, Banda*, xxi (1909), p.128.

⁵³ Humphries, *Final Banda SR* (1909), p.16.

The community love their villages, and cling to their lands, as before, in the capacity of cultivators. They have taken up new trades, and can with difficulty be tempted to take up foreign service; but the 'power of management' appears to have gone from them by the destruction of their credit; and in a tightly assessed estate, the zamindaree profits are but the profits of management. Pure rent has been reduced to a cypher. We cannot wonder than if property had to become valueless.⁵⁴

Such a state of things came to a head during 1837-8. Like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Bengal, evidence from NWP&O also, indicates that dispossession of land accelerated during famines.⁵⁵ In NWP&O, the 1830s were characterized by widespread land transfers, linked primarily to prevailing agrarian and commercial depression and overassessed revenue demand paid in cash and rigidly collected.⁵⁶ The 1837-8 famine, was so severe that it left not only most peasants, but even some of the richest landlords like Begum Sumroo, in debt; they petitioned the government for relief, in the form of loans, suspension and remission of revenue, which was endorsed by district officers as the most effective form of relief. Yet the Sudder Board insisted on full collection of revenue, success in which reflected an officer's merit and efficiency.⁵⁷ In Hathras and Mursan, the important trading marts in Aligarh, arrears mounted to Rs 36,000 during 1837-8, and when, by 1841, despite remissions of Rs twenty-two thousand, these arrears could not be recovered, nine villages were sold.⁵⁸ In Mainpuri, Hamirpur and Kanpur, many cultivators deserted their lands as they were unable to meet the high revenue demand which the authorities were bent on

⁵⁴ R.N.Cust, *Selections from the Records of the government of the NWP, New series*, iv (Allahabad, 1868), 26 January 1855, p.346.

⁵⁵ see ch. X, pp. 416-21.

⁵⁶ Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change*, p. 132.

⁵⁷ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, ii, p.127.

⁵⁸ Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, p.109.

collecting. In 1841, lands assessed at Rs 54,000 were sold for recovery of arrears at Mainpuri alone.⁵⁹ In Banda, the revenue arrears that accrued during 1837-9 could not be recovered till the 1840s. Massive transfers of land took place between 1843-60, the trend accelerated during the famines of 1860-1,⁶⁰ and 1864-8, leading to a fall of sixteen per cent in cultivated area in Banda and consequent loss of revenue.⁶¹ Young found that in Sultanpur much of the debt in 1868 dated back to the failure of harvests in 1864-5.⁶²

During the 1868-9 famine, *Marwari* moneylenders gained control over extensive tracts of land in Bundelkhund, especially Jhansi.⁶³ In Hamirpur, the revenue demand was fully collected (apart from Rs 280) leading to a sharp increase in sale and transfer of land, both privately and by court orders.⁶⁴ Officials attributed the depressed condition of the landowners primarily to the severe enforcement of land revenue in unfavourable seasons, compelling *ryots* to sell their land at ruinous prices.⁶⁵

In the 1830s and 40s, due to defaults in payment of land revenue, forced auctioning of land to execute court decrees was common. Such sales approximated 2,000 acres per year, spurring the Board of Revenue to note, “The entire prostration of the indigent but powerful debtor, before the weak but wealthy creditor.”⁶⁶ The districts hardest hit by such sales were Aligarh, Agra, Mathura, Fatehpur, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Bareilly, Jalaun, Hamirpur, and Banda. In Rohilkhund, during the first fifteen years

⁵⁹ *Mainpuri SR* (1906), pp.45-6.

⁶⁰ B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.33.

⁶¹ *Gazetteers, Banda*, xxi,p.132.

⁶² *Oudh Selections*, 1868-9, pp. 64 -5.

⁶³ *Jhansi, SR* (1871),p.49.

⁶⁴ *Revenue Administration Report*, no. 345 of 1868, box 17,serial.12,list19. From C, Grant, collector of Hamirpur, to M.H. Court, commissioner Allahabad, 10 October 1868.

⁶⁵ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5,ii, p.127;

⁶⁶ Metcalf, *Land Landlords*, pp. 124 -5.

of British rule, the sale of land for revenue arrears that had to be paid in cash was very high.⁶⁷ Coercive processes were employed to recover arrears, resulting in large-scale sale of land by decrees of court, apart from what was sold by consent of the parties.⁶⁸ In Hamirpur, between 1815 and 1818, as many as thirty-nine estates were sold at public auctions for a price barely exceeding one-third of their yearly demand, and 178 estates had to be farmed out. At Aligarh, between 1833-7, as many as 657 estates were sold by the decree of civil courts.⁶⁹ In total, between 1839 and 1858, 115,000 acres, or just under ten per cent of the total cultivated area of the district, was transferred by the revenue process. Another 565,000 acres changed hands privately or were forcibly auctioned in accordance with court decrees.⁷⁰ The acquisition of land with the aid of the decree of courts was so great that Atkinson dubbed it to be “.. a total revolution in the body proprietary, for which it is difficult to find a parallel in these provinces.” Even till 1896-7 famine, alienation of land was heavy. Total area transferred by court orders in NWP&O was 185,135 acres and by private contract or gift as high as 468,626 acres.⁷¹

Morris talks in terms of recovery of lost assets, including land in inter-famine years. He criticizes the tendency of some scholars to base their conclusions only on evidence from famine years, which he calls, “occasional evidence.”⁷² However, empirical evidence shows that land sold or mortgaged during famine could hardly ever be recovered during normal times. Thus, each famine left the affected *ryots* and even

⁶⁷ Brennan, 'Social Change,' *IESHR*, 7,4 (1970), p.449.

⁶⁸ In a short span of four years, (1810-1814), at Aligarh 228 villages with an aggregate jama of Rs.2, 53, 942 were sold to recover arrears. See Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, pp. 56-7.

⁶⁹ *Gazetteers, Aligarh*, vi, p.134.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.151.

⁷¹ *Administration Report, NWP&O*, 1895-6, p.27.

⁷² M.D. Morris, 'Economic Change and Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century India', *IESHR*, III, no.2 (June 1966), pp.190-2.

some landlords vulnerable to further dispossession and impoverishment.⁷³ Government instituted Inquiries to probe the questions of increasing land alienation, indebtedness and poverty of *ryots* well up to the 1890's, shows that the lot of the majority of cultivators did not improve. What is relevant for our purposes in this controversy, is that land alienation assumed an endemic form during famine years.

Development of infra- structure

Elimination of famines was an important aim in the scheme of imperial consolidation and expansion of power. Irrigation development was considered an effective means for achieving this, though this was not possible even by the turn of twentieth century.

Canals

Canal irrigation, as indicated in chapter one, was most fully developed in the Doab.⁷⁴ By 1860-1 canals irrigating an area of about 1,000,000 acres.⁷⁵ By 1901 the system extended to twenty-two of the forty-eight districts in the province.⁷⁶ Some of the outstanding works of canal irrigation were the eastern and western Yamuna canals, and the Ganga canal. The latter project in 1850 was described by its British eulogizers "As a work, which stands out unequalled in its class and character among the civilized nations." This canal, the first constructed and designed by Sir Proby Cautley, owed its origin to the 1837-8 famine. Commenced in 1842, it started from Hardwar, and came up to the central plateau of the Ganga-Yamuna-Doab. From here it bifurcated into

⁷³ Scarcity deptt, 1902, August, 1902, f. 488, *Decennial Report*, p. 21.

⁷⁴ Stone, *Canal Irrigation*, p.2.

⁷⁵ B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p. 81.

⁷⁶ *Census NWP&O*, 1901, xvi, i, p.12.

several branches. Deoband branch to the west was fifty-two miles long, while the Anupshar branch was 107 miles long; the lower Ganga canal⁷⁷ took a semi-circular course, touching Aligarh, Kanpur, Etawah, Fatehgarh, and Bulandshahar. Including distributaries and branches, the canal's effective length was 3,800 miles.⁷⁸ Other distributaries and canals were Nagina canal in Bijnor, and the Dehradun canal. Mathura and Agra were irrigated by the Agra canal. Meerut district benefited immensely from canal irrigation. In 1872-3, 6.5 per cent of its cultivated area was under canal irrigation, as against the corresponding figures of 15.8 per cent in Muzuffurnagar, 12.8 in Bulandshahar, 9.8 in Aligarh, and 7.2 per cent in Saharanpur.⁷⁹

In sharp contrast, canal development remained entirely neglected in the famine-prone Bundelkhand region until 1878, when it was proposed to develop a network of canals drawing on the Betwa and Ken rivers. The Betwa canal, along with the Paricha reservoir, was constructed between 1881-5, and, by the end of the century, gave complete protection to two, and partial protection to the other two of the four tehsils in the Jalaun district.⁸⁰ In Banda, the Ken canal gave protection to three of the district's five *tehsils*. The Rath *tehsil* in Hamirpur was protected by the Dhasan canal by the turn of the twentieth century.⁸¹ By 1896-7 the total area irrigated by canals was 2,000,000 acres.⁸²

The following shows the area irrigated by wells, canals, ponds in the NWP&O in 1880:

⁷⁷ W. Crooke, *The North Western Provinces Of India- Their History, Ethnology And Administration* (London, 1897), pp. 142-3.

⁷⁸ *Cambridge History of India*, vi, p. 85; Bhanu, *History, Administration*, pp. 313-14.

⁷⁹ *Meerut SR*, p. 19.

⁸⁰ Knox, *Notes*, p. 25.

⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 25.

⁸² *Decennial Report*, p. 14.

Table.6

	NWP acres	Awadh acres	Total acres
Wells	4,480,000	1,314,000	5,794,000
Canals	1,694,000	-	1,694,000
Rivers & Ponds	1,985,000	1,982,000	3,967,000
Total	8,159,000	3,296,000	14,455,000

Source: *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1880-5*, ii, p.85.

In the light of the stark difference between canal provision in the Doab and the Bundelkhund, it is relevant to question the suppositions behind the emphasis on canal development, and how effectively protection against famine and drought was thus increased. Most officials including famine administrators, stressed the development of canals as one of the principal counter measures to famine, a view endorsed by the Famine Code of 1880 and the Famine Commission of 1898.⁸³ They were agreed that “Among the means that may be adopted for giving India direct protection from famine arising from drought, the first place must unquestionably be assigned to irrigation.”⁸⁴ Irrigation had the potential to prevent and mitigate the effects of famine, consequent loss of revenue, and disruption of trade. It would also facilitate the expansion of agriculture and generate wealth.⁸⁵ During 1860-1 famine the number of boats on the Ganga canal increased from 200 to 1,000 between January and June 1861, no doubt facilitating trade especially movement of grains. Besides it also helped affected people to travel cheaply. This spurred Baird Smith, to strongly

⁸³ Girdlestone emphasized “irrigation was the only means of preventing famines.” Girdlestone, *Report*, p.109.

⁸⁴ *IFC, Report, 1880-5*, ii, p.150. On importance for expanding irrigation works see *IFC, 1880-5*, ii, pp.150-69.

recommend that not only should canals be extended, but, importantly canal communications be extended and strengthened in all the commercial marts. He also recommended modifications of six bridges towards the lower end of the Ganga canal. Docks for the storage of boats, at Roorkee and Kanpur; sheds for goods at different landing places, landing platforms, cranes and all minor aid required by traders for security and convenience be provided.⁸⁶ Such measures would stimulate trade and mitigate the effects of famine. It reflects official over-optimism rooted in the notion that the power of science and technology were powerful enough to successfully overcome natural scourges. It would, therefore be worthwhile to examine the scholarly verdict on the impact of canal irrigation.

Proponents of canal irrigation emphasized the productivity gains, especially the intensification of agriculture, “Untold augmentation that accrued to the agricultural resources of the people, especially in time of drought.”⁸⁷ Stone, attributed the principal source of prosperity of all groups, in the western part of the NWP&O, to the development of canal irrigation. He considered, it ensured a steadiness in the outturn, which contributed to the prosperity, and the comparative immunity of the region to famines and scarcities.⁸⁸

Proponents emphasized that even in the same districts, the impact of famine varied because of canal irrigation. For example, in the ‘dry’ southern unirrigated *parganas* of Kanpur, subsistence crops were entirely destroyed, and the *banias* refused loans, while the landlords were not in a position to help; in canal irrigated villages, on the

⁸⁵ B. Chandra, *IESHR*, v, no.1 (March 1868), p. 9.

⁸⁶ B. Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.84.

⁸⁷ R. Temple, *The Story of My Life*, ii (London, 1896), p.74.

⁸⁸ Stone, *Canal Irrigation*, pp. 340-5.

other hand, there was a substantial area under indigo and sugarcane crops; these fetched a good price and constituted a certain degree of security for the *bania*, who did not withdraw capital assistance, so that distress was contained. In Lalitpur, during the 1868-9 famine, villages with tanks were comparatively better off than the unirrigated ones. *Sathia* rice was grown around the edges of the tank, and no cattle died of thirst. Also, wherever there were tanks, wells were filled with water. During all four famines, cultivators having access to irrigation such as at Meerut were able to produce enough to carry them over to the next harvest, and even sell them to their best advantage. It was noted “ The end of the famine (1896-7) left them in a state of prosperity.”⁸⁹ However, the benefits of canal irrigation would have been considerably enhanced had the government totally suspended the cesses on the use of canal water during famines.

In contrast, some scholars have contended that the benefits derived were very different from the suppositions. First, protection from famines was limited, as was evident from the severity of the suffering during the 1868-9, 1877-8, and 1896-7 famines, even though irrigation works were by that time, at a mature stage of development. Canal irrigation was concentrated in areas with plenty of fertile soils, and where cash cropping dominated, such as Meerut, Muzzfarnagar, Saharanpur, Aligrah, Kanpur. Cash cropping was largely in the hands of few persons, possessing capital resources and able to make long term investments; benefits, therefore, accrued to them.

⁸⁹ *Deccennial Report*, p. 18.

In famine prone Bundelkhund, canal irrigation was virtually non-existent till 1880. One reason could be that the heavy clayey soils *mar* and *kabar*, were not suited to canal irrigation. In the winter irrigation brought rust and blight, not to mention the ever-present danger of being overrun by *kans*, which would render land uncultivable for years. Thus, subsistence crops remained unprotected, and, there was hardly any positive impact on their output, which meant that, the majority of the *ryots* dependent on subsistence cropping, derived virtually no benefits and remained unprotected from famines.⁹⁰ Since cultivators preferred to use canal facilities, for which they had to pay heavy tax, mostly for cultivating and protecting cash crops, the results were necessarily selective and lopsided, as the benefits largely accrued to the richer cultivators and the moneylenders. This induced more imbalances in the economy,⁹¹ making the “exploitation of the strata of poor peasants more intense.”⁹² Another deleterious effect of canals was the further stimulus they gave to double cropping, leading to the exhaustion of the soils, and the spread of *reh*, salinity and swamps which bred diseases, all of which contributed to a fall in soil fertility.⁹³

Railways

The second-half of the nineteenth century witnessed development of - roads, railways, telegraph, and steamships; these were crucial given the importance assigned to private trade in famine relief and prevention. The opening of the Suez

⁹⁰ *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-8&79, Pitcher Report, p.10; Revenue Administration Report, NWP, 1880-1, p.2.*

⁹¹ Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, i, pp. 64-91

⁹² Whitcombe asserts, “The canals did not remedy the growing imbalance, still less did it protect the people from scarcity and famine, contrary to the retrospective assertions of Sir. John Strachey.” *Agrarian Conditions*, i, p.90.

⁹³ Sleeman, *Journey Through The Kingdom Of Oude*, i (London, 1858), pp. 33-4; Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, i, pp. 75-90.

Canal in 1869 gave a spurt to trade and commerce. The importance attached by officials to the development of communications, is reflected in the views of John Strachey:

although the entire prevention of famines..is beyond the power of any government, we can do much to mitigate them by removing obstacles which hinder commercial intercourse, and by means which increase and secure the production increase of land. The instruments by which we can do this are roads, railways, works of irrigation, and wells.⁹⁴

Contemporary officials, as well as Famine Commission reports, noted with some exaggeration the dynamism in private trade and the greater market integration in terms of uniformity of prices and availability of food attributing this to well-developed communications, especially railways.⁹⁵ This argument was the excuse of authorities for not interfering with the functioning of private trade or regulating the prices of grains. Exports and imports were affected by the prices ruling in distant grain depots;⁹⁶ for example, during the 1877-8 famine, prices of grain in Awadh, fluctuated with prices in Banaras, Calcutta and Bombay. Such views were reiterated by Lord Elgin, who believed that, railways were the means by which the material condition of Indians could be improved. Lord Curzon too backed the development of railways on a priority basis; railways enabled surplus areas to feed the deficit areas and import grains from external markets, thus mitigating the effects of famines.⁹⁷ Recent literature has attributed the failure of relief policies before the 1870s largely to the inadequacy of infrastructure, especially roads and railways, which severely

⁹⁴ J.Strachey, *India, It's Administration & Progress* (4 edn.Introduction by T.W.Holderness; London,1911),p.230.

⁹⁵ *IFC, Report, 1880, Appendix 1*, pp. 198-9.(UPSAL); *IFC, Report, 1898*, p.351; McAlpin (1983), p.156.

⁹⁶ *IFC, Report, 1880-5,ii*,pp.49-51.

⁹⁷ G.N. Curzon, *Lord Curzon in India Being A Selection from His Speeches As Viceroy & Governor-General Of India, 1898-1905* (Introduction by Sir Raleigh, London, 1906),pp. 283-4.

restricted the speedy movement of grains and precipitated steep price hikes, leading to failure of people's entitlement.⁹⁸

One of the distinguishing features of the Post-Mutiny era was the rapid development, and extension of railways and, with it, improvements in terms of trade; this was viewed as the crucial factor in the perceived prosperity of the western part of the province, especially Meerut division, which got a boost in cash crop production, marketing, and commerce.⁹⁹ By 1858 Allahabad and Kanpur were connected by a railway line, which by 1860 extended to Etawah; by 1864, railway had reached Delhi covering a distance of 1,020 miles between Calcutta and Delhi.¹⁰⁰ During the 1868 famine, high prices gave great impetus to production of food and fodder crops, especially in Meerut district. Railways facilitated heavy exports from the region, generating wealth for local producers. Altogether railways brought in four and quarter million maunds of food grains in first half of 1869 to the famine- afflicted districts. As much as 50,000 tons of grain was brought from Awadh to Kanpur alone. On the other hand, one and a half million maunds of grain was exported out of famine-afflicted districts by road to central India, ¾ million maunds by rail to Punjab.¹⁰¹ The same phenomenon was witnessed during the 1896-7 famine.¹⁰² The mileage of railways open to public traffic had risen by the 1890s to 3,569 miles, an increase of thirty-two per cent over the previous decade, while the goods traffic had risen to three and a half million tons, as compared to two million tons over the previous decade.¹⁰³ The new lines and increased traffic generated considerable employment not only in the actual

⁹⁸ See *Introduction*, pp.10-11.

⁹⁹ Derbyshire, 'Economic Change and the Railways in North India,' *MAS*, 21:3 (1987), p.524, 537.

¹⁰⁰ Bhanu, *The North Western Provinces*, pp. 332-3.

¹⁰¹ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p.89.

¹⁰² *Gazetteers, Meerut*, iv, p. 57.

¹⁰³ *Decennial Report*, p. 16.

working of the lines but also in the handling of an immense mass of goods, as also on railway works especially at Lucknow, Meerut, and Gorakhpur. It was noted “the extension of railway traffic is the distinguishing industrial feature of the decade.”¹⁰⁴

In contrast, Banda suffered acutely during the 1837-8 and 1860-1 famines. One reason was that, till 1865, there was no metalled road, and the only railway line that touched the region was the Jabalpur branch of the East Indian railway.¹⁰⁵ Consequently commercialization of agriculture and expansion of markets remained backward and cultivators remained predominantly dependent on subsistence agriculture; when harvests failed the requirement was easy availability of grains at reasonable prices, but this was hindered by the absence of good roads and railways, and so prices escalated. Also job opportunities were limited, as it was alongside railways and metalled roads that commercial and military towns flourished. Better communication put new wealth in the hands of traders and led to expansion of industries, thereby creating varied avenues for employment, adding to the resources of the well- to- do.¹⁰⁶

The major criticism has been that the impact of railways on India was lopsided. Critics have argued that the shift to cash cropping reduced the availability of subsistence food considerably, and have stressed the role of railways in exporting scarce grains thus producing insufficiency of grains even during normal times, depleting the country of its surplus, making India an easy prey to famines.¹⁰⁷ The 1898 Famine Commission report, too noted:

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* p.16.

¹⁰⁵ *Gazetteers, Banda*, xxi, p.70.

¹⁰⁶ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, pp. 439-40.

¹⁰⁷ Chandra, *The Rise And Growth Of Economic Nationalism*, p.184.

Though they bring grains to tracts liable to famine in years of drought, they also prevent large accumulation of grain in these tracts in years of plenty.¹⁰⁸

The growth of the market economy, cited as the major benefit accruing from infra-structural development, benefited the already rich, the middling and the poor peasants, became more vulnerable to famines.¹⁰⁹ The dynamism of private trade and uniformity, or even moderation of grain prices was of little consequence to those who had hardly any purchasing power.¹¹⁰ These critics point out that the events of 1896-7, and later of the 1899 famine and the Bengal famine of 1943, were pointers to the inadequate and limited capacity of railways in mitigating famine distress. Railways increased the dependence of the country on agriculture while the capital spent on rail construction would have yielded greater dividend, if it had been utilized for industrialization and construction of irrigation projects.¹¹¹ According to Whitcombe, one of the most detrimental effects of railways in NWP&O, was the widespread use of timber as fuel for locomotives, leading to deforestation on a considerable scale, especially in the Doab where railway construction was heavily concentrated.

Commercialization of agriculture

Commercialization of agriculture, which was limited till the 1830s, because of poor communication and transport, flourished by the 1860s, with improvements in rail connections. Yet the observations of colonial officials as also of recent scholars are

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* fn 36,p.184.

¹⁰⁹ Chandra, 'Reinterpretation of Nineteenth Century Indian History,' *IESHR*, v (1968), p. 47, fn.26; D.Thorner, Capital Movement and Transportation: Great Britain and India's 'Railways,' *Journal Of Economic History*, xi (1951), pp.400-2.

¹¹⁰ *IFC, Report, 1880, Appendix, i, p. 112.*

¹¹¹ Chandra, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (New Delhi, 1966), pp. 178-215; 'Reinterpretation Of Nineteenth Century Indian History,' *IESHR*, v (1968), p.47 fn.26; Bhatia, *Famines In India* (London, 1967), pp.307-8.

not consistent on the impact of commercialization. Washbrook, Charlesworth, Morris, and Stone have argued that the movement from lower to higher value crops was positive for the income of smaller peasants.¹¹² Siddiqui, Amin, and Whitcombe who have looked at the specificities of small-scale agriculture in NWP, argue that the expansion and marketing of wheat, sugarcane, cotton and indigo did not benefit the majority of middling and poor *ryots*.¹¹³ They argue that the rigours of a monetized revenue demand, to be paid in cash on time, impressed the need for maximizing agricultural output and prices. It forced the small and middling peasants to cultivate cash crops for the market in addition to subsistence crops, as the value of these crops was high; for example, sugarcane cultivation covered a mere seven per cent of the cultivated area in Bijnor, but paid thirty-six per cent of the gross rental. Cash crop required greater capital inputs, manpower, irrigation, marketing, and communication facilities, in order to be promptly and profitably marketed.¹¹⁴ These resources were mainly in the hands of rich landlords and moneylenders. Poor and intermediary cultivators, lacking these resources, could only cultivate with the help of loans, and wait for considerable time before the profits actually accrued, as cultivation of some cash crops was expensive, complex and a long-term process. Thus, their income became more and more dependent on the sale of their commercial crops and they came to require regular supplies of credit to tide them over from one financial year to

¹¹² D.Washbrook, 'Economic Development and Social Stratification in Rural Madras: The 'Dry Region' 1878 -1929,' in Dewey and Hopkins (eds.), *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London, 1978), pp.68-82; N.Charlesworth, *Agrarian Society and British Administration in Western India, 1847-1920* (Cambridge, P.hd.1973), pp.145-6, 153-4; Morris , 'Economic Change and Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century India', *IESHR*, iii, no.2 (June 1966), pp. 190-1.

¹¹³ A.Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change In A North Indian State; Uttar Pradesh 1819-33*(Oxford, 1973), pp.132-3; Amin, 'Small Peasant Commodity ' in Bose (ed.), *Credit, Markets*, pp. 115-23; Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, i, pp. 155-77.

¹¹⁴ Amin, 'Small Peasant Commodity 'in Bose (ed.), *Credit, Markets*, p. 123.

the next.¹¹⁵ As access to markets was difficult for resourceless cultivators they were forced to sell their crops as soon as they were harvested to local creditors at contracted rates. By 1880, it was seen that poor peasants were abandoning sugarcane cultivation for a mix of rice, hemp, and millets.¹¹⁶

Thus, at every point within this process there were opportunities for extortion and profits went to those with surplus material and financial resources. Settlement reports note that poor cultivators were crippled not only by the heavy interest they had to pay on borrowings, but also by the low prices they were compelled to take for their produce.¹¹⁷

When...the loans are not cleared off, and the cultivator gets deep into the moneylender's books ...it is then customary for the creditor to take over the whole of the cultivator's grains or cane and dispose of it to the best advantage for himself, giving the debtor credit for the price always somewhat and sometimes very much below the current rate.¹¹⁸

Pandit Ajudhiya Parshad, a *zamindar* of Indalpur, stressed "the great loss to which the *asamis* were put by the pernicious system of selling cane-juice and *rab* to the *mahajan*."¹¹⁹ Sometimes, as low a price as Rs sixteen per hundred *kaccha* maunds was entered in the bonds, when the ruling price in the open market was Rs twenty-six and Rs twenty-seven."¹²⁰ Also, these crops were subjected to special *zamindari*

¹¹⁵ Daniel and Alice Thorner, *Land and Labour in India* (New Delhi, 1965), pp. 55, 108; For a discussion of sugarcane and its benefits see, *Bijnor SR* (1874), pp. 94-5; *Moradabad SR* (1881), pp. 44-8.

¹¹⁶ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, p. 435.

¹¹⁷ *Mathura SR* (1879), p. 90; *Bareilly SR* (1892), p. 95; *Azamgarh SR* (1881), pp. 144-5.

¹¹⁸ *Moradabad SR* (1881), p. 64;

¹¹⁹ Deptt. of Agriculture and Commerce, *Report of the North Western Provinces and Oudh*, 1881-2; p. 49.

¹²⁰ *Bareilly SR* (1892), p. 95.

cesses, so that whatever minor profit a small peasant might gain was eaten up in paying these cesses. The rich landlord was again the beneficiary.¹²¹ Not being able to benefit from price rise was a serious problem for the cultivator but more serious was the exhaustion of reserves as regards family consumption, for which the peasant had to borrow from the *bania*/landlord. Thus, not only resources, but also the *ryot*'s industry was controlled by his creditors and thus the *ryot* was not a free agent.¹²² The process of commercialization thus involved the peasants in a forced cycle of market relations, buying and selling under the compulsion of debt, in which an increasingly large number of peasants were caught.¹²³ Further cash cropping, market economy, export of commodities including grains, and price rise, created a new landed and commercial elite in control of capital development, which became a strong basis for wealth and power, which worsened the economic condition of the majority of middling peasants, artisans and labourers, and crucially weakening their hold on their lands.¹²⁴ Critics assert that the prosperity in the west of the province was exaggerated, and that the condition of poor peasants was more or less the same everywhere.¹²⁵ In the context of Pre- Mutiny famines it has been argued that those areas which were not sufficiently monetized or commercialized and were not cash crop oriented suffered less as did the well- irrigated tracts of the east.¹²⁶

¹²¹ *Bulandshahar SR* (1865), pp.5-6.

¹²² Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change*, pp. 132-3; Evidence of Geddes before the Parliamentary Select Committee, 1871, as quoted in "*Undeveloped Wealth and State Reproductive Works in India. Ways to Prevent Famine and Increase the Material Progress of India*, pp.129-30.

¹²³ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, p. 48.

¹²⁴ Bhatia, 'The Entitlement Approach to Famine Analysis: A Critique,' in J.Floud and A.Rangasami (eds), *Famine And Society* (N.Delhi,1993), p. 41.

¹²⁵ Amin, 'Small Commodity Production,' in Bose (ed.), *Credit, Markets*, p. 91; G.Pandey, *Ascendancy Of the Congress in the Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34; A Study In Imperfect Mobilisation* (Oxford, 1978), pp.14-17. He argues that the differences in the material and economic well being of the peasants in the east and west of the provinces has been exaggerated.

¹²⁶ Sharma, *State, Society*, p. 57.

Moreover, it is argued that commercialization led to food shortages. The expansion and export of grains had implications for the supply and availability of grains in famine and scarcity-hit areas, as well as the entitlement to purchase it in the context of famines. It also affected the pattern of crop production, which shows that the balance was tilted towards producing commercial crops which did not constitute the staple diet of the majority of the *ryots*, who in any case did not have the resources to purchase it or benefit from growing higher-value crops.

However, cultivation and export of wheat picked up from the mid-nineteenth century, when nearly 5,902,770 acres were cultivated throughout the province. About ten to twenty per cent of the wheat was exported to Europe, the rest internally marketed.¹²⁷ By 1860, at Meerut, no less than 270,000 acres, constituting twenty-six per cent of the cultivated area, was under wheat, while seventy-thousand acres had wheat mixed with other crops like barley and gram.¹²⁸ By 1878 this had risen to 1,371,103 acres. Rohilkhund and Awadh, also reported substantial increases.¹²⁹

Rohilkhund was the chief producer and exporter of sugarcane and its finished products like jaggery and sugar. At Meerut, sugarcane production rose from seven per cent in 1865 to 11.5 per cent in 1902.¹³⁰ At Azamgarh, by the 1870s, it occupied 11.9 per cent of the total cultivated area.¹³¹ Overall sugarcane cultivation increased by eight per cent in the 1890s, over the 1880s. Poppy cultivation increased forty-eight

¹²⁷ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, p. 434.

¹²⁸ *Gazetteers, Meerut*, iv (1904), pp. 44-5..

¹²⁹ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, p. 433.

¹³⁰ *Gazetteers, Meerut*, iv, p. 40.

¹³¹ Amin, 'Small Peasant Commodity,' in Bose (eds), *Credit, Markets*, p. 123.

per cent indicating the enormous benefits accruing to those who managed to cultivate it. *Til* also registered substantial increase in cultivation.¹³² Rice was also grown and exported from here to districts in the lower Doab, and other regions of India, especially Deccan and the Punjab. Cultivation and trade in cotton, which chiefly centred in Bundelkhund, Kanpur, and Allahabad, and saw a recession in production in the 1830s, picked up from the mid- nineteenth century. In Meerut, cotton was chiefly grown in Baghpat, Hasanpur and Ghaziabad *tehsil* and, by 1860, covered 8.7 per cent of the cultivated area of the division.¹³³ At Aligarh, cotton cultivation covered 13.6 and indigo 3.4 per cent of the total cropped area, leading Atkinson to record “ ... besides grain, the staple crops are indigo and cotton...”¹³⁴ By 1850, indigo, was one of the most important exports of India. There were 171 indigo factories in operation, producing approximately 3,625 maunds of indigo annually. Farrukhabad was the chief producer and exporter - here by 1870s, the total cropped area under *kharif* was 477,578 acres, of which 31,156 acres were under indigo cultivation.¹³⁵ In step with this increase, a number of indigo factories sprang up in Farrukhabad, Bareilly and Shahjehanpur; by 1860, about 150 factories were operating in Farrukhabad alone and in Badaun indigo plantation and manufacture were the only industries in existence before 1880. But because of competition from artificial dye, indigo cultivation suffered a decline in the 1890s.¹³⁶

Price rise

¹³² *Deccennial Report*, pp.13-14.

¹³³ *Gazetteers, Meerut*, iv, p.42.

¹³⁴ Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive*, p. 377.

¹³⁵ *Final SR, Farrukhabad* (1875), p.11. See note on the value of Indigo, in relation to its proportion to the total cropped area.

¹³⁶ *Deccennial Report*, pp. 13-14.

The increase in the area under commercial crops was accompanied by a rise in prices such produce commanded. The price of indigo rose twenty-five per cent between 1837-73. Cotton prices rose by fifty per cent between 1844-53;¹³⁷ and by another eighty per cent between 1846-73. The beneficiaries of rising prices were those free from debt obligations with access to markets and ability to negotiate prices for their produce.

Table 7 shows the average price of cleared cotton, per maund, between 1828-73, in Aligarh district.

Table. 7

1828-36,	1837- 40	1844-53	1854-63	1864-73	1841-57	1858-73
Rs a. p.	Rs a. p.	Rs a. p.	Rs a. p.	Rs a. p.	Rs a. p.	Rs a. p
6. 0. 0.	6 . 8. 0.	7 . 12. 4.	11. 9. 4.	14. 0. 0.	7. 9. 5.	14. 5. 0.

Source: E.T. Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the Aligarh District*, 1875, p. 472.

Between 1860-1900, prices of grains and oilseeds rose by sixty per cent, those of *gur* (jaggery) by twenty-four per cent, poppy by twenty per cent and cotton by ten per cent. Prices of grain in Awadh rose by ninety per cent compared to a forty-five per cent rise in eastern parts of the province.¹³⁸ But it was the substantial rise in prices of bare necessities such as salt, sugar, flour, pulses and firewood in the 1830s that was of concern.¹³⁹ Between 1840-70, the prices of foodgrains rose sharply, as observed by Boas, the collector of Moradabad

In Moradabad as elsewhere, there has been a substantial rise in prices...the average price of wheat, during the last settlement was more than 100 percent, higher than during the preceding years; gram, sells at 80 per cent, more than it did; barley, more than twice as much. Bajra, for about 88 per cent more, and

¹³⁷Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive*, p. 472.
¹³⁸ I.D.Derbyshire, 'Economic Change and the Railways in North India,1860-1914,' in I.J.Kerr(eds.), *Railways In Northern India* (Oxford,1991),p.180.
¹³⁹ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, p.295.

common rice, for more than double its former price. Gur alone is not substantially more valuable than it was.¹⁴⁰

The spurt food grain prices not only in famine affected areas but also those not affected was because of heavy and unceasing exports.¹⁴¹ As regards wages the chief difficulty lay in gauging various form of remunerations to a common standard. But, overall, while prices were rising, the real wages for agricultural labourers and village artisans remained broadly constant till the mid 1880s.¹⁴²

Indebtedness: beneficiaries and losers

The processes which led to the penetration of the money economy into rural areas also intensified the conditions of moneylending, usury and peasant indebtedness, which further compounded the vulnerability of the *ryots* and was a subject of lively debate amongst officials and scholars specially after the mutiny.¹⁴³ Not only the poor peasants but often *zamindars* and *taluqdars* were dependent on them for monetary support. While the former landed and commercial class was suffering decline, the power of the new moneyed was being consolidated. Colonial rule opened up new possibilities for the creditors with its emphasis on laissez-faire, which loosened government obligation for extending credit, and acknowledged indebtedness as customary, and the moneylender as integral to Indian rural life even in normal times. Some scholars argue that the loans of *mahajans* and *banias* constantly helped the *ryots* to extend their holdings, replace or purchase their cattle, and to buy manure, seed and plough. The landlords ensured the continuance of village customs and

¹⁴⁰ Moradabad SR (1909), p.5.

¹⁴¹ For details see pp. 409-411.

¹⁴² Decennial Report, p. 17; Commander, Malthus and the Theory of Unequal Powers, M4S, 20 (1986), p. 688.

¹⁴³ M.L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (London, 1947), pp.246-8; V. Nash, *The Great Famine and its Causes* (London, 1900), pp.78-80.

traditions and, at their best, reported excess exactions by the local officials.¹⁴⁴ This situation was one of 'co-operative conflict.' The Indian Famine Commission. noted:

We have found no reason to believe that the agricultural population of India have at any known period of their history been generally free from debt, although individuals and classes may have fallen into deeper embarrassments under British rule, than was common under native dynasties that preceded it. It has been usual for the landholders in all times, habitually to have transactions with the moneylenders of their villages, with whom they carry on a running account on friendly terms, taking from him advances for seed and food in the months preceding the harvest, and handing over to him the greater part of their produce, from the money proceeds of which he pays their dues to the state, and places any balances to their credit.¹⁴⁵

The vulnerability of the *ryots* was further accentuated by the exploitative system of moneylending, which had the backing of the British law courts. However, the government did not intentionally facilitate the usurious and unfair practices of moneylenders; infact many district officers, especially from the 1830s emphasized the increasing indebtedness of the majority of the agriculturists and protested at the strengthening grip of the moneylender. Indebtedness of the peasantry, though a pre-colonial phenomenon, assumed serious proportions from the 1830s, and had by the 1870s, become alarming and was being emphasized by district officers.¹⁴⁶ In 1869, Elliot estimated, "that in the entire North Western Provinces, fully ten million sterling is borrowed by the agriculturists for seed and food grain, rent and revenue, clothing and other expenses."¹⁴⁷ A few years later this had increased- nearly fifteen million rupees were borrowed annually in normal years; in years of distress this was between twenty and thirty and probably nearer thirty.¹⁴⁸ In the year 1878, the proportion of

¹⁴⁴ Dilbagh Singh, *State Landlords, and Peasants* (New Delhi, 1967), p.177.

¹⁴⁵ *IFC, Report, 1880-5*, ii, p.130.

¹⁴⁶ *Precis*, Appendix A, Revenue scarcity deptt, 1888, f.16, p.11; See the comment of A. Cadell, *Muzzufurnagar Report, Canal Report*, pp. 18 -19, as quoted by Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, 1, p. 189.

¹⁴⁷ Harrington, *The Calcutta Review*, LXXV1(1883), p.164.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.164.

peasants indebted ranged from thirty-three to thirty-seven per cent in Gonda and Pratapgarh, to seventy-five per cent in Sitapur, Kheri and Fyzabad, and eighty per cent, in Barabanki.¹⁴⁹ In many districts such as Mainpuri, peasant indebtedness was found to be collective and the *ryots* of the entire village borrowed money from the *bania* to buy seeds and manure, and purchase or hire bullocks and plough to cultivate the villages fallow land.¹⁵⁰ The situation was serious enough for the government to institute enquiries, and the question of rural indebtedness was thoroughly discussed by famine commissioners. The comprehensive evidence that they provide confirmed that famines increased indebtedness.¹⁵¹

The government in its anxiety to reform endeavoured to create a balanced system of credit relation by introducing written contracts, enforceable in civil courts, bypassing the earlier system of transactions based on moral grounds. According to some scholars the reason why the influence of the moneylenders was not so pervasive before the 1830s was the lack of credit worthiness of the borrower, and the lack of legal assistance in ousting him from his holdings.¹⁵² The system of written contract favoured the literate and resourceful who could fight their battles in the law courts. They could exploit the ignorance and illiteracy of resourceless peasants to their own advantage, thus further facilitating the ability of the *Marwari* moneylenders to hold the poor *ryots* in their thrall through unfair calculations and practices. They increasingly marginalized the local village *Brahmin* moneylenders, who based their transactions on personal knowledge of the individual's liability to default. The moral

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.155.

¹⁵⁰ *Mainpuri SR* (1906), p. 7.

¹⁵¹ *IFC, Report, 1880-5*, ii, pp.130-1; *A Collection of Papers 1887-8*, pp. 9-20.

¹⁵² H. D. Robertson, *District Duties During the Revolt In North Western Provinces Of India In 1857* (London, 1859), pp.135-7; E. William, *Personal Adventures During the Indian Rebellion* (London, 1858), pp.12-13; Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, p.123; Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions*, i, ch. IV.

basis of debt transactions was more humane, flexible, and less exploitative. This change from moral and customary to impersonal, legalistic and contractual has been described as “a revolutionary change..”¹⁵³ This new elite of moneylenders was hated and suspected by the needy populace, and were targets of popular attack during famines. There were hardly any opportunities for the small and middling, let alone the poor *ryots*, to accumulate resources or venture into new economic opportunities generated by cash cropping and commercialization without loans. The government, in conformity with the spirit of *laissez-faire*, did little to redress the problem of indebtedness, land alienation, or provide alternative sources of credit which would have encouraged the development of a more equitable and balanced agrarian system involving reinvestment of profit.

Debts, once incurred, grew rapidly because of high rates of interest and manipulations of moneylenders, which increased during famines. At many places, for example, at Gorakhpur, Champaran and surrounding areas, grain was lent at *siwaiyya* (twentyfive per cent), at the first harvest, *dehoriya* (fifty per cent), at the second harvest, and *tinpawaiya* (seventyfive per cent), at the third harvest and so on. An original debt of one maund of grain would easily increase to one hundred maunds.¹⁵⁴ Many district officers, including Sleeman, recorded several such examples of fraud and extortionate dealings that the cultivators were subjected to.¹⁵⁵ Another interesting fact to note, is that on small loans, the interest rate was very high, 37 ½ , per annum; on the larger loans the rate was twenty-four to twenty-six per cent.¹

¹⁵³Rothermund, ‘Government, Landlord,’ *IESHR*, I,4 (1969),p.352.

¹⁵⁴Harrington, ‘Economic Reforms in Rural India,’ *The Calcutta Review*, LXXVI(1883), p. 164.

¹⁵⁵Sleeman, *Journey Through Oude*,i, pp.244 -6; 413-18.

Landlessness and its impact

These considerations bring us to the consequences of land alienation and the identification of beneficiaries and losers. An investigation into long term famine process is essentially concerned with the erosion of individual productive and adaptive capacities. Land was essential to this. The value which cultivators attached to land is reflected in the fact that *ryots* frequently chose to starve rather than let go of their holdings,-a point that has been reiterated in a different context in the recent famine writings of De Waal.

The significant point is that the *ryots* were losing their lands in considerable amounts. And this had had dramatic social and economic consequences within the peasantry. Firstly, the accumulation of land by a handful of landlords/moneylenders worsened the income of the majority of the *ryots* as their control over source of production was either totally removed, or weakened. Many old families were forced to reduce the size of their holdings, or abandon them altogether, as observed from trends in Aligarh, Mainpuri, Rai Bareli, Bijnor, Kanpur, Moradabad, Banda, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Jhansi, and Mathura. The general pattern was that the indebted small and intermediary cultivators initially mortgaged their land and finally sold it. These small estates passed to rich landlords and traders, moneylenders and sometimes to professionals like lawyers and bureaucrats.¹⁵⁶ The social status and power of the old, established families eroded thus altering the structure of landholding, and thereby the social composition of society. The grip of gentry farmers holding middle-sized properties, weakened considerably. It meant that the elite was confronted by a mass of petty

¹⁵⁶ Mainpuri SR (1906), p.15; Rai Bareli SR (1897),pp.36-7;Lucknow SR (1898), p. 4.

proprietors, with whom their relations tended to be of absentee rent receivers.¹⁵⁷ The lands were often acquired by outside landlords/ moneylenders who were unsympathetic. These 'outsiders' unscrupulously used every means to secure profits on hazardous transactions. They worked entirely through the civil courts, and evicted needy *ryots* from their holdings, and made excessive gains, especially during famines.¹⁵⁸ These aspects are underscored by reports of district officers that investments in land were eagerly sought, and land considerably gained in value.¹⁵⁹ The average price of land, sold privately at Mathura in 1837-8, was Rs 3.44 per acre. In 1872, it was priced at Rs 13.98 per acre, and by 1900, prices had soared further.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion.

From the foregoing discussion, British perspectives on improvements do not necessarily appear to have been concerned with the eradication of peasant vulnerability to famine. An indebted peasantry did not have the autonomy to accumulate or develop their holdings. High land revenue rigidly collected in cash on time even during famines ensured that the majority of cultivators lived hand to mouth and lacked resources to improve their lot from opportunities brought about by commercialization of economy and improvements in infrastructure. Their normally fragile subsistence base was further eroded by famines. Further, the government's commitment to laissez-faire, and its fostering of elite interests, prevented it from taking strong measures to effectively control the problem of land alienation or

¹⁵⁷ Stokes, *IESHR*, xii, 2 (April- June 1975), p.119.

¹⁵⁸ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, ii, pp.131-2.

¹⁵⁹ Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, p. 161.

¹⁶⁰ *Gazetteers, Mathura*, vii, p. 134.

indebtedness, despite recommendations from district officers that some limit be put to this phenomenon.¹⁶¹

Evidence suggests that the agrarian economy registered a degree of advance, in terms of development of irrigation and communication facilities, agricultural production especially the cultivation of cash crops as well as upward price mobility, indicating the availability of additional investible resources in rural society and expansion of agriculture. Evidence does not indicate to what extent the benefits of the increase filtered down, whether poor peasants, often with one bullock and a small plot of land, could establish a favourable market, whether capital resources were dispensed among all sections of rural society or were concentrated mostly with the upper strata of agriculturists and a body of usurers.

This analysis suggests that the entitlement of middling and poor *ryots*, artisans and labourers weakened, especially their hold on their land, exacerbating their struggle for subsistence by the combination of high land revenue, over-taxation, imbalanced credit relations, and enforced exposure to the uncertainties of the markets and climate. The same could be said for the consequences of the development of rail, roads and canals. The government, though concerned at the various levels at which the entitlements of the *ryots*, labourers and artisans were eroded, could not stem this because of their commitment to *laissez-faire*, their reliance on and perpetuation of elite landlord interests, and demand for revenues in cash; also their inbred Malthusian logic which hindered them from recognizing the processal links between diminishing of resources and capacity to withstand famine. The government's main objectives in implementing

¹⁶¹ *RaiBareli SR* (1897), p.36.

and following such policies were fiscal concerns and political stability. Economic exigencies were subordinated to the political. All-round economic regeneration of society could not be accomplished, and, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, famine tipped the balance even further, in favour of moneylenders and landlords.¹⁶²

¹⁶² *A Collection of Papers Connected With an Inquiry into the Condition of the Lower Classes.*

Introduction

This chapter relates ideological trends and ideas that were imported from Britain, to India to meet a situation of subsistence crisis, which was in many respects dissimilar to conditions in Britain. It examines these influences-cultural, economic and moral-and their importance in the making of the official mind, limiting the aims and duration of relief. However, the shaping of relief policy must not be viewed solely within the framework of European intellectual milieu, for these were also shaped and interpreted according to Indian circumstances and needs.

Malthusianism, Social Darwinism and Poor Laws

The government offered economic, political and intellectual defences for their limited efforts in tackling famines during the period of study. Attitudes to famine and poverty were influenced by laissez-faire, Malthusianism and, from the 1860's Social Darwinism, which espoused stringency and limited welfarism. The moral justification of these was embodied in some aspects of the philosophy of the Poor Laws of England and conceptions of the moral economy of India. These combined economic rationality and Christian morality. Till 1868, low priority was attached to famine relief because of the combined influence of these ideologies.¹

¹S. Ambirajan, 'Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the Nineteenth Century,' *Population Studies*, 30,1(1976), pp.5-14; Klein, 'When the Rains Failed,' *ISER*, 21,2 (1984), pp.185-214; McAlpin, *Subject To Famine*; Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, pp. 4-5.

As in England, so in NWP&O, officials feared that excessive and ill-directed relief would breed endemic pauperism and discourage self-reliance. The difference was that, whereas in England the state was obliged to maintain the poor even in normal times, in India there was no such commitment, the responsibility lying with family, community, and private philanthropy. Relief policy was, therefore, pervaded by a deep Victorian moralism. Senior civil servants like Thomason, William Muir, John and Richard Strachey, Charles Elliot, and Trevelyan, who oversaw several famines were men of deep evangelical piety and, influential in formulating relief policy in NWP&O. They with George Couper, Viceroy Lytton and Secretary of State Salisbury, successfully thwarted any radical moves towards liberal relief, particularly during the formulation of the 1880 Famine Code. Their motives in espousing stringency in relief were a mix of concern for social order and genuine philanthropy- poor people had to be prevented from being idle and instructed to work hard. These attitudes are an illuminating comment on the thinking of the age, indicating that the main criticism of relief policy in British circles was that the government was doing too much rather than too little. These ideas, according to Ambirajan, formed the intellectual bedrock of the official perceptions of famines, and provided the justification for the negative and limited efforts at relief.

The Malthusian argument, reviewed in the introduction of the thesis, remained influential in the determination of relief. This was reinforced from 1860's by the Darwinist argument that during famines the process of natural selection would eliminate the weak and unfit. Attempts to keep them alive meant interfering with the process of natural selection, which in turn had bad consequences for fitter and deserving sections of society. Such indifference is reflected in the language of famine

reports, and the correspondence of indifferent officials. Martin Gubbins at Etawah, justified excessive deaths and suffering within the Malthusian framework.

That the population has been very sensibly reduced by death is abundantly clear from the still deserted houses and abandoned lands, as well as from the general fall of rent...This latter fact sufficiently indicates the competition, not of cultivators for land, but of landholders for cultivators, and it will no doubt require the lapse of several years to replace the population that has been swept away.²

Such ideological commitments indicate a pre-dominance of fiscal concerns and little respect for human life. Till 1868 the classification of relief was based on the physical fitness of victims. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, relief was to be given selectively to those who were capable of work, while the 'helpless,' 'infirm,' and 'weak' were made the responsibility of public charity which, the government was aware, was not effective during famines. It left the vast number of suffering people to fend for themselves in an environment of dearth, lawlessness and hunger. Relief was deliberately made stringent even for the old and incapacitated, as enjoined in John Strachey's minute, written during the 1860-1 famine, reflecting official attitudes and concerns in high quarters. The aim was that only the really desperate would have recourse to relief. Similarly, the system of contract labour followed in several districts was openly Malthusian. Only the physically fit were employed and they were offered only subsistence wages and very exacting tasks were set. The provision of loans and advances was deliberately limited and difficult conditions were attached. The priority was to safeguard the interests of private traders, collection of full revenue and maintenance of law and order- these being justified within the laissez-faire,

² B Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.31.

Malthusian and Darwinistic reasoning. The disastrous outcome of such policies was most evident in the 1837-8 and 1866 famines. The deaths of millions in Orissa was rationalized on the grounds that they belonged to the inert classes,-the infirm, widows, and orphans- whose utility in the scheme of economic and social progress was nil.

But such ideological bigotry was opposed even in 1830's, by many officers; they argued against economic and moral orthodoxy and protested that the law of economics could not prevail over saving human lives. They urged, that the stringent conditions of relief and the inferior treatment meted out to famine victims was the cause for the low morale and helplessness widely recorded among them.³ Such opposition grew over the years. After the Mutiny the imperatives of political, and social consolidation further countered moralist and fiscal obsessions. The central government's commitment from 1868, to avert starvation deaths and give relief to all classes irrespective of family and community commitments, denoted its anxiety to thwart popular and social disorder that accompanied famines, criticism of the failure of existing relief both at home and abroad, as also by heightened humanitarian and moral concerns- assuming the role of moral patron⁴

If public charity should fail from any cause, the government must step in to save life, and that government contributions should not be limited to a sum equal to the public contributions.⁵

Such moral commitments were more on paper than in practice even till the 1880's and encountered stiff opposition from a section of officers. But still a crucial shift

³See ch.IV, pp. 155,178-9; D.M. Hall, *Perceptions of Famine: India in the 1870's* (MA. dissertation, University of London, 1994), p. 23.

⁴Golkin, *Famine A Heritage of Hunger* (California, 1987), pp. 80-1.

⁵Srivastava, *History of Famines*, p. 98.

had been made and recognized, and is best reflected in the in the successful tackling of the 1873-4 famine. Richard Temple mounted a generous and liberal relief policy; the outcome was that there was hardly any mortality, demoralization or apathy. But hard-liners like John Strachey chose to ignore this, and mounted a scathing attack on Temple, on grounds that he had dealt with this famine under conditions of 'financial surplus.' and extravagance. This led Temple to bewail, "By an irony of fate it was actually argued that the danger of famine could not have been extremely urgent because it had been successfully overcome."⁶

Differences over relief policy came to ahead during the making of the Famine Code. The laudable objective of averting starvation deaths was attacked by those espousing financial stringency making the objective unrealisable even by 1896-7. Opinions varied according to attitudes towards laissez-faire, Malthusianism, or belief in the moral economy, but all in one way or another, justified fiscal stringency by invoking these ideologies. They chose to ignore that famines undermined the social, economic and moral fabric of society and financial stringency could not be justified. Further, they had recourse to the notion of a long-standing tradition of famines in India, and, in the Malthusian spirit, accepted the inevitability of mass starvation and deaths.⁷

The Famine Commissioners felt that an undertaking to 'save life,' was too moral and expensive and pressed upon Indian administrators by the weight of 'irresponsible' public opinion in England.⁸ Thus Elliott argued that he would "Sooner risk some loss

⁶ R. Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India* (London, 1882), p. 405.

⁷ J. Strachey 'On the Connection between Rainfall and Sunspots', attached to the appendix of the *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, pp.46-8.

⁸ *East India Company (Report Of Famine Commission) Appendix, I; Miscellaneous Papers Bearing Upon the Condition Of the Country and People Of India*, p. 117.

of life by starvation and would rather let the struggle for existence become sharper and more fatal than it is.”⁹ He emphasized: “The government must give up the idea of saving life at any cost and of holding district officers responsible that no mortality occurs.”¹⁰

The great object of saving life and giving protection from extreme suffering may not only be so well secured, but in fact will be far better secured, if proper care be taken to prevent the abuse and demoralisation which all experience shows to be the consequence of ill-directed and excessive distribution of charitable relief.¹¹

Implicit in such pronouncements was the acceptance of mortality as the defining characteristic of famine. It undermined the government’s declared intent of preventing starvation deaths, as reflected in Elliott’s assertion that the campaign against famines like other wars, must have its butcher’s bill.¹² The views of Elliott were endorsed by General Richard Strachey, Chairman of the Famine Code Committee, Salisbury and Grant.¹³ Grant, argued:

I believe that the proposition that the state is bound at any mere financial sacrifice to save human life in famines cannot be laid down without seriously damaging principles and social structures far more important to a community than the preservation of life.¹⁴

In the Malthusian refrain, it was underlined that good infrastructure and settled peaceful conditions had curbed mortality amongst the suffering people, favouring an increase in population which, added pressure on means of subsistence. Their indifference for human lives is reflected in the argument that increased death rates

⁹ *ibid.* views of A.C.Lyall, p. 118.

¹⁰ *Condition of the Country and the People Of India; Notes of a Discussion that Took Place in Simla*, 20 September 1878, Reply of Elliott, p. 110.

¹¹ *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, p. 48.

¹² *Condition of the Country and the People*, p. 110.

¹³ *ibid.* pp. 110-111.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 118.

during famines must not be misconstrued as unsuccessful administration of relief.¹⁵ Some like Grant went to the absurd length of justifying fiscal stringency and increased deaths on such a flimsy ground as not damaging the moral and social structures of society. These were considered more important than the preservation of human lives.¹⁶ Such strong lobbying succeeded in restricting liberalism and keeping relief policy, discriminatory and harsh. Strict tests determined who qualified for relief. Another reason for fiscal stringency was that officials could not have recourse to fresh taxation, as it would undermine their credibility, with the landlord and mercantile classes. However, in later years they did tax them for providing towards famine insurance.

The powerful influence of these ideologies and of powerful personalities- such as the Strachey brothers, Elliot, Grant and Couper, ensured that the ethos of the Famine Code remained harsh. Couper argued, in his significant memorandum of 1881:

If we are to secure that a class of men-so low in intellect, morality and possessions, the retention of which makes life valuable, as to be absolutely independent of natural population checks - shall be protected from every cause, such as famine and sickness, which tends to restrain their numbers by an abnormal mortality, they must end up eating every other class in the community.¹⁷

Such opposition ensured that hardly any radical shifts were made to easing conditions on relief works. Even till the 1880's, long distances had to be covered to reach relief stations, large amounts of work allotted, and physical conditions in relief camps were difficult, unhygienic and degrading. Low subsistence wages, which could not

¹⁵ *ibid.* reply of Elliott, 20 September 1878, p. 110.

¹⁶ *ibid.* views of Lyall, p.118; *IFC, Report*, 1880, i,p.48.

¹⁷ Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, p.5.

have met even average nutritional needs, were rationalized in the spirit of the Poor Laws and recourse to moral economy even during the 1896-7 famine. These wages were often further reduced, in the knowledge that starving people would still avail it in a bid to save their lives.¹⁸ A harsh environment was deliberately created in the poor houses and relief camps, which some have likened to ‘death traps,’ which bred diseases and epidemics, killing thousands in the process.¹⁹ There was no provision for economically reintegrating famine victims. Digby and others, who argued for flexibility in laissez-faire policy during famines, did not argue for liberalization and generosity in relief provisions. According to them, “To encourage the people to expect more from the government would be to demoralise them to the most extreme extent.”²⁰

However, opposition to economic and moral orthodoxy grew amongst an increasing number of officials as reflected in discussions during the making of the 1880 Famine Code; their opposition to some extent ensured that fiscal and moral pressures to keep relief stringent were offset by the primacy of preventing starvation deaths at least on a visible scale. Provision was made for liberal remissions and suspension of revenue, no arbitrary exclusion of the weak and famished from relief works both large and small, discontinuance of distance tests, and extending economic protection to a wider range of affected people, although the debate on the issue of ‘worthy recipients’ continued.²¹

¹⁸ see.pp.158-63.

¹⁹ Klein, ‘When the rains failed,’ *ISER*, 21,2 (1984), p.189.

²⁰ *Condition of the Country and the People*, views of Digby, p.133

²¹ see.pp.176-9.

The famine commissions of 1898 and 1901 reiterated principles embodied in the 1880 Code, but recommended for more liberal wages and freer extension of gratuitous relief. Thus, by the turn of the century, a direct link was established between a generous and liberal relief policy and obviation of mortality and suffering.²² Relief policy became more rooted in notions of welfare. Klein attributed the success of relief policy at the turn of the twentieth century in containing mortality and migration, to a diminishing faith in Poor Law principles, Malthusianism, Social Darwinism and weakening of laissez-faire, and the strengthening of liberalism and humanism.²³ According to her,

India's escape from dreadful famine tolls in the twentieth century was the result partly of the abandonment of these ideas and the liberalisation and humanisation of the relief policies; and it emanated also in the inter-war era, from the simple good fortune of more benign natural conditions.²⁴

Economic priorities: laissez-faire

The tradition of classical political economy was the most important influence in shaping relief policy. The question of government regulating the grain trade during famines in NWP&O was under official consideration especially from the first quarter of the nineteenth century. English civil servants bound for India, received training at the East India college at Hailebury, where they imbibed the political economy and policy prescriptions of Adam Smith, as interpreted by Professors Malthus and Jones. Smith's individualistic interests were identified and tied to Malthus's population principle and, in its extreme form, the iron laws of wages and population later,

²² Klien, 'When the rains failed,' *ISER*, 21,2(1984), p.189.

²³ *ibid.* p.189.

²⁴ *ibid.* p.189.

complemented the Social Darwinian thesis of evolution and survival of the fittest. The precepts of political economy exercised a powerful influence on a generation of influential Company officials especially in the 1830s and 1840s; by mid-nineteenth century they assumed powerful positions and influenced famine relief. They believed that the solution to famines lay in non-interventionism and relied on private trade to make foodgrains available during famines.²⁵ Parallels can be found in the case of Ireland where, even when acute starvation prevailed, Trevelyan, (the Lord Chancellor) refused to curb the export of food. "Do not encourage the idea of prohibiting exports, perfect free trade is the right course."²⁶ Even Indian officials accepted the orthodoxy of laissez-faire; for example, Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, the Muslim reformer, who witnessed the 1837-8, 1860-1 and 1868-9 famines, was a staunch adherent of free trade principles; this was specially mentioned and appreciated by Baird Smith.²⁷

In the discussions on famines, laissez-faire focused on the free flow of trade, non-regulation of food prices, no imports by the government, and no prohibition on exports. This was based on the safe but questionable logic of the existence of abundant food supplies, which would ensure that harvest failure in one part of the country would be made up in another. Although there was never a collapse of food production in the whole country, this assumption was questionable given that nineteenth-century famines were of exceptional severity and increasingly affected very large parts of the country, as evidenced in the 1896-7 famine. It was argued that

²⁵ S. Ambirajan, 'Political Economy of Indian Famines' *South Asia*, i (1971), p.22; Loveday, *History and Economics*, p.83.

²⁶ C. W. Smith, *The Great Hunger* (London, 1962), p.123.

²⁷ B. Smith, *Report*, i, p.15; Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy And British Policy in India* (Cambridge, 1978), p.75.

government intervention in private trade was administratively difficult and expensive. Famine was a question of the supply of available food in a regular manner, which was a function of grain markets and traders. Free markets and grain dealers were essential for the proper regulation and distribution of grains, and the government could not effectively undertake the role that grain dealers cumulatively could, lacking the machinery and necessary knowledge.²⁸ Official discussions projected government control as damaging interference in the economic sphere, and a disincentive to private initiative. Were the government to intervene, the grain merchants would combine and suspend market transactions. This fear impelled the NWP&O government to even turn down the idea of building public granaries and releasing food stocks at reasonable prices when necessity arose.²⁹

It was perhaps in this context that the nature of the Post-Mutiny British State has been likened to that of the “night watchman,” free trade policies being followed rigidly.³⁰ The conservatism of the colonial administration grew, as reflected in their approach to agrarian policy, reform and taxation; the government’s pro-landlord settlements, prioritizing landlord interests, overlooking the interests of poor peasants. Importantly, government restricted its role in matters of rural credit and loans so as not to impinge on the interests of moneylenders and *banias*. Laissez-faire was helpful in strengthening arguments against any radical moves that would affect existing property rights, and in prioritizing infrastructural development over useless relief schemes aimed at saving the destitute and dying. Such development mainly profited the

²⁸‘Famines in India and the Duty of Government in Connection with Them,’ *Calcutta Review*, Lviii (1874), pp.157-8.

²⁹*ibid.* pp. 157-8.

³⁰Awasthi, *Aspects of the Economic History of India* (Bombay, 1963), pp. 68, 183; Loveday, *History and Economics*, p.83; B.B.Mishra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 214, 359; D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India* (Oxford, 1945), p.205. T.E.

commercial and prosperous land-owning classes, which had the resources to benefit from expansion of commerce and commercialization of agriculture. Bhattacharya questioning the excessive faith in laissez-faire attributed its continuing influence and hold on pressure of interest groups.³¹

Such policy was in contrast to those of pre-colonial rulers who, in keeping with the tenets of *rajdharmā*, were eager to maintain their hegemony, political and moral.³² Prohibition of hoarding, import of grains, fixing of prices, remitting of taxes and punishment of those breaking price regulations were the methods employed to deal with famine, besides provision of employment on public works as well as gratuitous charity. This continued till the end of the eighteenth century. The early decades of Company expansion followed its predecessor's example. Trade was regulated to some extent; for example, during the 1770 famine, the Bengal Presidency government, not only prohibited the export of grains but also issued a proclamation against their hoarding.³³ During the 1781 famine, the Madras government considered it necessary to take upon itself the supply of rice and foodgrains, and selling them at fixed prices.³⁴ During the 1802-4 famine in north-west India, the government imported food grains. It was from the 1812 famine that, non-interference with the free flow of trade was enjoined.³⁵ Henceforth, laissez-faire was the determining influence on relief policy through the nineteenth century.

Metacalf, 'Laissez faire And Tenant Right In India', *IESHR* (July- September 1963), p.78; B.M. Bhatia, *Famines In India; A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India* (1963), p.183.

³¹ S.Bhattacharya, 'Laissez-faire In India,' *IESHR*, ii, i (January 1965), pp.1-22.

³² Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen*, pp. 334-5.

³³ Campbell, *Extracts From Records n India Office Regarding Famines In India*, p.191; *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, p.42.

³⁴ C. Walford, 'On the Famines of the World Past and Present,' *Journal of Statistical Society* (1978), p. 443.

³⁵ Loveday, *History and Economics*, p.39; *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, p.42.

However, the assertion of a straight-forward famine policy, rooted in orthodox laissez-faire is simplistic, and overstates continuities. Brebner argues that in Britain during the course of nineteenth century there was a gradual decay of the idea of laissez-faire;³⁶ this was true in India as well, which witnessed interplay between state interventionism and laissez-faire rooted in political power.³⁷ This trend became pronounced after 1857, when there was a visible expansion of state and executive power, and further tightening of state regulations, was considered appropriate during crises like wars and famines, even though this contradicted the free trade ideology. Moreover, significant interventions were made in terms of the development of infrastructure which, it was believed, would lead to an expansion of trade and commerce, and help in the free movement and redistribution of grains, which in turn would moderate grain prices. Another index of state intervention was the growth of financial commitment to combat famines from minimal levels in the mid-nineteenth century, to a twenty-fold increase per person by the 1890s.³⁸ More important was the concession that, if private trade failed to supply grains, government could intervene to avoid large-scale suffering and mortality, as occurred during 1837-8 and the 1866 Orissa famine.³⁹ Laissez-faire was continuously modified in the light of political and social consolidations. What may be termed modified laissez-faire, remained at the core of the provincial and central government's handling of famines.

The 1837-8 famine

³⁶ J.B. Brebner, 'Laissez faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth -Century Britain,' *The Journal of Economic History*, viii (1948), and supplement, pp. 59-73.

³⁷ Bhattacharya, 'Laissez -Faire in India,' *IESHR*, ii, i (January 1965), pp. 1-22.

³⁸ Klein, 'When the rains failed,' *ISER*, 21, 2 (1984), p. 189.

³⁹ Metcalf, 'Laissez Faire And Tenant,' *IESHR*, i (July- September 1963), pp. 74-81.

The 1830s were characterized by pressure for free trade from European mercantile interests, which demanded an end to privilege and monopoly and scope for private merchants in India.⁴⁰ Such dominance of laissez-faire in official thinking was reflected in the handling of the 1837-8 and subsequent famines. Non-interventionism was justified by prevailing understandings of famine discussed in the Introduction, which blamed climate, moral failings and irrationality of Indians, for their occurrence. The government's duty was limited to disseminating accurate information, providing employment to the able bodied on large public works, encouraging private charity, and, above all, facilitating free flow of trade.

Yet, despite support in principle, for laissez-faire, many district officers from the 1830s, cautioned against exclusive reliance on private trade during famines. They argued that on account of several shortcomings the pattern of food supply was not measuring up to requirements. Underdeveloped infrastructure and insufficient purchasing power which, remained unreplenished by government, combined to exacerbate a pre-existing subsistence crisis. Even if food was available, the poor were unable to keep up with spiralling prices; mortality and migration became inevitable. Many district officers recommended that the NWP&O government maintain its own emergency stocks; provide adequate liberal wages in order to prevent the total collapse of purchasing power; suspend and remit revenue; and give loans and *takavi* advances to restore suffering people's entitlement to some extent. They suggested 'judicious interference' in regulating trade, making grains available to needy people on humanitarian grounds.⁴¹ Such interference, was in defiance of a doctrine that was

⁴⁰P. Spear, Lord William Benetynck in Wainwright and Phillips (eds.) *Indian Society and Modernisation, 1830-50*, p. 22.

⁴¹ Pre-Mutiny, criminal-judicial procds, 73, October 1837, NWP; from J. Thomason, offg. secretary, to the Lt.-Gov. NWP, to T. Metcalfe, commissioner, Delhi div, 11 October 1837.

not only perceived as a technological science but also as a divine doctrine. Deviations from it was often justified by invoking divine providence. “We and we only are responsible to God for this people whom he has committed to our care.”⁴² Others like Rudyard Kipling invoked the ‘burdens of the white man,’ as justification;

Take up the white mans burden, the Ports ye shall not enter, the roads ye shall not tread. Go make them with your living and mark them with your dead.⁴³

But the Sudder Board viewed such interference with disfavour, and rebuked officers for “overreacting.” Disturbed at reports of disruption of trade, the board ordered that free trade not be interfered with, and, facilities be extended for protecting unrestricted trade.⁴⁴ It even frowned on aid, in the form of loans and grants, and suspension and remission of revenue. District officers argued that government should bring pressure on grain dealers to be more considerate to the suffering, who went on rampage in several districts. Despite several petitions for regulating trade, Thomason, who was secretary to the Lt.-Gov. sided with the traders, many of whom threatened to suspend all trade transactions if their lives and property were not protected against popular attacks. He noted:

Protection must be afforded to all boats laden with grains which navigate the river. The maintenance of free and unrestrained commerce in grain is a point of utmost importance, and any failure will produce much mischief and misery in the country.⁴⁵

⁴² Anon, *How We Tax India* (London, 1857), p.37; On the religious inputs to British political economy, B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence Of Evangelicalism On Social and Economic Thought* (Oxford, 1988).

⁴³ Bhattacharya, *IESHR* (January 1965), ii, i, p.3.

⁴⁴ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 53, serial 5, list 1; to C.G. Mansel, magistrate, Agra, from the offg. commissioner, B. Taylor, 7 December 1837.

⁴⁵ Pre-Mutiny, criminal- judicial, procds. 73, October 1837, NWP. From J. Thomason, offg. secretary to the Lt.-Gov. NWP to T. Metcalfe, commissioner, Delhi div, 11 October 1837.

Orders were issued to maintain law and order to facilitate the free flow of trade, by deploying extra police, intensive patrolling, and army assistance.⁴⁶

Such a policy had the support of influential bureaucrats like Col. Sleeman. Sleeman glorified the role of the grain dealers and indicted officers for being prejudiced against them. Whenever officers refused to cave in to pressure for intervention in terms of curbing hoarding or fixing prices and assured co-operation and security to traders, crisis situation could be contained as at Sagar in 1833. Sleeman noted with satisfaction that despite famine, the *bazars* were all supplied, and the shops full of grain. He, therefore, recommended non-interventionist policy during all famines.⁴⁷ Similarly Baird Smith, whose observations and recommendations were so influential in the formulation of relief policy was convinced that "violent interferences with the course of trade; persecution of traders; fixing maximum selling price of grain; constituting the government the great grain dealer of the country, and endeavouring to fulfil this impossible function through mechanism equally impossible" had substantially contributed to giving the worst aggravations to famines. He was anxious that this mistake never be repeated.⁴⁸ Successive famine administrators as Girdlestone, Henvey did not refute Baird Smith on this. The result of such economic orthodoxy was that the needy barely had any access to food, resulting in high mortality and migration.

In contrast, in neighbouring Awadh, which was comparatively less affected, orders were issued banning export of foodgrains. A letter from the Nawab of Awadh stated,

⁴⁶ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 53, serial no.5, list 1; to Mansel, magistrate of Agra, from the offg. commissioner, Taylor, 7 December 1837.

⁴⁷ Sleeman, *Rambles*, i, pp.197-202..

⁴⁸ B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p. 14.

“In consequence of the great scarcity of grain in Oude, His Majesty cannot in justice to the poorer classes of his own subjects, issue orders for its exportation from his own dominions.”⁴⁹ Princely states continued to interfere and regulate grain trade during famines, just as their predecessors had done in pre- British times.

The 1860-1 famine

Two significant policy statements on famine relief considerably influenced relief during the 1860-1. The collector of Moradabad, John Strachey, who played a significant role in subsequent famines, despite urgings ‘both by Englishmen and natives to interfere in some way or the other, for the purpose of cheapening food,’ issued a memorandum he had drafted in England while on furlough. It was an uncompromising exposition of relief as an ‘unnecessary evil,’ deprecating any attempt by officials to import grain, or regulate its prices. Strachey insisted that the government confine its duty to providing employment to the able-bodied at subsistence wages, and decried liberalism in relief. In keeping with the laws of political economy of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, who was at that time working in the India Office,⁵⁰ he emphasized that the government should distance itself from the grain trade, and not discourage traders from carrying their trade to places where prices had been pushed up by scarcity. So staunch was Strachey in his adherence to laissez-faire that he forbade any discussion of its pros or cons on the grounds that these had already been discussed threadbare by administrators and academicians in

⁴⁹Pre-Mutiny, NWP, Agra div, judicial, vi, 1838. To R.Campbell, offg. Jt. magistrate, Farrukhabad, from I. Low, Resident of Lucknow residency, 10 February 1838.

⁵⁰J.C.Geddes, *Administrative Experience Recorded in Former Famines; Extracts from Official Papers Containing Instructions for Dealing with Famines*, 1874, p. 17; Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p.113.

Britain, and the ideology had acquired the form of an axiom.⁵¹ The governor, Edmonstone, despite representations, heeded John Strachey's advice and allowed no interference with the grain trade.⁵² However the provincial government did try to stimulate trade by giving interest-free monetary advances, for the supply of grain to workers on relief works at prices lower than those in neighbouring markets.⁵³

John Strachey was quoted approvingly by officials during the 1866 famine, and his memorandum was issued as a policy statement a few years later by the Government of India.⁵⁴ Baird Smith, who had overseen and reported on the famine of 1860-1, agreed with Strachey in this regard, diagnosing the famine as an outcome of the depressed economy. He considered the freedom of the market as, 'the best and surest aid against famines,' and recommended that private trade be encouraged and not interfered with. In this context he indicted what he perceived to be the over-activism of Warren Hastings during famines in the late eighteenth century in the Bengal Presidency. He praised Strachey's sagacity at thwarting any attempt to tamper with free trade.⁵⁵ To prevent any interference in free trade, the government issued policy statements to quell any departures. For example:

Strict injunctions should be given to all local officers to abstain from any interference with the ordinary course of trade in the buying and selling of grain. Under no pretext what ever can anyone be held to be justified in bringing pressure to bear on the dealers, however serious may be the want of food, or however high may be the prices demanded...without special authority, the purchase of grain by public officers, otherwise than for distribution to persons receiving relief, is prohibited.⁵⁶

⁵¹ J. Strachey, *India, Its Administration and Progress* (London, 1903), p.176.

⁵² Geddes, *Report*, pp.15-16.

⁵³ Srivastava, *History*, p.35.

⁵⁴ Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p.113.

⁵⁵ B. Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.14.

⁵⁶ Geddes, *Report*, pp. 3-4.

These comments reflect the ideology of the official mind. Officials who tried to regulate trade by fixing prices of foodgrains, or, who sided with the hungry against the grain merchants, earned the censure of the government as demonstrated in the subsequent chapter;⁵⁷ Strachey became the finance member of Viceroy Lytton's council in 1875, and, exercised overriding influence in determining the shape of relief principles as embodied in the Code.

The high tide of laissez-faire was reached during the 1866 Orissa famine. The central and state governments refused to intervene, even when there was a near total absence of food. Consequently, large-scale mortality was reported. Orissa had no railways, roads were few and in poor condition, riverine and sea communications were disrupted by the heavy monsoon. Under these circumstances the laws of supply and demand proved completely inoperative. Orthodox reliance on free trade resulted in the death of 1.5 million people. When the unfolding tragedy became clearly visible, the state government imported a minimal amount of foodgrain to distressed areas, with the stipulation that sales be made at prices that don't discourage private traders from importing grains.⁵⁸ Widespread criticism followed the mishandling of the Orissa famine, which led to a reappraisal of free trade policies, amongst officials, the public, and pressure groups.

Famine policy after the 1866 famine varied from a staunch and paralysing adherence to laissez-faire to subtle interference depending on the convictions of officials on the

⁵⁷ Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 113.

⁵⁸ Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy*, p.80; 'Political Economy and Indian Famines,' *South Asia*, i (August 1971), pp.20-8, especially p. 27.

spot,⁵⁹ especially wherever life-threatening circumstances prevailed.⁶⁰ The death tolls during famines, especially 1866, spurred critics to mount a sustained attack on rigid laissez-faire. They argued that the outcome of free trade belied the supposition that grain from surplus areas would flow towards scarcity areas, thereby making grains easily available and moderating prices. This, they pointed out, was because India was still underdeveloped, and unsettled conditions created too much insecurity for effective free trade. Transport facilities were inadequate to handle sufficiently large-scale domestic movement of grains, therefore, merchants continued to rely on the familiar and secure export markets, rather than to speculate to supply inaccessible famine tracts, where profits and payment were not guaranteed. Baird Smith recorded, “So miserable are the means of inter-communication in many of those districts” and he might have added, so weak the spirit of competition, “that while in one bazar famine prices of 1 ¼ per pound might be ruling, in another, not thirty miles off, the price would be under 1/2d, yet no flow from the full to the exhausted market took place.”⁶¹ Even in the 1880s, large areas like Bundelkhund were not well connected by road or rail and, transport constituted a grave impediment to the effective flow of free trade.

Moreover the poverty of India was on a scale that could never be visualized in the West. Capital was not easily available, and the governments-state and central, did little to remedy this. Additionally, the institutional infrastructure was very different from the West. Trade and commerce were confined to particular castes, and there were peculiar customs of purity and pollution that hindered the growth of commerce.

⁵⁹ Girdlestone, *Report*, pp. 23-4.

⁶⁰ Secretary of State to Viceroy of India, 9 October 1866; Public despatch no. 85 of 1866, as quoted by Ambirajan, 'Political Economy and Indian Famines,' *South Asia*, i (August 1971), p. 27.

⁶¹ Metcalf, 'Laissez Faire And Tenant' *IESHR*, no.i,i (July- September 1963), p.113.

Brotherhoods of *bantias* or *Khattris*, who were the traditional commercial castes, facilitated collusion and collaboration for unlawful purposes like hoarding grains and contraction of customary credit during famines, and prevented competition. There were towns where the whole grain trade was in the hands of one or two *mahajans*, and even famine prices did not tempt outsiders to engage in grain trade.

One is therefore, hardly justified in assuming that the combination be admitted also, that it may be to the interest of the dealers to maintaining prices at unnecessarily high rates, even at the risk of a quantity of grain, being left on their hands.⁶²

It was argued that grain prices during famines could not be fixed from considerations of humanity “the measure is one, which, must defeat its own object and aggravate the evil.”⁶³ It was however admitted that, “at the same time it is clearly wrong for Governors to go out of the way to proclaim to the dealers that they will be protected in raising their prices as they please, as Sir. Beadon did at Puree.”⁶⁴ Instead it was mooted that the grain dealers be cautioned from unduly raising prices.

The fear of grain-riots is a most wholesome check on the dealers and, though of course they must be put down by the strong hand, yet a word of caution to the dealers not to provoke them, like Lord Napiers in Ganjam, can never come amiss.⁶⁵

1868-9 famine

Despite these judicious but significant onslaughts, the ideological power of *laissez-faire* was so strong that it conspired to rule out anything more than a marginal

⁶² ‘The Operation Of Laissez Faire Principles,’ *Calcutta Review*, xlv (1867), p.106.

⁶³ *ibid.* p.107.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.107.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* p.107.

tinkering with food supply and control. The political imperative for consolidation of economic and political interests ensured that beneficiary groups continued to control the functioning of markets and affected people's accessibility to food grains. A more radical shift from laissez-faire was needed to tackle the famine situation. Critics of laissez-faire stressed humanitarian reasons for some measure of government interference.⁶⁶

The 1868-9 famine memorandum, while emphasizing non-interference with free trade, admitted that government intervention might become necessary if private efforts were insufficient to supply the wants of the outlying tracts. This was in conformity with the proclaimed governmental aim, central and state, owning full responsibility for obviating starvation deaths and helping the helpless, irrespective of private charity. These shifts are reflected in Lt.-Gov. William Muir's policy during the 1868-9 famine. Muir did not entertain the idea of government importation, preferring to encourage private trade by advances of money to traders free of interest, as at Gorakhpur. The traders undertook to store grain in specified places, so as to be purchasable by the government at fixed prices and cover the expenses of the traders; while those who preferred to import grains for sale at their own discretion received advances repayable without interest in six months. The state government readily sanctioned an expenditure of Rs 50,000 to supply grains in the distressed districts of Gharwal and Kumaun. Employment was offered at public works and labour paid in grains. Government also stored grain at Haldwani and Ramnagar. Still at other places the government imported and distributed grains in large quantities.⁶⁷ 400,000

⁶⁶ *ibid.* pp. 106-108; *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, pp. 34-5; Bhattacharya, 'Laissez Faire in India,' *IESHR*, ii, i (January 1965), pp. 1-21 especially pp. 3-4.

⁶⁷ Home Public 'A' Procds. f. 189; from Col. H. Ramsay, commissioner of Kumaun, to R. Simpson, Secretary to the NWP&O, 22 June 1868.

maunds were imported from Kanpur and sent to Jhansi, Duttea and Gwalior.⁶⁸ Importantly, from 13 January to 15 March 1869, the government reduced the rates of railway freights for grains. Grains were also exempt from tolls at ferries and octroi barriers, and compensation paid by government to toll collectors amounted to Rs 25,086.⁶⁹

1873-4 famine

From 1873-4, there was a decisive swing towards greater intervention, even though 'political economy' remained a smoke-screen for justification of stringency in relief and not imposing fresh taxes on the well off, which the government ultimately did. Viceroy Northbrook and his council, though liberal in provisioning relief, opposed the purchase of grains and refused to prohibit exports. In the initial phase of the famine, there was a conflict of opinion between the central and state governments on the measure of state regulation. The governor, George Campbell, right through the famine argued for prohibition of exports, at least from Bengal, as it would bring down the prices of grain in Calcutta, and the grain would automatically flow to the high price regions in Bihar. He would 'dam up the grain and force it back.' Northbrook's stance was endorsed by the then Secretary of State, Argyll, who felt that nothing would justify prohibition of exports except the reasonable certainty that exports would so exhaust resources as to render them insufficient to supply the needs of distressed districts.⁷⁰ Rice from Burma was imported in quantities, which almost equalled exports. "The strange spectacle was seen of fleets of ships, taking rice out from the

⁶⁸ Henvey, *Report*, p.66.

⁶⁹ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p.89.

⁷⁰ *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, p.49.

Hoogly and passing other ships bringing rice in.”⁷¹

However, during the course of this famine, the position of the central government was increasingly compromised due to sustained pressure from the governor Campbell and, organizations like the British India Association, the Indian Press, as well as influential English newspapers like *The Times* in Britain; they mounted a campaign to prohibit export of grains and importing grain where necessary. The persistent anxiety was to avoid a repeat of the Orissa tragedy.⁷² This anxiety was shared by Northbrook and his council, as well as Salisbury, who had succeeded Argyll, as Secretary of State. Salisbury was specially concerned as he had been Secretary of State during the Orissa famine and felt chastened by the tragedy. Not only did he want to avoid loss of human lives, but also wished to make amends for his earlier non-interventionist stance. He urged Northbrook “to make the fullest provision for importing grain.” The central government under sustained pressure imported huge quantities of grain and, by the beginning of March 1874, had purchased 480,000 tons of grains.⁷³ To stimulate trade, Northbrook instructed the railway companies to reduce by half the freight charges on grain travelling towards threatened districts. The central government undertook to bear the costs of this reduction;⁷⁴ and directed that liberal advances be made to the *zamindars* to make agricultural improvements, purchase seed grain, or to feed the needy *ryots* on their estates. It also sanctioned £50,000 to assist emigration to Assam and Burma.⁷⁵

⁷¹ P. Woodruff, *The Men Who Ruled India: The Guardians* (London, 1954), p.103.

⁷² E.C. Moulton, *Lord Northbrook's Indian Administration 1872-76* (London, 1968), pp. 94-5.

⁷³ *ibid.* p.101.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.93.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 93.

In the face of widespread criticism of surplus expenditure, mounted by non-interventionists, the situation was one of confusion as reflected in the vacillating policy followed by successive viceroys and governors. Northbrook's successor Lytton followed free trade ideology in its most orthodox form, much to the delight of John Strachey, who noted, "The policy followed by the government of India during the viceroyalty of Lord Lytton was one of absolute free trade, without reservations or qualifications."⁷⁶ One reason for the appointment of the Famine Commission in 1878 was to spell out a clear policy on the extent of government responsibility for supply and distribution of foodgrain during famines.

1880- Famine Code

Three broad strands of opinion emerged during the discussions of the Famine Commission of 1878. There was overall support for free trade policy as the ideal mechanism for distribution of grain. The difference was the stress on the extent to which this was to be followed in a situation of crisis. Firstly, there was the pressure group called 'quacks' by their critics in the British Parliament, wanted the colonial Indian government to undertake measures that would reduce obstacles to free trade on a permanent basis. They argued that famines were indicators of the precarious levels of subsistence on which the majority lived. One way to alleviate their economic condition and enable them to withstand famines was to prioritize the construction of roads and railways, irrigation works and removal of tolls and restraints on trade, over spending money on alleviating distress.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Strachey, *India, its Administration* (London, 1903), p.180.

⁷⁷ See above pp.45-7,78-87,176.

The question of relief was more problematic. The interventionists, led by Northbrook, Argyll, Campbell and Colvin, while expressing faith in free trade, emphasized that government ought to import grain and sell it at market prices when private trade proved inadequate. The success of such an interventionist attitude was demonstrated during the 1873-4 famine. Caird and Sullivan, both civil servants from Madras, wanted grains to be stored by government in districts having poor communication facilities, and therefore, inaccessible. They also doubted the availability of surplus grain that would enable grain to flow from surplus to scarce areas.

But these suggestions were opposed by non-interventionists especially from NWP&O, notably the Strachey brothers, Elliott, Lytton, Couper and MacDonnell, on several grounds. They argued, firstly, that the problem of famines could only be palliated and not remedied. Free trade and employment on public works for the able bodied, distribution of food, and relief at poor houses were the palliatives that the government, central and state, could offer. Secondly, they emphasized the costs involved. Most importantly, laissez-faire to them had become a reliable axiom. Interference in economic activity meant tampering with private property rights and personal liberty, thereby inflicting injustice on the grain traders. In crisis situations, government's mostly follow precedents, and this was, to a large extent, true of the government's reaction to famines in NWP&O. There was stress on the immediate and welfare aspects of governmental actions rather than strengthening the long-term productive and remunerative powers of the afflicted people. Moreover, some officials feared that intervention would deter merchants from importing and supplying grains to these inaccessible parts, making the famine situation more difficult.⁷⁸ They argued

⁷⁸'The Operation of Laissez -faire Principles,' *Calcutta Review*, xlv (1867), pp.104-5; *IFC Report*, 1880-5, iii, pp.50-3.

that with the continuing extension of railways, the ordinary operations of trade would supply the wants of food during famines.⁷⁹ What stands out is, the conservatism and political dominance of the supporters of laissez-faire especially from the NWP&O, stifled a more adequate response to liberal relief, in contrast to the liberal and realistic attitudes of the Madras and Bengal officials.

The scale was strongly tilted towards interventionism. Even the doctrinaires were compelled to recognize that there could arise exceptional circumstances that necessitated government interference, as when a combination of local traders refused to sell, or sold at exorbitant rates only. According to this view, sales below the retail market rate were to be considered an effective form of relief, independent of any labour test.⁸⁰ Also, government was to step in and send grain to remote places, where communication facilities were not developed, or traders were not able to meet the demand so that there was fear of the supply getting exhausted. It was also recommended that the government store grains, and be prepared with a sufficient supply during famines, to meet the wants of affected people.⁸¹ Thus, in the end, the views of Sullivan and Caird prevailed with some modifications. In addition, moves towards local responsibility and accountability for starvation deaths, liberal provision for granting of *takavi*, remission and suspension of revenue, expanding the scope of gratuitous relief, commitment for the creation of infrastructure, and the appointment of famine administrators to compile data after every famine, all circumvented the economic orthodoxy, and shifted the balance away from non-interventionism. Thus while ideological pre-suppositions changed little, actual policy fluctuated.

⁷⁹ *IFC, Report*, 1880,i, p. 67.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* pp.70-1; Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 113.

⁸¹ *IFC Report*, 1880,i,p.71.

Klein concluded, "Famine policies were liberalised as the need declined to concentrate on building development works and as the simple existence of a modern infrastructure of transport and irrigation proved insufficient, in a Malthusian, laissez-faire context to contain famine induced mortality."⁸² Social scientists questioned the strength of official faith in this doctrine, and administrators attributed their steadfast adherence to it, partly because of the pressure of interest groups.⁸³ Evidence from the NWP&O corroborates this viewpoint.

1896-7 famine

During 1896-7, the questions of food supply and price were vital. Right from the onset of famine, central and provincial governments were under pressure from political and popular groups, as well as the press, especially the vernacular press, to intervene if necessary to make the difficult conditions bearable. The matter was important enough to be immediately discussed by the Viceroy and his Executive Council. Overwhelmingly, the members disapproved of any interference in private trade, either by way of prohibiting exports or promoting imports. This was approved by Secretary of State for India, George Hamilton, who wrote, "I am sure the less you interfere with private trade, the better, for any dislocation of so ubiquitous an instrument might lead to wholesale disorder, for the consequences of which you would be responsible."⁸⁴ Viceroy Elgin, brushed aside fears that the government's non-interference led to manipulation of markets and aggravated famine conditions,

⁸² Klein, 'When the Rains failed,' *ISER*, p.206; Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy In India*, p.75.

⁸³ Bhattacharya, 'Laissez- Faire in India,' *IESHR*, ii,i (January 1965), pp. 1-16.

⁸⁴ Hamilton to Elgin, 8 January 1897, p.2. (Mss.Eur.C.125/2,OIOC).

and published a policy statement in the *Gazette of India*, in early 1897, summing up the government stand thus:

The Governor-General in council believes that the intervention of the government as purchasers or importers would do infinitely more harm than good, as it would cripple and discourage the agency which is best able to gauge the need, which is impelled by self interest to anticipate it, and which alone is best able to supply it effectively.⁸⁵

MacDonnell firmly opposed any departure from the principles of non-intervention, and favourably influenced Elgin in this. MacDonnell himself was advised by Lord Lytton through the newspaper *Tribune*- that government operations in grain markets disorganize and paralyse private trade and the two cannot co-exist. “Absolute non-interference with the operations of private commercial enterprise must be the foundation of our policy.” But protests from some officials, as well as criticism in the press, both in India and in England, forced them to modify their stand at later stages of famine.

The tensions between interventionists and non-interventionists were reflected in the fact that provincial governments took opposing stance on government’s interference in private trade. For example, the Bengal government, recording the short supply of grain, doubted the ability of private trade to meet supply needs and recommended some measure of regulation of the grain trade, and additionally requested the central government to authorize them to advance money to traders to import foodgrain.⁸⁶ This was a direct contravention of the policies of the central and the NWP&O government.

⁸⁵ Gazette, p.33, quoted by Dreze, 'Famine prevention in India,' in Dreze and Sen (eds). *The Political Economy of Hunger* (Oxford, 1990), p.34, fn. 79.

⁸⁶ P.L. Malhotra, *Administration of Lord Elgin, 1894-9* (New Delhi, 1979), pp.116- 7.

In contrast, MacDonnell refused to tamper with free trade in NWP&O. He had no complaints against private traders and their manipulations, and reposed faith in the *banias*, who he believed were resourceful enough to provide the supplies.⁸⁷ He was convinced that the mere rumour of any intervention on the part of local authorities was enough to make dealers shut their shops, and divest the district of grain supplies.⁸⁸ He was anxious to enlist their co-operation and so toured the province to reassure them, that his government would not interfere in market transactions. He ensured that these notables were on the relief committees, involved in relief dispensation, and in the maintenance of law and order. MacDonnell appealed to these powerful groups to show consideration and generosity to the suffering masses.⁸⁹ The Lt.-Gov. wrote to one of the Awadh associations, emphasising that government would not enter into competition with grain traders. Far from being beneficial, such competition would be mischievous in the extreme. The grain trade of the country was and that the free flow of the trade has been immensely facilitated in the recent years by the construction of roads, and railways,...that stocks of other countries are finding their way to remunerative markets here, and that, as the great economist Mr. Mill said that though a government can do more than any one merchant, it cannot do nearly so much as all the merchants.

Offers of grain supplies through government mediation was frowned upon and discouraged by the Government of India, and the result of such intransigence was summed up in the offer of Mr Samuel and Son, during the 1899 famine:

⁸⁷ Macdonell to Elgin, 4 March 1897, pp.95-6(Macdonell papers, Ms. Emg. Hist. C.353, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

⁸⁸ The Operation Of Laissez Faire Principles,' *Calcutta Review*, xlv (1867), p. 105.

⁸⁹ MacDonnell to Cadell, 3 October 1896, p. 2.(Ms.Eng.Hist.C.352).

We are aware that in 1896-7, government left the importations and the supplies to private trade, and the result was an enormous speculation by the merchants established in India, and resale of 75 per cent of the grain to other than Indian consumers in the distressed provinces.⁹⁰

However in NWP&O, the acute scarcity of foodgrain at reasonable prices agitated the public mind. There was a steep shortfall in production, which was estimated by the Chief Secretary, Holderness, at eighteen or nineteen million tons.⁹¹ Imports exceeded exports by 120,000 tons and, in 1897 alone, the net imports were over half a million tons.⁹² Local bodies and influential private individuals demanded that government prohibit exports and regulate prices. *The Rifah-i-Am Association* of Lucknow demanded that government grain stores be opened so as to check grain dealers from holding back the stocks and raising prices.⁹³ The *Poona Sarvajanic Sabha* sent a memorial urging the government to stop exports of foodgrain and import grains where necessary.⁹⁴ The Indian press demanded that in the face of a prolonged famine government regulate trade in some measure. Pictures of starving people were published and satirical poems and jokes ridiculing the government's ideological stance abounded in the vernacular press. For example, *The Karnamah* regretted that the government despite appeals had refused to interfere with the free course of trade,

⁹⁰ Offer of Ms. Samuel & Son to supply maize during the present famine. Procds, revenue and agriculture, Famine, February 1900; no. 8 "C." as quoted by M. K. Bhabha, *The Famine of 1899-1900, and the Government of India* (B.Litt, Oxford, 1973), p. 215.

⁹¹ Dreze, 'Famine Prevention in India,' in Dreze and Sen(eds), *The Political Economy of Hunger*, p.34, fn. 79.

⁹² Scarcity deptt, August 1902, f. 488; *Decennial Report on the Material Condition of the People of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, p.15.

⁹³ The Rifah -i -Am Association put forward other proposals i.e. relief works and poor houses be started at once, suspension and remission of revenue, government take special and immediate steps to communicate with the landlords of the province for the maintenance of public peace; see. *Tribune*, 11 November 1896.

⁹⁴ Malhotra, *Administration of Lord Elgin*, p.116.

which greatly added to the prevailing distress.⁹⁵ The vernacular press demanded an embargo on exports abroad. For instance *Awadh Panch* recorded:

The grain exported from this country at present is really so much of the life-blood of the famine stricken natives. The bags of grain were as it were, bags of natives, whom the civilized ...of England will eat after killing them with the sword of free trade.⁹⁶

The Rafiq-i- Sultanat attributed the growing poverty and distress of the people to the government's policy of free exportation of goods.⁹⁷ Similarly, *The Zamanah* (Kanpur) commented:

Famine has been present in the country for three years, but the government persistently refused to suspend the export of food grains even temporarily, and the result is that the evil has deepened into a dire calamity.⁹⁸

Anti-laissez-faire lobbyists argued that even in normal years foodgrains that were exported were at the cost and risk of Indians, as India exported not just its surplus but the grain stocks necessary for their needs. Even if there was a small surplus, this reserve which could be useful in obviating hunger during famines was exhausted by exports.⁹⁹ Nationalists, and a section of officials, criticized the export of food-grains, citing it as the principal reason for high prices and famine. Dutt protested, " Even on the eve of the great famine, the export of food- grains goes on as briskly as ever."¹⁰⁰ The Indian National Congress, at its 1891 Nagpur session, recommended some government intervention to check free and unlimited exports, which pushed up prices.¹⁰¹ They urged that export duty be levied, while some demanded a complete

⁹⁵ *The Karnamah*, 10 February 1897, pp. 110-111. L/R/5/74.

⁹⁶ *Awadh Panch*, 21 May 1891, p.376. L/R/5/68.

⁹⁷ *The Rafiq-i - Sultanat*, 19 January 1897, p.64. L/R/5/74.

⁹⁸ *The Zamanah*, 1 April 1897, p.241. L/R/5/74

⁹⁹ *Hitvadi*, 25 July 1891, p. list 4, vol. 24. UPSAL.

¹⁰⁰ Dutt, *Economic History*, i (London, 1904, reprinted N.York, 1956), p. 349.

¹⁰¹ *Bharat Jiwan*, 15 February 1892, p.50. L/R/5/ 69; *Bharat Jiwan*, 19 January 1900, p.47. L/R/5/77; Ray, *Indian Famines*, p.64.

embargo on exports. This demand gained greater force during 1896-7. The Congress, at its twelfth session, underlined that the most pressing problem was the scarcity of food in the country. It was even demanded that government import food from Persia, Russia, or America.¹⁰² When the central government did not concede to this demand, it was argued that at the cost of Indian lives, grain was made available at cheap rates to well-fed people in England.¹⁰³ The Indian government rebutted these charges, pointing out that foodgrain exports from British India had declined drastically from 48,864,395 cwt in 1894-5 to 32,420,134, cwt in 1896-7.

Such criticisms, the suffering of the people, and past experience led many officers to argue for a departure from *laissez-faire*. However, MacDonnell remained adamant on non-interference with free trade. To illustrate his point he cited Banda, which had broken down under the impact of famine (Black Famine). Private trade was reported to flow normally with the local *banias*, supplying grains at prices regulated with those of the nearest *bazars*.¹⁰⁴ He was however, ready to minimize administrative obstacles to facilitate movement of grains, reduce railway freight charges, maintain contact with grain dealers, and provide information about the state of grain trade and markets. Such a stance brought him into conflict with several district officers. Some like Innes, acting on his own, stopped the export of grain from Balrampur estate, earning him the disapproval of the Lieutenant Governor.¹⁰⁵ At Sultanpur, the magistrate opened grain stores where grain could be purchased at cheaper rates than from the *banias* in the *bazars*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Zaidi, *Indian National Congress- A Glorious Tradition*, i, 1885-1920, pp. Report of the Indian National Congress, 1896, pp. 57-8; Malhotra, *Administration of Lord Elgin*, p. 116.

¹⁰³ *Bharat Jiwan*, 9 April 1900, p. 171. L/R/5/77.

¹⁰⁴ Macdonell to Elgin, 23 December 1896, pp. 52-3. (Ms. Eng. Hist. C. 353)

¹⁰⁵ MacDonnell to Adams, 4 October 1896, pp. 8-9. (Ms. Emg. C. Hist. 352).

¹⁰⁶ E. Luce, *Glimpses of Christian India* (London, 1932), p. 69.

Even at the height of the famine, grains were being exported out of the province; this raised the price of grains and escalated the intensity of the famine, by reducing the much-needed stock available for local consumption. Superior landlords and merchants who exported grain made huge profits. But MacDonnell faithfully stood by the banias whose actions he deemed were “in harmony with our perceptions of what the circumstances required and in accordance with general supply of law and demand.”¹⁰⁷

Small wonder that the 1901 Commission under MacDonnell recorded that, during the famines of 1897 and 1899, there was never a dearth of food in the famine tract, and attributed this to the protective effects of railways. He added confidently that in the whole of India, with the exception of mountainous tracts, there was, for the future, no anxiety as to the ability of private trade to deliver food where it was needed.¹⁰⁸

The 1898 and 1901 Famine reports assessed the effectiveness of laissez-faire, in the light of modifications enjoined by the 1880 Famine Code, as practised during the 1896-7 and 1899 famines and reaffirmed the basic principles of the code, despite several improvements. However, increased official pressure to depart from the tenets of laissez-faire eventually overcame the orthodox view, especially as concern to avert starvation deaths increased. It minimized the extent of social disruption via a more generous relief policy, and became the cry of the nationalists, who initiated their own relief efforts. This was evident in the case of the 1907 famine, response to which included importation of grain, advances free of interest, and a system of grain credit orders. This departure, and a liberal grant of loans, successfully combated the famine.

Klein remarked:

¹⁰⁷ Macdonell to Elgin, 4 March 1897, p.96. (Ms.Eng.Hist.C.353).

¹⁰⁸ Strachey, *India its Administration* (4.edn.London,1911), p.248.

The northern Indian famine of 1907 had the potential to destroy millions of lives in the large tracts where the crops had withered, and their survival attested that modernisation and a partial liberalisation of the policy almost 'conquered the famine.'¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

One can tabulate a parallel development of laissez-faire and state interventionism dictated by political expediency, fostering of vested economic interests and humane objectives, over the four famines studied. By 1896-7, the capacity of free trade to deliver the goods during famines was increasingly doubted, and state intervention espoused. Though laissez-faire was not abandoned, noteworthy, was the scale and variety of state intervention, in terms of infrastructure, widening and liberalising relief in giving suspension and remission of revenue, provision of loans, and supply of foodgrain where lives were endangered because of scarcity of food. Such a policy rendered orthodox laissez-faire weak¹¹⁰

Changes in ideology of the rulers was due to an increasing sense of responsibility and accountability. Even the British press was critical of famine policy. Importantly administrators built on their cumulative experience which in India in dealing with famines was, that, over stress on market mechanisms to provide easy access to food grains was an unreliable proposition, especially in the pre-1880 years, when infrastructure was still not well developed especially in the rural areas. Several district officers advised that even if food movement and trade were left in private hands, government should hold grain stocks which could be distributed through government

¹⁰⁹ Klien, 'When the Rains Failed,' 21,2(1984), *ISER*, p. 206.

¹¹⁰ Awasthi, *Aspects of Economic History of India* (Bombay, 1963), p.183.

agencies or public distribution systems amongst the needy. The existence of public food stocks could to some extent have prevented collusive behaviour of traders in response to enhanced demand for food, and price rise due to panic buying.

But such needed measures were not taken up on a systematic basis, even when unrestrained private trade and free market operations were having a visibly damaging effect on famine-affected groups. There was little justification for continued export of grains, especially from deficit areas to areas of surplus production, as well as to foreign countries, with no import of foodgrain and non-regulation of prices. Markets, far from being 'free,' were shaped by authority systems, resource base and political accessibility, and the power of individuals and groups. Adherence to it, even in limited form, thwarted the objective of alleviating the condition of the poor. Therefore, the political objective of using famine relief to strengthen the concept of a welfare paternal state, resting on the allegiance and loyalty of its subjects, remained largely unrealized.

Introduction

In the previous chapter it was established that the discourse on relief was appropriated for political ends; bureaucratic priorities and agendas subsumed humanitarian concerns and were rationalized by ideologies. This chapter examines the patterns of relief, its fluctuations over time, the government's perceptions of its role in relief, the role of institutions¹ especially bureaucracy² in its evolution and implementation.³ In the process the role of infrastructure,⁴ democratic politics,⁵ free press⁶ and political will, reviewed in the Introduction as important components for determining the success and nature of relief will be scrutinized in this and subsequent chapters.

Mechanics of decision making – central, provincial and district

Till mid nineteenth century relief was primarily a provincial responsibility. It was shaped by a variety of officials at essentially three levels-the Sudder Board of Revenue decided revenue matters, and the commissioners of the various divisions, were responsible for technical matters. District officers played the key role in relief implementation; they oversaw specific operational plans, including decision making for their districts. Their attitudes and interests had a major bearing on the affected people's survival whom being isolated from the central and state governments depended on them for relief. This denoted a decentralized approach -leading to

¹ Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, p.249.

² Rangasami, 'Failure of Exchange Entitlements,' *EPW*, xx, no. 41, October 1985, p. 1747.

³ Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor*, p.304; Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p. 117; M. Daly, 'The Operations of Famine Relief,' 1845-7, in C. Portier (ed). *The Great Irish Famine* (Mercier, 1995), p.128.

⁴ W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (London, 1868), pp. 51-3; Mc Alpin, Railroads, *IESHR*, (January-March 1995), xii, pp.43-58.

⁵ Illife, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 9.

⁶ Dreze & Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, p. 212.

confusion as there was no central co-ordinating authority. Different departments viewed the crisis from different angles and often responded with opposing assessments of the nature and measure of relief to be offered. These stemmed from ideological, personal, as well as hierarchical differences, often working at cross-purposes. Disagreement was pronounced on issues of wages, remission and suspension of revenue, grant of loans and *takavi*, expansion of gratuitous relief, and, most importantly - free trade and, from 1860's responsibility for starvation deaths. Whereas many local officers represented the realities and interests of the suffering, senior bureaucrats ensured that fiscal priorities would dominate over the sufferers.

During the 1837-8 famine, the Sudder Board, with its commercial outlook and its control of the purse strings, exerted immense influence on executive action and the outcome of relief. It took a cold, narrow, and legalistic approach to famines, treating them as occasions for ideological assertion, especially towards grant of remissions, suspensions and of *takavi* loans, and wages, which till the 1880's was based on the notion of 'burden sharing.' This brought it in conflict with several district officers, who underlined the devastating consequences of famine, urged for liberal remission of land tax. They recommended that in keeping with the traditional moral obligations of Indian rulers, the government should make *takavi* grants, and offer some other inducements to enable the afflicted to stay on in their villages, and protect them from exploitative moneylenders and landlords. They stressed that lack of credit was one of the main causes of migration, which resulted in the estates lying uncultivated for a

number of years resulting in further loss of revenue.⁷ Hamilton advised the Sudder Board,

I am confident that the only chance of retaining the lower classes of agricultural community in their villages, where drought and famine prevails, is the suspension of government demand.⁸

The commissioners of Rohilkhund and Meerut suggested that advances be made to help *ryots* buy seeds and begin cultivation, but the Sudder Board did not agree and instructed that *takavi* be given only for the construction and repair of wells. The collector of Hamirpur requested advances of *takavi* of Rs 2,319, to facilitate sugarcane cultivation, getting substantial security from individuals in need of it: “the calamities of the present season and the indigent condition of the proprietors render the pecuniary assistance solicited necessary to enable them to extend their collection.”⁹ This was turned down.¹⁰ The *tehsildars* of Allahabad, despite the dissuasion of the collector, persisted, applying economic logic to pressure the Sudder Board to relent. He stressed that not only the *ryots* but also many rich *zamindars* were in distress and had applied for loans and suspension of revenue. Such were their losses in terms of crops and cattle that local *banias* refused to advance them anything, making government interjection necessary: “Further refusal will be attended with considerable injury to the interests of the government.”¹¹ The collector relented and

⁷Procds. Sud Bd. of Rev, NWP,123, July 1838; to the commissioner 4 div, Allahabad, from H. M.Elliott, Secretary, Sud. Bd of Rev, 3 July 1838, pp.64-5.

⁸Procds. Sud. Bd. of Rev, NWP,114, February 1838; from R.N.C. Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div to Elliott, Secretary Sud, Bd Of Rev, 13 February 1838, p.33.

⁹Procds. Sud. Bd. of Rev, NWP, 116, March 1838; to R. Lowther, offg. commissioner, Allahabad div; from J.N. Taunton, collector of Hamirpur, 28 Feburary 1838, p.7.

¹⁰Procds. Sud Bd. of Rev, NWP, 116, March 1838;to the offg. commissioner,Allahabad div, from Elliott, secretary Board of Rev, 20 March 1838, p.9.

¹¹ Procds.Sud.Bd.of Rev, NWP,123,June1838, to,Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad, from I.Taunton,collector, Allahabad, 26 June1838, p. 287.

put in a request for Rs 70,000, for disbursing as *takavi*.¹² The Sudder Board refused to make the concessions, which it termed “misplaced expectations.”¹³

The Sudder Board in conformity with *laissez-faire*, spelt out a stringent policy under which grants and other concessions could be made “...The agricultural population being aware that they must provide their own resources, maybe without loss of time make their own arrangements...”¹⁴ The Board further stipulated that,

Calamity alone was to be the standard of remission.” All payers of revenue must be looked upon as equal in the eyes of government ... and (remissions) were conditional on zamindars making an equivalent reduction to his tenantry.¹⁵

The Sudder Board insisted on full payment of revenue despite the distress, and those unable to pay were put to severe physical punishment.¹⁶ Even the salaries of the *chaprasis*, *shanas*, watchmen, and *Amins* were stopped.¹⁷ While the Sudder Board, emphasized the immediate revenue context- maximum collection of revenue- the district officers, emphasized that in order to make the long- term processes of reproduction safe, a liberal policy be adopted. Their humanitarian and moral concern for the suffering people was in contrast to the Sudder Board’s, which was self-sustaining and commercial, upholding the outright use of authoritarianism in what they perceived to be a display of state power.

¹² *ibid.* p.287.

¹³ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, Revenue, 1838, series 111, -1a, no.136; to Hamilton, commissioner, Agra div, to Elliott, secretary, Sud. Bd. Of Rev, 15 June 1838.

¹⁴ Procds. Sud. Bd. of Rev, NWP, 1838, 122; from Elliott, secretary Sud. Bd. of Rev, to Hamilton, offg. commissioner of the Agra div, 29 May 1838, p.243.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.243.

¹⁶ Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP, March 1838, 116, to. I.Thomason, offg. secretary to the Gov.- Genl. NWP, from I.H. Elliot, Secretary Bd. of Rev, 20 March 1838, p. 467.

¹⁷ *Gazetteers,, Hamirpur*, xxii (1909), p.101.

Such differences often culminated in serious confrontations between junior and senior officers even leading to the resignation of some; for example Charles McMinn fell from official favour for strongly criticizing relief in Agra district, and sought the direct intervention of the Gov.-Genl. instead of going through the usual official channels. The inquiry instituted found many of his charges correct, but still he was censured and transferred. It earned him the ire of senior bureaucrats like Couper, who felt that he was unfit to be a member of the civil service, and, if not dismissed, should be transferred to distant places like Assam or Burma. The sympathy for the needy which McMinn displayed was at variance with the harshness of Couper.¹⁸ His indictment reflects concern for convention and bureaucratic hierarchy, rather than the validity of his criticisms.

Such concerns found full play in the confrontation between Mansel, the magistrate at Agra, and Hamilton, the commissioner of Agra division, on the issue of reduction of worker's wages on the relief works at Agra. Hamilton, with the backing of Thomason, ordered a reduction on grounds that it would induce the workers to find work elsewhere and not exploit government liberality. Implicit in his stand was the concern that the labour from the general market must not be weaned away and injure commercial interests. Mansel, also an influential member of the Agra relief committee setting aside political economy concerns, supported a resolution to raise the rate of wages to eight Gwalior pice for men and, seven for women; this was intended to secure a healthy sustenance. Hamilton, was furious and complained that Mansel used his power and influence in the Agra Relief Committee "of that body to oppose the

¹⁸Metcalf, *Land Landlords*, p.196, fn 85.

views of his superiors;”¹⁹ and that the directions of the government had been totally set aside.²⁰ The situation reached such a crisis point that Hamilton wrote to the Gov.-Genl. and complained

of the want of co- operation on the part of the magistrate, in carrying his orders into effect, for reducing the rate of allowance to the poor suggesting at the same time that the government should fix the rate, as the only way to settle the discussion which was daily becoming more embarrassing, and that no employment should be given to the paupers after the 1 September..

The officiating commissioner was authorised to communicate to Mansel (magistrate) that any factious opposition to his wishes and orders was considered utterly inconsistent with subordination due to a superior officer and that it was highly disapproved of.²¹

Mansel’s, opposition to wage reduction was remarkable and reflected his humanitarian concerns, especially for women and children. He argued that reduction in the already meagre wages was unnecessary as the improvement in weather prospects was an inducement enough for the labourers to leave and commence their pursuits.²² His censure reflects the difficulty well-intentioned officers faced in promoting their humanitarian concerns which were subsumed and defeated within the larger framework of ideological assertions and bureaucratic conventions. It also demonstrates that, despite censure, junior officers often acted independently of their seniors, especially, in assessing the needs of the affected.

¹⁹Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial,73, serial 25, list1; to I.Thomason, secretary to the Gov.-Genl.NWP, from Hamilton, the offg. commissioner, Agra div, 23 July 1838.

²⁰ibid.

²¹Board Collections, E/4/165, November-December 1838;judicial & general deptts, NWP, 11 December 1838; Narrative of the Procds. of the Gov.-Genl. in the NWP, during the third quarter of 1838.

²² Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial,55, serial no. 5, list 1, 13 June 1838; report of the Agra subcommittee of which Mansel was an influential member.

They resented that their presentation of factual information was dismissed as exaggerated and their recommendations turned down. For example, the magistrate of Farrukhabad, emphasized the disorder and lawlessness that had gripped his district and asked for additional help. But no help was forthcoming since the commissioner of Agra played the situation down, observing that, during abnormal times there was a tendency to exaggerate reports and facts of disorder.²³ A similar clash of views occurred between Markham, collector of Fatehpur and Simpson, commissioner of Allahabad division on giving of relief to *parda-nashin* women.²⁴ This led many officers not to inform the government of the level of suffering in their district.²⁵ Data was manipulated so as to avoid blame and accountability, resulting in lack of proper evaluation of policy outcomes. Such tactics are recognized as a bureaucratic escape route.²⁶ Rigidity and stifling of dissent was objected to by many of the officers affected. A letter written by Syed Imdad Ali, a *tehsildar* in Rohilkhund division, highlights the degree of hierarchical subordination, to the extent that one could not express a candid opinion, senior officers being wary of criticism. According to him, subordinates did not provide unwelcome information on famines, such as how funds were embezzled, or the mal-administration of relief works, and mistreatment of inmates in the poor houses was very often overlooked and discounted as unreliable, or exaggerated. The occurrence of starvation deaths and other severities were played down. The actions of bureaucrats and government were legitimized and sustained by

²³ Pre-Mutiny, Agra Div, judicial, 53, serial. 5, list 1, from Hamilton, offg. commissioner Agra, to F. Robinson, Farrukhabad, 18 August 1837.

²⁴ Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, revenue, 1878, no.225; bundle 81, box 121, serial.1, list 43; from the offg. collector, Fatehpur, to I Simpson, commissioner, 4 div Allahabad, 6 July 1878.

²⁵ Board collections, judicial- revenue and general depts, no.4 of 1838; Narrative of the procds of the Gov.-Genl. NWP. during the first quarter of 1838, 5 May 1838.

²⁶ B.B.Schaffer, 'Towards Responsibility: Public Policy In Concept and Practice' in Clay & Schaffer, eds. *Room For Monoeuvre: An Exploration Of Public Policy In Agriculture and Rural Development* (London, 1984), pp.1-12.

the optimistic tilt of famine information and reports. Thus, the situation of famine victims remained largely unalleviated.²⁷

Lack of information and co-ordination complicated and hindered relief well up to 1890's, despite an important shift from the 1860-1 famine; the control of the central government and the Secretary of State in London became pronounced, and the system gradually became centralized. *Paragana, tehseel and*, village level autonomy gave way to provincial intervention, which in turn often took instructions from the centre, which was advised by the Secretary of State at London. Solutions were supposedly arrived at through co-ordination and comprehensive planning at these various levels. But ideological and personal differences plagued relief and did little to rectify the situation.

This was recognized by Lt.-Gov. George Couper, who in a circular to the district relief committees, regretted that the Agra relief committee had not received the full co-operation from local relief committees.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the central committee, unless duly informed of the condition of the people in each district of their wants.(the central committee) cannot discharge its proper functions with successful effect..the proceedings of the central committee show that its enquiries have not always been answered... perhaps more might have been accomplished had their suggestions been more generally followed.²⁸

²⁷Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, 1858-80, xii, box 87, serial. 1-8, f. no.82, translation of a letter from Syed Imdad Ali, 2 June 1878.

²⁸Post-Mutiny, Meerut div, vii, f. 4, 1861, circular 997; from Sir. George Couper, Secretary, NWP. to local relief committees at Dehardoon, Saharanpur, Muzzfurnagar, Meerut, Bualandshahar, Aligarh, Mathura, Mainpuri, Farrukhabad, Bijnor, Moradabad, Bareilly, Agra.

Such bureaucratic wrangles found full play in the creation of the Famine Commission of 1878 and the formulation of the 1880 Famine Code. John Strachey, the finance member of the Viceroy's council, controlled the manoeuvring of the Commission and the making of the Code, aided by his brother Richard Strachey, Chairman, of the Commission; Charles Elliot, Chief Secretary, NWP&O, was also the Secretary of the Commission, and, George Couper, the Lt.-Gov. NWP&O, was an influential member of the Commission, as also MacDonnell, who became Lt.-Gov. of NWP&O in the 1890s. The conservative and imperialistic views of these NWP&O civilians clashed with the more liberal and realistic recommendations of the Madras civilians, like Sullivan and Caird, on wages, terms of gratuitous relief, task work and free trade. The former group displayed hesitation to move away from established axioms and ensured that the Famine Code made no dramatic shifts on these issues. John Strachey, for example, disdainfully set aside the opinions of medical experts like Cornish, who pointed out the inadequacy of wages and allowances, arguing that the laws of economics could not be the determining factor of human nutritional needs. Besides, personal slights and future promotions were also settled during these troubled times. Those promoted had toed the official line.²⁹

Recognizing the need for accountability and co-ordination amongst these actors the 1880 Code specified the responsibilities and duties of district officer; recommended the establishment of the office of Famine Commissioner, to act as the central, authority in co-ordinating and directing relief operations, and keeping the centre and London informed of the progress of famine and relief operations.

²⁹ L. Brennan, 'The Development of the Indian Famine Codes: Personalities, Politics and Policies' in B. Curry & G. Hugo (ed), *Famine as a Geographical Phenomenon* (1984), pp.106-7.

Despite such measures co-ordination and accountability in relief administration was lacking, even during 1896-7. Lt.-Gov. MacDonnell permitted district officers to mould relief according to local exigencies within the broad framework of governmental – state and central, directions; for example in some places daily wages were given, whereas in Bundelkhund wages were given thrice a week. But often officers acted independently, contravening the policy directions and orders of government; this infuriated MacDonnell. He complained to Viceroy Elgin that district officers were not fully trained to tackle emergency situations.³⁰ Bennett, had made an assessment that was generous to the *ryots*. This led MacDonnell to accuse him of needlessly “sacrificing government revenue,” complained that Bennett did not keep him sufficiently informed in revenue matters.³¹ MacDonnell was further infuriated when he learnt that Innes, the magistrate of Balrampur, acting on his own imported large quantities of food in his district in direct contravention of laissez-faire tenets.³²

Levels of hostility, distrust and want of co-operation and respect between Indian officials and British district officers increased over the four famines and was further compounded by race animus. Much of this distrust was based on the perception that the other lacked integrity and commitment and misperceived the cultural susceptibilities of the needy. Allegations of malpractice, incompetence, corruption, and racial discrimination abounded. During 1860-1 famine, reports from Jalaun, Jhansi, and Hamirpur indicated that Indian officers formed a clique, and indulged in activities deemed illegal and corrupt. The situation was serious enough for the state

³⁰Macdonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896. pp.18-19.(Macdonnell papers, Ms. Emg. Hist. C.353. Bodleian Library)

³¹ibid.3 December 1895, pp. 1-2. (Ms.Eng.hist.C.353).

³² see ch. III, p. 134.

government to issue a circular concerning the dangers of such cliques.³³ To break the clique the commissioner of Jhansi transferred Indian officers from one district to another.

Even Lt.-Gov. MacDonnell was not above such biases. He was suspicious and distrusted Indians especially Muslim officers. He sympathized with British officers who were unwilling to work in subordination to Indians; he lauded British officers, and felt that they deserved more recognition and accolades as they bore the brunt of the work.³⁴ *The Times*, reflecting such mood commented:

It is only in times of emergency and difficulty that it is possible to test the reserve strength latent in any given executive system of administration. It was soon found that the pivot on which everything depended in any administrative district was the European officer. Wherever the element was absent it had to be supplied, thus confirming the universal experience of the preceding emergencies, which shows that the mere capacity for passing competitive examinations cannot compensate for those qualities which are inherent in or are obtained from race, training or instinct.³⁵

Such discrimination accentuated the 'alien rule' feel.

Evolution of relief policy

As indicated in ch.III, pre-colonial rulers considered it their duty to intervene with relief during famines. Thus, the obligations of an ideal monarch during famines constituted an important theme for discussion in the ancient and medieval literature of India. According to Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, it was the moral duty of the king to retain the faith of the people. He should provide seed and food from his own

³³ GAD Procds, June 1861,10; circular 408A, f.458 F, 25 February 1861; from commissioner Jhansi div, to the Secretary NWP&O, 2 May 1861.

³⁴ MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 February 1897, pp. 92-3.

³⁵ *The Times*, 6.8. 1897.

resources as well as those of the rich. Public works should be opened to provide employment, and wealth redistributed and people assisted by the government in migrating to areas of plenty.³⁶ Kalhan's, *Rajtarangini*, has an elaborate account of the measures adopted to counteract Kashmir famine, in 917-18 AD.

Chronicles for medieval and Mughal India discuss measures to combat famine. Ala-ud-din Khilji, Muhammad-bin-Tughluq, Akbar, Shahajehan and Aurangzeb, took energetic steps to give relief. Ala-ud-din, in the late thirteenth century, issued famine regulations, which included establishment of grain stores in every locality of the capital, rationing of grain at fixed rates, and opening of free kitchens.³⁷ This has often been viewed as the closest approximation to a coherent relief policy. Muhammad-bin-Tughluq's reign was stalked by severe famine; his relief measures included transfer of capital, including the population, from Delhi to Devnagiri; this is one of most famous examples of state-sponsored migration, which, proved counter-productive resulting in heavy loss of life and suffering.³⁸ Tughluq's more positive relief included advancing loans, sinking wells, encouraging migration and distribution of free provision, to the population of Delhi at the rate of twelve *chittacks* per day and, the establishment of charity houses for the free distribution of cooked food.³⁹

Similarly the Mughal emperors opened almshouses and free kitchens; to provide employment, Akbar sanctioned the construction of a fort as well as recruited more soldiers in the army. He also appointed Shaikh Farid Bukhari, as a special famine officer, while separate and free kitchens were established for Hindus, Muslims and

³⁶ R. S. Shastri, *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, Eng. translation (Mysore, 1923), p. 254.

³⁷ K. S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis* (Allahabad, 1961), pp. 272 -7.

³⁸ A.B. Pandey, *Early Medieval India* (Allahabad, 1980), pp. 196-7.

Jogis. Remission and suspension of revenue was given though the exact amount is not known: Shahajehan, remitted seventy lakhs.⁴⁰ Even at this time a strong relationship was recognized between famines and unemployment, and the relief measures were emergency measures, aiming to restore immediate entitlement to food through cash for work relief schemes.

Under the East India Company, it was during the 1770 famine that a special inquiry was appointed to make recommendations for the alleviation of distress. During the 1783 famine in Madras, government employed labour on large public works and encouraged migration, but there is no evidence of any suspension or remission of revenue. Export of grains was prohibited.⁴¹ During the 1806 famine in Madras, the question first arose whether relief work was to be provided near the affected area or the centre. During the 1802-4 famine large public works were opened to provide employment to the needy, and the local government made some suspensions and remissions of revenue, granting *takavi* of Rs ninety-four thousand at Allahabad, and Rs 1,80,826 at Kanpur.⁴²

Notwithstanding these earlier piecemeal initiatives, the 1837-8 famine saw the beginnings of a relief policy, though really serious attempts at relief were made only from 1860-1 famine. The governments, central and state, despite ideological preconceptions, considered it obligatory to institute relief. The principles adopted then remained the basis for relief with some variations through the subsequent three

³⁹ R. P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects Of Muslim Administration* (Allahabad, 1963), pp. 277-9.

⁴⁰ P. Saran, *Provincial Administration of the Mughals* (London, 1973), pp. 398-406.

⁴¹ Girdlestone, *Report*, pp. 8-9.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 23; For account of relief during earlier famines, see, S. Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy And The Colonial State; North India In the Early Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2001), ch.II.

famines. An examination of the abstracts and, proceedings of the 1837-8 famine and later reports reveal that the government recognized the famine as unusually severe and viewed with horror its magnitude and extent that depopulated whole villages.⁴³ Officers impressed the urgency of relief primarily for the maintenance of peace and prevention of migration. Both these were linked to revenue and fiscal concerns. Lawlessness disrupted trade and commerce and therefore the revenues of the state. It resulted in a sharp increase in numbers in prisons, yet it was easier, cheaper, and more fruitful to employ needy on relief works than to maintain them in jails. Similarly, extensive migration resulted in the holdings lying uncultivated for a number of years, which meant further loss of revenue.⁴⁴ Yet efforts at giving relief was made only in January 1838, on the persistent representations of the district officers, and only when famine had become acute.

Relief policy :1837-8-1880

Responsibilities for relief were evenly apportioned between the government and the public. In keeping with the official perception that famines were of work rather than food,⁴⁵ government's role was confined to providing employment to the able bodied while relief of the helpless and infirm rested on the community, leaving the availability of scarce foodgrain to the natural laws of supply and demand. This was the central principle of relief till the 1868-9 famine.⁴⁶

⁴³Home Public A, 28 September 1860, nos. 62-5; note from G.Couper, Secretary to the Government NWP, to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of India: Home deptt, 13 September 1860.

⁴⁴ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, revenue, serial.17; from H.W. Elliot, Secretary Sud. Bd. of Rev, 30 June 1838.

⁴⁵B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.82; Girdlestone, *Report*, p.100;

⁴⁶B.Smith, *Report*, i, pp. 13-14 ; *IFC, Report*, 1880, p.116.

Employment at large public relief works was the primary relief measure aimed at generating income to protect the minimum 'entitlement' to obtain food. In order to ascertain the most needy deserving relief, government improvised a system of tests based on distance and residence, in addition to the task work test. These tests were viewed as proving the need of recipients for relief, which was given to them with the maximum economy. Task work performed by them was not less than seventy-five per cent of what labourers performed in normal times. In the case of those who were capable of working, wages earned for a day's work were to constitute the only entitlement to state relief. Even children six years of age were made to work (carrying earth in baskets) in return for being fed at state expense. Additionally needy people had to trek long distances to reach the relief works.

Sanction was given for the construction of public works in Allahabad, Agra and Bundelkhund divisions.⁴⁷ The commissioner of Agra was sanctioned Rs two thousand to start relief work for the able bodied only. Later relief work commenced at Farrukhabad, Mathura and Kanpur. Although the numbers who initially applied for relief were manageable it soon became an 'avalanche'.⁴⁸ By March 1838, over three *lakhs* migrants poured into Agra from all over the Doab, despite the meagre relief given. At Kanpur, only 800 out of 5,000 applicants could be employed.⁴⁹ While the clamour for relief went on increasing, cash allocated for the purpose remained meagre. Despite pressure by district officers, the Sudder Board refused to sanction more money. Such was the paucity of funds that at Agra, there were not enough tools

⁴⁷ Home public A, no. 62-65, 28 September 1860. Note from Couper, Secretary, NWP. to Grey, Secretary Govt. of India, Home deptt, 13 September 1860. UPSAL.

⁴⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 1836- 8, vi; from Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, to Hamilton, offg. commissioner Agra, 21 August 1837.

⁴⁹ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 48.

and baskets for digging and carrying purposes,⁵⁰ and relief was given only on alternate days at Agra and Kanpur.

During 1837-8 and subsequent famines, the nature of work on which the destitute were employed depended on local circumstances: construction and repair of roads, tanks and wells afforded the usual means of employment. In the interior of the districts, these works were not so readily available, and were replaced by the clearing of *serais* (rest houses) and removal of filth, filling up of tanks, repairing of the *chopale*, or the levelling of ground to prevent swamping. For example, relief works at Kalpi and Hamirpur were mainly on tanks, roads and wells. *Thanas* and *tehsildaris* were repaired and two *serais* constructed.⁵¹ However, the official preference was for the construction of roads, its repair and sometimes metalling of existing ones. Many new roads were constructed as a part of the famine scheme, such as the roads from Fatehgarh to Agra passing through Mainpuri; from Etawah to Mathura; between Mainpuri and Aligarh; and, from Kanpur to Mainpuri. In addition, the road from Delhi to Agra was repaired. Sanction was also given for the construction of twelve extra-sized bridges on the Delhi-Allahabad road.⁵² In Rohilkhund and Bundelkhund, tank building and repairs were more popular, and canal construction was also mooted at Rohilkhund. The superintendence of these works was entrusted to the village head.

By 1860-1 such works were more numerous; by 30 April 1861, about twenty-six central and seventy-five district relief houses had been established, and on an average

⁵⁰Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, vi, 55, series 111, serial 7, list1, f.7/122; from C.G. Mansel, magistrate of Agra from Hamilton, offg.commissioner Agra, 2 April 1838.

⁵¹Girdlestone, *Report*, p.64.

⁵²Board collections, E\14\60, October- December, 1837; judicial and revenue deptt., no. 16 of 1837, 16 October 1837. (UPRAA).

80,000 persons received daily relief.⁵³ Workers were usually organized in gangs of 500, to each of which a separate cash keeper and a series of petty officers were attached. Work was concentrated so as to facilitate supervision and administration of relief. It was also stipulated that works of permanent utility that could be completed in a reasonably short time be undertaken. The cleaning and construction of canals, and the repair and metalling of roads were priority, and viewed as a part of infrastructural expansion, a preventive of famine as well as helping in the movement of grains. Some of the prominent relief projects were the road from Roorkee to Deyrah, over the sub-Himalayan region, the road from Hapur to Gurmukteshwar, the Hindun river diversion, the Fatehgarh branch of the Ganga canal, the Bulandshahar branch of the Ganga canal; the road from Shekohabad, irrigation works near Agra and at Delhi, works in Agra and Delhi districts, the road from Delhi to Mathura, irrigation works in Gurgaon, in Rohtak, Hansi and Hissar. The total number of persons employed on all kinds of special works was 143,500.⁵⁴

During the 1868-9 famine, the earliest relief works commenced in September 1868 in Jalaun, Jhansi and Lalitpur and closed in October 1869.⁵⁵ Eight large works were operating under the public works department. Tanks and reservoirs and metalling of unmetalled roads prevailed in Jhansi; in Banda, roads and a new tank were constructed;⁵⁶ while, at Lalitpur, labourers were usually employed on tanks.⁵⁷ Irrigation and railway works dominated in Rohilkhund. The Agra canal, three out of four Rohilkhund canals, and the Meerut drainage works were not specifically famine

⁵³B.Smith, *Report*, I A, p.16.

⁵⁴B.Smith, *Report*, I, p.18.

⁵⁵IFC, *Report*, 1880-5,iii, p.91.

⁵⁶Henvey, *Report*, p.57.

⁵⁷IFC, *Report*, 1880-5,iii, p. 90.

relief works, but did employ famine labour by contract system. Others were opened specifically to deal with the famine situation. For example, in Bijnor, needy people were mainly employed on roads and in the clearing of the Nagina canal; in Badaun, relief seekers were employed on nine district roads. These infrastructural facilities became symbols of the state and may be viewed as conveying its authority in a silent yet forceful manner.

The organization of large relief works remained virtually the same over the four famines. These employed not less than 5,000 labourers, the bulk of whom were obliged to leave their homes and reside at the site. They were usually placed under European supervision so that strict discipline could be enforced.⁵⁸ Workers were divided into gangs of a certain number of diggers-usually one digger to three carriers, and aggregating sixty effective workers. To each gang was assigned a measured task, which had to be completed. If the work fell short of the allotted task, the workers were fined a minimum, which represented a penal or bare subsistence ration. In many places the least excuse was sufficient to spur officials to strike the poor off their relief lists. Eight to ten hours work was the minimum required. A roll call was made every day and tickets issued to the workers, which had to be produced at the time of payment.

Small and casual relief

Concentration of large numbers of people in relief camps had negative social consequences. Basic amenities to so many could not be provisioned; they created

⁵⁸*Scarcity deptt Government, NWP.&O; Famine and Relief Operations*, 1898; lxii, p. 36.

health and sanitation problems, leading to outbreaks of diseases and epidemics. They were difficult to administer- the sole positive feature was that monitoring of food distribution was easy once the needy had 'settled in'. The rationale was to avoid the poor congregating at large public works and thereby circumvent the problems cited above. From the 1860-1 small-scale relief works were started; from 1868 famine, there was a preponderance of minor relief works, under the superintendence of district officers. The principle was that the physically fit were to work on large relief works and the weak, though able to work, on small projects. In twenty affected districts, minor works were opened and sometimes several minor works operated in the same district.⁵⁹

Gratuitous relief

Information is scanty regarding gratuitous relief during 1837-8. What is evident is that the pervasive influence of Malthusian and later Darwinian ideologies and the spirit of Poor Laws justified government's apathy-central and state, towards gratuitous relief, which was considered the responsibility of the community and family. The inception and working of relief societies, relief provided by missions, and instances of private philanthropy provide some insight into the nature and extent of gratuitous relief, the method of dispensing it, whether relief was given in cash or grain, and the kind of institutions/networks through which relief was provided. As the above ideological influences waned, the scope of gratuitous relief expanded. From 1860-1 famine government doubled its contribution towards gratuitous relief, which for the first time was given an institutional framework and dispensed through outdoor, or village relief systems, poor houses, state kitchens and relief societies, administered through prominent local residents, village officers and superintendents. From 1868,

⁵⁹ *IFC Report*, 1880-5,iii, p.90.

gratuitous relief was made unconditional, liberalization in remission and suspension of revenue, grant of *takavi* and loans not only to help the poor but also small and middling landowners was given. The first move towards the policy of village assistance or nucleated personal help may be seen in the relief of '*parda-nashin*' in their homes in 1860. Later, the same principle was extended to weavers.⁶⁰ However, even in 1901 the Famine Commission was invoking *laissez-faire* to justify meagre relief as it had led to complaints about its adverse effects on labour markets.⁶¹

Poor houses

The establishment of poor houses was the most important measure adopted during 1860-1. It was first introduced at Moradabad by its magistrate, John Strachey, noted already as an upholder of *laissez-faire*, and then adopted throughout the province.⁶² The spirit of the Poor Laws was at the heart of the poor house system. They were looked upon as asylums for the reception of those who could not otherwise be relieved, such as vagrants or homeless cripples. The system entailed the distribution of relief in the form of cooked food rather than doles in grain or cash. Arrangements were made for cooking, sanitation and a conservancy and dispensary was attached to each poor house.

These poor houses were the deterrent element of the relief works. There were no labour or any personal selection tests, but submission to the conditions of residence, constituted a test to prove that the inmates were truly suffering. Discipline was severe, and the food so bad that it compared unfavourably even with prisons. The

⁶⁰Loveday, *History and Economics*, pp. 92-3.

⁶¹ Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, p.22.

⁶²*IFC, Report, 1880-5*,iii, p.16.

inmates ate out of necessity and fell prey to various ailments and stomach disorders. Those deemed able were provided with work, mainly sewing, weaving and making of ropes, *duree* manufacture, grinding corn for women, and heavier work such as road repairing and making, building sheds, for men.⁶³ The inmates were frequently sorted: those deemed fit for labour were drafted on to relief works, and the unfit, who had a fixed residence, were sent back there and entered on village relief lists. The harsh conditions, and indignity attached to poor house relief, discouraged the needy from availing relief. Numerous rumours were associated with poor houses, one being that those who went there would be forcibly converted to Christianity.⁶⁴

By the end of February 1861, one hundred poor houses were functioning and an estimated 80,000 needy were relieved there; by June the figure had risen to 140,000.⁶⁵ Despite their shortcomings and unpopularity, poor houses remained the backbone of gratuitous relief; their justification and usefulness was summed up by the 1901 Commission thus: 'The poor houses cost little; they can do no harm, and they may postpone for a time or altogether the necessity for more extensive and costly measures of relief'.⁶⁶

Wages

During all four famines wage policy was conditioned by the spirit of Poor Laws, laissez-faire and understandings of moral economy; importantly it discriminated along gender lines. Low-relief wages were attributable to several factors like

⁶³ Girdlestone *Report*, p.78.

⁶⁴ Srivastava, *History Of Famines*, p.212.

⁶⁵ *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, p.16.

⁶⁶ *IFC, Report*, 1901, p.19.

misinformation, miscalculation of needs, fines, or lags in adjustments to price of grain or fuel. The principle on which the scale of wages was framed was the bare amount sufficient to maintain sustenance under the circumstances as reflected in Sleeman's advice discouraging full rate of subsistence wages:

As it tends to keep concentrated upon such points vast numbers who would otherwise be scattered over the surface of the country among the village communities... the rate of subsistence should always be less than what the able bodied person usually consumes, and get for his labour in the fields.⁶⁷

Such comments guided wage policy even during 1896-7. The justification was that the government's duty was to save life, and not the maintenance of the normal nutritional levels and comfort of the working persons, which besides being unjust to other sections of society, encouraged the labouring population to cling to relief works.⁶⁸ Such notions demonstrate the underlying concern for political economy and an inability to get away from the spirit of the poor laws.

Stress was on exacting full task from those on relief works. It was feared that failure to do so, would turn relief works into what Sir John Strachey in 1877 called 'a vast picnic.'⁶⁹ Aid was given according to the work done, the amount to be completed in a stipulated time being left entirely to the discretion of the disbursing officer, who regulated it according to the strength and power of the applicant. There was no separate provision for skilled workers who had to dig and carry like others. The majority of the officials favoured cash remittances although some preferred providing the needy directly with food grains or cooked food. They questioned the

⁶⁷Sleeman, *Rambles*, i, p.195.

⁶⁸*IFC, Report*, 1901, p. 36.

⁶⁹MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 February 1897, pp.89-90 (Ms.Eng.Hist.C.353).

wisdom of giving cash wages without ensuring adequate availability of foodgrain at reasonable prices, which would have involved government intervention in regulating trade.

Initially during 1837-8 wages were fixed at the lowest subsistence wage of, 1 anna for a man, $\frac{3}{4}$ anna for a woman, and $\frac{1}{2}$ anna for a child per day. In keeping with the objective of not breeding pauperism, government issued orders to the commissioners of distressed divisions to further reduce subsistence wages as it suspected that at certain places wages were too high, inducing needy people otherwise employed to join relief works.⁷⁰ This, it was thought, weaned away valuable labour from the free markets.

Such reductions took place at Farrukhabad and Kanpur, where the wages were initially fixed as elsewhere, at 1 anna for a man, $\frac{3}{4}$ for women, $\frac{1}{4}$ for a child.⁷¹ At one anna a day men could barely buy half a seer of the cheapest grain. Yet the wages were reduced to starvation level of $\frac{3}{4}$ anna for a man, $\frac{1}{2}$ anna for women and $\frac{1}{4}$ for a child. A further reduction, in *pargana* Bilhour at Kanpur, to half and even quarter of an anna for a man was justified on the grounds that it had no effect in deterring applicants, many of whom came from as far as Etawah, Mainpuri, Agra, and Farrukhabad.⁷² At Agra, the magistrate refused to reduce wages.⁷³ At Hamirpur, the

⁷⁰ Board collections, E/4/163, NWP, judicial, revenue and general depts, no.6, 1838, 4 August 1838. Narrative of the Procds. of the Gov.-Genl. in the NWP. during the second quarter of 1838.

⁷¹ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 47.

⁷² *ibid.* pp.47-8.

⁷³ see above, pp.142-3.

rates were the same as at Kanpur. As famine matured at several places able bodied men who had had been hired at market rates were restricted to one anna a day.⁷⁴

Table 8 reflects what was considered adequate subsistence wages for labour at Fatehgarh, where wages were given in grains:

Table. 8

	Food (oz).	oz.
	Flour	Dal
Diggers and carriers	24	4
Men and women with infants	20	4
Women and orphan children	16	0
able to cook for themselves		
Children above 10 having parents	16	0
Children under 10	12	0

Source. *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p. 123.

During the 1860-1 famine there was no perceptible change from 1837-8; rate of daily wages was, as before, to be kept at the lowest possible scale.⁷⁵ For a man it was one anna six pices, for women it was one anna, and for a child six pices.⁷⁶

During 1868-9 famine, wage rates still remained at subsistence levels, though in some districts there were variations; for example, in Bijnor, male coolies were paid one anna in April 1869 but this was reduced to nine pices in June 1869.⁷⁷ Women’s wages were reduced from nine to six pices, and physically weaker men doing women’s work

⁷⁴Girdlestone,,*Report*, p.47; *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, pp.90-1.
⁷⁵Progs. Govt of India, Home (public), no. 47, December 29, 1860. From Couper, secretary, NWP, to the commissioner of Meerut div, no. 1375 A; Agra, 4 December 1860; Girdlestone, *Report*, pp. 71-3.
⁷⁶Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 73.
⁷⁷*IFC,Report*, 1880-5, iii pp. 90-1.

like carrying earth baskets were paid women's wages.⁷⁸ Similarly, in Bareilly, when numbers on relief works swelled, rates were lowered to one anna, nine pice, and six pice for men, women, and children, respectively.⁷⁹ Henvey records that in Jhansi the rate of payment was ruinously low, consequently the work was badly done. In contrast, in Meerut payment was much higher, three annas three pice per man per day.⁸⁰ Despite opposition from some officials, wages and rations were reduced in order to induce workers to leave relief works and recommence their ordinary occupations.⁸¹ At several places contract labour was employed such as the Agra Canal, contractors receiving Rs 2.40 per thousand cubic feet, although this work has been commenced in normal times.⁸²

Even during 1896-7 famine, MacDonnell was concerned about protecting relief from perceived abuse and imposition, not to breed pauperism or upset the general labour market. He reported to Viceroy Elgin that to ensure that the needy did not prolong their stay at relief works, "I am stiffening tasks and tightening wages with the object of encouraging that exodus. Some of those who leave will not return."⁸³ Such paltry wages could not maintain even average nutritional levels and led to enfeeblement of needy people, increasing their vulnerability to diseases, besides contradicting the professed aim of thwarting starvation deaths.

The gender discrimination widened with the progress of four famines. During earlier famines there were protests and concern at this discrimination, but the 1880 Code

⁷⁸ For sex disparity in wages see also pp. 369-70.

⁷⁹ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p. 91.

⁸⁰ Henvey, *Report*, p. 100.

⁸¹ *ibid.* pp. 88-9.

⁸² *ibid.* p. 99.

⁸³ MacDonnell to Elgin, 4 March 1897, p. 100. (Ms. Eng. Hist. C. 353).

itself justified the discrimination on grounds that women, were habituated to receiving ‘lower’ wages; they had lower physiological needs, and equal wages was ‘refuted by the custom of the country.’⁸⁴ It laid down as a principle that there should be “separate wage rates for suitable for different ages and sexes.”⁸⁵ Such discrimination during 1896-7 famine was justified on the grounds that firstly the classification of men with women was bad from a physiological point of view; and secondly that the allowances were not insufficient but adequate. It was emphasized that such a classification was desirable economically and administratively.⁸⁶ Moreover the Lt.-Gov.himself, opposed any liberalization of wages as he felt that the existing scale was sufficient to maintain the needy people in satisfactory health and any increase would mean offering competition to wages in the open market. This change would mean not a change in detail but of far reaching principle.⁸⁷

Disease and mortality

Close on the heels of all the four famines came an outbreak of epidemics, mainly small pox, cholera, fever and dysentery; famine commissioners noted that famines increased the ‘destructiveness’ of the epidemics’.⁸⁸ Dreze & Sen identifying the vital components responsible for famine related devastation and deaths identified health care as the key factor.⁸⁹ Diseases may be viewed as a major cause of famine due to its disruptive effects on human beings, crops and animals - the most famous example of famine being caused by disease being the Irish famine of 1845-6, which left nearly a

⁸⁴ *IFC. Report* 1880, i, p. 39.

⁸⁵ *IFC, Report*, 1880, i, p. 58.

⁸⁶ NWP&O, Scarcity deptt, 1899, nos. 1-8, f. 273; from the Chief Secretary, govt. NWP&O, to the Secretary, Govt. of India, revenue and agriculture, Nainital, 9 October 1899, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p.7.

⁸⁸ *IFC, Report*, 1880, Appendix, i, ‘Famine Relief’, G.E.Eyre and Spotswood, p. 28.

⁸⁹ Dreze & Sen, *Hunger And Public Action* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 219-20.

million people dead. NWP&O reports indicate that while no age was immune from these diseases mortality among the children and elderly was particularly high. Officials observed that as afflicted people migrated they carried diseases with them and mortality escalated. Those treated at hospitals suffered from nervous depression due to malnutrition, social calamities, loss of homes of relatives and friends and from dark prospects of the future. "They were one and all starving and the majority were skeletons from atrophy."⁹⁰ Authorities agreed that women fought famines more tenaciously than men, despite being under multiple pressures and succumbed less easily than men.

Dysentery, and diarrhoea, virulent during all four famines, were attributed to the problem of mal-absorbtion and inability to digest unconventional food and wild foods, bad sanitary conditions, and unventilated houses. Additionally prolonged mal-nutrition reduced energy output and the destruction of storage energy. Prevalence of cholera was usually attributed to prolonged hot weather followed by a torrential rainy season. The victims were usually those who were denied admission to any form of relief and therefore severely malnourished. Those who did manual work on relief works for long hours on inadequate subsistence, would have been equally famished. In addition, rising prices compelled people with small incomes to switch to inferior and insufficient food, making them vulnerable to diseases. Small wonder that the intensity of famine and the effectiveness of relief policy was judged in terms of mortality figures.

⁹⁰ B.Smith, *Report*, i, p.28.

The issue of epidemics and disease was recognized as a problem even in 1830's but till the late 1860s there were virtually no coherent scheme to tackle sickness, epidemics, and inadequate nutrition due to fiscal and Malthusian concerns and as these were considered to be the inevitable consequences of famine.⁹¹ But the concern for health and prevention of diseases amongst officials is reflected in their opposition to low subsistence wages and opposition to its further reduction such as by Mansel and Cornish. During the 1837-8 famine, heavy mortality was reported from Kanpur, Aligarh, Delhi, Farrukhabad, and Agra. At Kanpur and Mathura, the chief killer was small-pox.⁹² Fever and cholera are reported to have raged at Farrukhabad and Agra.⁹³ Cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery killed nearly 250 daily at Agra. Though no funds were set aside for medical aid, dispensaries were established at Kanpur, Agra and Bareilly; these rendered medical aid, funded mainly by missions. But it was reported that, due to religious prejudices and having to walk long distances, sick people did not avail even existing paltry medical facilities.⁹⁴ The assistant civil-surgeon at Farrukhabad advised the magistrate to raise wages which, did not meet basic nutritional needs and were responsible for the widespread sickness. He found jail hospitals over-crowded with patients, in the last stages of emaciation and suffering from bowel complaints.⁹⁵

During 1860-1, a cholera epidemic prevailed in Bundelkhund especially Hamirpur and Jhansi, Jalaun and Koonch. Due to persistent fever which raged between January and April 1860, enlargement of spleen became common. Besides bowel complaints,

⁹¹ Arnold, 'The Discovery of Malnutrition and Diet in Colonial India,' *IESHR*, 31, 1 (1994), pp.1-27.

⁹² *Friends of India*, 29 March 1838, p.140.

⁹³ *Englishman*, 7 September and 11 October 1838.

⁹⁴ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 56, serial 8, list 1, f.8/123; to R.N.C. Hamilton, commissioner, Agra div, from the Secretary to Gov.-Genl. NWP, 11 November 1839.

⁹⁵ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, vii, basta 192, box 562, serial 12, 9 November 1838.

dysentery, diarrhoea and various skin diseases became rampant⁹⁶ Mortality was high but reliable figures are not available; numbers dying due to diseases are barely discussed. At Meerut alone, by March 1861, it was estimated that seven thousand people died from starvation, but Baird Smith dismissed these figures as ‘many among these are from other causes than actual starvation.’⁹⁷ At Bulandshahar the death toll was nearly 3 1/2 per cent of the population of the district - 24,700 deaths.⁹⁸ These deaths reflect the insufficient nature of relief provided. From Allahabad poor houses it was reported that the numbers suffering various ailments was so great that every available doctor including *hakeems*, *vaid*s even apprentices, doctors including private practicers, were roped in for help. Such was the work overload that several of these doctors and subordinate medical staff became ill and many died.⁹⁹

Similarly small pox raged during the first six months of 1869; sunstroke, fever, and later cholera, in combination, took a heavy toll. According to the deputy commissioner, ‘Men came in weary and weak, and fasting and took a long draught of water, and fell down and died.’ The official statistics for the first nine months of 1869 showed 529,753 deaths or 17.9 per cent per mile, in comparison to 1868 which registered 319,886 or 10.8 per cent per mile.¹⁰⁰ Of this 73,000 were fever cases, 60,000, small pox, cholera 53,000.¹⁰¹ In Jhansi 20, 331 people reportedly died; the deaths were attributed as follows: small pox 3,310, cholera 1,794, fever 8,043, dysentery 382, diarrhoea 1,194, starvation 218, sunstroke 1,023, and miscellaneous

⁹⁶ GAD, Medical, NWP&O, December 1860; *Report On the Working and Progress of Dispensary at Orai*; from C. Hatchell, Orai, ending June 1860, pp.107, 115. UPSAL.

⁹⁷ GAD Procds, NWP&O, June 1861, vol .10, p. 472; Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 86.

⁹⁸ Girdlestone, *Report*, p.86.

⁹⁹ GAD Procds, NWP&O, June 1861, vol.10; from G. Williams, commissioner, Meerut div to Secretary, Govt NWP&O, 26 April 1861, p.63.

¹⁰⁰ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, pp. 87-8.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 87-8; Henvey, *Report*, p. 125.

4,367.¹⁰² Dr. Planck pointed to insufficient and inferior food as the principal cause of the 200,000 deaths in 1869. As the numbers registered in 1868-9 was only a third of the actual mortality, the excess mortality in 1869 was estimated to about 600,000.¹⁰³ Bennett found that during the 1873-4 famine, in the fifty villages in Rohilkhund he investigated, there were 3,380 deaths, which were assigned to the following causes: hunger 1723,(51 per cent), small pox 686 (20 per cent), fever 443 (13 per cent), and miscellaneous 528 (16 per cent).¹⁰⁴ .

As indicated in the Introduction, mortality registration remained imperfect even till 1897-8. Though it was known that mortality was very high, concluding the mortality rates was virtually impossible due to absence of reliable, unprejudiced statistics.¹⁰⁵ Apart from a few dispensaries and hospitals, deaths and its causes were recorded by the police and *chaukidars*, who, often failed to quantify starvation deaths and deaths due to disease. Firstly, starvation deaths were not freely admitted and went unreported to the police. Those dying of malaria, pneumonia, typhoid, or jaundice were clubbed in the general category of fever deaths. Even in 1897, cholera deaths were classified as fever deaths. However, from 1880 mortality rates per thousand are available from the reports of sanitary commissioners and health officers partly due to better registration but also because of virulent mortality during epidemics. These would have made better sense if there was a break down of categories of mortality, men, women and children, details of age are absent. Within this imperfect, broad framework it is instructive to analyze how the ratio of male and female mortality changed as well as the obvious ability of male and females to survive hardships. The

¹⁰² Henvey, *Report*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p.126; *IFC Report*, 1880-5,iii, pp.87-8.

¹⁰⁴ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p.245.

¹⁰⁵ B.Smith, *Report*, 1860-1, i, p.27.

most common assessment would be that females are more susceptible to diseases or that their deprivation and poverty made it likely that there would be higher death rates amongst them. But facts were different; for example, during the 1877-8 famine, in ten circles of the Agra district, 4,800 deaths were officially recorded, 1,030 were of males and 770 were of females.¹⁰⁶ In the age group of fifteen to forty-five years, it was 178 females to 260 males.¹⁰⁷

The following table shows age and sex starvation deaths in thirty-four villages of Agra district, during 1877-8 famine.

Table. 9

Under	Year.	1year	To 15	15 to	45	Over	years.	Total	
1			years.		years.	45			
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
3	2	12	8	42	8	31	26	88	38

Source: *Report On Scarcity and Relief,NWP&O,1877-78&79, p. 372.*

The disproportion of male deaths over female especially in the fifteen-forty-five category is excessive. One reason for this could have been the disinclination of male relatives to report the deaths of their female relatives especially if they were starvation deaths as this reflected badly on them.¹⁰⁸ Similarly during the 1896-7 famine Surgeon-Lt. Brown, visited relief camps and found that “women as a rule are generally in a better condition than the men.”¹⁰⁹ Women were less vulnerable physiologically as they had smaller energy needs and most nutrients, as they are smaller than men, have lower metabolic rate, and higher body fat. Physiological

¹⁰⁶ *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79,Roberts, Report, p. 371.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.p. 372.*

¹⁰⁹ *Scarcity deptt, NWP&O, nos. 131-182, f.118. From Surgeon-Lt. H.R. Brown, to civil-surgeon Unnao, 7 May 1897.*

vulnerability is modified by social factors- value systems of different cultures as also severity of famine.

Suspensions and remissions of revenue

The revenue and judicial proceeding volumes reflect the government's anxiety not to lose revenue, and to give relief without incurring undue financial strain. They also show the ineffectiveness of schemes which aimed to give loans for restricted purposes like sinking wells. The severity of the 1837-8 famine affected not only the indigent peasants but also the wealthier landlords. Diwan Bahadur Singh, Rahmat Ali Khan, Mullick Ahmad Khan, Gulazrimall from Bareilly; and from Meerut, Col. Skinner, Ukbar Ali Khan, and Mustafa Khan petitioned the provincial government for suspension and remission of land revenue.¹¹⁰ In keeping with the traditional norms of past Indian rulers, there was a general expectation and call for revenue remission and grant of *takavi* by agriculturists. Ignoring such expectations the Sudder Board insisted upon maximum possible revenue collection.¹¹¹ Trifling remissions and suspensions were granted in order to span the immediate crisis, but proposals for grant of loans and advances, other than for sinking wells were declined, on the grounds of breaking the spirit of self-reliance. The *zamindars*, the Board felt ought to make arrangements for the supply of seed after obtaining security and guarantees of reimbursement from other cultivators; this would obviate complications of account and ensure the cultivation and sowing of the soil. Such a policy aggravated suffering and ruined

¹¹⁰Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP. 1838, 121. To G.F.Franco offg. commissioner, Meerut , from E. Wilmot, offg. collector, Meerut, 17 May 1838,pp.445-9.

¹¹¹Procds. Sud. Bd. of Rev, NWP,1838, 121; to offg. commissioner of the I. Davidson, 3 div, from G.F.Lushington, offg. collector , Bareilly, 17 May 1838, p.296; Sharma, State, Society, p. 146. Sharma argues that caution and rigidity in giving suspension and remission of revenue and grant of *takavi*,

many, resulting in mass migration- entire villages were found deserted and unpopulated.

Estimates of remission and suspensions during 1837-8 vary and are of questionable value. Girdlestone estimated that about Rs forty-nine lakhs was remitted. But elsewhere it was estimated that a total of 90 ½ lakhs out of a total demand of 360 lakhs was remitted.¹¹² In some of the worst affected districts, the remission and suspension was a meagre twenty-two lakhs in Agra,¹¹³ seventeen lakhs in Kanpur, seven lakhs each in Mainpuri and Farrukhabad, while three lakhs each at Mathura and Jalaun.¹¹⁴ In Jalaun nearly half the population emigrated or perished and alienation of land was steep.¹¹⁵ Hamirpur suffered terribly, but the greater part of the revenue demand was exacted leading proprietors to resign their estates in large numbers. About four lakhs was remitted.¹¹⁶ At Allahabad there was no remission of revenue and the total uncollected balance was only Rs 1,263.¹¹⁷

The adamance of the Sudder Board partially stemmed from the lack of confidence in the Indians. *Tehsildars* were given police assistance to compel the cultivators and even wealthy landlords to pay their dues, as they were suspected of screening themselves under the general clamour of a bad season.¹¹⁸ Such a stringent policy was justified by invoking the *laissez-faire* tenet. It reflected the government's intent not to

became pronounced from the 1820's and sharpened during the 1830's with the ascendancy of *laissez-faire*.

¹¹² *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p. 24.

¹¹³ *Gazetteers, Agra*, viii, p. 45.

¹¹⁴ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii p. 24; *Gazetteers Jalaun*, xxv, p. 34.

¹¹⁵ *Gazetteers, Jalaun*, xxv, p. 33; *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p. 24.

¹¹⁶ *Gazetteers, Hamirpur*, xxii, p. 102.

¹¹⁷ *Gazetteers, Allahabad*, xxiii, p. 48.

¹¹⁸ *Procds. Sud. Bd. of Rev*, 1838, 121. To Lowther, commissioner of the revenue deptt, 4 div, Allahabad, from S. Becher, offg. collector, Fatehpur, 18 May 1838, p. 169.

encroach on the role and domain of the moneylenders and landlords, which thrived on such transactions. During 1860-1, ninety-five per cent of the revenue demand was collected. The government took this to be a proof of the moderation of the existing settlement, and also that *ryots* had resources to cope with the famine. About £20,000 was remitted and nearly £35, 000 was given as *takavi* advances for the purchase of seed and plough cattle.¹¹⁹ The entire cost of relief works throughout the province was estimated by Baird Smith at £250,000.

From 1868 onwards, considerable emphasis was laid on moral strategy, in the form of loans, remission and suspension. These were given, either from the state's own resources or through those who had surplus resources to loan, on certain fixed principles.¹²⁰ These were to facilitate the purchase of seeds, bullocks and manure, digging of wells, hutting and restoring of habitation, all aimed at preventing a total collapse of entitlements both in the immediate and long term context. How far this was effective is debatable. The State government remitted approximately £40, 000 and £100, 000 were disbursed as *takavi*, and, of this sum, more than £30,000, was given for plough, cattle, and seed.¹²¹ In the districts of Jhansi, Lalitpur and Bijnor, about ten lakhs were distributed as *takavi*.¹²² In Jalaun, Rs 2, 57, 256 or twenty-eight per cent of the demand was regarded as irrecoverable at the close of the year 1868-9.¹²³ Suspensions and remissions of revenue were looked upon as palliatives even by the 1880 code and Famine Commissions of 1898 and 1901.

¹¹⁹Geddes,, *Report*, p. 26; Henvey, *Report*, p. 9.

¹²⁰ Board Collections , judicial, revenue and general Deptts; no. 4, of 1838. E/4/162, 15 May 1838. Narrative of the procds. of the Gov.-Genl. NWP.during the first quarter of 1838.

¹²¹ Geddes,*Report*, p. 27; Henvey, *Report*, p.9.

¹²² *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p. 96.

¹²³*Gazetteers, Jalaun*,xxv,p. 34.

It is important to evaluate the extent to which suspension and remission of revenue and granting of loans and *takavi* mitigated the impact of famine and facilitated the process of resettlement and rehabilitation. This was inextricably linked to certain questions such as the conditions attached to these loans, the criteria for selection and distribution; and the role of the distributing agency; which would be important variables in affecting the outcome and impact of this form of relief. Even the loan returning mechanism would be important in affecting the fortune of the peasants, notably the period for which the loans were made, what rate of interest charged, and what would happen if the *ryots* were unable to return the loan within the stipulated time and conditions. *Takavi* loans, for example, were mostly aimed at those *ryots* who held reasonably substantial holdings and not for those having little or no land to stand as guarantee. These inherent problems within the scheme were reflected in its implementation. Initially, in the 1830s, while loans were sanctioned for very limited aims like sinking of wells, by 1896-7 their aim had widened to include purchase of seeds, replacement of implements, preventing mortgaging of land and other assets, and even rebuilding of property. By 1896-7 *takavi* loans did play some role in reducing the vulnerability of the affected population to famines. We have seen how the sheer pressure, exacerbated by fraud, by the money lending agencies, led to increased indebtedness and land alienation. The dependence on these power groups for loans considerably minimized the benefits of the loans and *takavi*, and limited the recovery of the peasants that such financial assistance was intended to facilitate. Thus the extent to which this form of relief was intended to assist in the recovery and rehabilitation of the famine victims is difficult to assess.

Relief committees

A number of relief committees were instituted from 1837-8, as at Agra, Kanpur, Farrukhabad and, Calcutta. These played an important role in dispensing their own relief, informing government about the ground reality of famines and the needy of existing relief measures. The chief task of these committees was to raise funds, aided by government donations usually limited to half the local subscriptions with the aim of providing employment, food, and shelter to the needy, especially the infirm and, respectable poor who could not work because of their social eminence. The personnel of the committees included district officials, eminent citizens both Indian and European, and prominent landlords, including men of all religious persuasions; in other words, those who carried weight in social and economic matters in the countryside. They had to be educated and possibly holding semi-official positions. The relief committees had territorial divisions and concentrated on alleviating distress in their particular area. Subscription lists were published with a view to transparency. Some of these committees commenced relief operations even before the government. Calls for donations by missionaries and other bodies drew the attention of the government and public in India and UK to famine suffering.

The Agra Relief Committee highlighted the problems of malnutrition, lack of medical care, proper sanitation and habitation, drinking water, being faced by the afflicted. These prescribed solutions as well. They drew attention to the inadequacy of wages on public works, and opposed any further reductions in allowances.¹²⁴ They also employed people on relief works, where the labourers received four pice per man, five pice per woman with an infant, and one pice per child. Its sub-committee, showing

¹²⁴ Board Collections, E /4/ 165, November-December, 1838; judicial revenue collection, and gen. deptts, NWP, 11, December 1838. Narrative of the procds. of the Gov.-Genl. NWP, during the 3 quarter of 1838; also above pp. 142-3.

special concern for women and children, recommended that the rate of pay to women with infants be raised from five to seven pice, on humanitarian and nutritional grounds.¹²⁵ Besides, it ran a hospital at Agra catering to over 1,500 patients.¹²⁶ It had a poor asylum attached to it, and could be viewed as a forerunner of the poor house system.

The following table indicates the amount disbursed in rupees by charitable societies:, in the Agra division during 1837-8;

Table. 10

Mathura	32,357,00
Agra	1,47,000,00
Farrukhabad	24,140,12,9
Mainpuri	14, 044, 14, 5
Etawah	25, 704, 5,6
Total	2, 43, 247, 0,8

Source; *Famine Report, Friends of India Society*, 7March 1839, p. 152.

Similarly, the Kanpur Relief Committee, gave employment at relief works, ran an orphanage and at the height of famine, fed over 1,500 people daily.¹²⁷ At Farrukhabad, a society was formed by Europeans, which subscribed Rs 600 per month. The missionaries too ran an elaborate system of relief as will be shown in chs.VI&VII. Private philanthropy also did not dry up and charitable individuals sometimes even sold assets to dispense charity.¹²⁸

¹²⁵Board Collection, E/4/165, November - December, 1838; judicial, revenue and general deptts; NWP. 11 December 1838; Narrative of the procds. of the Gov.-Genl. in the NWP, during the 3 quarter of 1838.

¹²⁶ Bhanu,*History and Administration*, p. 302.

¹²⁷*Gazetteers,Kanpur*, xix, p. 62.

¹²⁸ see pp. 385-7.

During 1860-1, relief committees were functioning in several distressed districts. A Central Relief Committee was set up in January 1861 in Agra, to co-ordinate the work of local committees, raise subscriptions from the public, distribute aid to various districts, and organize gratuitous relief for those unable to work. All local committees were asked to keep the Central Committee fully informed of the conditions of the afflicted, local requirements, and the state of local funds. The Central Committee met every week to monitor the situation. It collected approximately twelve lakhs, of which nearly Rs 3, 07, 000 were subscribed in England, Rs 1,02,000 contributed by government, while the rest came from various parts of India, including Rs 1,34,000 subscribed in the province.¹²⁹ Thus co-ordination and accountability to a central body became pronounced by the 1860s.

The significance of these charitable works lies not only in the charity dispensed but also in the political-cultural implications of their activities. As opposed to the indigenous charity which was usually individualistic, sporadic and aimlessly given, colonial charity was institutionalized. Like mission charity; it had a purpose, rules and regulations regarding who deserved charity and to what extent, and the method by which the recipients were to be relieved and what was expected in return. Thus their functioning was seen as conforming to Poor Law principles. Moreover they set an example of philanthropy and social service; in contrast the indigenous elite were perceived as indifferent to their countrymen's suffering and lacking in public spirit. The missions projected themselves as taking on the role of the pre-colonial ideal monarch and of the moral-patron. Such munificence enhanced their moral and political prestige, and contributed to the consolidation of the political and moral

¹²⁹*IFC, Report, 1880-5, iii, p.35.*

interests of the state, which was the aim. Significantly, stung by accusations of indifference it galvanized Indians and several indigenous institutions to organize their relief. A Parsi merchant Rustomjee Cowasjee started a fund and exhorting Indians not to lag behind European philanthropy; he collected Rs 15,000 in a few days.¹³⁰

Famine policy codified

From the 1860s there was extensive discussion regarding the handling of famines. Voices of political dissent and change were heard as notions of accountability and responsibility for famine emerged. The scholarly campaigns of Digby and Dutt, in particular, set a new agenda for the handling of famines that was taken up by both British administrators and embryonic nationalist groups such as the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and later the Indian National Congress.¹³¹ Official responses were recorded in famine reports, besides a variety of official records. Despite these undertakings, responses to famine were characterized by confusion and ambiguity, from central and provincial governments, district officers, politicians, and technical experts, especially in key areas like movement of grains, wages, revenue suspension and remission, nutrition, statistics and diseases.¹³²

The urgency to fight famines along clear scientific lines was felt. The 1878 Famine Commission, was specifically set up to lay down a set of all-India principles and enable provinces to draw up their own respective Codes. The 1880 Famine Code was neither 'radical' nor 'innovative,' and the relief system emerging from it did not dramatically change the incidence of famines. Most solutions remained anchored to

¹³⁰ *Friends of India*, 8 March 1838, p.83.

¹³¹ see pp. 208-214.

¹³² See pp.138-46.

to the lingering influences of Malthusianism, laissez-faire, and the priority of keeping state costs at a minimum. But the 1880 Code was the first written Famine Code which remains unmatched in detail and not significantly updated in terms of ideology, and are influential even in modern times in the formation of famine responses.

While no drastic changes were made, actual policies fluctuated. As already argued the necessity of eradicating famine mortality by the 1860s was an impelling factor in introducing subtle but significant alterations in relief. For this the 1880 Code relied on broader policy initiatives such as on intervening at an early stage of famine. The Code instituted a system of recording information connected with famine such as weather, agricultural, health and economic conditions of the people; knowledge of these helped in determining the level of distress and would render relief more effective, thereby controlling political dissidence and turmoil. This aspect was reinforced by the Famine Code of NWP.¹³³ There was renewed emphasis on development and improvement of transport, irrigation and credit. Until this time the utility of these had been minimal and expensive, especially in famine prone areas like Bundelkhand. Schemes for loans and for sinking wells and co-operative credit became more flexible, and may be viewed as a new priority in famine prevention.

The 1880 Code recognized that the dislocation of production- related factors was not the sole cause of vulnerability to famine; erosion of entitlements and accessibility to available food was a prime determinant. The remedy lay in intervening to protect entitlements at an early stage so that sufferers would be stopped from resorting to negative coping mechanisms like mortgaging land, jewellery, equipment, and cattle

¹³³*The New Famine Code, NWP&O* (1901), pp.2-3.

which impaired their ability to cope with future famines.¹³⁴ Despite this evaluation, relief continued to provide 'entitlement protection,' through employment on relief works at bare subsistence wages, which continued to discriminate against women. The concept of specialized relief was recommended - providing relief to artisans in their own trade, especially weavers. It recommended that new material and looms be provided and the cloth made purchased at government rates.¹³⁵ In practice, low priority was attached to make relief compatible with indigenous coping strategies and community and village support mechanisms even in 1890's. The assessment of the requirements of the needy was neither realistic, nor concerned with minimizing their vulnerability to famines. It continued with one standard set of relief provisions for the whole country, overlooking the range of problems faced by people living in famine prone regions such as Bundelkhund, varied from those in Awadh or western Doab. These problems varied amongst different classes of the people as well. The high levels of mortality, migration, disease and dislocation, even in 1890's suggests the inadequacy of relief. Such shortcomings suggest that there was hardly a proper evaluation of the causes and nature of famine.

There was conflict among members over organizational aspects of relief. Caird and Sullivan, from Madras, agreed to the employment of the fit on large public works and extracting seventy-five per cent labour tasks from them, but believed that labourers should be paid normal labour wage rates. Their recommendations were turned down on the grounds of expense and for producing an adverse effect on market labour and

¹³⁴ Henvey, *Report*, pp. 4-5; Loveday, *History and Economics*, p.56; see chs.II&VIII.

¹³⁵ *IFC, Report*, 1880,i, p.185.

breeding demoralization.¹³⁶ As Campbell noted, “There is a constant dilemma that if we are too liberal, there are sure to be great abuses, if we are too hard the people may starve.” Local responsibility towards gratuitous relief was emphasized but it was recognised that “the community’s sense of its responsibility to its poorer members could not be enforced in times of scarcity.”¹³⁷ This constituted a significant shift from the government’s previous position. Senior bureaucrats like Richard and John Strachey, Charles Grant and Charles Elliott opposed the government undertaking moral responsibility for preventing starvation deaths on grounds of financial embarrassment, damaging community structures, and the Malthusian/Darwinian argument that famines were natural calamities which were not without their use.¹³⁸ Accepting such responsibility was a dangerous political premise which could ‘school poor Indian subjects’ to look to the state in all calamities. Since famines were frequent in India, Elliott admonished, “the intervention and responsibilities of the state must be very cautiously permitted.”¹³⁹ Notwithstanding such opposition government reaffirmed its responsibility to prevent starvation deaths. A sum of Rs fifteen million was to be kept aside yearly as Famine Insurance Fund. It could be used to mitigate distress in a bad year, or for constructing canals and railways. The influence of personalities as well as dominant ideologies concerning relief are reflected in the effectiveness of the continuities of policies and general rules in a variety of local circumstances and regional conditions.

Still, the 1880 Code made significant shifts in the concept of relief. It expanded the

¹³⁶Brenan, ‘The development of the Indian Famine Code’, B.Curry& G.Hugo (ed), *Famine As a Geographical Phenomenon*, pp. 103-4.

¹³⁷ *IFC, Report, 1880, i, p.48.*

¹³⁸ *Condition of the Country and People, Principles of Famine Relief*, p. 117.

¹³⁹ *ibid.* views of C. Grant, 28 October, 1878, p.118.

outlay of relief and liberalized provisions for remission and suspension of revenue, grant of loans and advances. The scope of gratuitous relief was expanded and government took full responsibility. There was awareness that relief ought to be sensitive to its context and make optimum use of human and material resources, social structures and value systems. Above all, though free trade ideology was not set aside, it was recognized that there might arise circumstances in which the government would have to step in and import foodgrain and sell it at reasonable rates.¹⁴⁰ The emphasis was on decentralization of relief and retaining public morale. Thus a measure of flexibility was introduced in the handling of famines and established precedents.

1896-7 relief : reflection of the Code

The 1880 Famine Code was first put to action in NWP&O during the 1896-7 famine, which was also the most widespread in the nineteenth century. Relief which was more liberal and localized was essentially of four kinds depending on whether the particular sub-region was considered a 'famine' or a 'scarcity' district. This was a break from past precedent. Relief still concentrated on 'entitlement protection' through guaranteed employment on large public works on subsistence wages and unconditional gratuitous relief.

Stress was on employment on small localized projects, and vocational projects which dominated the early stages of famine while in later more intense phases, large public works constituted the backbone of the system.¹⁴¹ For several reasons it was

¹⁴⁰ Ch.III, pp.127-8. *IFC Report*, 1880-5, iii, pp.50-3.

¹⁴¹ *Resolution of the Administration of Famine Relief in the NWP.& O, During the 1896 -7Famine*, p. 37.

advantageous to institute small relief projects, make relief village based and employ physically fit persons locally: hot weather, scarcity of water, and epidemic outbreaks made it both difficult and dangerous to congregate people in large camps.¹⁴² Equally, preventing the uprooting of affected people from their surroundings was emphasized. Thus there was a shift away from large, centralized relief works. It was assumed that once sufferers had the means to purchase food, grains would be made available by private trade. Besides, government involvement in relief assumed a wide variety of forms which included extensive credit controls and incentives, import substitution measures, infrastructural investment, the dissemination of information, and a flexible taxation system. For the first time relief policy was used as an entry point for addressing matters of long- term consequence.

Small works aimed at creating employment avenues that were suited to afflicted people's vocations and being of utility to village communities; for example, what better work could there be in Jhansi for unskilled people than trenching the land and eradicating the *kans* grass? Well sinkers were to be employed to make wells for the neighbouring estates, and thus safeguarded against future droughts;¹⁴³ carpenters making furniture, cobblers making shoes for the army, weavers were given thread for making cloth and contractors were allowed to purchase the cloth.

Local landlords were encouraged to participate and contribute towards the management, expenditure and supervision of these localized works. They were obliged to employ village labour under prescribed wages.¹⁴⁴ Grants of loans free of

¹⁴² *ibid.* p. 37.

¹⁴³ *IFC, Report, 1880, Appendix, iv, p. 95.*

¹⁴⁴ *Resolution On the Administration Of Famine Relief, NWP&O, 1896-7, p.107; IFC, Report, 1901, pp. 12-13..*

interest but partly recoverable within two years were made, calculated to improve the agricultural conditions, water supply, and general sanitation of the villages by which they and their tenants would benefit.¹⁴⁵

Bundelkhund, the worst afflicted, was the key area of relief operations which, commenced in October 1896. Testworks opened in January 1896; relief works commenced in September 1896, and were in full-scale operation in all distressed districts till October 1897 and in some districts till February - March 1898. Tanks, bunds, reservoirs, and canals offered the largest proportion of employment for famine labour. Many reservoir schemes in Bundelkhund, as also the Betwa canal there, and the navigation channel between Kanpur and Allahabad were examples of such works. Tank repair and construction were popular, as a good tank was an immense boon to the village as a source of irrigation, for watering cattle and supplying household wants. Also, revenue accrued from tanks, deriving from the sale of fish and *singhara* (water chestnut).¹⁴⁶ As a result of these schemes 1,147 tanks and 271 embankments were constructed; village roads were repaired and works of sanitary improvement were carried out such as clearing and draining village sites or filling up insanitary excavations.¹⁴⁷ One of the most prominent notables to be involved in such work was the Maharaja of Benaras, who instituted many relief schemes and employed famine labour in his district. These works consisted exclusively of small embankments to intercept and retain surface water, as rocky soil here was not conducive for digging wells. The Raja of Balrampur was also conspicuous for the assistance he rendered his

¹⁴⁵ *Resolution on the Administration of Famine Relief, NWP & O, 1896-7*, p.107.

¹⁴⁶ *Condition Of the Country and People, reply of Col. Brownlow*, p. 367.

¹⁴⁷ *Resolution On the Administration of Famine Relief, NWP & O., 1896-7*, pp.107-8; *IFC, Report, 1898*, pp. 107-8

tenantry in Gonda.¹⁴⁸ Small projects were also carried out by district officers at state expense. The works constructed under this scheme included 324 tanks, twenty-four embankments, and other minor irrigation works.¹⁴⁹ At Sultanpur the needy were employed to construct a big drain extending about a quarter mile from the city to the river.¹⁵⁰ Railway schemes were not preferred as they involved heavy expenditure while roads offered employment to a small number of people.

However the most important addition to relief was the introduction of intermediate relief works.¹⁵¹ In determining the recipients of gratuitous relief, lists were drawn by circle officers with the assistance of village accountants, headmen, and local notables; admission to poor houses, state kitchens and homes for the respectable poor was more readily available. Those who were considered suitable for relief were placed on lists of permanent and temporary recipients of relief. The village *panchayat* and the relief committee looked into the claims of the '*parda-nashin*' and other 'respectable classes' and allowances were fixed and distributed on a weekly/fortnightly basis.¹⁵² The circle officer or superior relief officers reviewed these arrangements during their weekly or fortnightly visits to the village. Lists were reviewed, recipients of relief summoned excepting *parda-nashins*, names of those no longer needing relief were struck off and those eligible added. Gratuitous relief commenced in June 1896 and reached its peak by 24 July 1897, when there were 424,000 persons on outdoor relief

¹⁴⁸ *Resolution On the Administration of famine Relief, 1896-7*, p.110.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.109.

¹⁵⁰ E.Luce, *Glimpses of Christian India*, p.69.

¹⁵¹ *IFC, Report, 1898*, p.66. The difference between Intermediate system and the system prescribed by the Famine Codes was the substitution of piece- work for task work and the exclusion of the minimum wage rates. Rates were prescribed and payments made according to the amount of work done, but a maximum task was fixed which limited the amount that could be earned in one day. The object of the system was to secure a proper out turn of work done for the money paid to prevent the congregation of a large number of ineffective workers.

¹⁵² *Scarcity deptt, Govt of the NWP&O, ' Narrative and Results of the Measures Adopted for the Relief of Famine During the Years 1896-7*, lxii, pp. 42-3.

and 45,000 in poor houses.¹⁵³ Numbers relieved here were larger than those employed on the public works. Casual relief was unconditional and village *chaukidars* (watchmen) were provided with money and provisions to relieve wanderers.

Relief committees were functioning in every distressed district and although their goals remained the same the relief offered by them expanded considerably in scope. There were shortcomings in co-ordination of relief which government urged be co-ordinated with the elite networks of Indian society, to control the Indian people, to control corruption in relief and to get acquainted with the needs of the afflicted.¹⁵⁴ A major development was the founding of the Indian Famine Relief Fund.

The salient feature of this and later famines was the stress on 'moral strategy' to avoid depression amongst the afflicted.¹⁵⁵ Short and long-term loans were given on easy terms, to enable the needy to replace old stocks, for seed, for hutting and restoring old habitation. Altogether Rs forty-two lakhs was advanced under the Agriculturists Loans Act and the Land Improvements Loans Act.¹⁵⁶ Suspensions and remissions of revenue approximated Rs.1.5 crores. At Kanpur, revenue remitted was just over two lakhs, while suspensions approximated six and quarter lakhs.¹⁵⁷ At Allahabad eight lakhs was remitted and 16,25,846 suspended, and one lakh and seventy five thousand rupees given as *takavi*.¹⁵⁸ Bundelkhund was desolated by this famine. At Jalaun, approximately eleven lakhs due as land revenue was suspended; of this nearly 77.45

¹⁵³ *ibid.* p. 77.

¹⁵⁴ Macdonnell to Elgin, 29 April 1898, p. 251.

¹⁵⁵ *IFC Report*, 1901, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.86.

¹⁵⁷ *Gazetteers Kanpur*, xix, p.66.

¹⁵⁸ *Gazetteers, Allahabad*, xxiii, p. 53.

per cent were remitted, while one and a quarter lakhs was distributed as *takavi*.¹⁵⁹ At Hamirpur, from October 1896-August 1897, Rs 57, 802 was dispersed in *takavi* loans for the purchase of seed and sinking of wells, and just over eight lakhs was suspended as land revenue, and about five and a half lakhs was remitted.¹⁶⁰ In Banda, which suffered more than other districts in the province, Rs 82,000 was distributed as subsistence *takavi*, eight and quarter lakhs rupees remitted, and nearly two lakhs suspended.¹⁶¹

The government claimed success in relief on the grounds that there were only twenty-five starvation deaths. This figure is questionable ignoring as it does, the high mortality which, if not owing to starvation, would be attributed to prevailing diseases. Allahabad division lost four per cent of its population, while Banda, Hamirpur and Jhansi lost ten per cent each.¹⁶² Rheumatism, goitre, poisoning, malarial fevers, cholera and infections of the ears and lungs were rampant; mortality was nearly forty per cent in famine affected districts at the height of famine. Table 11 shows mortality figures from October 1896 to September 1897 In NWP&O:

Table.11

Entire Province		Famine Districts only		Scarcity Districts only.	
Actual death rate	Normal death rate	Actual death rate	Normal death rate	Actual death rate	Normal death rate.
36.30	33.04	39.54	32.80	36.53	33.26.

Source: *IFC Report* 1898, p.148.

¹⁵⁹ *Gazetteers*, Jalaun, xxv,p. 37.
¹⁶⁰ *Gazetteers*, Hamirpur, xxii, p.50.
¹⁶¹ *Gazetteers*,Banda, p.66.
¹⁶² *Deccenial Report On the Material Condition*, 1901-2, p.11.

Despite better medial facilities (see table 14). death rates were exceedingly high in famine-affected districts especially between October and November 1897. These were attributed to poor sanitation facilities, plague and malarial fever upon a population already enfeebled by privation.

Table 12 shows mortality rates in famine affected districts:

Table. 12

	August	September	October	November
Hamirpur	6.62	8.93	9.89	6.60
Banda	2.61	4.05	4.76	5.06
Jalaun	6.19	9.34	9.78	6.95
Jhansi	4.40	5.15	5.64	4.74
Mathura	2.00	4.75	8.37	7.73
Agra	4.17	7.75	12.44	9.22
Etawah	3.08	4.26	8.83	7.46
Hardoi	5.72	4.82	5.40	4.05

Source: *Triennial Report of the Dispensaries and Charitable Institutions Of the NWP&O, for the three Years Ending 31 December 1898, p.4.*

Cases of cholera were 4,190 in 1896, and 3,585 in 1897; these fell to a mere 368 in 1898.¹⁶³ These figures excludes the numbers treated at hospitals and dispensaries attached to relief works. While accurate statistics are unavailable the districts that did

¹⁶³ *Triennial Report of the Dispensaries and Charitable Institutions Of the NWP&O, for the three Years Ending 31 December 1898, p. 6.*

furnish returns show that 31,379 patients were treated in 1896 and 88,443 in 1897. Malaria took a heavy toll, peaking in 1897; as partially reflected in the increasing expenditure on quinine and febrifuges and other charges for treatment of malarial fever; it was Rs 3,031 in 1896, Rs 8,385, in 1897 and Rs 4,077 in 1898.¹⁶⁴

Table 13 shows the figures for malarial fever for four years:

Table. 13

Year	Number Of Cases	Percentage of the total number of patients
1895	683,136	17.9%
1896	580,752	14.6%
1897	713,032	19.3%
1898	691,979	17.9%

Source: *Triennial Report On the Dispensaries and Charitable Institutions Of the NWP&O,During the three Years Ending 31 December 1898*, p. 6.

Despite availability of improved and expanded medical facilities, there was a perceptible decline in the numbers of outdoor and indoor patients; there was a steep decline in medical expenditure as well. This could be attributed to mistrust of governments intentions, and interference particularly the removal of women to quarantine, corruption of medical staff,¹⁶⁵ several medical dispensaries, some of a temporary nature, were set up; several were exclusively for women such as Female dispensaries at Orai and Azamgarh, The Kings Female Dispensary at Lucknow and

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*p.6.
¹⁶⁵ MacDonnell to Elgin, 29 April 1898, p.251.

Female dispensaries at Nagina and Bijnor.¹⁶⁶ Women medical missionaries acquired importance as they were given access to women in need of medical attention, and women dispensaries were mostly manned by them.

Table 14 shows the medical resources available during 1896-7:

¹⁶⁶*Triennial Report*, pp.4-5.

Table. 14

Year	No.of Civil hospitals and dispean saries	No. of	Patients		Acco modat ion in no.of beds	Income	From subscrip tions		
	Total	For Women	Outdoor	Indoo r		For general hospitals and dispensa ries	For instituti ons for women	Invested capital	Total expendit ure
1895	340	38	3,955,68 1	61,51 4	3,473	Rs 120,494	Rs 25,643	Rs 12,33,000	. Rs 7,55,252
1898	369	52	3,801,25 5	55,58 9	3,905	96,964	15,002	15,27,685	 6,60,166
Increase	29	14	...	...	432	...	...	2,91,685	...
Decrease	...	...	154,426	5,925	...	23,530	10,611	...	95,086

Source: Triennial Report Of the Dispensaries and Charitable Institutions Of the NWP&O for three years ending 31 December 1898,p.5.

Conclusion:

An overview of the evidence examined leads us to the questions that were set out in the beginning. To what extent did the relief policy meet popular expectations. Did it accomplish its objective of preventing starvation deaths and alleviating immediate suffering ?

Relief during the four famines was based on intellectual doctrines rather than compassion and realities of the situation. The economic and moral dangers that Malthusian, Social Darwinism and the Poor Laws stressed would arise, if generous and liberal relief was dispersed, were significant in limiting relief which was guided to achieve economy. For these reasons wages paid on relief projects remained paltry. The problem addressed, was the restoration of immediate elementary purchasing power. Limited governmental action and relief found justification in the ideology of laissez-faire with emphasis that free markets, free transactions and merchants would supply grains at reasonable prices, which often they did not.¹⁶⁷ Such rationalizing was a shield for bureaucratic uncertainties, and lack of knowledge of popular expectations and Indian society. Famines undermined society's moral, economic and social fabric; financial stringency therefore cannot be justified. Small wonder that the laudable objective of preventing starvation deaths was unrealizable even during 1896-7.

Importantly the perceived causes of famine dictated relief given. Officially the four famines studied arose due to monsoon failure leading to loss of crops. Relief was structured around the idea that under the British, famines were of work rather than food, and based on large public works programmes; once the negative impact of such

large works became apparent, small local works were also considered important. Relief was activated much after assets were mortgaged or sold and migration had commenced. It was largely directed to protection of minimal consumption levels, and did not complement popular adjustment mechanisms, wherein prevailing consumption level was the first to be curtailed. The erosion of the production base, though small when judged individually, became enormous and significant when totalled up for the whole community in the famine area. Thus, impoverishment increased over successive famines.

Government, state and central, was reluctant to redress the structural problems that lay at the heart of poverty and famines. They ought to have concentrated on long-term general promotion and strengthening of entitlements, through such measures as diversification and generation of more employment opportunities; provision of loans to meet immediate consumption requirements, purchase of seeds and cattle, sinking wells and interest on such loans to be waived or kept at minimal and the loans to be returned in easy instalments; remission and suspension of revenue and easy access to irrigation facilities, promotion of education, adequate medical and basic civic amenities available such as potable water, sanitation facilities, as also clean living spaces. Differences of region, culture, occupation, and gender were overlooked. Relief was given to victims as if they were a homogenous entity; hence the needy were unwilling to avail relief, and did not appreciate government efforts. The image of a modernizing, benevolent and reformist state could not be strengthened.

¹⁶⁷B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.82; Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 100.

Despite these shortcomings, evidence indicates that government made some positive interventions, especially, after the 1880 Code. The scope and financial outlay of relief widened: in undertaking responsibility for obviating starvation deaths and providing full gratuitous relief, liberal provisioning of loans and *takavi*, suspension and remission of revenue; in giving vocational employment; and emphasis on extension of village and casual relief, even relief of cattle. The government thus cannot be accused of deliberate cruelty. As expectations of the afflicted were not given importance even immediate suffering remained unalleviated. The primary and long-term objective of strengthening imperial political interests through the medium of relief will be discussed in the next chapter.

ChapterV: Landlords, Government and Consolidation of Interests

Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the close connection between relief and politics. Famine literature reiterates the same.¹ Elizabeth Noble, in her eyewitness account of famine and floods, drew a close connection between relief and politics.² The argument is that tackling famine becomes a part of the wider process of state building, specifically, the consolidation of political power and tightening of state control. Hunger makes suffering people dependent and submissive to authority as a source of stability and control, especially where authority controls the resources.³ In NWP&O too, officials especially in the Post-Mutiny era, perceived famines as processes of state building, and, relief as a form of investment that would yield rich political dividends. Hence relief assumed an important place in the imperial discourse. Increasingly relief was dictated by political exigencies that would facilitate the consolidation of imperial authority. It was in this ideological context that there was a gradual enlargement of relief.⁴ Responsibility for preventing starvation deaths, expansion of unconditional gratuitous relief, retaining the confidence of the people, and maintenance of law and order, the series of famine administrators appointed to compile data on famines, the Famine Code, conferences, the appointment of famine Commissioner acquire new importance in this light.

¹ Dreze & Sen, *Hunger And Public Action* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 210-14; Rangasami, 'The Masking Of Famine,' in Floud & Rangasami (eds). *Famine And Society*, pp. 51-63; Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor*, pp. 275-319; Keen, *Benefits of Famine*.

² M. E. Noble, *Glimpses of Famines and Floods* (Allahabad, 1907), pp. 71-95.

³ Dirks, 'Social Responses,' *Current Anthropology*, 21, 1 (February 1980), p. 30.

⁴ See ch. IV.

This chapter examines the extent to which relief policy achieved the political objective of widening the support base of colonial rule and consolidation of power, and the mechanisms through which the government endeavoured to realize this.

Famines and consolidation of state power

Two lines of action were followed to accomplish this: firstly, the legitimization of political power could be achieved by conciliation of the upper classes; and, secondly, by controlling the lower classes through a show of strength and vigorous imposition of law and order. Famines provided a platform for the demonstration of both. Promoting the idea that the British government in India aimed at moral and material regeneration of Indian society was one of the main justifications of their presence in India. In this notion lay the themes of consolidation and control.

Famines became opportunities for the colonial government to display an example and compare their efforts favourably with past rulers. Government's response to famines reinforced the administrative capacity, the benefits of orderly government, generosity and liberalism, which it was hoped would bind the Indian subjects to their rule and widen their support base. This was reflected in a collector's report in 1838 claiming,

In a season of such unprecedented calamity it is a noble sight to view the thousands who are saved from death by the generosity of the British government. In this respect we have set an example to the surrounding states.⁵

⁵ Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, 1838, 121; to Lowther, commissioner, revenue department, Allahahbad div; from S. Brecher, offg. collector, Fatehpur, 18 May 1838, pp.170-1.

The government expected gratitude and loyalty of their subjects as a return. “The state has up to this point done its duty as a paternal government in supporting its famishing subjects, it only remains now to give an impulse to their industry.”⁶ It was keeping in mind the political benefits that certain sections of the officials urged the need for a generous and liberal relief. MacDonnell emphasized to Elgin, “The help we are giving will have a good political effect.”⁷

A very good spirit pervades the provinces and the people high and low appreciate what is being done for them. The government has thus appeared to them in its truly benevolent character, and come what may, the political good of this cannot be eradicated.⁸

Much to the satisfaction of district officers this benevolence could assume a divine form; for example during the 1896-7 famine at many places, the government was viewed as having a mandate from God to alleviate the suffering. The fight against famine was equated to the *Mahabaharta*. It was rumoured that Lord *Vishnu* had entered the person of the Lt.-Gov. and was directing relief operations. British authority thus touched a strong moral high ground.

Government, landlords and famines

Traditionally during crises the peasants looked to the rulers and *zamindars* for protection and nurture. But, by the 1830s, the landlord-tenant relationship was in flux; paternalism was being replaced by the greed and indifference of exacting landlords whose position in

⁶ Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP. 121, f. 183: At a meeting of the Sud. Bd. of Rev: Present R.M. Bird and H. M. Turner. From the offg. commissiner, Agra div.

⁷ Macdonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896, p.23. (Ms.Eng. Hist.C.352)

⁸ MacDonnell to Elgin, 22 November 1896, p.35.

the agrarian system was modified significantly after 1857. They assumed more individualistic roles. Government though concerned, was unwilling to tread on rights and privileges of landlords in conformity with its laissez-faire stance, and the imperative need for political stability, which depended on landlord support.⁹ According to the 1880 Famine Commission report, "Landlords and tenants were yearly becoming more hostile, so that the landlord will generally refuse any aid to his occupancy tenants, when they are in difficulties, and do all he can to ruin them, and drive them off the land."¹⁰ They even had tenant families evicted from their holdings when men were away on relief works. It was observed in Rohilkhund that:

The tenants were in bad times with the zamindars - they had been constantly quarreling about the enhancement of rent: had fought out their disputes in courts, when the pinch came the tenants feared to leave their villages lest his holdings be misappropriated by the landlords.¹¹

The objective was "to harass the tenant and to diminish the value of his occupancy rights, by bringing suit after suit for enhancement of the rent."¹² A *Chauhan* cultivator at Moradabad complained that during his absence at a relief work, in Bareilly district, his *zamindar* had succeeded in ousting him from his *khast* even though his wife and children had remained all along in the village.¹³ Such instances of coercion, rapaciousness and forcible eviction of tenants were frequently reported. Concerned officials observed, "If this famine lasts for a year there will not be an occupancy right left in the whole of Moradabad."¹⁴ The *ryots* resisted going to relief works and poor houses lest the landlords

⁹ See ch.II,III.&IV.

¹⁰ *IFC,Report*, 1880-5, ii, p. 117.

¹¹ Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund div, deptt. xii, series 11,box 88,f.3/90; C. Robertson, Secretary to the government, NWP. March 1879.

¹² *IFC,Report*,1880-5, ii,p.117.

¹³ Post- Mutiny, Rohilkhund, deptt xii, f.92, serial no.1-4, from C. Robertson, to commissioner, Rohilkhund,undated.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

take advantage of their absence and evict them from their holdings. “The cultivators have the greatest care and regard for their holdings, since the time of the last settlement a constant quarrel is going on between the zamindars and the tenants.”

This is not to argue for a sweeping universal change in the attitude of landlords, but that there were shifts in their duties and commitments, towards their tenants, and dependents. Not all landlords were exacting or abandoned their commitments, and some, even if they wished to help were unable to do so because of their own economic limitations. The substitution of contractual legal relations in place of ancient patriarchal relations tended to weaken the security of the tenants at will, and to increase the friction between the new occupancy tenant and landlords.¹⁵

Evidence indicates that the quality of relationship with the landlord determined to an extent the intensity of suffering of the *ryots* during famines. Reports emphasized that suffering was aggravated and mortality heaviest in those areas where landlord-tenant relations were strained.¹⁶ For example, in Bareilly and Shahjehanpur, due to overassessment and rack-renting, the impact of famine was severe and loss of assets alarming. Pitcher found that mortality and want were greatest in villages where the *zamindar* had collected rents with great rigour. He found cases of cattle being seized for rent, and crops being sold on the ground to *bantias* over the heads of cultivators. Over and above this twenty-five per cent of arrears was also levied for a default payment of rent. This maybe illustrated by the example of two neighbouring villages Amra Karor

¹⁵ Loveday, pp. 115-16.

¹⁶ *Report of Scarcity And Relief, NW&O, 1877-78-&79*, Pitcher, *Report*, pp. 316-17.

and Kasimpur, situated five hundred yards apart. Amra Karor had 807 residents. During the 1873-4 famine there were only fifty-eight deaths here despite the fact that virtually nothing had been grown; here the landlord behaved with generosity and kindness. But in Kasimpur half the area was under rice cultivation and the tenants were pressured for rent even for lands lying uncultivated for the previous two years. Here, out of 432 cultivators seventy deserted and fifty-one died, and the condition of the remaining was precarious.¹⁷ In other two villages, tenants with right of occupancy came to Pitcher to complain that, although they had been unable to sow their fields on account of the dearness of seed grain, their landlords were pressing them for rents.¹⁸ In many villages, to escape the coercion of landlords, the *ryots* cut their *rabi* crops and fled by night, carrying off crops, goods and cattle, leaving the land uncultivated and their arrears unpaid.¹⁹ In regions where landlords were unwilling to help the tenants or did not have the resources to do so, land alienation was striking. "The number of villages in the hands of the banias in Bilsanda and Bisalpur, strikes one as at once remarkable."²⁰ And this would have greatly enhanced their power and social status.²¹ Similar was the situation during the 1896-7 famine. Lt.-Gov. MacDonnell recorded:

As soon as the symptoms of the famine became apparent, the landlords held back from helping their ryots, by refusing to advance loans, and the mahajans and the banias followed suit, as it pays them better in times of high prices to turn their money over and over again by selling grain, instead of advancing it to be repaid by a harvest which may never be reaped.²²

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.317.

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.316.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.316.

²⁰ *ibid.* p.317.

²¹ B. Cohn, 'Structural Change in Indian Rural Society, 1796-1885, in Frykenberg (eds). *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Wisconsin, 1969),p. 84.

²² MacDonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896,pp. 19-20.

As the affliction commenced during 1896-7, the landlords and moneylenders fearful of even harder times hoarded grain, and refused to sell. MacDonnell however, continued to repose confidence in them. He toured the province to win landlord support by associating them closely with relief dispensation and pressuring them to be considerate towards the suffering people.²³ He held joint conferences with district officers and prominent landlords, seeking their advice and co-operation in alleviating distress.²⁴ This demonstrates the level to which the patron-dependent relationship had declined.

Instead of taking strong measures as popularly expected, government undertook half-hearted measures to protect the enfeebled *ryots* from being arbitrarily ejected, like the abolition of the usury laws in 1855, and the creation of occupancy rights in 1859. Government perceived famines as providing opportunity to identify and work through the social and political networks of society, by buffering and perpetuating unequal relationships of income, power and prestige; for example, during 1837-8, the services of landlords were extensively utilized despite reports from several places that *zamindars* had led and participated in the crimes. The magistrate of Farrukhabad made a telling observation: "The offences are headed and perpetrated by the village zamindars...that they are the only people who can prevent this is equally obvious."²⁵ Officials were aware that they commanded little popular trust and confidence. Even if they had to allay fears and rumours about poor houses and relief works they had to take the help of an entrenched local elite. An exasperated commissioner of Rohilkhand recommended:

²³ MacDonnell to Cadell, 3 October 1896, p.2; MacDonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896, pp.20-1.

²⁴ MacDonnell to J. Woodburn, 31 October 1896, p.9.

²⁵ Pre-Mutiny, criminal-judicial, procds, July 1838, 77, NWP, from Robinson, mag. Farrukhabad to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra, 8 February 1838.

This can best be done by working through those of their own class to whom they are accustomed to turn to in times of adversity-I mean their own zamindars. These are the people I would utilize. Their influence would have the best effect, the people would not suspect their motives: and I believe the zamindars as a class would well respond to any confidence reposed in them, and lend us most valuable aid in meeting what we must admit are serious difficulties.²⁶

He emphasized that in many places, including Moradabad and Bijnor, where there were numerous rich and influential *zamindars* whose services were to be utilized.

I would largely employ the best zamindars and would have them working and reporting to the covenanted officers and taking his instructions. They should not be placed under peshkars, police officers, kanungoes, or such like. If they are they will no longer regard their selection as a compliment, and will have no heart in the work. I am confident that by working with the zamindars we shall effect much more than any other mode, that in this way one rupee will go further than two rupees in any other.²⁷

It was recommended that the well-disposed be given incentives and confidence reposed in them, and they be induced to give the lead in defending their own rights and property as well as that of the community.²⁸ Landlords were included on relief committees in the capacity of advisers and supervisors, and were entrusted with the distribution of loans and advances. The authorities made cash advances to them leaving distribution, recovery of loans and re-peopling of villages to his discretion. When the resources were distributed, a bond admitting personal guarantee or joint responsibility and pledging property generally was taken and executed to whom the advances were given.²⁹ Gratuitous relief especially of the respectable poor was the charge of local notables, who identified upper

²⁶ *Report of the Scarcity and Relief Operations in the NWP&O, 1877-78&79*, p. 265.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 265.

²⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Rohilkhund div, criminal- judicial. procds. August 1837, 179, NWP. From J. Turner, offg. commissioner, Bareilly, to offg. Magistrate, Shahjehanpur, 14 August 1837.

²⁹ Scarcity deptt, f. no.73; from Chief Secretary, NWP&O, to the Secretary, Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP& O, 5 October 1896. UPSAL.

social classes needing relief and provided the same.³⁰ Government's dependence on financial and moral support of the landlords increased by the 1890s. It considered providing landlords with reasonable financial contributions and entrusting relief administration of their estates and villages to them.³¹ Below the district level the headman, *qanungo* or *mukhia*, recommended those considered suitable for various administrative offices. These institutional arrangements of power had an intentional quality that reinforced and enhanced the politics of patronage and distinction, leading to the growth of increasing power differentials by buttressing existing structures of power, enabling government to dominate the indigenous society, and Indian local controllers, to command its resources.

Officials feared an uprising during 1837-8 famine, especially as impoverished landowners participated and instigated lawlessness.³² The fear of rebellion never died and was real especially during 1896-7, as reflected in the correspondence between Viceroy Elgin and MacDonnell. MacDonnell was quick to reassure the Viceroy that all was being done to alleviate relief and thus retain the affection, trust and gratitude of the masses, especially the Hindus. He was suspicious of Muslim landlords and officers, and accused them of being seditious and having extra-territorial loyalties;³³ he emphasized that all should be done to retain the Hindu landlords on the British side as for better or worse they were the controlling power in the countryside of these provinces. As a step toward this he recommended that legislation be passed to free many of them from debt and thus

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *IFC Report*, 1901, pp.12-13.

³² See. pp.199-200, 210-12, 346-7.

³³ MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 July 1897, pp.172-3. (Ms.Eng. Hist.C.353.)

retain the traditional landed families in their position of influence and exploit this to ensure the safety of their own rule.³⁴ Many landlords were given powers of honorary magistrate over their estates, and projected as repositories of government faith. The elite gentry of landlords were wielded into a cohesive bulwark through official honours, bureaucratic powers and associations such as the Awadh Taluqdar Association. Thus persuasion, rhetoric, reward and punishment, provided a wide context for the consolidation of power. For the landlords such dependence enhanced their prestige and their bargaining power with the administrators.

Attitudes towards the poor

While moderation and prudence was used to secure conciliation of elite interests, the submission and obedience of the poorer classes was obtained through a show of strength and vigorous imposition of law and order, and official attitude was conditioned by the spirit of the poor laws. Relief works and camps, poorhouses, orphanages, state kitchens, institutions and, mechanisms constituted a positive arena of government intervention in the citizen's lives. Here one could see an overactive and vigilant state regimenting and controlling poor people physically and mentally, exercising a great measure of control over an ever widening circle of human activity, permeating personal and interpersonal relationships. The afflicted were familiarized with the immense power and resources of the government, stability of the existing order, which, the more it was displayed would strike deeper roots in their minds.³⁵ They decided the nature and amount of work to be

³⁴ MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 July 1897, pp.170-2.

³⁵ *Pioneer*, 27 November 1897.

extracted from inmates, hours of work, their diet, habitation, wages, relief apparatus was used as a kind of surveillance mechanism and was characterized by implicit threats - threats of fine, punishment, withdrawal of food, making further dents in the confidence and esteem of the needy, the aim being to discipline and make them law abiding. For example, at Jhansi, during the 1868-9 famine, idleness was punished by reductions in food or expulsion.³⁶ The regulation and discipline of poor houses was harsh and insensitive. The diet given to inmates was worse than that given to the animals; starving people preferred to die rather than submit to the degradation and coercion of these places. The following extract of a letter from Syed Imdad Ali, was a protest against the coercion so openly practised in poor houses.

Bread of kaccha gram instead of wheat, was given to the poor creatures in the poor houses, whereas if the bread of gram is proposed for the horses it is parched before it is made into bread, and consequently lots of men, women and children died of indigestion, notwithstanding the poor houses being inspected by the station surgeon every day.³⁷

The government became concerned to eliminate, punish and control individuals and groups, whom they deemed to be '*badmashes*,' 'criminals.' Scholars and officials have demonstrated how certain groups who were invariably poor and of lower castes were projected as inherently criminal, given a set of well-defined characteristics and were perceived as a threat to general safety, and to lawful authority. For example, Baird Smith witnessed the immense suffering and mortality amongst *Gujars*, but hardly any remedial measures were undertaken to alleviate it. He justified this apathy on the grounds that *Gujars* were known for their dishonesty, criminal ways and indolent habits; "It is hard to

³⁶ *Report of the Scarcity and Relief Operations, NWP&O, 1877, 78&79*, p. 265.

³⁷ Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, xii, 1858-80, box 87, f. 82. Translation of a letter from Syed Imdad Ali, Dy. collector, Moradabad, 2 June 1878.

reconcile ourselves.. to leave men, women and children to perish in the miseries of famine because adults of the race are under the dominion of perverted feelings.”³⁸ He therefore felt no sympathy for their suffering, which he did for other ‘respectable groups.’³⁹ From Etawah it was recorded that “Dacoities especially in years of scarcity.. very prevalent. These offences are however mostly confined to the lower castes.”⁴⁰ Such cultural stereotypes dictated official treatment of paupers and vagrants who were perceived as dangerous and therefore to be controlled. There was a clear lack of official respect for them. To control them several Vagrant Acts were passed, such as in 1869, 1871, 1876 and 1894, and workhouses, state kitchens and orphanages were established, and rules laid down. The results were often imperceptible; that there was no large-scale organized resistance is an indication of the success of the controlling efforts of the administrators.

The above negates Sharma’s argument that there is little evidence to show that officials displayed any sense of discrimination or respect for status and hierarchies and that the recipients of relief were treated as “an undifferentiated mass to be employed on productive ventures.”⁴¹ This may be partially true for famines that struck in the early stages of East India Company rule when a strictly pro-landlord policy was not followed. Importantly very little by way of giving relief existed and the only classification they used was of “able-bodied” and those “not physically fit.” However, as the policy of

³⁸ B.Smith, *Report*, i, pp.19-20.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *SR. of parganas Phuppoond, Beyla, Ooreya. From H.R.Gubbins, Settlement officer, North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, under regulation 1x, 1833, ii, part, 1 (Benaras, 1863), p.325.*

⁴¹ Sharma, *Famines, State and Society*, pp. 238-9.

giving gratuitous relief started shaping up, the various distinctions of caste, class, physical fitness and even of occupation were activated, recognized and reinforced. Contrary to Sharma's conclusions, it is argued that often relief far from being a great social leveller actually used to reinforce divisive social and cultural categories. This is best shown in official concerns to make special arrangements for the impoverished upper classes, who would die rather than work at relief projects alongside common people. Relief seekers were identified by caste. Higher-caste people were given jobs as supervisors at relief works, or were superintendents at poor houses, clerks or accountants.⁴² Middling castes were employed as gangmates and *moharirs*, while the very poor and inferior castes were employed as scavengers, *bishtis*, and removal corpses and patients stricken by cholera, malaria as regular medical staff absconded from such duties.⁴³

For the 1837-8 famine, class and castes are not usually mentioned but for later famines there are frequent references to caste and occupation of relief seekers. Occupation usually denoted caste; for example, references by Baird Smith, to the distress of weavers, denotes they were usually *Julahas*; petty shopkeepers were usually *Vaishyas*. Cobblers are *Chamars* and *Pasis*; and washermen were *Dhobis*. Occupations are clearly stated especially from the 1860's in the quest for identifying who was the first to fall on relief and what kind of relief was suited to them. The plight of the *Julahas* and how best to relieve them was of immense official concern. Officials grudgingly recommended that

⁴²Girdlestone *Report*, pp. 50, 55.

⁴³Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, depts. vii, f.1, bundle 169. Copy of a Report from militray, Asst.-Surgeon, Richardson, Jhansi district to collector Jhansi, 20 April 1897.

Julahas be employed in their vocation, though they perceived the *Julaha* as “A cantakerous, litigious, foul-mouthed fellow, he is useless or nearly so as a navvy; let us then place him at the work to which he is accustomed.”⁴⁴ Later narratives, especially of poor houses, emphasized the caste of inmates such as illustrated by table 18 (pp.395-7). At relief works officers were concerned to search for *Brahmins*, *Thakurs* or *Kayastha* cooks. The Central Relief Committee formed at Agra in 1860 ruled that for the infirm, the incapacitated and the aged cooked food be given. “The food so distributed should be cooked by persons ... care being taken that these persons shall be, such as that none would object on grounds of caste prejudices, to receive food from them.”⁴⁵ In fact at the Bareilly and Pilibhit poor houses, which lodged 5,000 inmates each “Separate blocks were allotted to *Thakurs*, Muhammadans and *Chamars* etc. And every care was taken to allow no interference with caste prejudices.”⁴⁶ Such an arrangement was deemed necessary because *Saiyyads*, *Pathans*, *Thakurs* and *Brahmins* refused to avail relief not because of social pride, but also reluctance to be herded with low-castes.⁴⁷ Amongst *Bhangis* and *Chamars*, the two lowest castes, poor houses and state kitchens were unpopular even during 1877-8 famine, as the *Chamar* held himself superior and objected to co-habiting with *Bhangis*. The colonial bureaucrats themselves were imbued with caste consciousness, and reinforced social distinctions of castes and classes to their advantage. Lytton, former Viceroy to India, was apprehensive that caste and class rules in relief dispensation must not be offended as the government’s grand efforts to combat famines

⁴⁴ *Report On Scarcity and Relief Operations, NWP&O, 1877-78 & 79*, p.265.

⁴⁵ *GAD procds, NWP&O, 23 February 1861; from Secretary, NWP&O, to commissioner, Meerut (no.1439A), 19 December 1860*, p.257..

⁴⁶ *Report On the Scarcity and Relief Operations, NWP&O, 1877-78 & 1879*, p.53.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.267.

might fail to secure the gratitude which they ought to.⁴⁸ However this regulationist position was full of tension and conflict. Officials differed on the extent to which the views of the state were to be imposed on the affected people. These differences stemmed from the differing perceptions of and implications of popular opposition to their rules and regulations on the one hand, and potential benefits and profits on the other.

Famines and nationalist mobilization -The Indian National Congress

From the latter half of the nineteenth century famines formed a central theme of the economic critique of the British rule. It became one of the primary conditions of nationalist mobilization. The writings of Nauroji, Dutt, Digby, Sutherland, and George Lambert were woven around the theme of famines, and their reaction to its frequent recurrence and deepening intensity was predictably caustic, accusing the British Raj of immiserising the sub-continent. They criticized the government's obstinacy in collecting revenue despite famines and demanded a liberal revenue policy in terms of revenue assessment, and recommended permanent settlement of revenue as a remedy.⁴⁹ Land revenue policy was an issue on which the nationalists were unanimously united.⁵⁰

While the four famines studied were not accompanied by rebellion and revolution, the memories of the famine and its consequences did give rise to anti-government sentiments and stimulus to nationalism and political action. Maclane listed famines as having the

⁴⁸ Northbrook to MacDonnell, 28 October 1897. (Ms.Eng.C hist 353)

⁴⁹ Nauroji, *Poverty And UnBritish Rule In India* (1901); Dutt, *Famine and Land Assessment in India* (London, 1900), pp. xi-xii; *England and India*, p. 134; G.Lambert, *India: The Horror Stricken Empire* (London, 1908).

⁵⁰ P.Mehta, *Speeches*, pp. 575-654.

potential to destabilize British rule in India. According him the famines of the 1890's cast a serious doubt upon official claims of increasing prosperity.⁵¹ Arnold noted that recurrent famines in nineteenth century India helped to stimulate the growth of the nationalist critique of colonial rule.⁵² Dang has argued that relief during earthquakes, famines and floods became a most effective weapon of political and social mobilization by the Congress and other political parties and pressure groups by the turn of the twentieth century.⁵³ Similarly, Singh has argued that the nationalist perspective on famines may be dated to the 1896-7 famine, which saw unprecedented political awakening.⁵⁴

Leaders like Tilak drew attention to the acute suffering and starvation stalking the NWP&O, and other provinces, and warned the government, central and state, to take adequate relief measures or face civil rebellion. Tilak undertook several propaganda tours and through his newspaper, '*Kesari*,' sought to mobilize suffering people and educate them to assert their rights. He impressed on the cultivators that it was their right to claim remission and suspension of revenue under the Famine Code, and that it was the moral duty of the government to help them in every possible way including saving their lives.⁵⁵ For example, he asked *ryots* not to pay land tax while the Famine Relief Act, was in force. Tilak emerged as the champion of the poor. He himself was at the forefront of organizing relief and mobilized grain merchants and bankers to make liberal donations,

⁵¹ J.R.Maclane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, 1977), p. 28.

⁵² Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 116.

⁵³ K.Dang, *The Congress and the Politics of Relief* (unpubl. M.Phil dissertation, JNU. 1992).

⁵⁴ K.S.Singh, 'Famine Nationalism And Social Change, The Indian Scenario,' *Indian Historical Review*, (India), 1-2, v. 14, 1987-8, p.187.

⁵⁵ *Kesari*, 15-22 December 1896.

and exhorted them to do service to their country by helping to alleviate distress. He exhorted them to act in the name of community and nation. His propaganda was more political than humanitarian; Vivekananda, too, was active in organizing relief, which he used not only to relieve distress but also as a weapon of social reform. Caste, class, religious and regional barriers were blurred and Brahmin boys were found nursing by the bedside of cholera stricken pariahs. The social dimension of Indian nationalism too found a focus in famine relief.⁵⁶ The government was alarmed at the revolutionary potential of such propaganda and mobilization.⁵⁷

By the 1890's the crucial influence and activities of the Congress made the government more accountable. At every annual session of the Congress, the critique of the British rule was along the lines of the nationalist writers and demands and resolution were centered on these issues. It mounted a scathing criticism of the colonial government for the over assessment of revenue, the backwardness of Indian agriculture and the frequent recurrence of famines. Congress took famine and relief as important issues at its annual meetings, setting up committees, highlighting the plight of the masses, passing resolutions and providing relief during natural calamities. At its 1897 session, the Congress deplored the outbreak of famines, and reminded the government of its duty to save every human life, and criticized the provisions of famine relief as embodied in the 1880 Famine Code as inadequate regarding wages and rations, and oppressive regarding task work. It agitated for adequate relief in the form of substantially reduced if not complete remission of revenue and demanded lower taxes. It criticized the government

⁵⁶ Singh, 'Famine Nationalism,' *IHR*, 1987-8, v.14, p.187.

⁵⁷ MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 July 1897, pp. 168-74 (Ms.Eng.C.Hist. 353).

for not offering rehabilitation to the victims in the aftermath of famines.⁵⁸ Madan Mohan Malaviya, highlighting the impoverished state of the *ryots* in the NWP&O, and their consequent vulnerability to famines, ridiculed the government for reimposing a cess for the maintenance of the *patwari* records on the *ryots*, with the agreement of taluqdars.⁵⁹ In several places, Congress used relief to forge links with peasants' groups, in the movement to withhold land revenue payment.⁶⁰ For example, the Congress co-ordinated its relief efforts with the *Servants of India Society*, which was actively involved in relief dispensation during the 1907-8 famine in the United Provinces. One of its premier members Pandit Hridaynath Kunzru, toured the province not only to organize relief but also district Congress committees. The Congress in late 1890s dispensed relief primarily through spinning and weaving and emphasized self-sufficiency, which was linked to the nationalist ideology of *swadeshi* and later an integral part of Congress propaganda. Thus, through relief efforts Congress developed a social service programme, which brought it in contact with the masses and gave it the legitimacy to speak for them.

During the 1896-7 famine, Indian residents in England held a conference there, under the presidency of Nauroji; they sought to educate the British public of the reasons for the increasing poverty of India, and the consequent famines, and their implications. Importantly, they called upon the imperial government to stop the constant drain of wealth from India.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Zaidi, *Indian National Congress- Glorious Tradition, 1885-1920*, i (New Delhi, 1987), pp. 134-5.

⁵⁹ *The Hon. Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya: His Life And Speeches*, 2 edn. (Madras, 1918?), pp. 25-8.

⁶⁰ Maclane, *Indian Nationalism*, p. 29.

⁶¹ *Hindustani* (Lucknow), 24 February 1897, p.150. (L/R/5/74, OIOC).

The government, central and state, was concerned that the Congress was making mileage out of the famine crisis and their interest in relief and welfare activities spurred the government to mount bigger relief efforts, taking into account the criticisms. Thus, there emerged two centres of parallel authority, both with welfarist claims and seeking the allegiance of the Indians-the Congress and the *Raj*. Despite organizational limitations, and that its propaganda had as yet not consolidated, Congress staked its claim as the spokesman of the suffering Indians and challenged government accounts as white washed, and demanded correct information. Other important religious groups like *Arya Samaj*, *Bramho Samaj*, *Anjuman Islamia*, Christian missionaries and others, participated in relief work and strike a mass base for their activities. What ensued was a struggle for power, a contest for consolidation of authority and identity.

Congress used famines and relief as weapons to attack imperialism. These were common secular issues and, were therefore uniting issues. Officials feared that the 1896-7 famine was providing the fuel for Hindu-Muslim unity and nationalist mobilization, and, were apprehensive of conspiracy and outbreak of popular rebellion. MacDonnell was concerned that educated Indians were on the lookout to embarrass the administration. He was suspicious of the increasing fraternization between Hindus and Muslims visible at political and religious meetings, and the spread of distrust of government motives, which he attributed to the growing influence and propaganda of the Congress.⁶² Though he assured the Viceroy that the widespread fears of conspiracy and rebellion were exaggerated, he proposed several counter measures. Firstly, he stressed that all should be

⁶² MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 July 1897, p.170.

done to mount a liberal and positive relief policy that would alleviate distress, which would retain the gratitude, trust and affection of the masses. He was particularly suspicious of Muslim officers whom he accused of participating in seditious meetings, and of suppressing vital information; when these officers were questioned about it they pleaded complete ignorance. He stressed that this increasing unity between the two communities could be countered by favouring Hindu landlords. MacDonnell passed orders that Muslim officers be transferred from Muslim dominated areas like Moradabad, Rampur, Barabanki and Banda; he also ordered that a balance be maintained between both the communities in posting officers and in no case was there to be a majority of Muslim officers in any particular district. He was optimistic that with the gathering of the harvest and the lowering of grain prices, the excitement and turbulence would subside.⁶³ The handling of famines was thus crucial to averting large-scale rebellion; increasingly the politics of famine relief was linked to the accountability of the government to the people, the activism of the nationalists and the vigilance of the press.

By the 1890s the media was playing a crucial role as conveyor of information and using it for public mobilization and action. Famines were mortifying for the colonial administration and made interesting press coverage and drew the attention of the world to the problems besetting India. An analysis of the vernacular literature throws up some broad themes. Firstly, what stands out is popular resentment at the apathy of the government in tackling famine distress. The feeling was that the alien government was unwilling to compromise with its own imperial interests even at the cost of human lives,

⁶³ MacDonnell to Elgin, 22 August 1897, p.200.

and that relief was being politicized.⁶⁴ A satirical fictitious memorial was published of the “deceased famine stricken people” addressed to Viceroy Elgin, in which the deceased are represented as telling Elgin that, though they were already dead, news of subscription being raised in India and England to afford relief, has made their mouth water at the prospect of the remaining sufferers receiving sufficient food through private charity.⁶⁵ Newspapers bitterly attacked the inadequacy of relief policy: “The men relieved in the poor houses and the relief works are not well taken care of for want of sufficient supervision.”⁶⁶ There was criticism of the quality of food given and living arrangements especially in the poor houses, inadequate wages, harsh and unsuitable task work, and so on. The ‘narrowness’ and ‘ungenerosity’ of the relief policy became a special theme of indictment, and was compared unfavourably with the ‘generosity’ and ‘liberalism’ of the Indian rulers.⁶⁷ Linked to these criticisms was the concern that India was being sapped of its wealth and being reduced to a land of famine and scarcities.⁶⁸ The press rebutted official claims of material betterment of the condition people. *The Hindustan* argued that contrary to official propaganda the country had lost its former economic stability and prosperity and the material condition of the masses had deteriorated. A conclusive proof of this was the frequent outbreak of famine and the heavy loss of life. It pointed out that in the first seventy-seven years of the nineteenth century there were twelve officially recognized famines, which caused an estimated fourteen million deaths.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Oudh Akbar* (Lucknow), 22 January 1897, p. 66 (L/R/5/74, OIOC); *Kashi Vaibhav* (Benaras), 21 January 1897, p. 67 (L/R/5/74, OIOC); *Oudh Punch* (Lucknow), 28 January 1897, p. 78 (L/R/5/74, OIOC); *Rohilkhund Gazette* (Bareilly), 16 January 1897, p. 49 (L/R/5/74, OIOC).

⁶⁵ *Oudh Punch*, 28 January 1897, pp. 79-80.

⁶⁶ *Zamanah* (Kanpur), 21 January 1897, p. 67 (L/R/5/74, OIOC).

⁶⁷ *Rohilkhund Gazette*, 16 February 1897, p. 136 (L/R/5/74, OIOC); *Dabir - i- Hind* (Agra), 20 February 1897, p. 149. (L/R/5/74, OIOC).

⁶⁸ *Nizam - ul - Mulk* (Moradabad), 16 January 1897, p. 49; *Rahabar* (Moradabad), 16 January 1897, p. 47.

⁶⁹ *Kalakankar*, 26-27 July, 1889, p. 472. L/R/5/66.

Newspapers highlighted stories of authoritarianism; personal enrichment and corruption amongst officials became the focus of reproach and complaints. Another theme frequently discussed was the cleavages and animosity that existed between the ruler and the ruled. The complaint was that, despite the prevailing famine, British officials did not devote time and attention to proper supervision of relief measures and instead engaged in leisure activities and sports, even when engaged in famine inspection tours; influential and educated Indians devoted their time to the Congress and conferences. The importance of press coverage in highlighting the inadequacies of relief was a major stimulant to relief during 1896-7 famine.

Famines, profit, and petty officials

During famines, relief efforts were undermined by corruption and often did not reach the needy. Rangasami has shown the importance of the bureaucracy in relief dispensation and how their assessment and reports of the local-level situation were instrumental in shaping the government response.⁷⁰ These reports were very often moulded to suit vested interests. A letter of Syed Imdad Ali emphasized that reports on famines were misleading and presented to reflect well on the district administration; no dissent was brooked. There was whitewashing of truth. Information embarrassing to the government such as highlighting the distressing conditions and weaknesses of relief administration were suppressed and misrepresented, starvation deaths underplayed or attributed to other

⁷⁰ Rangasami, 'The Masking Of Famine: The Role of the Bureaucracy,' in Floud & Rangasami, eds. *Famine and Society* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 57-63.

causes.⁷¹ Pressure groups and the vernacular press, and more so the Congress demanded that accurate information be given to the public. Local benefactors of relief diverted resources for profit; officials overlooked much of this corruption. Funds failed to reach the needy, and were siphoned off by persons of position in government and in the community power structure. Misappropriation of the limited funds reduced the effectiveness of schemes to improve the infrastructure necessary to generate employment and provide assistance opportunities.

Corruption was pronounced at the local level of relief distribution. Famines provided economic opportunities to lower ranks of the bureaucracy such as *qanungoes*, *tehsildars*, *naib tehsildars*, *patwaris*, circle inspectors, gang *moharirs*, and gang mates at relief works. Their exactions abound in famine literature. The motive was not always greed or profit. Inadequate salaries were influential in determining the fate of already insufficient relief. During the 1837-8 and later famines under study, district officers pointed out that inadequate salaries of petty bureaucrats, which were not raised in line with prevailing high prices, were responsible for the corruption amongst them. Thus, the magistrate of Mainpuri stressed that a salary for the *burkandazes* of three rupees was inadequate even during normal times. This must have induced many to misuse their position to extract money from the villagers or force the *zamindars* to feed them. He recommended that the salary be raised to four rupees.⁷²

⁷¹ Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, 1858-80, xii, box 87, f.82. Translation of a letter from Syed Imdad Ali, Dy-collector, Moradabad, 2 June 1878.

⁷² Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, Mainpuri, judicial, iii, series, 3, list, 1; to Hamilton, commissioner Agra div, from C.F. Fagan, magistrate, Mainpuri, 10 June 1838.

Syed Imdad Ali, Dy.-collector of Moradabad, highlighted how relief at poor houses was manipulated and money misappropriated. He alleged that, “the enormous sums of government money are nominally spent on public charity, but in reality they are embezzled by dishonest persons engaged in management.”⁷³ The temptation to profit by siphoning off wages and selling grains was strong. Often good grains were sold to the local *bania* and merchants for substantial profit. During the 1837-8 a contemporary journal noted:

The relief society feeds about 1500 daily; but then owing to the villainy of those who serve out the food, the flour is so adulterated with lime and sand, that heaps upon heaps have died on eating it⁷⁴

During the four famines, the *patwaris* and *tehsildars* misappropriated funds. By 1896-7 the very name *patwari* became synonymous with oppression and corruption, and it was alleged in the press that some of them made a fortune and relief did not reach the needy. The official agency for the distribution of relief was described in the press as an ‘unmitigated evil.’⁷⁵ *Patwaris* in particular were singled out for their corrupt and domineering ways. Warburton, officiating collector of Hamirpur, wrote to the Secretary, NWP&O:

I append a list of 30 prosecutions, all with one exceptions that of the *patwaris*. A few of the cases were fraudulently of obtaining a part of the allowance, made to the respectable persons under the head 11, of the charitable fund. The greater number was of extorting from the

⁷³ Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, 1858-80, xii, box 87, f.82; translation of a letter from Syed Imdad Ali, Dy-collector, Moradabad, 2 June 1878.

⁷⁴ *Englishman*, 24 March 1857, as quoted by Loveday, *History and Economics*, p. 41.

⁷⁵ *The Advocate*, 1 June 1897. Vernacular News Tracts, UPSAL.

recipients of the gifts, under head 1V of the charitable fund, a portion of the money received by them.⁷⁶

He emphasized that the *patwaris* were a great power in Bundelkhund and, inspite of all official efforts, had little difficulty in persuading poor people either to believe that it was they who had obtained the charitable gifts for them, or that they would prevent them more aid in future if they were not given their share. The one exception was an assistant registrar qanungo doing duty as a circle officer, who was prosecuted for holding back a portion of the allowances of the charitable fund.⁷⁷ The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, drew attention to the appalling conditions prevailing in the *mofussil* areas of Benaras district; here the needy were entirely at the mercy of *patwaris* and *qanungoes*. It was alleged that of half the village population that was afflicted, sometimes not even one person per village received relief, and those who somehow managed to get enlisted did not receive more than one instalment .. and the amount of these allowances was given as eight annas or one rupee per month!⁷⁸

Such intentional misuse of relief could not be regarded as anything but ‘corrupt,’ but higher officials typically turned a blind eye to such malpractices. In most cases the perpetrators of crimes got off lightly, usually with a transfer or a censure, or at the most a fine or short-term suspension. There were hardly any cases of dismissal from service or imprisonment; for example, of the thirty prosecutions of the *patwaris* connected with the distribution of charitable money, twenty-two ended in conviction by magistrates, the accused in the remaining eight cases being discharged. On appeal, the magistrate’s

⁷⁶ Post-Mutiny, scarcity deptt, Allahabad div, f. 61, vii, serial, 20; copy of a letter no. 622, 21 September 1897. From H.G. Warburton, offg. collector, Hamirpur, to the Secretary, NWP & O.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 May 1897.

decision fared rather badly; five of the twelve appeals ended in a reversal of the conviction. This was partly due to the sessions judge taking the extraordinary view that a *patwari* taking an anna in the rupee from the recipient of charitable money was committing no offence, as that was the recognized *dastur* (rate) in the country.⁷⁹ These instances show that corruption at this level had become rife and acceptable. So accepted was corruption in the lower bureaucracy, and officials so complacent that no action would be taken that, in one instance, an engineer on a relief work made a report against a subordinate official who declined to overstate in the register the number of labourers.⁸⁰

The collector of Fatehpur reported that a case of fraud had been detected in which Muhammad Shafi, a circle officer (Ghazipur district) embezzled Rs108/4/6 entrusted to him for distribution. The officer, however, went on to note:

I am to observe that confidential reports received demi-officially..showed that an unusually large number of patwaris and other officials employed in connection with famine relief works were dealt with both departmentally and judicially in Fatehpur for frauds and irregularities, and that a large number of departmental appeals from them were heard by your predecessor.. I am therefore to ask you to be good enough to insist on that officer to furnish a full and accurate return of all the cases of fraud and dishonesty, which were dealt with departmentally or judicially during famine relief operations were in progress.⁸¹

The Rohilkhund Gazette, complained that *patwaris* in Baheri *tehsil*, Bareilly district realized grain and money from cultivators as famine subscription under the pretext that

⁷⁹Post-Mutiny, scarcity deptt, Allahabad div, f. 61, vii, box 307, bundle 224, serial. 20, 1897; copy of letter 622, from Warburton, offg. collector, Hamirpur, to the government. NWP&O, 21 September 1897.

⁸⁰*Jamil- ul -Uloom* (Moradabad), 14 January 1897, p.50 (L/R/5/74,OIOC).

⁸¹Post-Mutiny, scarcity deptt, Allahabad div, , vii, box 307, bundle, 224, f.61, 1897; to the commissioner, Allahabad div, from the under secretary, government of India, NWP&O, 29 November 1897.

the it took Rs five from each of them as donation for the relief fund and allowed them to reimburse themselves by raising subscriptions from cultivators. This was brought to the notice of the government and according to the *Dab Daba-i-Qaisari*, an inquiry was conducted by Hailey, who reported, “ The tehsildar took Rs five each of the patwaris for the poor house, and the latter tried to recoup themselves by taxing the pockets of the cultivators.”⁸² The irony is that when *patwaris* themselves were fleeced they protested vehemently. *The Rafiq-i-Sultanat* reported that it had received several complaints from the *patwaris* of Moradabad *tehsil* to the effect that the supervising *qanungo* would not pass their papers, which they had to submit to him for every agricultural season, without taking one months salary from them. “The *tehsildar* of Moradabad, ought to pity the *patwaris*, and warn the *qanungo* against his misbehaviour, or the writer will disclose the name of the offender with details.”⁸³

There were allegations of misuse of relief even of *pardanashin* women by intermediary agencies or male relatives. Cotton was distributed to these women to be spun; as long as higher rates were given from the *bazar*, there was widespread distress amongst them. But when the rates were reduced to the market price and there was no profitable margin left, the distress ceased. The intermediaries made profits only while the high rates lasted. Such an instance occurred in Amroha, Moradabad during the 1868-9 famine, where the relief of *pardanashin* was being handled by the four *meer mullahs*.⁸⁴

⁸² *Dabdaba - i- Qaisiri*, 13 February 1897, pp113-14. (L/P/5/74, OIOC)

⁸³ *Jami - ul - Ulum*, (Moradabad), 14 January 1897, p. 48, list 4. UPSAL..

⁸⁴ *IFC.Report*, 1880-5, ch. iii, section ii, p. 276.

The relief works were sites of illegal and daring transactions committed usually by mates and gang *moharirs*. The pattern was that the mate most often extorted a pice or two from the other workers of the gang under threat of turning them out.⁸⁵ Then there were numerous instances of *moharirs* and gang mates converting to their own use, money meant for disbursement to relief workers. They did this by falsifying the registers, or paying short wages and appropriating the balance.⁸⁶ In one instance, in June 1897 it was discovered that the reported measurement of work done on the Kulphaar Charakhari road, and after that by some change in the Gurkha tank, large works were so largely in excess of the actuals, that there would be no possible doubt that M. Alamadar Hussein, the officer in charge of his entire staff, had combined to defraud the government by drawing wages on bogus gangs, by neglecting to refund wages for very short tasks, and then taking a pice each from the adult labourers, who under the circumstances would be willing to pay and say nothing about it. The presence until May of a visiting officer, who was obviously a partner in the fraud, helped to delay its discovery. The officer was dismissed in May, and Alamadar Hussein and his entire staff, were dismissed when the fraud was detected.⁸⁷ On the day of payment enlisted his own children, specially brought from home, in the gang representing them to the paymaster as having worked during the days for which payment was being made, while he satisfied the requirements of the

⁸⁵ Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, depts. vii, box 307, bundle 224, f. 61, 1897; From the Dy.- collector, to the commissioner, Allahabad div, 25 October 1897. Brief Notes Showing the Number of the Cases of Fraud and Dishonesty on the Part of the Famine Staff in the Jalaun district.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

muster role that some of the children who had been present on those days were not present.⁸⁸

Such corruption was not confined to Indians; several instances of the involvement of British officials also came to light. Usually consisting of siphoning off loans and other relief remunerations. The Dy.-collector of Shahajehanpur, Roberts, siphoned off money from the famine fund meant for purchase of cattle seed. His conduct was more shameful than local level officials like Sideshwari Narayan and Saiyyad Ikbal Ali, in as much as they received bribes from the well- to-do, while Roberts deprived the needy, relief.⁸⁹ Roberts was suspended from service. Reportedly, it was common for European doctors to extort money from well-off Indians by simply declaring that they saw symptoms of plague in them; the latter felt compelled to grease the palm of doctors for fear of segregation. The greater part of the famine relief fund also went into the pockets of European supervisors.⁹⁰ Such corruption was oppressive and resented by people then even the difficulties of isolation and segregation.⁹¹

Conclusion

We find that in addition to financial factors there was lack of rigour in implementing relief measures. Frequent regular visits of senior officers to remote areas to provide

⁸⁸ Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, depts.vii, box, 307, bundle 224, f. 61, 1897; from the Deputy.-collector. to the commissioner, Allahabad div, 25 October 1897; Brief Notes Showing the Number of Cases of Fraud on the part of famine staff in Jalaun district,.

⁸⁹ *Rohilkhund Gazette* (Bareilly), 24 August 1897, p.558 (L/R/5/74, OIOC)

⁹⁰ *The Rohilkhund Punch* (Moradabad), 16 May 1897, p.353 (L/R/5/74, OIOC).

⁹¹ Macdonnell to Elgin, 29 April 1898, pp.251-2.

stronger and direct links with local officials and famine afflicted classes was needed.

An obvious pre-requisite was to ensure that program allocations reached those for whom they were intended. It underlined the need for popular involvement rather than the elites in programs designed to assist them, as well as improvement in channels for exchange of co-operation and information.

Undoubtedly during famines the nexus of interests of government, landlord, petty bureaucrat and moneylender strengthened and became more closely intertwined. It was in their mutual interest to act in conjunction rather than at variance. Entrenched elites often exploited the crisis to suit their self-interest. Their responses were shaped by questions of authority systems, resource bases and control mechanisms. The effects and duration of famines were often aggravated and lengthened by their actions. The rich grew richer and the poor poorer, and in the process the contours of society were changed and moulded to further the interests of the superior groups, whose support government did much to retain.

However such pervasive conjunction of elite interests, corruption and exploitation was resented by the masses; their resentment was harnessed by nationalist groups to further the cause of nationalism. The Indian National Congress highlighted the shortcomings and corruption in relief and provided solutions to counter these. It mobilized popular support on these issues exhorting Indians to unite and fight for common cause and self-respect.

The alienated masses were gradually mobilized into throwing their lot for nationalist cause.

Chapter VI: Missionaries and Famines

Introduction

The famine of 1837-8 is significant because, for the first time, the East India Company intervened with a programme of relief works which, though limited and narrow in approach, saved thousands of lives.¹ This was also the famine when missionary activities came to the fore and their actions and policies set a pattern of behaviour which, with minor variations, was largely followed during subsequent famines. This chapter examines a possible connection between famines and the intensification of mission activities, which led to a spectacular increase in conversions to Christianity.²

Historiography

Religious conversions during famines gave them a controversial dimension, which has been widely documented for many parts of the world; independent studies on the theme have added to the richness of famine historiography. In Ireland, during the 1845-9 famine, the proselytising activities of Protestant missionaries aroused popular anger. It was noted that, in the midst of acute starvation and suffering, proselytisers went from cabin to cabin accompanied by apostate priests and lay people, “proffering food and money and clothing to the naked and the starving, on condition of their becoming members of the conventicles.”³ Fr. Martin Hart of Ballycastle spoke of how his parishioners “once honest and religious, are now the reverse,” and that proselytising societies, “with plenty of meal and money have their

¹ E. Eden, *Up the Country* (London, 1930), pp. 64-5

² A.A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (London, 1993), p.159.

³ I. Whelan, ‘The Stigma of Souperism,’ in C. Poirtier (ed), *The Great Irish Famine* (Mercier, 1995), p. 147.

agents busy in the area, trying to win the people from the faith.”⁴ A more recent example of the use of famine relief for religious conversion were seen during the 1985-9 famine in Sudan. The Sudanese government itself hoped that hunger in southern Sudan, would offer excellent opportunities for wholesale conversion to Islam. A confidential working paper of the Democratic Unionist Party endorsed the exploitation of hunger and use of relief by Islamic relief agencies to weaken resistance of the largely Christian southern Sudan to the northern Muslim elite, by pressurising conversions to Islam.⁵ Indeed, surveys were carried out by Islamic groups in May 1986, “for the purpose of Islamization and relief work.”⁶ There were also rumours that “Christian” aid agencies would use relief to promote Christianity, and several aid agencies suspected of this were expelled.⁷

Conversions under the pressure of hunger was commented upon by missionary scholars particularly for southern India. Prominent missionary scholars, like Latourette,⁸ Thorburn,⁹ Webster,¹⁰ and Alter,¹¹ contributed detailed studies of their work in India, and established a co-relation between famine and conversions. Latourette wrote an extensive account tracing the expansion of Christianity in Africa and Asia, listing the rendering of relief during famines, and its use for ulterior purposes, like preaching the Gospel to the hungry in relief camps as one of the most important and effective weapons for gaining converts. He provided evidence from nearly every part of India, from Tinnevely in the deep-

⁴ *ibid.* p.148.

⁵ Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, pp. 179-80.

⁶ U. A. Mahmud and S.A.Baldo, *Al Daien Massacre: Slavery in Sudan and Khartoum. Human Rights Violations in the Sudan* (1987), p. 3. quoted by Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, pp. 180-1.

⁷ Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, p.181.

⁸ K. S.Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity; North Africa and Asia. The Great Century In North Africa and Asia, 1800 -1914.*

⁹ J.M.Thorburn, *The Christian Conquest of India* (New York, 1906).

¹⁰ J.C.B.Webster, *The Christian Community and Change in the Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi, 1976).

¹¹ Alter, *In the Doab and Rohilkhund* (Delhi,1986), p.228.

south,¹² to Hyderabad,¹³ Allahabad,¹⁴ and the Central Provinces.¹⁵ “A substantial proportion of the converts came through mass movements. Many of these were attracted during times of famine, through the relief given by the missionaries... and from the classes which suffered the most.” In a similar vein, the noted missionary scholar Thorburn commented:

As a result of the terrible famines which occur frequently, missionaries have found themselves in the presence of a large number of orphans ... the children are received as permanent wards, and in this way scores of Christian orphanages have been founded and equipped for a career of practical service in different parts of India.¹⁶

Despite the frequent occurrence of famines and large-scale conversions that accrued in the NWP&O, and the existence of rich empirical data- this issue has been treated marginally within the ambit of broader themes by historians.¹⁷ Webster and Alter, both Presbyterian missionaries, noted that till 1836 the Presbyterian Church in the NWP& O could not get a single Indian convert. But the situation changed during the 1837-8 and subsequent famines, when a significant number of converts accrued to their church. A sizeable number of them were orphans, acquired by their missions, and raised as Christians; these constituted the nucleus of the Christian Presbyterian community, especially in the Doab and Rohilkhund.¹⁸

¹² At Tinevelly large scale conversions were made of *Madigas* by the missionary Clough, who supervised relief during the 1876 famine; Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, pp.166-7.

¹³ At Hyderabad the growth of Wesleyan Methodists missions was aided by the famines that occurred between 1896 - 1900, Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, pp.153-4.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.88. Latourette notes that, the strength of the Roman Catholics diocese at Allahabad was meagre till the 1897 famine after which a large Christian colony arose out of the orphans from the famine.

¹⁵ Mennonites established themselves in the Central Provinces during the 1897 famine. They administered relief, acquired a large number of converts in the process, and established orphanages, schools, medical services, churches. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, p.177.

¹⁶ Thorburn, *The Christian Conquest*, p. 190.

¹⁷ Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, ch. v; Arnold, *Famines, Social Crisis*, p.78.

¹⁸ Webster, *The Christian Community*, p.51; Alter, *In the Doab*, p.228.

Powell established a co-relation between famines and the large-scale conversions to Christianity especially of orphans.¹⁹ Her study focuses on the 1837-8 famine in the NWP&O, and the processes, which led to the establishment of the controversial Sikandra orphanage, which expanded into the first Christian village in the upper Doab. The large-scale conversions of orphans whom the missionaries acquired, baptized, and housed into Christian orphanages and villages, raised the call of religion in danger. What aroused particular outrage was that the missionaries used their position on relief committees and their proximity to government officials to their advantage. The government was seen as abetting these conversions. This myth of government collusion never really died out and has been cited as an important cause of the 1857 revolt, which drew support from many of the districts where the missionaries had been active. An argument common to the literature surveyed is that conversions during famines were the outcome of economic and material destitution, and not any intellectual or spiritual conviction, and that an element of desperation and coercion was implicit in them. They could be termed “induced conversions.”

However, social scientists like Forrester²⁰ and Gladstone²¹ deny a direct connection between famine and conversions. Kooiman agrees that in southern India there is evidence of famished people converting in large numbers to Christianity during famines. But interpreting these conversions in a wider socio-economic context he suggests that they were not “induced” but “adopted” and “willing” conversions by those, who had suffered

¹⁹ Powell, *Missionaries and Muslims*, ch.VI.

²⁰ D. B. Forrester, *The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity, 1860- 1900*, in Oddie (ed). *Religion in South Asia; Religious Conversions and Revival Movements in Modern and Medieval Times* (New Delhi, 1991), pp.42-3.

²¹ J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala.. A Study of Christian Mass Movements in Relation to Neo Hindu Socio- Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850 - 1936* (Trivandrum, 1984).

economically and socially at the hands of their former co-religionists, and perceived the change of religion as an effective survival strategy and an opportunity for upward social mobility. These converts only stood to gain if they aligned themselves with the dominant political culture.²²

Forrester and Gladstone argue similarly. Forrester suggests that the spiritual, psychological, social and material aspirations which expressed themselves in a mass movement, were best able to surface and become effective in times of social and economic dislocation such as famines. He referred to the 1860-1 famine in southern Kerala where, despite extensive relief measures undertaken by missionaries, large-scale conversions occurred only after the famine was over. He viewed these conversions as movements of social and cultural emancipation. They were the outcome of intellectual conviction, a process of “adhesion,” a calculated, rational choice, famines merely being a precipitating factor.²³

Christian missions

This chapter will examine the activities pre-dominantly of three important missions in the NWP&O: the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), and the American Presbyterians; these occupied some of the principal stations in the region. Certain principles governed their establishments. Firstly, they had their own demarcated areas, where they concentrated their efforts to evangelize: For example, the American Presbyterians concentrated their efforts in Rohilkhund; the CMS stations were found concentrated in the Doab, in cities of wealth, importance and influence,

²²D.Kooiman, ‘Mass Movement, Famine and Epidemic. A Study in Interrelationship,’ *MAS*, .25, 2 (1991), pp. 281-99.

²³Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, pp.2, 414-15.

such as Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Benaras, Allahabad, Lucknow, Fyzabad, Agra, Aligarh, Meerut and Dehradoon; the SPG was active in Kanpur, Roorkee, and later Bundelkhund. These organizations functioned as independent units, but were sufficiently close to react to each other. Although there was keen competition there was also tacit agreement that they would not intrude upon each other's area of influence and, whenever they did so, there was bickering and open rivalry.

The CMS, representing the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church, was founded in 1799. Their first mission in India and Ceylon was founded in 1813 and, by the latter-half of the nineteenth century, the CMS had far more missionaries in the field than any other mission. The CMS began work in Chunar, Agra, Meerut, Benares and Gorakhpur between 1809-24,²⁴ and extended their operations all over the Doab, by 1869.²⁵

The SPG, first commenced activities in India in 1814 when it established the diocese of Calcutta. The diocese of Madras was founded in 1835, to be followed by Bombay in 1837. The SPG commenced its activities in NWP from 1833. The operations were carried on in the districts of Kanpur, 1833-92, Banda, 1873-92, Roorkee, 1861-92, and Hardwar, 1877-92. These missions were initially a part of the diocese of Calcutta but, in 1893, NWP&O was placed under the Bishop of Lucknow.²⁶

American Presbyterians commenced their operations in India in 1834. They opened missions in Allahabad in 1836, and Fatehgarh in 1838, spreading generally westward and south of the

²⁴Webster, *The Christian Community and Change*, p. 4.

²⁵*CMS. procs for Africa and the Far East, 1868-9*, p. 98-9. (Heslop Room, Birmingham University library).

²⁶*Classified Digest of the Records of the SPG. in Foreign Parts, 1701- 1892*, 4 edn.(London, 1894), p. 590.

Ganga. They commenced work in Rohilkhund in 1856, and established mission stations at Lucknow, Shahjehanpur, Bareilly, Moradabad, Bijnor, and Nainital after 1857.

Expansion of missionary activity in NWP&O

Evangelical and missionary movements made themselves felt as a force from 1833 onwards with the removal of restrictions on the movement of missionaries in India. This was the period of the high tide of English liberalism, of which evangelicalism was an important ingredient.²⁷ An alliance was cemented between Christian civilizing missions and commerce, moulding the policy of liberalism.²⁸ Pressure from the evangelists and the sympathetic attitudes of civil servants like Bentinck, Thomason, Wheler and Muir, succeeded in gaining them unfettered access to all parts of India. Many civil servants used the services and advice of missionaries extensively in their social reforms policies.²⁹ The lofty purpose of the white man's civilizing mission underlay the consciousness of the missionaries and most civil servants in India. From 1833, which coincided with the prevalence of agrarian and commercial depression and famine in Bundelkhund, missionary activities expanded, and a significant and aggressive encounter ensued between Christianity and Indian religions.

Between 1793 and 1833, missionaries in NWP reported virtually no success in gaining converts or establishing missions, churches and Christian villages. It was argued that the progress of Christianity in NWP was more difficult than elsewhere, as Hinduism was solidly and compactly entrenched and had acquired an almost impenetrable character; the region

²⁷ E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians* (Oxford, 1959), p. 28.

²⁸ *ibid.* pp. 33-4, 36-40.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 34.

was considered the last tract which would submit to the Gospel.³⁰ Missions reported even less chance of success here than in Benaras, predicting that the effect of conversions on the Hindu community would be as great as on the Roman empire when Rome adopted the Christian faith.³¹ The same was true for Agra, a stronghold of Islam where Muslims showed intolerance to mission activities.

It was not that missions were inactive. The reports of the CMS and SPG indicate that they undertook varied activities and established institutions and forums, which would bring them in close contact with Indians, gain knowledge of Indians, and influence them to appreciate and accept Christianity. They set up printing presses, schools, colleges, churches, hospitals, vocational and industrial training schools, orphanages and, most importantly for our purposes, famine relief centres. Besides, missionaries made sustained efforts at preaching in the *bazars* and fairs, distributing Bible tracts and pamphlets, visiting homes and establishing schools and dispensaries.

The apparent lack of success in gaining converts was both disheartening and disorienting for missionaries. They argued that the various institutions they founded, especially schools and medical care, created the intellectual and social environment conducive to the reception of Christianity.³² Yet C.W. Smith, a member of the CMS committee, in a minute in 1837 on the performance of the CMS mission school at Mirzapur, expressed dissatisfaction at the way the school was being managed and regretted that there had been no converts; he recommended that a European schoolmaster be appointed to introduce a decidedly more

³⁰ CMS.procds. 1837-8, Benaras, p. 53.

³¹ *ibid.*; *Friends of India*, 28 June 1838, p.349.

³² G. A. Oddie, *Social Protest in India- British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reform; 1850-1900* (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 22-3.

religious tone into the school.³³ Similar perceptions and arguments were expressed by several other missionaries. Revd. John Barton, in charge of the St. John's school at Agra, wrote in 1861, "It cannot be denied that so far as the actual conversions are concerned, the results hitherto had been very small. Our college has now been established 10 years ..there have been to my knowledge, no converts from amongst the students."³⁴ This view was reinforced at the successive missionary conferences held at Ootacumund (1858), Lahore (1868), Allahabad (1872-3), Bangalore (1879) and Calcutta (1882-3). Some missionaries also attributed their lack of success to inconsistent or neutral official attitudes toward them and inadequate monetary resources and manpower, as reflected in the debate they carried on in the press regarding the most suitable methods for gaining converts.³⁵

The 1837-8 famine apparently precipitated a sudden change in CMS influence in the region. Stock Elliot, the historian of the society, noted that the activities of the CMS increased manifold owing to the terrible famine, which threw large numbers of orphans in missionaries' hands.³⁶ Girdlestone also noted the upswing in missionary activity during 1837-8.³⁷ Moreover, the tone of the CMS and SPG reports changed, in contrast to pre-famine years, from pessimistic to optimistic and, jubilant. During famines, they were relatively successful in gaining converts, established new congregations and expanded the existing ones, and founded orphanages and Christian settlements. Such was their success and consequent expansion that they had to request more finances in order to consolidate their

³³M.A.Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal, 1793-1837* (Oxford, 1972), p.242 fn.2.

³⁴CMS. *Procds, 1861-2, Report from mission at Agra*, p. 122; USPG, E23, 1867-8 B, diocese of Calcutta, Report from Revd. K.W.Hikey, mission at Roorkee, for the quarter ending November-December 1868, 21 November 1868. (Asia-Australia, Rhodes House, Oxford).

³⁵*The Friends of India*, 5 April 1838, pp. 152-3.

³⁶S. Elliott, *One Hundred Years Being the Short History of the Church Missionary Society* (London, 1899), p. 60.

³⁷Girdlestone, *Report*, p.58.

gains, and attract more adherents. The important question is how and why did Christianity take hold over mostly poor people during famines, while failing to do so in normal times?

Missionary goals, perception of India and Indians

Missionary discourse and perception of Indians and their society were linked to missionary goals in India, which were pre-dominantly religious and political. The rapid expansion of colonial power by the end of the eighteenth century generated debate regarding the nature and obligations of the government towards Indians and Indian society. While the British government in India was cautious of the utility of missionaries to the Empire, the missionaries had no doubt of the utility of Empire to the Christian religion. Missionary discourse was concerned with giving a moral and rational justification for the permanency of the British presence in India, as best illustrated in the writings of Charles Grant, director of the East India Company.³⁸ It was stressed that British rule in India was divinely ordained, for the purpose of spreading Christianity.³⁹ The theme of the providential ordering of history, in particular for the spread of Christianity, recurs persistently in the writings of missionaries. Alexander Duff, for example, argued:

Can it be without a reference to the grand design of the providence and grace that a Britain so endowed has been led to assume the sovereignty of India ... a decree hath gone forth and who can stay its execution - that India shall be the Lords.⁴⁰

³⁸ C. Grant, *Observations On the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to the Morals and Means of Improving It*, 1792 (London, 1813), Parliamentary papers, 1812-13, session paper 282, pp.5-116.

³⁹ Forrester, *Caste and Christianity in India; Attitudes and Policies on Caste and Anglo Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London, 1979), pp. 129-30.

⁴⁰ A. Duff, *India and Indian Mission* (Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 25-6; Webster, *The Christian Community and Change*, p. 243.

Secondly, missionary discourse emphasized the moral obligations of Christianity, and thereby of British rule, towards Indians and their society, which they regarded as being in a state of religious and moral degradation. Grant, for example, represented Hinduism as a conglomeration of debased beliefs, practices and superstitions, a special target of criticism being the caste system. He viewed Indian society to be degraded as a consequence of Hinduism⁴¹ He perceived the lives of Hindus to be governed by “unparalleled depravity,” linked to the Hindu religion, which he perceived as a despotism that encouraged immorality.⁴² He concluded:

Upon the whole then, we cannot avoid recognizing in the people of Hindustan, a race of man lamentably degenerate and base; retaining but a feeble sense of moral obligation; yet obstinate in their disregard for what they know to be right, governed by malevolent and licentious passions, strongly exemplifying the effects produced on society by the great and general corruption of manners and sunk in misery by their vices.⁴³

The antidote prescribed was Christianity, which it was argued would bring moral regeneration, social happiness and political stability. Only the reformatory power of Christianity would provide an equitable and progressive framework for social and economic justice that would change Indian society.⁴⁴

Missionaries, therefore, demanded a closer collaboration with government and more active role in the governance of India.⁴⁵ The bishop of Llandaff, Richard Watson, in a sermon before the House of Lords, expressed hopes that the government “in settling the affairs of

⁴¹Grant, *Observations*, pp. 25-44.

⁴²Grant, *Observations*, pp. 25-8, 44; B.S.Cohen, Notes On the History Of the Indian Society and Culture in R.Frykenberg (ed). *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Wisconsin,1969), p. 8.

⁴³Grant, *Observations*, p.39.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* pp.90-5.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp.111-12

India, will pay more attention to the spiritual condition of its inhabitants than has hitherto been done.”⁴⁶ Similar exhortations were made by Joseph White in the 1784 Bampton lectures, and Thomas Thurlow, bishop of Linclon, in his annual sermon before the Society for the Propagation of Gospel in 1786. Thurlow dwelt on the immense possibilities of evangelization of India:

Can we withhold from so many millions of rational beings, unhappily deluded by error or degraded by superstition, the privileges of an emancipation from the chains of darkness, and an admission into the glorious liberty of the children of God.⁴⁷

Missionaries, actions, policies and discourse were structured by a lofty moral vision of their role. By highlighting what they considered to be the debased conditions of Indian society, they were giving moral legitimacy and justification to British rule in India.

Charles Grant, like most other missionaries, was concerned with the political consolidation of British rule in India, which Grant viewed as closely linked to the religious and educational spheres. Many did not distinguish between secular and religious education and, in this context, emphasized the use of English education as an agency of evangelism and reform.⁴⁸ Western religion and education, Grant argued, would enlighten the minds of ignorant Indians and stimulate qualitative changes in their material and moral lives and in the very structure of society, thereby facilitating conversions to Christianity.⁴⁹ He, therefore, urged a closer alliance of missionary and commercial interests as necessary for the stability of the Empire. He assumed that British rule in India was permanent and indispensable, and divinely ordained for the benefit of Indians. This had as its backdrop the notion of the white

⁴⁶A. K. Davidson, *Evangelicals and Attitudes to India 1786- 1813* (London, 1990), p. 34.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.34.

⁴⁸Duff, *India and Indian Missions*, pp. 25- 9.

⁴⁹Grant, *Observations*, pp. 107-10.

man's burden of civilizing others.

They were given to us not merely that we may draw an annual profit from them, but that we might diffuse amongst the inhabitants long sunk in darkness and vice and misery the light and benign influence of truth ..we may humbly hope for some measure of the same success which has usually attended serious and national attempts for the propagation of that pure religion which comes from God, best secure that protection of his providential government, of which we now see such awful marks in the events of the world.⁵⁰

Such imperialist discourse and resolve strengthened. William Bentinck, civil servant and later Gov.-Genl. of NWP, for instance, shared the evangelical belief that English education was necessary for reception of Christianity and perpetuation of British rule.⁵¹ British rule in India, was projected as "Christian rule" even in 1890's, was rationalized by highlighting the perceived benefits of orderly administration, the rule of law, and advancement of technology.⁵²

In time perhaps under continued good and Christian government, the forces of law and order, of pure morality and true religion have had centuries rather than decades to develop their vitalizing influences..thank God, that slowly it may be, but steadily and surely under English guidance and aid, India is advancing, in this great development, to their divine destiny.⁵³

Moreover, missionary discourse argued that a common religion would create a strong bond between ruler and ruled. Propagation of Christianity would provide loyal subjects to the Empire. Buchanan reasoned that there could never be confidence, freedom, and affection between the people and their sovereign, where there exists a difference of religion. Such

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 111.

⁵¹ P.Spear, 'Lord William Bentinck,' in C.H.Phillips and M.D.Wainwright (eds). *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation* (London, 1976),p.26.

⁵² *Friends Of India*, 22 March 1838, p.121.

⁵³ USPG, E53,1898A, diocese of Lucknow, report of Revd.J.R.Hill,,Banda, p.13.

discourse fused the identity of Church and state, and evaluated Indian society and its needs in terms of 'evangelical religion.' Such powerful and sustained critique of Indian society and culture was mounted with greater zeal and fervour during famines. The annual report of the CMS noted that, "the diffusion of genuine Christianity in India, was a measure equally important to the interests of humanity and the stability of our power."⁵⁴ Thus Revd. Hill of the SPG expressed the view: "It is only real light that put to flight the thick darkness of ignorance and sin, which is the heritage of the Hindus."⁵⁵

The central unwavering aim was unquestionably the conversion of India to Christianity.⁵⁶ Missionaries considered the evangelization of India as " the...greatest distinctive enterprise yet attempted by the Church of Christ."⁵⁷ At the first All-India Missionary Conference, held at Allahabad in 1872-3, the debate centred on the best and most effective methods for gaining converts.⁵⁸ Revd. Hoppener reflected:

I have always maintained and firmly believe that God has given us this country, not to enrich ourselves ..but to bring this country under the sway of the Gospel .. and for this end the 'forward policy ' must go on, and bring the semi-savage tribes under the benign rule of the British government.⁵⁹

But there were obvious disagreements about the methods to be employed for the attainment of this goal. Several missionaries refused to participate in relief work as it was not "A proper spiritual concern," and especially if monetary inducements or relief work were used

⁵⁴ CMS. *Annual Report*, 1816-17, p. 54.

⁵⁵ USPG, E 23B, 1867- 8 B, Diocese of Calcutta, from Revd. J. Hill, Mission at Kanpur, for the quarter ending 30 June-10 July 1866, p.1729.

⁵⁶ Oddie, *Social Protest in India; British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reforms, 1850- 1900* (New Delhi, 1979), p.17.

⁵⁷ *Report of the General Missionary Conference, Allahabad, 1872-3* (London, 1873), Paper by Revd. J. Wilson, mission at Bombay, Free Church of Scotland, p. 12.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* pp. 89- 135.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* Paper by Revd. J. Wilson, p. 12.

⁵⁹ USPG, E 52a, 1897, diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd..F. H. T. Hoppener, mission at Roorkee, for the quarter ending 30 September 1897, p. 32283

to gain converts. Missionaries also feared that relief would be politicized.⁶⁰ Most, however, agreed that instituting projects for famine relief was subordinate to the higher aim of gaining converts. Inevitably their social and philanthropic activities derived impetus and strength from this primary objective. That the conversion came before relief, is reflected in Revd. Hoernle's (of the CMS) strong criticism of the 'Romish Priest' at Sardhana, in Meerut district, for feeding famine refugees from Agwanpur during the 1860 famine, but not providing them the bread of life, the word of God, and the Christian instruction.⁶¹ The Presbyterians dispensed famine relief primarily for evangelistic reasons. It provided them the opportunity to preach the Gospel to large numbers gathered in relief camps and gain a fair number of converts.⁶² At Saharanpur, they issued notices, offering food, clothing, and education to those willing to join their asylums.⁶³ Contemporary scholarship reinforces this.⁶⁴ In the truly utilitarian spirit they used relief distribution as an opportunity to distribute scriptural tracts and conduct religious services. The Commitment to evangelical aims was not inconsistent with the deep concerns of many missionaries for the welfare of the Indian people.

Missionary perceptions and discourse on famines

Missionaries at the human level perceived famines to be material destitution, which the government was obliged to alleviate; they considered their own duty to be in alleviating the

⁶⁰Golkin, *Famine: A Heritsge of Hunger: A Guide to Issues and References* (California,1987), pp. 62-3.

⁶¹Alter, *In the Doab*, pp. 84-5.

⁶²Webster, *Christian Community and Change*, p. 185.

⁶³*Englishman*, 20 November 1837.

⁶⁴USPG, E9, Report, 1861B; from Revd. Burell to Revd. E. Hawkins, Secretary, SPG. London, Kanpur, 13 September 1861,p.1533.

spiritual destitution of the Indians.⁶⁵ Famines were divine opportunities for evangelization, “Surely no Christian needs to be reminded how the great missionary added to his principal work for the soul of men, the lesser labour of healing and feeding them.”⁶⁶ That famines were considered an effective instrument for the diffusion of Christianity is reflected in the appeal of Bishop Clifford at the height of the 1896-7 famine: “We who have met together at Allahabad, as representatives of the evangelistic work in north India ...appeal to our brothers at home to join us in evangelising the millions around us.”⁶⁷

During famines, the style of the missionaries in propagating Christianity was largely polemical, and their discourse and propaganda was based on the material, economic and social needs of the sufferers rather than strictly the precepts of Christianity. Missionaries imbued famines with a sacred and divine character and interpreted them in religio-cultural terms that were easily grasped by the poorest sections of society, amongst whom they preached. Famines were “divine visitations and divine chastisement,” to punish Indians for their sins and for following a false and fallen religion. Even as late as the 1890s, when it was commonly acknowledged that controllable long-term economic factors, were responsible for famines, missionaries still attributed their recurrence to divine causes. “Pray ye therefore who in his wrath is now punishing this nation for its sins and idolatries by famine and pestilence.”⁶⁸ Famines came to acquire a retributive and inevitable character, a *karmic* meaning, a logic and fatalism, in keeping with the psyche of the afflicted. Arnold notes that calamities were rendered logical and intelligible by religion, which provided

⁶⁵*CMS. procds.* 1896-7, ‘Annual Report of the Committee read at the Anniversary of Exeter Hall, 4 May 1897, p. 195.

⁶⁶USPG, E,51, 1896A, Diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd. Hill at Banda, for the quarter ending December 1896, ‘Bundelkund the Famine Province of India,’ document 10764, section 35.

⁶⁷*CMS. procds.* 1896-7, ‘Annual Report,’ p.195.

⁶⁸USPG, E 51,1896A, diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd. Hill, Banda- Bundelkhund, for the quarter ending 31 March 1896; 27 February1897, document 10764, section 35.

guidelines for seemingly appropriate action.⁶⁹ As famines were manifestations of God's wrath, missionaries thought it their duty to bring the misguided heathen to the right path, the path of Christianity. Moreover, some missionaries projected themselves as divine mediators between God and man and saw their own role in these calamities as 'providential.'⁷⁰ They preached that God had given them the power to provide solutions to the ills that were afflicting Indian society, whose perceived degradation was attributed to Indian religions that deliberately sought to inflict moral and material poverty on its own people. This language of providentialism made a significant contribution to famine phenomena and provided a rational justification for the limited relief, especially in Pre- Mutiny era.

What techniques did the missionaries use to back their propaganda especially during famines? Missionaries attracted, and held together their audiences, by psychological techniques that drove their discourse with great force and conviction. Christianity was portrayed as a religion with superior powers. Missionaries stressed that the Gospel which they preached had the power of transforming life, as the proper ways of God were set forth in the Bible; hence the importance of studying the Bible, which would bring true the utopian dream of "heaven on earth." Failure of prayers resulting from ignorance of the ways of God, accounted for the occurrence of famines and epidemics.

How did missionaries demonstrate their claims? Striking in their rhetoric is the marked use of symbols, and of ritual forms; besides invoking the Christian myths, they had recourse to 'special prayers,' rituals, omens, fasts, dreams, visions and congregational prayers that would bring rain. These special prayers and rituals were an adaptation of Hindu forms of

⁶⁹Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 77.

⁷⁰*Friends Of India*, 22 March 1838, p.121.

worship that intrinsically had the potential of strong evangelistic propaganda; Christian experience was, thus, gradually nurtured. A missionary, writing under the pen name of Sinceritas, appealed to Christians of all denominations to assemble themselves and invoke the aid of that holy being, for,

In the history of Christian experience nothing is more true than that the Almighty is the hearer and answerer of prayers, and too many proofs exist in the pages of the holy writ to show that calamities the most direful have been averted or withdrawn, by means of their powerful weapon of Christianity, under these impressions, and surrounded on all sides by sorrow and tribulations, we should beg through your pages to propose to the Christian community of India generally, the celebration of a solemn fast, upon some appointed day, when Christians of all denominations, may with one accord and one voice, call upon their gracious god, to avert the heavy scourge, which now sweeps so fatally over India's plains.⁷¹

It, therefore, became the peculiar providence of Christians to pray for the preservation and salvation of the wretched of the earth. They emphasized the altruism and philanthropy of Christianity, which was imbued with divine and powerful meanings. The calls for fasts and special prayers were made exclusively to Christians, which implied that Christians were the chosen people, whose prayers and entreaties were redressed by God. They projected the alleviation of famine distress to be the task of Christian charity.⁷² Christian benevolence and charity was glorified in missionary rhetoric; and favourably compared with lack of public spirit and indifference of Indians.

Such appeals also emphasized the ritualistic and magical aspects of Christianity. Some of the special prayer ceremonies to avert famines were seemingly akin to the rain-invoking

⁷¹*Friends of India*, 28 June 1838, pp. 346-7.

⁷²Post-Mutiny, Meerut div, depts. vii, f.no. 4/1861, circular no. 997. From Sir. George Couper, Secretary, Govt. of India, NWP&O, to the Secretary of Relief Committees, 21 June 1861; *Friends of India*, 22 March 1838, p. 121.

ceremonies traditionally held in NWP. These special prayers too had a community character, requiring the participation of large numbers of affected people; and were conducted during crisis, thus creating an atmosphere of expectancy and purpose. Missionaries actively organized, participated and supervised these. Although descriptions of these ceremonies do not go into the details of rituals these highlight that the missionaries explained why chastisement like famines was periodically inflicted on non-Christian countries like India, the lessons it was intended to teach, and how through Christian prayer, famine and suffering could be averted.⁷³

Great importance was attached to the doctrine of healing through Christian prayers. For example, Revd. Carmichael, at Dehradun, met the drought at the beginning of 1896 with a series of special prayer meetings. Three times a day they assembled for special prayers in the villages. In his own words,

We read passages from God's word, which showed why such chastisements were inflicted by our heavenly father, and the lesson they are intended to teach. Then we fell down before God and confessed our sins, so that each might be mentioned before God in turn. Then we asked God to pardon each particular sin, asking one of those present to plead for it, so that each prevalent sin might be pleaded and prayed about in a similar manner.⁷⁴

After praying continuously for a fortnight, it started raining and continued for several days .

Revd. Carmichael then changed the programme and held meetings to thank God for the relief given.⁷⁵ The onset of rains was attributed to these prayer meetings, which served the dual purpose of sustaining and reviving the spiritual life of Indian Christians; they were also meant to impress the suffering people with the power and efficacy of Christian prayer, which

⁷³ *Friends of India*, 28 June 1838, pp. 346-7; See Appendix II, for special prayers conducted during famines, p. 251.

⁷⁴ *CMS. procs*, 1896-7, 'Annual Report, from mission at Dehradun and Mussoorie, pp. 210-11.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 211.

became equated with superior powers: political, magical and religious. They gave hope to suffering people, and sense of purpose and self-worth. Above all, missionaries rationalized that famine-related sufferings were rooted in the indigenous religions, and escape lay in embracing Christianity. Such discourse, is a good index of the basic assumptions of some missionaries. Their propaganda bordered on the hypnotic and their persuasiveness bordered on pressure.

Missionary propaganda in the socio-economic sphere had a broad appeal, which emphasized their sense of separateness. The missionaries drove home the deprivations of the suffering people, projecting themselves as 'saviours,' wanting to help victims of social injustice and economic oppression with programmes of social, moral and economic upliftment, within the framework of Christianity.⁷⁶ They did this by highlighting the social evils of Hinduism, and ideologically linked these to corruptions in religion. They stressed the links between caste and social structure which deliberately inflicted moral and material destitution on inferior castes; and contrasted this with the Christian religion, which would offer all a place of dignity and equality. They impressed the suffering people that their moral, social and economic regeneration lay with Christianity, which was linked to the larger order, comprising the white colonial administration, which denoted elitism, power, education, commerce, industry, technology and enlightenment. By stressing these alignments, they imbued Christianity with power and appeal.

Missionaries encouraged receiving groups to use their new religion to serve their particular purposes, needs and aspirations. Needy people converted, responding to economic needs,

⁷⁶*Friends Of India*, 5 April 1838, p.153.

social degradation and deprivation. For some, conversion was a rational survival option and an attractive proposition to better their material condition. For others, it had a social dimension and meant transgressing elite codes and norms which had inflicted humiliation on them, thereby giving a social and symbolic meaning to their personal situation, by imbibing another elite code, which was also politically dominant and powerful, they aspired to a place of dignity and equality.⁷⁷ It was reported that many became Christians for motives as varied as escaping the oppression of *zamindars*, enlisting missionary aid in lawsuits, receiving monetary benefits from missions, to marry someone not possible under Indian customs, and to obtain fruitful employment and housing.⁷⁸ They viewed their conversion as a move towards “social emancipation,” and a rejection of their previous social order.

The social composition of converts is of importance. Scott and Gladstone similarly emphasized that those least favoured by a social order and its ethical rationale, are most likely to be attracted to a new creed that offers a place of dignity, and a competing great tradition. Christian missions, they argue, found a more sympathetic response among the lower castes of the Hindu hierarchy, who were looked upon by the superior castes as less than civilized.⁷⁹ Such were the conclusions of mission reports as well. Little is known of the background of orphans who were directly acquired and baptized. Though specific information on the background of adult converts is unavailable for earlier famines, one can make inferences from the private papers of the missionaries and mission reports; from 1860s, reports and proceedings do mention their caste and religion. These indicate that adult

⁷⁷J. Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, 1976), p. 281; Gladstone, ‘Christian Missionary Work and Socio- Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850-1910,’ *Indian Church History Review*, xxx, 1 June 1986, pp. 37-8.

⁷⁸USPG, E 24, 1868-9, diocese of Calcutta, from Revd. P.W.Thomas, Mograhat, for the quarter ending March 1869, document 10094/69, pp.1568.

⁷⁹Scott, *Moral Economy*, p. 288; Gladstone, ‘Christian Missionary Work,’ *ICHR*, xxx, 1 June 1986, pp. 37-8.

converts went through a process of ‘adhesion,’ before choosing to convert, whatever their motives. Specifically targeted were people most afflicted by the prevailing famine, and therefore, physically and psychologically weakened. This suggests that converts were mostly economically poor, and from lower castes. Only in one instance is there a specific reference to the background of converts. Orphans acquired at Saharanpur orphanage during the 1837-8 famine were categorized by Campbell in 1844 as follows: of the nineteen orphans, three were *Brahmans*, one a *Jat*, one an *Afghan*, one a *Chamar*, and the rest of unknown background.⁸⁰ This breakdown shows the varied background converts could come from, although, in view of the caste and class nexus, it is unlikely that missionaries had much success in gaining well- to- do upper caste converts. This is reflected also in the argument of some missionaries that, rather than concentrate on acquiring numerous lower caste, economically poor class converts who proved ‘poor Christians’ in any case, they should target high-caste and well- to- do Indians, the natural leaders of Indian society.

Mission reports indicate that their discourse was better received and found receptive audiences during famines. Congregations normally empty were filled to bursting point. This propaganda was carried on in the churches, at special prayer meetings, as also through many formal and informal channels of communication and persuasion such as preaching at *bazars*, distribution of bible tracts and pamphlets, visiting needy people at their homes and give relief, but also preaching the Gospel. The transmission of this propaganda had strong institutional backing and very well organized with a number of catechists, missionaries and pastors, for whom the propagation of Christianity was an end in itself.

Gains: consolidation of Christian ideology

⁸⁰ Webster, *The Christian Community and Change*, p. 51, fn.1
245

During the four famines studied, missionaries co-operated with the government in rendering relief. Many missionaries did commendable work in alleviating human suffering. Very often it was they who recognized the impending distress and started relief work, much ahead of the government. Their appeals for subscriptions, both in India and England, helped focus the attention of the public and government in India and England on the prevailing distress.⁸¹ These appeals emphasized not only their moral and humanitarian concerns, but also their Christian motivations, and the consolidation of Empire. These appeals underlined that philanthropy during famines would go a long way towards reconciling Indians to Christian control. For example, during the 1860-1 famine, appeals for help were made for the first time in Britain, and contributions received with the purpose that it “ will not only reconcile India to our control, but cause an improvement in the religious aspect of the country and by the extension of Christian religion conduce to the eternal happiness of the people.”⁸² A sum of about Rs twenty lakhs was raised, part of which was saved and later spent during the 1866 Orissa famine. During the 1896-7 famine, public funds raised in Britain amounted to £550,000, much of it contributed by Christian congregations in response to pulpit appeals.⁸³ Mission involvement in relief drew competing groups from other religions, resulting in greater public participation, and infusion of a moral and social public responsibility to alleviate distress. Suggestions and criticism from missionaries, as well as other groups, contributed to changes in the Famine Code, especially regarding the care of famine orphans.

⁸¹ Golkin, *A Heritage of Hunger*, p. 62.

⁸² Letter forwarding two drafts of £25,000, to the government of India, for relief from William Cubitt, M.P. Lord Mayor of London, 18 May 1861 (Home Public), no. 88, June 1861. The letter was later withdrawn to prevent publicity of the sentiments expressed in it. vide Home public procds, no. 89, June 1861 as quoted by Bhatia, p. 63.

⁸³ *CMS .procds*, 1897-8, ‘Annual Report of the Committee; General review of the year,’ 3 May 1898, p.172.

The devoted work of some missionaries in relieving famine distress brought in manifold rewards-political, religious, perceptible and imperceptible. Revd. Burell, spoke of these benefits thus:

Greater benefits are the channel of benevolence and more intimate connection between the Europeans and the natives, thus opened ... important public works carried on originally with the view of only employing the starving and the reception of the orphans into institutions where they may be trained as Christians.⁸⁴

Their devoted exertions in rendering relief earned them the gratitude and admiration of many. For example, Revd. J.J. Moore of the CMS at Agra toiled through the oppressive heat for months during the 1837-8 famine, at great risk of health and total sacrifice of personal consideration, steadily directing the distribution of public charity and superintending the management of the asylum. His outstanding work earned the appreciation of the public as also of the Lt.-Gov. of NWP&O.⁸⁵ He was hailed much to his mortification, as ‘*Khuda*.’(God).⁸⁶

Importantly, missionary involvement in relief emphasized that while an alien religion and government were toiling on behalf of the distressed and oppressed, their co-religionists left them high and dry. The conviction prevailed that while Hinduism had left the famine stricken to die, Christianity had stepped in like an angel from heaven, to comfort and cheer them with effectual succour and sympathy.⁸⁷ The comparative indifference of the indigenous religions left the needy with a diminished sense of confidence in their own religion. The missionaries preaching in the relief camps reported that, “hundreds of people requested us to

⁸⁴ USPG, E 9, 1861B; Report from Revd. Burell, Kanpur, to Revd. E. Hawkins, Secretary, SPG. London, 13 September 1861, p.1533.

⁸⁵ *Friends of India*, 7 March 1839, p.152.

⁸⁶ *CMS. procds. 1839-40*; Report from Agra, p.62.

⁸⁷ Elliott, *One Hundred Years*, p. 122.

receive them into the Church, and many heathen people represented themselves as Christians, simply in order to find favour from us.”⁸⁸ The SPG missionary at Banda noted:

All their ideas ... have been completely revolutionised in these last two years. They have beheld the Christian governors of the country with innumerable subordinate functionaries and officials toiling as if their lives depended upon the issue of rescue ... their exertions and anxieties for their future succour have over balanced them with astonishment. Even the poor scared Kols ... were no longer frightened at the very sight of the white man’s face.⁸⁹

In addition government extensively utilized the counsels and services of missionaries who had close contact with the sufferers and were acquainted with their habits, customs and language; missionaries were given key positions on relief committees and brought in close contact with the otherwise distant administration. The work of these relief committees was not conditioned by narrow political ideologies or aims, though often sectarian and elitist considerations were covertly promoted. Many senior government servants serving on them were of evangelical leaning, such as Bentinck, Thomason, Hamilton, Capt Wheler, Dr Madden, Mrs & Major Rind, William Muir and A.W. Begbie, Civil and Sessions judge.⁹⁰ The missionaries used their proximity and links with the administration to purchase huge plots of land at cheap prices, and established orphanages, dispensaries, churches, and sometimes exclusively Christian residential villages, constructed on a priority basis. In addition they established printing presses, for which they obtained exclusive orders for printing government transactions. Obviously missionaries used relief primarily to consolidate a Christian community identity, representing the secular government as ‘Christian’ and emphasizing official exertions as ‘Christian.’ This contributed towards

⁸⁸ USPG, E52 1897 A, Diocese of Bombay, Report of Revd. N.V. Athwale, Sonnai, Ahmednagar, for the year ending 31 December 1897, section 2, document 35759, p.12.

⁸⁹ USPG, E53, 1898 A, diocese of Lucknow, Report from Revd. Hill, Banda - Bundelkhand, ‘The Indian Famine- A Retrospect,’ pp.13-14.

⁹⁰ *Friends Of India*, 7 March 1839, p.152.

fusing the identity of the Church and government. Moreover, their philanthropy reinforced the moral underpinnings of the British rule, strengthening the political foundations of the Empire. Christianity, and the British government, were equated with philanthropy, generosity. Famines became a confidence- winning process.⁹¹

Several Christian villages came into existence and flourished because of covert aid from influential government servants. For example, it was the mediation of commissioner Hamilton, which enabled the CMS to convert the tomb of Mariam Zamani, into a boys' hostel and the Turkish bath (*hamam*), into the girls' hostel- this was the inception of the now famous Sikandra orphanage. Soon afterwards, a printing press was attached to the orphanage, and government orders for printing went exclusively to it. This enabled the orphanage to become economically independent, and expanded into the Sikandra village. Similarly Capt. Wheler, during 1837-8, used his influence and money both personal and from subscriptions to collect orphans and openly helped to found the well- known Fatehgarh mission, which later developed into the controversial Raka orphanage.⁹² He was transferred to Agra during this famine, but continued his evangelical crusade there; the Christian village at Chittaura, near Agra, was the result of his evangelical exertions.⁹³ Thomason, Secretary to the Government of India, during the 1837- 8 famine and later, the Lt.-Gov. of NWP, was an active member of the relief committee, and a staunch supporter of the missionary cause. His mere presence at the helm of affairs in NWP would have boosted the confidence and morale of the missions. During the 1860-1 famine, the exertions and patronage of William Muir, Secretary to the NWP government, and subsequently Lt.-Gov. facilitated the

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 58.

⁹³ *ibid.* p. 58.

establishment of the first Christian village Muirabad at Allahabad. Thus, there was a good deal of interaction, merger and fusion of the political and religious.

Besides, there were imperceptible gains, such as developing close contacts with the otherwise distant administration, and with influential members of Indian society, and most importantly with the general populace, who appreciated their services. During the 1837-8 famine, Revd. Moore of CMS, was the Secretary of the Agra Relief Committee.⁹⁴ Another key member was Revd. Chambers, a chaplain of the station. Revd. Ulman served as the almoner of the Farrukhabad relief committee during the 1860-1 famine and was put in sole charge of food distribution. He used the feeding times to preach the gospel and showed preference in employing Indian Christians in assisting him dispense relief.⁹⁵ Maclean, who was stationed at Agra and Sikandra, was elected a member of the government relief committee and made a disburser for Agra city. This brought him in contact with wealthy Hindus and Muslims, “and gave him opportunities, of telling the Gospel story to hundreds.”⁹⁶ Maclean, believed “The famine led many people to think that the practical sympathy manifested by the government increased their respect for the British rule.” Very many also gave up the worship of the idols.⁹⁷ Thus, the imperial and the religious aims fused and furthered during famines. Revd. Ulman, referred to what he perceived as the ‘noble revenge’ of famines.⁹⁸ The 1860-1 famine gave the Christians an opportunity to treat with kindness and charity, those who had so recently attacked them. Such an attitude speaks

⁹⁴ CMS. *procds*, 1839-40; *Report from Agra*, p. 62.

⁹⁵ Webster, *Christain Community and Change*, pp. 180-1.

⁹⁶ CMS. *procds*, 1897- 8, *Report from Agra and Secundra*, p.213.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p. 214.

⁹⁸ Alter, *In the Doab*, p. 122.

eloquently of evangelical opportunism, and it was the exploitation of relief to such ulterior purposes that roused the opposition of the non-Christian communities in India.⁹⁹

Till 1868, the government did not take responsibility for gratuitous relief and starvation deaths; food and money were the main requirements which the missions had in plenty. Missionaries competed in offering higher monetary benefits and economic inducements, and sometimes even tempted adherents of another denomination to join theirs. Revd. Thomas complained:

A number of my Christians (about 20) have joined the Baptists with the sheer object of getting money from the Baptist missionary who have been busily engaged these last few months in giving away money ... thus corrupting... and enticing our people, in joining them. When one reader asked one of those who have left us, the reason why they did so, the reply was, "your padree does not give us money, and what shall we do."¹⁰⁰

He concluded angrily that Baptist ministers and SPG. missionaries, by their imprudent giving of money corrupted, pauperized and spoilt the people.¹⁰¹ The processes by which the missionaries gained converts, especially orphans will be discussed in the following chapter.

Conclusion:

It has been demonstrated how many missionaries utilized famines as opportunities for significant religious gain- perceptible and imperceptible. Specially to be noted are the large number of converts which accrued to Christian missions during the four famines studied.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ USPG, E 24, 1868-9, diocese of Calcutta, report from Revd. P.W. Thomas, missionary at Mograhat, for the quarter ending, March 1869, document 10094/69, p.1567.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

Famines bred and magnified existing emotional, physical and spiritual anguish among the afflicted. Many missionaries took advantage of this vulnerability. Instead of attacking the government for inadequate relief, they exploited the situation and pointed to the failure of the indigenous deities in protecting the afflicted from the ravages of famine. Further they underlined with satisfaction that despite the prevailing suffering Christians in India were largely secured from want and privation and that largely Christian countries like England were free from such scourges. The afflicted could end their suffering if they became Christians. Such persuasive rhetoric was backed by powerful material incentives.

That such propaganda was successful in gaining converts shows that the government's relief measures were inadequate to protect even immediate nutritional entitlements of the afflicted. Missionaries aware of these limitations projected themselves as patrons and as the cultural arm of British imperialism in India and assured food, clothing, clean shelter, employment resolution of long-standing litigations, and remedy of other grievances. Their charity and relief efforts won the admiration and affection of many, though also giving rise to bitterness and competing nationalism. How it spurred several indigenous socio-religious organizations to mount relief and attack the perceived ulterior and sinister relief of missions relief will be conclusively discussed in the next chapter..

Orphans, orphanages, Christian villages

The primary and most cherished result of famines for most missionaries took the form of the orphan child. The founding of Christian orphanages and villages were the most significant controversial gains and constituted the nucleus of Christian communities in the NWP&O. During 1837-8, the Agra Relief Committee had custody of 2,000 orphans, all under eight years of age, but had neither the finances nor any coherent scheme for their upkeep; the solution was to deposit them at various missions in the Gangetic region, mainly the upper Doab which was comparatively less affected. This led to the founding of many orphanages and Christian villages and the expansion of existing ones, for example at Kanpur, Benaras, Fatehpur, Fatehgarh, Saharanpur, Agra and Farrukhabad. The SPG started its first poor house and orphanage at Kanpur during the 1835-8 famine.¹ The first female orphanage was established in the Sevadah *kothi* at Kanpur, constituting the nucleus of the Kanpur mission.² The empty CMS orphanage at Benaras was reactivated and expanded with the acquisition of 200 orphan boys. A seminary had to be quickly constructed to accommodate them.³ A similar pattern characterized the founding of the first Presbyterian mission and orphanage at Saharanpur, where they received orphans; and Christian villages, such as at Fatehgarh. It is not possible to construct the process of the founding of each of these institutions; however, the Sikandra orphanage and Christian village, the first in the Gangetic core region, illustrates the general pattern.

¹ USPG, E51, 1896A, Report, diocese of Lucknow, 1896 A; by Revd.Hill, Banda- Bundelkhund, for the quarter ending 31 March 1896, Section 35, document 10764.

² *ibid.* section 35.document 10764.

³ CMS. *procds*, 1838-9, p. 7.

The Sikandra and the Raka orphanages and villages, are typical examples of links between famines and conversion. Of the 2,000 children that had fallen in the hands of the Agra Relief Committee, about 500 were claimed by the CMS at Agra and of these, 330 survived (180 boys and 150 girls). In claiming these victims, the clerics of the CMS had neither secular nor altruistic motivations, and viewed the plight of orphans as an evangelical opportunity. Chamber, the company's chaplain at Agra, and a member of the Agra Relief Committee, observed:

The ulterior object with the great body of the orphans is to form a germ of the Christian colony containing resources for self-support by honest labour and affording the refuge of society and useful industry to any converts it may please the Lord to add to the native church, so that they may be preserved from falling back to heathenism, or being fed as idle drones.⁴

A school, a church, and a press were quickly constructed, and in the next few months the number of orphans slowly swelled into a Christian village, the first in the region, which the missionaries considered 'providentially found.' The conversion of orphans and the inception of the Sikandra orphanage and village were a source of immense controversy. This settlement was destroyed during the 1857 Mutiny, and could be restarted only during 1860-1 famine. Similarly, Capt. Wheler directed relief efforts in close co-ordination with Presbyterian missionaries at Fatehgarh. He used his personal influence, money and the subscription of 'his fellow countrymen' to render relief and collect orphans.⁵ He was aided by the Presbyterian Dr. Madden, and a high caste Hindu convert, Gopinath Nundy. They collected a large number of orphans, and moved them to Fatehgarh, where the Presbyterians

⁴ R. Chamber to the Editor of the Christian Intelligencer, Agra, 1838, quoted by Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, p.161.

⁵ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 58.

founded the famous Raka orphanage, which was initially funded by Capt. Wheler.⁶ Its inception was deemed to be “an ordering of providence.”⁷ It gradually developed into a flourishing Christian village, the orphans growing and marrying among themselves, leading to the expansion and consolidation of a cohesive Christian community. Churches, schools and houses were built and a famous tent and carpet factory was established which flourished but was destroyed during the 1857 Mutiny. It was later restarted and registered as a joint stock company, the ‘Native Christian Orphanage Tent Factory.’⁸ The “Isaipur” (Christian) settlement was also the product of the 1837-8 famine. Capt. Wheler continued his ‘Christian’ efforts at Agra, preaching in the *bazars*, utilizing relief to collect orphans, here also contributing financially and using his influence to found the Christian orphanage and village at Chittaura, thirty miles from Agra.⁹ It was acknowledged that the difficulties generated by famine brought about the conversions.¹⁰ The baptism of infants at the various orphanages provoked an elite backlash, which shall be considered later.

This pattern was repeated during the 1860-1 famine: orphans were collected, and several orphanages, Churches and Christian settlements started. The CMS annual report from Agra for 1860-1 observed:

We have been cheered by an unusually large number of converts, more than double the number of adults having been baptised than has been the case in any previous year. This we would desire to consider as an additional reason for thankfulness, prayer and efforts made during the coming year.¹¹

⁶ibid.p. 58.

⁷ Revd. J. J. Walsh, - *A Memorial of the Fatehgarh Mission and her Martyred Missionaries: With Some Remarks on the Mutiny in India* (London, 1859), p. 38.

⁸Webster, *Christian Community and Change*, pp. 72-3.

⁹Girdestone, *Report*, p.58.

¹⁰ ibid. p. 34.

¹¹CMS. *procds, 1860-1, Report from Agra*, p.106

Revd. Medland reported from Meerut that, during the 1860-1 famine, there were more baptisms than in any previous year, leading to the establishment of numerous Christian settlements and congregations, such as at Kankarkhera and Maliyana on the outskirts of Meerut district¹² and at Agwanpore, twenty miles east of Meerut;¹³ another was founded at Ikla in Meerut district.¹⁴ The Ikla congregation expanded and grew in strength steadily and was regarded as the strongest in the district.¹⁵ At Kankarkhera and Maliyana, the converts were from the *Chamar* community mainly outcaste leather workers and landless labourers who were under severe privation because of the prevailing famine. The CMS missionaries toiled very hard to alleviate their distress, and they reported that many impressed by the altruism of Christianity asked to be accepted as Christians. Revd. Medland lost no time in baptizing several of these families. A brick Church was quickly built at Kankarkhera, and a chapel founded at Maliyana. Primary schools were also established at each of these places.¹⁶

The Churches, schools and chapels, together with the presence of missionaries, contributed towards consolidating and defining the convert's newly acquired identity. They were the physical manifestations of their change of religion. Commenting on the converts, Revd. Medland reported:

The inquirers seemed earnest in their desire, but famine had reduced them to great destitution. It was therefore necessary to assist them in resuming their agricultural pursuits. On application the Meerut relief committee paid each family fifteen rupees towards the purchase of bullock ploughs and seed corn. The remaining sum required was added from a sum of money placed at our disposal by friends in England. In all 15 men, 16 women, and 19 children, were baptised.¹⁷

¹²ibid. *Report from Meerut*, pp. 110-111.

¹³CMS. *procds*, 1861-2, *Report from Meerut*, pp. 126-7.

¹⁴Alter, *In the Doab*, p. 69.

¹⁵ibid.p.70

¹⁶ibid.p.66.

¹⁷CMS. *procds* 1861-2, *Report from Meerut*, p.128; Alter, *In The Doab*, p.69.

A teacher and a catechist were immediately placed there, and the construction of a church, school and house for the catechist to live in commenced.¹⁸ Similarly, a Christian colony at Dhoon in Meerut district expanded during the 1860-1 famine. Mrs and Major Rind proved a great help in accomplishing this. They worked among the Indian converts and provided for all their material wants, while the pastor, Tulsi Paul, continued to administer the consolations of the Gospel. Thus, under guaranteed material and spiritual protection the congregation remained intact, and attracted many new adherents.¹⁹

The CMS activities in the Allahabad region attracted attention. Here the Sikandra orphans received refuge when they were attacked during the Mutiny. It was only during the 1860-1 famine that there was an influx of more orphans, leading to the founding of a mission, an orphanage and a Church, ultimately expanding into the famous Christian village of Muirabad. Named in gratitude to its patron, William Muir, it still exists, and present-day Christians trace their ancestry to the 1860-1 famine converts.²⁰ Importantly, during this famine the Sikandra village was re-established. The CMS at Agra decided, at the onset of the famine, to receive under their charge, as many orphans as they might be able to acquire. They were encouraged in this by district authorities, pecuniary aid being from famine subscriptions, and other sources. As soon as the buildings were repaired, they received about 560 orphans. They were sent by the magistrates of famine-stricken districts. The Church was rebuilt at Sikandra, and placed under the charge of Revd. Danube.²¹

¹⁸ibid. p.128; Alter, *In the Doab*, p. 69..

¹⁹CMS. *procds 1861-2, Report from Meerut*, p.129 .

²⁰This information is based on personal knowledge of the present writer.

²¹CMS. *procds, 1861-2, Report from Agra*, p.120.

The SPG and the American Presbyterians were no less active and made similar gains. The SPG's Azadpur orphanages for both boys and girls, destroyed during the Mutiny, were rebuilt and reopened and some 300 children were received during the 1860-1 famine.²² Revd. Burell could scarcely contain his delight at the prospect of receiving the 'second instalment,' of orphans from the chaplain Mr. Shaw, who in turn obtained them from the magistrate of Moradabad; additionally, he also baptized nine adults and four children and these along with the orphans would swell his depleted orphanage. "Thus I have found some fruits granted to our mission at a time, when I was very dull about the mission in general."²³ Not to be outdone, the Presbyterians, active in Farrukhabad region, set up missions, orphanages, Churches, schools and dispensaries.²⁴ The same was true of Sikandra. The SPG mission and orphanage founded at Banda can be dated to the 1874 famine.²⁵

During the 1896-7 famine, this trend continued unabated. From Benaras, Miss Bull of the CMS, in charge of the girls orphanage, reported an influx in the number of orphans, and requested additional manual and fiscal assistance to cope with the situation.²⁶ Reports from Aligarh observed that missionaries were aggressively preaching and dispensing relief, and collecting orphans; with the result that, at Hathras, there was a distinct mass movement towards conversion to Christianity.²⁷ Reports of large-scale conversion to Christianity came from a group of villages east of Meerut city. The interest in Christianity pre-dated the famine, but the first conversions took place at the height of famine in 1898 at Jeyi, a small

²²USPG, E. 53,1898 A, diocese of Lucknow; Report of Revd. Hill, Banda, 'The Indian Famine- A Retrospect,' p. 6.

²³USPG, E12,1862, Report of Revd..Burell to Revd. Wallings, Secretary, SPG, January to 30 March 1862, document 2065/63, p.635.

²⁴Webster, *The Christian Community*, pp. 180 -1.

²⁵USPG, E 53,1898A, diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd. Hill, Banda, 'The Indian Famine,' 1898 A, p.7.

²⁶CMS. *procds, 1896-7, 'Report from Benaras,'* p. 201.

²⁷*ibid.Report from Aligarh,,* 'p. 209.

village west of Parikshitgarh.²⁸ Revd. Hall baptized forty-five men and women belonging to the outcaste *Lal Begi* sect (Scavengers). This movement then spread rapidly to other villages in the area, such as Khajuri, Laliana, Asilpur and Sheopuri. Thirty-seven converts were baptized at Dhanpur alone in 1898.²⁹ As rapidly as they could, the missionaries stationed teachers and catechists in the villages and schoolhouses. For the convenience of supervising the expanding work, they also built a missionary resthouse at Jeyi, on the main road from Meerut to Parikshitgarh.³⁰

Large accessions of converts were made at Chunar. The congregation here numbered only thirty at the beginning of 1897. But by 1898, they increased to seventy-two. A home for women and girls' and an orphanage was established. Nineteen adults and twenty-two children were baptized. They quickly learned to read and write and repeat verses and hymns.³¹ Reports from Lucknow also indicated that famine relief was organized by the missionaries at six different places where, for seven months, starving people were rendered material and medical aid, "and systematic instruction was given to them at the same time."³² Reports from Gorakhpur indicated hectic missionary activity. Catechists stationed there spent their time preaching to the starving at relief works run not only by missions but also those run by the government, "and it appeared manifest that many of the hearers took a real interest in the Gospels message." Revd. Ellwood joyously baptized twenty- nine orphans here, and hundred adults, who the report stated "were first attracted to Christianity, through the kindness received during famine."³³ Not to be outdone the SPG. missionaries

²⁸ Alter, *In the Doab*, p.78.

²⁹ *ibid.* pp. 78-9.

³⁰ *ibid.*p. 79.

³¹ *CMS.procds. 1897-8; Report from Benaras*, p. 202.

³² *ibid.Report from Lucknow, and Fyzabad*, p. 208.

³³ *ibid.Report from Gorakhpur*, p. 204.

successfully collected orphans and established separate orphanages for boys' and girls' at Banda. About 300 orphans were taken away by the American missionaries, leaving about 500 still unclaimed in the various state orphanages. SPG. report for 1898 estimated that over 7,000 children were orphaned by the famine. Of these, about eight hundred were received into their Church orphanages; over two hundred were taken in by the CMS.³⁴ Some were claimed by their co-religionists or relatives, and those that were still left, were claimed by the Roman Catholics and the American missions. These are a few of the most prominent establishments which came into existence during famines; undoubtedly there were many more.

An analysis of the pattern described above shows that, once the orphans were baptized and housed, the missionaries sought to create structures of protection, both moral and material. The entire framework - the missionary houses, compound, schools, chapels, farms, pastors and catechists-cushioned and secured the converts from heathen association and influence. Every building, every Church, every Christian organization whether social or intellectual, that took root was viewed as making stronger and clearer the outlines of Christianity, as a distinct cultural presence. Specific instructions were given to separate orphans from heathen association and kept constantly under Christian instruction and mission superintendence, for as long as possible.³⁵ The environment was deliberately constructed to cut the converts from their previous surroundings, and the missionary obsession for this is reflected in the fact that they were reluctant to employ non-Christian teachers; where they were compelled to

³⁴ USPG, E 53,1898A,diocese of Lucknow; Revd. Hill, missionary at Banda- Bundelkhund, 'The Indian Famine,'p.8.

³⁵*CMS.procds 1838-9*, p.71.

employ, due to the absence of qualified Christians, they ensured that these teachers did not reside on school or mission premises in order to ward off their 'evil influence.'³⁶

These orphanages and villages were economically self-sufficient and became the physical manifestations of a convert's new identity, besides providing the basis for the expansion of mission activities. These aimed at giving a new identity, a new Christian bonding. Hence the curriculum for teaching was heavily religious and Christian. The CMS. and SPG. records indicate that the girls' had three hours of religious instruction and then they had to memorise the religious texts, learn the Bible, sing hymns and participate in congregational Christian worship, and were schooled to pray individually, all under the care and patronage of the missionaries. They provided a Christian nurture, and a Christian acculturising ethics was relentlessly hammered home on the converts. By gathering the converts within a new institutional framework, and providing a common code of social and moral conduct, and a common cultural idiom, the missionaries were endeavouring to raise a homogenous Christian community in India.

The question of employment of the converts was a taxing one. Orphans were usually unskilled, and could be trained from a young age for particular vocations. Adults who converted were either unemployed or, if they had a vocation, they had to forego it because of the persecution of their former co-religionists. Finding employment for largely illiterate and inferior caste poor converts was not easy "How can we become a settled body until there is some branch or industry in which the Christians can earn a living."³⁷ However, with

³⁶ USPG, E 12, 1862, Report from Revd. Hill. Kanpur, to Secretary SPG, London; doc.2063, pp.679-80

³⁷ USPG, E12, 1862; Report from Revd. Burrell, Kanpur, to Revd. F.R. Wallings, Secretary, SPG, 17 February, doc.3040/1863, p.631.

government assistance, missionaries obtained for their converts positions like those of clerk, accountant, and in railway works. The orphans were mostly employed and trained for jobs under mission auspices for example, at mission owned printing presses; some taught at mission schools, became pastors or catechists and were given regular salaries. Still others, worked at carpet and tent factories owned by the mission, as at Raka Christian village, and at European owned cloth and paper mills as at Kanpur. The problem was important enough to feature as a subject of discussion at the Punjab Missionary Conference in 1862. A committee was appointed to go into the question and no less a figure than the Lieutenant- Governor was to be its sponsor.³⁸

Controversial incidents concerning orphans

Orphan converts merit special attention because it was around them that the religious controversies centred during the four famines studied. Immense importance was attached to the conversion of orphan children: first by the missionaries; then by the public of the NWP&O, who perceived that, after being politically subjugated by the British, the missionaries were out to annihilate their culture and religion; and, finally, by the government, state and central, which did not want to be seen as aiding and abetting any such design, especially in the aftermath of the Mutiny. The conversion of orphans was thus a source of bitter controversy, distinguishable from adult conversions, which were presumably the result of some deliberation. Adult converts were viewed as making calculated, rational choices and earned ridicule and harassment, but did not generate anger and bitterness as with the forcible baptizing of orphans. The orphans had no choice in the matter and were unaware

³⁸ *Report of the Punjab Missionary Conference, 1862-3*, pp. 207-9.

of the enormity of what was happening to them. Counter measures were adopted by Indians to thwart these conversions.

The missionaries perceived the claiming of famine orphans as their special and moral duty, and referred them as 'treasures,' 'fruits,' and 'relics' of famine. The orphanages proved to be the foundation or the 'steel frame' of Christian communities in several places in NWP&O.³⁹ Helpless, rudderless and impressionable, during famines, orphans could be easily moulded to become good Christians 'by teaching them the truth about our heavenly father, and his son our Lord.'⁴⁰ These orphanages the Bishop of Calcutta reported with satisfaction, were flourishing and, being nourished by the necessities created by the famine and creating a body of intelligent native Christians for the next age. "Thus all is waiting for a similar visitations of mercy, with that which has led me to the present letter."⁴¹ Such sentiments were not isolated; they were being echoed in mission reports even at the turn of the century. Many SPG missionaries were hoping that great number of conversions would follow from God's chastisement of the Indians by famine.⁴² Revd. Hill of Banda remarked of the orphans, that the missionaries, with God's blessing " build up out of these wrecks of humanity and children of the devil worshippers, the church of Christ in India."⁴³ The usefulness and centrality of these orphanages in the evangelization of India is reflected in the following comment of Revd. Bauman, who as Chairman of the Native Church Council visited stations where CMS missions were located during the 1896-7 famine.

Our mission orphanages have again proved useful and much needed institutions .. some seem to argue against the

³⁹USPG, E7, 1860, Report of Revd. Burrell, to Revd Bullock, Secretary, SPG. London, 15 January 1861, for the quarter ending September 1860, p.1249.

⁴⁰The Indian Famine,'in *News from the Mission*, November 1897,p.5

⁴¹CMS. *procds.* 1839-40: ii, ' Extract of a letter from the Bishop of Calcutta, to the Earl of Chichester,' Calcutta, 27 February 1839, p.140.

⁴²USPG,E53,1898A, diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd.Hill, Banda, 'Famine-A Retrospect.'p.13.

⁴³*ibid.*..Report of Revd. Hill, 'The Indian Famine,' p. 10.

necessity of such institutions. It is needless to add that many thousands of the poor waifs, and starving would have met either a pre-mature end of their existence, or lingered on as slaves and drudges of the harem, or joined some of the tribes of professional thieves and cattle lifters, had they not been sheltered in the Christian asylums. Here they received not only food and clothes and medicine but also a moral and mental training.⁴⁴

Orphanages thus became a kind of supply or feeder line of converts to Christianity. Where orphanages did not exist as in Kanpur, the missionaries reported no success in gaining converts. They stressed that these orphanages were the foundation of the Church at several places and gave the crucial initial push to missionary activities.⁴⁵ They, therefore, demanded the founding of more orphanages.⁴⁶ Such was the importance attached to orphans that the chief occupation of some missionaries during famines was to go collecting little children, irrespective of the existence of their parents. This is how Revd. Burell wanted to re-establish the mission at Kanpur, which had been destroyed during the Mutiny. To accomplish this, he endeavoured to first establish a thriving orphanage there, and so went about collecting little children during the 1860-1 famine for the purpose.⁴⁷ “ I have collected the children from various places but chiefly from those districts where the famine was most severely felt.”⁴⁸ Burell reported that he was entrusted with more than hundred children enabling him to establish an orphanage at Nawabganj.⁴⁹ The SPG missionaries at Banda went about collecting orphans during 1896-7, and drafted them on to their various orphanages at Banda, Roorkee and Kanpur. So successful were they in collecting children that Revd. Hill, was

⁴⁴*CMS.procds. 1897-8, Annual Report*, p. 196.

⁴⁵USPG, E 7, Report, from Revd. Burell, Kanpur, to Revd. Bullock, secretary, SPG, London, for the quarter ending December 1860, 15 January 1861, p.1249.

⁴⁶*ibid.* p. 1249.

⁴⁷*ibid.* p.1249.

⁴⁸USPG, E12, 1862, from Revd. Burell mission at Kanpur to Revd.E. Hawkins secretary, SPG, London, for the quarter ending June 1862, document 2064, p. 639.

⁴⁹*ibid.* p.641.

obliged to restrain them because their missions lacked the resources to support so many children. “One’s ability to relieve is necessarily limited by the means at one’s disposal.”⁵⁰ And, despite the pressure of the Indians not to hand over the famine orphans to the missions, even during the 1896-7 famine, orphans in the custody of NWP&O government, being fed on state kitchens, were drafted on to missions.⁵¹ The crucial importance of orphans is reflected in that the London SPG listed Indian famine orphans as the ‘Suggested Subjects of Prayers,’ ‘that they might be brought up in the love of God.’⁵²

Abductions and conversions

In their anxiety to obtain orphans, some over-zealous missionaries resorted to illegal and imprudent methods, flagrantly flouting legal authorities, generating immense tension among officials and the public. District officers reported that some missionaries were especially commissioned to run a network for purchasing and ensnaring children; these missionaries even hired agents to collect children by force and paid a premium for doing so. Revd. John wrote:

Mr. Wallings commissioned me to procure as many destitute children as I could meet with in the famine stricken districts through which I passed for the orphan home at Nawabganj. Several months having passed since the period of extreme severity of the famine, not very many were to be found.⁵³

Further, some missionaries concealed these children when authorities demanded their

⁵⁰USPG, E 51,1896A, Diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd. Hill, Banda- Bundelkhund, for the quarter ending 31 March 1896, section 35, document 10764.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² USPG, E53,1898A, diocese of Lucknow, Report of Revd.Hill, Banda-Bundelkhund, ‘Famine –A Retrospect’, p 10.

⁵³ USPG,E 12,1862,, *Report, from Revd.. John, mission at Kanpur, to T.W. Bullock, secretary SPG. London, 6 January 1862*, p.141.

restoration to their parents. Such illegal activities became the despair of district authorities, who, truly alarmed at these reports warned the missions to desist from so flagrantly breaching the laws. The matter was considered serious enough, and the negative publicity attached dangerous enough, to be referred to the Lt.-Gov.⁵⁴ A few examples may be discussed.

During the 1860-1 famine the officiating magistrate of Agra reported that a missionary, Father Lewis, deputed by the Pro-Vicar Apostolate of Hindustan at Agra, came to Aligarh and commenced purchasing children from famine-stricken parents and relatives.⁵⁵ Subsequently some parents lodged a complaint with the deputy magistrate of Aligarh, and petitioned for recovery of their offspring.

The deputy magistrate went in person to the serai where the priest had taken up his quarters and there found that upwards of thirty children had been collected together for transport to Agra, and procured through questionable female agency.⁵⁶

The magistrate acted promptly; many of these children were recovered and returned to their parents.⁵⁷

On 17 February 1861, Gyanee, a *Chamar* woman, complained at the *kotwalee* at Agra that she had lost her three- year- old child. She alleged that her child was abducted from the working gangs near the fort where she was working at the time.⁵⁸ She had learnt that her

⁵⁴ Post-Mutiny, judicial, Agra div, f. 342/ ii, 1861, serial. 16; from A.L. Phillips, magistrate of Agra, to G.F. Harvey, commissioner of Agra div, 3 April 1861. UPRAA.

⁵⁵ Post-Mutiny, judicial, Agra div, f.342/ ii, 1861, serial. 16; from Couper, Secretary Govt. NWP. to Harvey, commissioner, Agra div, 29 April 1861.

⁵⁶ Post-Mutiny, judicial, Agra div, f. 342/ ii, 1861, serial 16; from. H.Princep, offg.magistrate of Agra, to Phillips, magistrate Agra, 19 March 1861.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

child had been taken to the institution at 'Padri Tola.'⁵⁹ (seminary) She stated that she went to 'Padri Tola' and saw her child, but was not allowed to bring the child away. Gyanees complaint was lodged and she was again sent to the institution with the *naib- kotwal*, but the child was not to be found; the third time she was accompanied by the deputy magistrate, Brown; Father Lewis, the Principal of the Roman Catholic mission, summoned the children for inspection but the child was not to be found. Subsequently Gyanees appeared before the magistrate of Agra, with the child, stating that she had remained crying at the gate of the orphanage till the child was restored to her by the orders of Father Lewis; she then brought the child directly to the magistrate, who believed her story was true. The child had a Roman Catholic medal round its neck, and a badge numbered 32⁶⁰ The fault was aggravated by the deception, which was twice practised against police officers. The mission office bearers who had concealed Gyanees child at the convent were guilty of conniving, and were accomplices in the act of child stealing.

This was not an isolated occurrence. On 13 March, a message reached Phillips, magistrate at Agra, from the magistrate of Aligarh.⁶¹ A man named Nuthoo had lodged a complaint stating that his child had been decoyed and taken away by a priest at Aligarh, to Agra. Phillips sent Nuthoo with a letter for Father Lewis, but with no effect, as the child was not forthcoming. Phillips went on to enumerate that, on the 14 March 1861, the following persons: (1) Birju lost a boy Poorna, (2) Prema lost a boy Neojee, (3) Kulloo lost a boy Purma, (4) Khushalee lost a girl Gauri, (5) Nandoo lost a girl Gyaso. They all declared on

⁵⁹Post-Mutiny, judicial, Agra div, f. 342/ ii, 1861, serial.16; from Phillips, magistrate at Agra, to Revd. J. Lewis, Principal of the Roman Catholic Orphanage, Agra, 7 March 1861.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹Post-Mutiny, judicial deptt. f.342/ ii, 1861, serial 16; from Phillips, magistrate at Agra, to Harvey, commissioner, Agra div, 3 April 1861.

oath before Brown, deputy magistrate of Agra, that the children had been stolen and that they had traced them to the Roman Catholic orphanage at Agra.

Deeming that ordinary application through Revd. Lewis were fruitless ... I requested Brown, deputy magistrate, Boulderson, asst. magistrate, with Waddington inspector, to proceed early on the spot on the 28 March 1861, and make a search.⁶²

The search of the huts in which the boys were kept was successful. Three boys were identified and recovered. The girls, however, could not be recovered as by this time the nunnery had been alerted and the search was unavailing.⁶³

Such censurable proceedings were not limited to Aligarh and Agra alone, but were fairly widespread. The discredit attached to such activities was aggravated by the difficulties, which some missionaries threw in the way of police action. Such illegal and improper conduct earned the censure and disapproval of the Lt.-Gov. himself, who wrote a strongly worded letter to Father Lewis, warning that such illiegal practices be immediately discountenanced.⁶⁴ The NWP&O government viewed such proceedings 'With great displeasure,' and warned that any repetition of these will subject those engaged in them to a criminal prosecution, which 'will be unhesitatingly instituted.'⁶⁵

This prompt government reaction had the desired effect. The Pro-Vicar Apostolate of Hindustan promised, in the presence of the Central Relief Committee, 'to take immediate measures to check such unwarrantable proceedings,' and stated that 'no child would under any circumstances, be placed under Roman Catholic orphanage without report to the police,

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Post-Mutiny, judicial, Agra div, f. 342/ ii, 1861; from Couper, Secretary, NWP to Harvey, commissioner, Agra div, 29 April 1861.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

and that any inducement to necessitous parents, to surrender their children for money be positively prohibited.'⁶⁶ He also undertook " That the name of every child shall be entered into a register to be at all times open to inspection."⁶⁷

Official reaction

It is difficult to summarize clearly the British government's policy towards the missionaries. Caution was exercised by the East India Company in dealing with missions between 1793 and 1833. Missionaries were denied unfettered access to British India. But thenceforth although the declared policy remained 'neutrality' and non-interference in religious affairs, there was a perceptible softening in official attitudes towards the missions especially in the aftermath of the 1837-8 famine,. For example, whereas previously the British-Indian government had refused to accede to the missionary demand that the government withdraw from the management and administration of non-Christian religious trusts and places of worship, by the 1840s, under sustained pressure of the likes of Willberforce and Henry Montgomery, there began a withdrawal from these commitments.⁶⁸ This further strengthened public fear that government and missionaries were working together to annihilate the religion and cultures of Hindustan and replace them with Christianity. This is regarded by some scholars as an important cause of 1857 Mutiny.

In the aftermath of 1837-8, the NWP&O government was aware that the notion had gained ground that it abetted conversions to Christianity. It was keen to dispel such notions and be

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, Indian Society and the Making Of the Empire*, 11: 1 (Cambridge, 1988), p.114; P.Spear, 'Lord William Bentinck,' in Phillips and Wainwright (eds). *Indian Society and Beginnings of Modernisation, 1830-1850* (London, 1976), p.26.

seen as religiously neutral, and above all to avoid another uprising such as 1857, which had threatened to undermine the foundations of British Empire in India. In the Post-Mutiny era in the context of famine, government responded where it felt that individual liberty was being threatened. Neither the central nor the state government interfered in the process of adult conversions, but did take steps to curb the over-zealous activities of some missionaries, especially the acquiring of orphans through illegal means and treating officials with scant respect. NWP&O government was especially cautious in assigning orphans to missions. Orphans and their baptism became such a serious political issue, that it was deliberated upon by the 1880 Famine Commission.⁶⁹ An all-India policy in regard to orphans was enjoined. The discovery of the orphans was firstly to be reported to the magistrate and a notice of discovery was to be put up at the magistrate's office, giving the sex, age and religion of the child. A Hindu had first claim on a Hindu child, and a Muslim on a Muslim child.⁷⁰ The Famine Code of NWP&O reinforced the suggestions and procedures of the Indian Famine Code dealing with famine orphans. It was also stipulated that orphans were not to be taken out of the famine district until a period of three months had elapsed.⁷¹ These measures indicate the government's unwillingness to take long-term responsibility for orphans. Prompted no doubt by the desire to refrain from exercising or even appearing to exercise the slightest pressure in the direction of proselytising through famine distress and relief, the services of missionaries were sparingly used on local relief committees.⁷² In fact, there was emphasis on involving influential Indians on relief committees, and in distributing the colossal sums of money which was sometimes raised in the United Kingdom or other British

⁶⁹ *IFC.Report, 1880-5, i* (London, 1880), p. 60.

⁷⁰ USPG, E51, 1896A, from Revd. G.H. Westcott, ' Religious Development in Northern India,' section 10, p.6

⁷¹ *The Famine Code of the North Western Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad, 1898), p. 25.

⁷² *CMS. procds. 1897-8, Annual Report, 3 May 1898*, p.171.

colonies in response to missionary appeals.⁷³ This was resented by the missionaries, but indicates the extent to which they had lost the confidence and esteem of the authorities. By the 1890s, officials were wary of missionary zeal; there were few district officers whose commitment to Christianity could match that of Thomason, Benetinck, Wheler or Muir in the 1830s to 1860s- their primary concern was the political consolidation of the empire rather than any religious objectives. During the 1896-7 famine, the question of utilizing missionary services on relief works became a sensitive political issue. This is reflected in the comments of James, Vice-Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, to the President of the provincial committee of NWP&O, Sir John Edge in April 1897. Edge considered this question a 'delicate one.' He felt that some missionaries undoubtedly did good work and could be trusted not to misuse funds allotted to them. But some misused them for gaining converts. Edge deemed such activities 'dangerous,' as they indicated that government was supporting Christian Churches in exploiting famine conditions.⁷⁴ Lt.-Gov. MacDonnell agreed with Edge and firmly rejected the proposal of creating a fund to be administered by missionaries during the 1896-7 famine, "It would be a most unfortunate step to take... If the cry of proselytism be raised I do not know what the effect would be."⁷⁵ "The government cannot get mixed up with missionaries."⁷⁶

Popular backlash

⁷³ *ibid.*p.172.

⁷⁴ *Notes On Tour by the Vice- Chancellor of the Central Executive Committee; Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund*, April 1897,p.4.

⁷⁵ MacDonnell to Elgin, 4 February 1897,pp.79-81.(Ms. Emg. Hist.C. 353).

⁷⁶ *ibid.*p.81.

The confrontation between Christian missionaries and protagonists of Indian religions, which began in the late 1820s, intensified after the 1837-8 famine. In the wake of aggressive evangelizing, particularly of the large-scale appropriation and conversion of children to Christianity, the Indian reaction also intensified. Opposition to these conversions and the consequences flowing from them took various forms, from peaceful petitions to threats and violent persecution, and even an active dislike of food relief, whether linked to proselytising or not. Above all it led to a suspicion and dislike of missionaries, the British rule and the 'Christian West.' This suspicion and dislike was to crystallize and gain strength over successive famines and assumed endemic proportions by the 1890s. Strategies were also improvised to build effective counter movements thereby introducing profound changes in a tradition-bound society.

The questionable activities of some missionaries triggered off a defence of indigenous values and religions in two main directions. Firstly, a co-relation was established between the government and forced conversions. The sense of betrayal is reflected in the numerous petitions and protests made to the government, central and provincial, to curb the activities of missionaries and about the threat they posed to Indian religious and cultural life. For example, 'The Indians of Bombay appealed for redress in 1839, fearing the encroachment of Christianity on their religion.'⁷⁷ New religious societies sprang up to expose the fraudulent claims and propaganda of the missionaries. Peace societies were formed in 1838, in order to contain the opposition and resentment of the public. At many places agitated people became violent, and there were reports of insurrection. Revd. Leupolt in Benaras, described what occurred there:

⁷⁷ K.Ingham, *Reformers In India, 1793-1833* (N.York, 1973), p. 19.

The magistrate was looted out of the city, and stoned - the general had stones, large pieces of kanker, thrown into his carriage within the cantonment ... the chief reason assigned for this cause is that the government intends to make common cause with the missionaries, in making all the people Christians ... the shops are all closed and if any is opened, it is instantly plundered, and the plunderers are applauded - we have a determined magistrate, but I fear that he will not be backed, and this would be a pity, for it will tell upon our work also.⁷⁸

The Friends of India news weekly, published numerous instances of converts being subjected to harassment and ridicule; the extent of hostility was so acute that missionaries started establishing Christian villages and arming themselves to safeguard their lives as well as those of converts. Peace societies were formed after which the missionaries were able to report with some confidence that “ we have now peace in our borders.”⁷⁹

The most damaging legacy of the famine years was the suspicion and mistrust created of mission activities, even avowedly secular ones, aimed at improving social and educational conditions. Missionaries complained that the majority of the public concluded that all schools, government and missionary - for they made no distinctions- intended to make them Christians, and that all teachers were *padris*, (Christian priests), and all the protests to the contrary they put down as so much falsehood and hypocrisy, and in consequence mistrusted the government.⁸⁰

An important result was that several indigenous reforming bodies arose to organize famine relief and to resist the encroachments of Christianity. In the aftermath of the 1837-8 famine,

⁷⁸Revd. C.B. Leupolt, to Major. Straith, Benaras, 4 August 1852 (CII /0177/49, Birmingham Archives).

⁷⁹*Friends of India*, 28 February 1839, p.138..

⁸⁰*CMS. procds. 1859-60, Report from Allahabad*, p. 102.

the leading Hindus of Calcutta formed the '*Dharma Sabha*,' whose main objective was the defence and preservation of Hindu religion. The *Dharma Sabha* accused the NWP&O government of abandoning its policy of neutrality, and showing undue favour to missionaries. The one theme that dominated the discussion of the *Dharma Sabhas* was how to get Hindu converts back to the Hindu fold.⁸¹ The *Bramho Samaj* also took the offensive in this regard; its objective was to prevent conversions to Christianity under duress. The *Samaj* patterned its activities on the lines of the Christian missionaries, which was a source of consternation and anger to the latter. Missionaries during the 1860-1 famine reported from Kanpur that they were getting stiff competition from *Bramho Samaj* missionaries.⁸² They copied the methods and organization of the missions, styled themselves 'missionaries,' established schools, were subtle and 'earnest,' and preached a simple theistic religion, which they deemed to be '*vedic*' based on reasoning and nationalism which 'diverts the attention and unsettles the minds of those who are hesitating about taking up the cross of the Christ.'⁸³ Revd. Hill complained that they put the 'new wine of the Gospel' into the old bottle of Hinduism.⁸⁴ However, the stiffest challenge came from the *Arya Samaj*, which was extremely hostile to the proselytising activities of missionaries. It went ahead and organized its own schools, orphanages and Press, and during the 1896-7 famine, staked a claim to receive Hindu orphans and prevent them from falling into missionary hands and being reared as Christians.⁸⁵ Lala Lajpat Rai, together with the *Arya Samaj* and some other Hindu associations, founded the Hindu Orphan Relief Movement with a similar purpose. His

⁸¹ N.Stephen, *A History of Christinity in India, 1707 – 1858* (Cambridge,1985), p. 375.

⁸² USPG, E 23B,1867-8B, diocese of Calcutta, Report of Revd. Hill, Kanpur, for the quarter ending 30 June 1866, dated, 10 July 1866, document 12732, p.1730 .

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*p.1730.

⁸⁵ K.W. Jones, *The AryaDharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab* (New Delhi,1976), pp. 236-7.

campaign was helped immeasurably by tales of missionary exploitation. In 1897, he called upon Hindus to help 50,000 Hindu orphans and prevent their conversion to Christianity⁸⁶

The Jains and some Muslim reform movements were also active in this regard. *The Bharat Jain Vershiya Digambar Sabha*, was founded in 1860, and amongst its objectives was to establish orphanages for Jain orphans, and prevent them from falling into Christian hands. During the 1896-7 famine, it actively dispensed relief, particularly claiming Jain orphans, and making long-term arrangements for their housing and education.⁸⁷ Similarly, the *Jain Mahasabha*, participated in relief of Jains and demanded that all Jain orphans be handed over to it. The *Sabha* in a resolution prayed that India be freed from calamities like famines.⁸⁸

The Muhammadan Educational Conference and some other associations such as the *The Anjuman Himayat -i - Islam*, came into being to counter the anti-Islamic propaganda of missionaries. It organized itself along the lines of Christian missions by appointing paid preachers, having its own press, issuing a monthly magazine, establishing schools and orphanages, and laid claim to Muslim orphans during famines and earthquakes.⁸⁹ Mission reports from Kanpur showed a drop in the number of children attending schools due to the

Injurious efforts lately made by the Muhammadans in the city to withdraw boys of their creed, from under our influence, by the establishment of rival schools free to all.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *ibid.* pp. 236-7.

⁸⁷ Scarcity Deptt, 1900, f. 356. Letter from Raja Seth Lachman Das, President Vershiya Digambar Jain Mahasabha, to the magistrate of Mathura, 4 February 1900.

⁸⁸ Scarcity Deptt, 1900, f. 356, telegram from Raja Seth Lachman Das, President Jain Mahasabha, Mathura, to the Viceroy of India, 25 October 1899.

⁸⁹ S.R.Wasti, 'Anjuman - i - Himayat- i- Islam, Lahore- A brief History,' *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, iii, nos.1, 2, January-April 1966(University of Punjab), p. 72.

⁹⁰ USPG, E12, 1862, Report, from Revd. John, Kanpur; to the Secretary, USPG. London, 6 January 1862, p.142.

These reforming bodies gave themselves a strong institutional character, almost identical to that of Christian missions. They had their own presses, published their own newspapers and pamphlets and distributed tracts. Besides organizing relief they sent preachers to regain converts and expose the Christian missionaries, against whom they made charges that were sometimes extravagant. In short they used the same techniques as the missionaries to counter them.

Most crucially the cry of 'religion in danger' gave rise to nationalism. Such practices as preaching to the hungry before administering relief earned the opposition of responsible Indians such as Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, who as a junior judicial officer witnessed the proselytising activities of missionaries. He was serving as a *naib munshi* at Agra in 1839, and was then appointed a *munsif* at Fatehpur Sikri. Khan in his *Asbab-i- Bagavat - Hind* (The Causes of the Revolt of 1857), laid much of the blame for the uprising on missionary activity.

In the year of the famine of 1837, the making of orphans into Christians was seen as a sign through out the North Western Provinces, of the government's intention that having thus impoverished all Hindustanis, they would convert to its own religion.⁹¹

Maulana Muhammad Miyan, in his four volume *Ulama -i-Hind- Ka -Shandar- Mazi* (*The Glorious Past of the Indian Ulama, 1857-60*), described the 1837-8 famine in almost identical terms as Saiyyad Ahmad. He justified the rising of the *ulema* by concluding that the conversion of famine orphans was the trigger for the *ulema's* declarations of *jihad*.⁹² These charges were substantiated by the fact that, during the Mutiny, places where

⁹¹Hafeez Malik, and Morris Dembo, *The History of The Bijnor Rebellion* (English. Trans) Michigin State University, Asian studies Centre pp. 124-6; See Appendix II, pp.434-8.

⁹²M. M.Miyan, *Ulma -i- Hind- Ka - Shandar- Mazi*, pp. 35-6.

missionary activities were concentrated and had conspicuous success in gaining converts were fiercely attacked, for example Meerut, Kanpur, Fatehgarh, Agra, Allahabad, Jhansi, Lucknow and Delhi. Christian villages and orphanages that had their inception during the 1837- 8 famine, most notably Sikandra and Raka orphanage at Fatehgarh, were attacked and destroyed during the Mutiny. Presbyterian mission schools, churches and houses were burnt and destroyed at Agra, as were mission premises at Jhansi and Allahabad.⁹³ Religious grievances and mission activities were not exclusively responsible for the Mutiny, but clearly influenced the activities of the rebels.

From the 1860-1 famine, opposition to missionary activities became stronger and more organized. Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, in numerous issues of the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, condemned the missionaries for preaching the Gospel to the starving before giving them food and other relief.⁹⁴ Criticizing the baptizing of famine victims, he urged the NWP&O government to discontinue the practice of handing over famine orphans to missionaries; he also exhorted the Hindus and Muslims to organize their own orphanages.⁹⁵

Contemporary studies have reiterated the criticisms of Khan and others. Alter noted the resentment and controversy generated in the wake of conversions. "The baptizing of the famine orphans became the most controversial (and characteristic) feature of the Presbyterian famine relief work in the nineteenth century."⁹⁶ It heightened the sense of belonging to a particular religion as well as the need to defend it, leading to competing community consciousness. Powell points out the significant connection between famines,

⁹³Webster, *Christian Community*, pp.191-3.

⁹⁴*Selections from the Vernacular News papers*, list 4, vol.10, 1871, p. 139; 1874, p. 505; 1877, p. 316-17, UPSAL; Alter, *In The Doab*, p.122.

⁹⁵Alter, *In the Doab*, p.122.

⁹⁶*ibid.* fn. 18, p.155.

the conversion of the orphans and the awakening of the *ulema* to the defence of Islam. She notes "A causal connection between famine orphans, conversion and the fear of Christianity, was established and publicized."⁹⁷ Thus, Christian evangelism proved offensive to large sections, and became a catalyst for religious revivalism.

In the rhetoric against missions, nationalism was used as a weapon, when it took on overtones of active hostility and antipathy to Christianity. Religion ate into politics and the unrest stemmed, not only from opposition to British rule, but also, as Revd Alfred Gadrally observed "A dislike of Christianity, such as I have never known given expression to during twenty five years in India."⁹⁸ To many Indians including Raja Ram Mohan Roy the acceptance of Christianity was an act of surrender to colonialism.⁹⁹ *Arya Samaj* especially impressed on the Hindus that Christianity was an alien religion of whites who were agents of imperialism, and out to destroy Indian culture and religion. Christianity was equated with alien power, oppression and colour. '*Kale Ko Mar Diya.*' (They have killed the black; italics mine). Christianity was perceived as anti-national and the converts as 'denationalised.'¹⁰⁰ The nationalists thus fused the identity of Church and State. *Bramho* and *Arya Samaj* effectively countered Christian propaganda. They urged reform of indigenous society and condemned superstitions, rituals, and above all untouchability, and the caste system. At the same time they ridiculed and attacked certain tenets of Christianity on grounds of being irrational, and self contradictory.

⁹⁷Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, p.159.

⁹⁸USPG, E 52,1897A, diocese of Bombay, Report from Revd. A. Gadrally, Dapoli, for the year ending 31 October 1897, section 7,document 35762, p. 5.

⁹⁹T.V.Phillip, 'Christianity In India during Western Colonialism; Conflict and Reconciliation or Adjustment,' *ICHR*,xxi,no.i (June 1987), p.16.

¹⁰⁰Webster, *The Christian Community*, p. 206.

By the 1890s, as nationalism struck roots, opposition to missionaries grew to sizeable proportions. The converts were subjected to insults, intimidation, violence and abuse. Webster noted this escalation of hostility; Muslim opposition to Presbyterian preaching was especially fierce leading to violent incidents, which had to be dealt with by the police and the courts.¹⁰¹ “During famines missionaries were warned to tone down their evangelistic efforts.”¹⁰² In one instance a missionary also received a death threat.¹⁰³ Missionaries reported from Aligarh that Muslim preachers were actively preaching Islam to thwart conversions to Christianity.¹⁰⁴ In Meerut, there was stiff opposition to the preaching of Christianity by paid agents of the *Anjuman - i- Islam*. A *maulvi* was paid Rs ten a month to disturb all Christian preachers and heap the foulest abuses on the missionaries.¹⁰⁵ At many places missionaries were subjected to ridicule and physical assault. Revd. Nihal. Singh, involved in evangelistic work at Allahabad, was attacked by an Afghan while preaching in March 1898. He first tried to strike him and begged the bystanders to give him a knife, ‘in order that he might murder the Christian, using all the while the most abusive and blasphemous language.’¹⁰⁶

Elsewhere it was reported that *Brahmins* deliberately caused disturbance, either by ridiculing the preacher or asking senseless questions. On one occasion in Gorakhpur, they prompted a school boy to put a mouse up the back of Revd. Petch's coat (which he allowed to creep up his back and down his sleeve, and then returned to the *Brahmin*).¹⁰⁷ Ridicule of this kind had

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 114, fn. 64.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ USPG, E 52,1897A, Diocese of Bombay, report of Revd.Gadrally, Dapoli, section 7, document 35762, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ CMS. *procds 1896-7, Report from Aligarh*, p.210.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid. Report from Meerut*, p.210.

¹⁰⁶ CMS. *procds 1897-8, Report from Allahabad*, p.191.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid. Report from Gorakhpur*, 1897, p.207.

entertainment value for onlookers. At Bareilly, a Muslim gentleman announced an award for the capture of William Butler, the pioneer American Methodist missionary. At this juncture, when national pride was gaining ground, there was a more pronounced and determined rejection by Indians of the Gospel.

From the 1830s till the close of the nineteenth century, the press (especially the vernacular) played an important part in highlighting the activities of the missionaries and mounted a sustained critique. Ridicule, outrage, suspicion and contempt of missionary activities poured forth. They were referred to as “ the fair skinned, smooth spoken, and mind bewitching child catchers, who go from place to place, with the noose of (professed) kindness (to ensnare their victims).”¹⁰⁸ The Bengal Auxiliary Missionary Society quoted an extract from the newspaper *Prabhakar*, dated 13 February 1837,

We would strongly advise that all these smooth tongued but world destroying missionaries should have a mark put on their white faces, and that they may be driven out of the city. ¹⁰⁹

It further added, “But what matter of astonishment is it that the rulers of the land are harbouring the very men who seek to hurt others.”¹¹⁰ Critics of the missionaries used the language of extermination to convey their horror and outrage at famine conversion. Their attacks also highlighted the alien rule, which they deemed oppressive, identifying a conspiracy between the Church and government to subjugate Indians culturally. Race, colour, and projecting Christians as anti-national, were emphasized. Papers carried extensive accounts of the various incidents whereby missionaries used hunger as a weapon

¹⁰⁸*Friends of India*, 8 March 1838, p. 85.

¹⁰⁹*ibid.*

¹¹⁰*ibid.*p.85.

for conversion. Missionaries were dubbed to be the 'cultural arm' of British imperialism. It was rumoured that this was the beginning of a government-aided programme for the conversion of the people of Hindustan to Christianity.¹¹¹

The Press continued to urge the government to thwart the forcible conversions to Christianity. During 1896-7, the vernacular press did an extensive coverage of conversions to Christianity and exhorted fellow Indians to support the needy and take care of their co-religionists¹¹² Newspapers carried stories of how famine-stricken people were committing suicide and selling their children at one and a half annas to two annas a piece to missionaries.¹¹³ The mistrust and bitterness was such that even straightforward cases of philanthropy and programmes for the improvement of social conditions were opposed. An appeal in a local newspaper at Moradabad vehemently objected to the public being asked to subscribe to the Lady Dufferin Fund which, it suspected, would result in the creation of a dangerous bureau. It accused hospital authorities of giving unfettered access to missionaries at hospitals, and surrendering patients to them.¹¹⁴

Changes in missionary strategies

From the beginning many missionaries had opposed using relief for gaining converts. As early as 1837-8, the Bishop of Calcutta protested that, despite lakhs of rupees being spent

¹¹¹Jones, *The New Cambridge History Of India*, iii.i (Cambridge, 1989), p. 212.

¹¹²*Oudh Akbar* (Lucknow), 27 February 1897,p152. (L/R/5/74, OIOC)

¹¹³*Anis - i - Hind* (Meerut), 24 February 1897, p.150.

¹¹⁴*Jami- Ul- Ulum* (Moradabad), 28 February 1897, p.165.

during 1837-9 famine, they achieved no worthwhile results in terms of good Christian converts.¹¹⁵ Similarly, during the 1860-1 famine, Revd. Schneider of the CMS at Agra, and Revd. Burell of the SPG, strongly objected to baptizing adult converts during famines as they remained “low quality Christians,” their conduct ‘unworthy.’¹¹⁶ “I have almost come to the conclusion not to baptise an inquirer till I know how he may be able to support himself in an honest way.”¹¹⁷ Despite his protests, large-scale conversions were made in Agra; in his report he refused to comment on the spiritual state of the congregation.¹¹⁸ Some were of the opinion that the mission involvement in orphanages must also end. The Benaras Committee minutes show that the parent committee (CMS. in Calcutta) had recommended ending missionary involvement in orphanages. But local missionaries in Benaras strongly disagreed, recording that despite many ‘sad, sad disappointments,’ (meaning orphans who had been weak Christians), nevertheless

orphan institutions form a legitimate department of missionary labours, and that it would be morally wrong not to receive and educate your herd of orphans who are providentially thrown upon us; and that God had blessed orphan institutions facts abundantly prove.¹¹⁹

Many missionaries did not report the bad behaviour and greed of converts for fear of negative publicity, embarrassment, and indictment of higher authorities. It was known that, if the material demands of the converts were not satisfied, they either reverted to their former religion or struck higher bargains with competing denominations; when questioned they

¹¹⁵ *CMS.procds. 1839-40; Appendix ii; ‘Extract of a letter from Bishop of Calcutta, to Earl of Chichester, Calcutta,’* 30 October 1839, p. 150.

¹¹⁶ *CMS. procds, Report form Benaras,* p.121.

¹¹⁷ *CMS. procds 1861-2, Report from Agra,* p.121.

¹¹⁸ *CMS.procds 1860-1, Report from Agra,* p.106

¹¹⁹ Resolution vii, minutes of the 25 meeting of the CMS. missionary conference at Benaras district, Benaras, 31 October to 1 November 1961. Minutes of the book at Registrar’s office, Bishops House, Allahabad.

openly accused the missionaries of not fulfilling their material needs. Once the relief fund closed, there were desertions from among the converts, and missionaries complained 'Of being sadly reduced to the minimum of our congregation.'¹²⁰.

At the onset of the 1896-7 famine, the SPG held a conference and resolved that their mission would not receive any adult by baptism into the church during hard times.¹²¹ Janavier, an American Presbyterian missionary and the editor of *Makzan-i-Masihi*, opposed the exploitation of famine relief for evangelizing.¹²² However, missions made no decisive shifts in their policy in regard to acquiring famine orphans and rearing them in the Christian faith, although some of them did object to use of overtly illegal means. SPG continued to send missionaries explicitly for collecting children, and gathering them into their orphanages. The same was true of the American Presbyterians and the CMS, despite provincial government strictures. This shift in policy, in contrast to that of the government, was mainly with regard to adult converts.

These missionaries were aware of the bad publicity attached to famine conversions which, in the popular perception became synonymous with 'economic gains,' 'untouchables,' and the 'depressed classes.'¹²³ Christianity was connected with peculiar ritual observances, or with charging their daily food.¹²⁴ The Census Report of 1891 noted that, in the early days of Christian missions it is almost a necessity that the mission should provide the means of

¹²⁰USPG, E7, report, from Revd. Burell, mission at Kanpur, to Revd. T.W. Bullock, secretary, SPG, London, for the quarter ending September 1860, 15 January 1861, pp.1234-35.

¹²¹ USPG, E 52,1897 A, diocese of Bombay, Report of Revd. Athwale, missionary at Sonnai,Ahmednagar, for the year ending 31 October 1897, section 2, doc.35759, p.12.

¹²²C.A.R Janvier, letter to the Board of Foreign Missions, 23 August 1900, as quoted by Webster, *The Christian Conquest*, p. 183.

¹²³ USPG, E 7, Report from Revd. Burell, mission at Kanpur, to the secretary SPG. London, for the quarter ending September 1860, p.1234.

¹²⁴ibid.

subsistence for their converts, and the charge is freely made that the converts change their religion for material gains.

Missionaries were eager to rectify this and give Christianity a more respectable and altruistic image. They were keen to get educated upper-caste and class converts who would have spiritual and intellectual affinity to Christianity. They perceived them to be the 'natural leaders' of the Indian society. The emphasis was on 'quality' converts rather than quantity. After the Mutiny the missionaries had to be careful not to openly employ methods that would offend the cultural and religious susceptibilities of Indians as this had the potential of destabilising British rule itself. Some advocated the use of more subtle, restrained and diplomatic means, such as schools, medical missions and targeting female members of a family who, the missionaries complained, often thwarted the intentions of the male to convert. It was with this intent to influence females that female missionaries were pressed into service from the mid-nineteenth century.¹²⁵ What motivated this shift towards adult conversions was firstly the weight they attached to public opinion, improving the image of Christianity, as also that of missionaries and the political implication of their activities.

Conclusion:

To what extent were the gains fruitful from the evangelical perspective? The selfless services of some missionaries showed Christianity at its best. They set an example of service, compassion, efficiency and organization, which saved thousands of lives and attracted many to their creed. The overzealous exertions of some, however, gave rise to communal

¹²⁵ See pp.379-80.

bitterness, a hardening of religious consciousness, and opposition to British rule. While some of their gains were short-lived, as reflected in desertion by some converts, undeniable major gains were made. Establishments such as Sikandra, Raka, Muirabad, Chittaura. Jeyi and numerous other orphanages and Christian villages proved to be the nucleus from which Christian communities expanded and flourished, and continue to exist to the present day. Colleges such as Christ Church in Kanpur, Eweing Christian College, Allahabad, flourish even today, and only a Christian can be the principal of this college.

Famines also provided a unique setting for understanding and co-operation between missionaries and officials, as well as with Indian people. Missions benefited in various ways like gaining popular confidence, official access, and institutional infrastructure such as orphanages, churches, schools, colleges, dispensaries, and establishment of Christian villages. All this facilitated the consolidation of a Christian identity, and led to the founding of a distinct and homogenous Christian community in India. It is thus evident that famines, far from being a negative phenomena, offered remarkable opportunities to missionaries, who used them to gain converts. However, sometimes this proved to be a double- edged sword.

Chapter VIII: Perceiving and Confronting Famines - A Popular Dimension

Popular perceptions of famine

A rich source for the study of famines is the oral tradition, which preserves memories and experiences of famines in sayings, folklore, poems and songs composed around them. Such sources embody a wealth of information, and present a perspective that archival sources, with their emphasis on official views, probably omit. In Ireland, the memory of the 'great hunger' has been preserved in the oral sources. Based exclusively on these rich sources a number of independent studies have been carried out of the Irish famine. For NWP&O, several compilations exist that give some opportunity to study famines. These oral sources enable us to study famines from the popular perspective, and the richness of its contribution to famine studies is only now being appreciated. These sources are permeated with a simple emotional quality, which has kept alive famine experience over generations. They describe the mechanisms by which affected people obtained sustenance, and reveal some startling information. They are rich in detail and convey the variety of experiences in a human manner, allowing a valuable interpretation of the famine crisis from 'below.'

It can be assumed that the frequency of famine in the nineteenth century enabled affected people to work out their own survival strategies and understanding of the phenomenon. On this basis an enhanced insight into the phenomenon and its consequences can be acquired from the discourse of contemporary observers and affected people. Aspects of nature were closely observed, monitored and commented

upon; natural phenomena, such as direction of the wind and clouds, withering and flowering of particular plants, and calling and wailing of certain birds and animals at odd hours were popularly interpreted as indications of an approaching famine. These sayings give abundant expression to peasant anxieties, while simultaneously displaying a broad understanding of the linkages between weather and crop prospects. What also becomes evident is that the peasants did not wait for the official confirmation of famines, gauging well in advance from weather patterns that famine was imminent. These observations reflect the proverbial wisdom of the countryside.¹

Since agrarian life in the province was largely dependent on timely monsoons, the stress was not only on adequate rainfall but also on well-dispersed and timely rains. Take for instance this popular saying of Bariagaon, in the east of the province:

*Aghan duna pus savai, Magh mas ghar hun se jayi*²

If it rains in *Aghan*, the yield will be double; if it rains in *Pus*, the yield will be one and a quarter-fold, and if it rains in *Magh*, there will be loss.

Ek bund jo Caitra mem parai

*Sahas bund Savan mem harai*³

if even a drop of rain fell in *Chaitra*, (March-April), there would be no rain in *Sawan*, (July- August)) meaning drought and famine.

¹ Note: I have followed the library of Congress transliteration, but omitting the “inherent” a in most cases.

² S.L. Srivastava, *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition* (New Delhi, 1974), p. 230.

³ *Gagah Aur Bhaddari ki Kahawate* (Lucknow, 1960), p. 6.

Weather vagaries apart, astrological calculations too were central in predicting infertile and unhappy periods; certain *tithis*, *nakshatras*, eclipses and planetary conjunctions were believed to augur the onset of phases of prosperity and happiness or want and famine. Take for example:

*Caitra mahina Rohini ghadi ek ho dikh,
hath mem khapara leke dar dar mange bikh*⁴

This means: in the month of *Chaitra*, if ‘*Rohini*’ is visible even for a moment, affected people with broken earthen pots will beg alms from door to door. Such astrological calculations were pivotal in influencing popular analysis and expectations of crop yield: occurrence of certain *nakshatras* and *tithis* in particular months was viewed as indications of favourable or unfavourable rains, influencing crop output, and predicting, whether famine and suffering would follow. For example: in the first fortnight (dark half) of *Savan*, on the tenth day, if there is *Rohini nakshatra*, then the grain will be dear, and rain little, and only a few persons will remain happy.⁵

*Savan pahile pakh mem dasmi Rohini hoi,
tej anna au mand jal birala biharai koi*⁶

On similar lines there is the saying:

*Dasi asadhi krshna ko, mangal Rohini hoi
sasta dhan bikayine hath hath na chhuiye koi*⁷

⁴ Srivastava, *Folk Culture*, p. 231.

⁵ *ibid.* p.236.

⁶ *ibid.* p.231 .

⁷ *ibid.* p. 231.

If on the tenth day of the dark half of *Asadh*, it is Tuesday with *Rohini nakshatra*, paddy will be sold at very cheap rate, and none will bother to touch it.

*Kark rashi mem mangalwari
grahan padai durbiksha vichari*⁸

If the moon is in *kark rashi*, (cancer) on a Tuesday, and there is an eclipse, this is a sure sign of impending famine.

*Ek mas mem grahan jo doyi
to bhi anna mahango hoi*⁹

If there are two eclipses in the same month, there is bound to be famine.

The flowering of certain plants and flowers, at a stipulated time was also interpreted as an indication of an untoward happening. When the spring crops,- mustard, *moong* (*Phaselous mungo*), and china (*Pauicum, italicum*) did not sprout, it was perceived as a bad omen. In every house, men and women mourned the approach of famine. This is reflected in the following saying:

*rabi ray eko nahim upjal - na khedi au cinh
ghar ghar soch karai nar nari - dur din bhel ab din*¹⁰

So strong and popular was the belief in these signs that even some of the most logical and sceptical British civil servants were influenced by them, and attached enough

⁸ *ibid.* p.231.

⁹ *ibid.* p.231.

¹⁰ Faturilal, 'Song of the Famine,' *Journal Of Asian Studies*, Maithali extra number, I, 1880-2, pp. 25, 30.

significance to them to communicate the information to the Lt.-Gov. of the province, who subsequently referred this matter to the Viceroy of India. Such an instance occurred during Muir's tenure as Governor, to whom Drummond, the commissioner of Allahabad division, wrote in 1868:

I had heard a general report that the flowering of the bamboo always proved a forerunner of a famine, but could not get data. However, the old revenue Shreshtidar (?) Gopalnjee Lal, tells me that in 1783, 1817, 1837, and 1860, the bamboo flowered and in each of those years there was a famine. I fancy the bamboo flowered in 1865-6, in Bengal, if so the coincidence is striking!¹¹

Muir enclosed this letter to Sir John Lawrence, the Viceroy, with the appended note that Drummond was 'entertaining doleful anticipations of famine, from the bamboo having flowered - rather a non sequitar one would say. The popular notion is an odd one. I had never heard of it before.' This shows that Muir, despite his scepticism, considered the mood sufficiently significant to report to Calcutta.¹²

Popular sayings attached great significance to the voices of particular animals and birds. Their calling and wailing at unusual hours, such as the crow, crowing at night and the jackals wailing in the day, was seen as a bad omen and indicating the onset of famine; for example:

*Kaua bole rat mem din mem bole siyar,
kahaim Ghagh aur Bhaddari se niscay parai akal*¹³

¹¹ R. Drummond to W. Muir, Bareilly, 18 May, 1868. (John Lawrence Papers, OIOC, Mss. Eur. F.90, vol. 55, letter, 48).

¹² W. Muir to Sir. John Lawrence, f. 90, v.55, letter 48, Allahabad, 25 May, 1868. (John Lawrence Papers, Mss. Eur. OIOC).

¹³ Srivastava, *Folk Culture*, pp.231-2.

The selling of animals, especially cattle, signified poverty and destitution while rearing denoted luxury and prosperity. Accordingly, the selling and mortgaging of land and animals, a characteristic response of middling and poor peasants to famine, signified utter destitution. This is reflected in the following saying:

*Magh sadi puno divas, candra nirmal joi,
pasu beco kan sangraho, kal hala hal hoye*¹⁴

If there is a clear moon visible in the sky on the day of *Magh shukla poornima*, there will be severe famine and great suffering, animals will have to be sold, and grains will be purchased and hoarded.

*Mangalvari Mavasi, Fagun Chairti joi,
pasu beco kan sangraho, awasi dukali hoi*¹⁵

If *Fagun* and *Chait Amaswaya* (moonless) falls on a Tuesday, there will definitely be a severe famine and, in order to survive, one will have to sell animals to buy and keep aside some grain. In the eastern districts of NWP&O, wolves were not killed as it was popularly believed that whenever a drop of the animal's blood fell there would be scarcity of rain.¹⁶

In the popular perception, there was great awareness of the consequences of famine, reflecting the tremendous dislocation and suffering it caused. Thus we find graphic

¹⁴L.Pandey, *Gagh Aur Bhaddari* (Varanasi, 1957), p.23.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 23.

¹⁶Crooke, *Religion And Folklore*, p. 45.

details of unemployment, mortality, migration, fragmentation of families, increased exploitation at the hands of the *banias*, landlords, and petty bureaucracy, and the ruin of craftsmen and artisans. Indeed these mirrored the direct experiences of the affected people. Conveyed is the unhappiness and frustration of those affected in the face of unemployment and starvation. Consider for example:

*Kal brahman bar dukan parai,
bahu log dukhim binu anna mara*

Ek eikan te bujhi, kaham jai ka kari.

I am left alone, where should I go, what should I do?

But the afflicted people did not give in fatalistically. The need for food led many to break social taboos and cultural norms. These acts were considered morally justified; there was no regret or remorse in committing them as reflected in the following Sanskrit saying:

Bhukhsitah: kimah: nah karoti papamah

(Hunger can drive a person to commit the worst possible sins.)

Another staple of popular memory is migration featuring the destination to where people popularly migrated. Malwa and Gujrat were the regions considered immune from famine, and the economic urgency for migration is reflected in the pleadings of wives to their husbands to go there before the crisis overwhelmed them. Also reflecting the importance of the timing of migration.

*Savan krshna ekadasi, garji megh guharat
tum jao piya Malva, ham jaye Gujrat*¹⁷

*Din ko badal rat ko tare
calo kant jaham divai bare*¹⁸

When the days are cloudy and the nights are starry, it is an indication that there will be severe affliction (famine). The wife urges her husband to migrate to a place where there are chances of survival, especially of the children, while conditions are still under control.

In the popular discourse the suffering and dilemmas such calamities brought on women is also significant. Female representations show that the consequences for women were graver than for men; the predominant imagery being of self-sacrifice and lament, as is expressed in the oral culture and sayings of the time. Migration of their spouse meant separation or even desertion, and therefore fragmentation of the family. They worried that if in the new place their husbands were unable to find fruitful employment, they would have to resort to begging:

*Ghar asadhi ki ashtami, sasi nirmal jo dikh
Piv jayeke Malva, mangtai phirayaim bhikh*¹⁹

Once their husbands had left, the women had to work very hard for survival, and often had no option but to go to their parents for shelter. Underlying this was a confidence in

¹⁷*Gagh Aur Bhaddari*, (Lucknow, 1960), p. 75.

¹⁸ Pandey, *Gagh*, (Varanasi, 1957), p. 44.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 20.

the strength of the moral economy that even during famines, women could turn to their parents for subsistence and shelter, as expressed in the following sayings:

*Savan pahile pancami, jor ki calai bayar,
tum jana piya Malva, ham jayem pitusar*²⁰

*Savan sukla saptami, canda citik karai
ki jal dekho kup mem, ki kamini sis dhara*²¹

Civil war and rebellion also figure as important themes. People knew that famines could give rise to such disturbances, and that once the patience of the masses was exhausted, starving and enraged men would rebel:

*Krishna asadhi pratipada, jo ambar gujrant
to Chatri Chatri larai, niscari kal parant*²²

*Koi jo Sanicar mem ko, koi jo tula ko hoi
raja vighraha praja cana, birlai jivai koye*²³

Nonetheless district officers recorded that suffering people were ‘immoderately sanguine,’²⁴ almost stoic and calm in their assessment of the consequences of famine; a song composed during the 1877-8 famine is essentially woven around the notion of famines as ‘disasters’ and stresses the socio-economic dislocation famines would bring in

²⁰ *Gagh* (Lucknow, 1960), p.78.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid* (Varanasi, 1957), p.16.

²³ *ibid.* p. 14.

²⁴ Revenue Administration Report, 1867-8, no. 246 of 1868, box 17, serial 12, list 19; From G.B.Ward, collector of Meerut, to commissioner, Meerut div, 10 October 1868.

their wake. Yet famine is treated very objectively and the distress to follow is analyzed without any fear. The shared character of the emergency is emphasized. There is an awareness that existing woes will increase greatly, not only because of lack of food and fodder, but also because of increased dependency on exploitative agencies like *banias* and landlords, perceived by the masses as ‘miserly, cunning, selfish, cowardly and blood sucking.’²⁵ They were viewed as the real culprits of the crisis, taking advantage of their own dependents. A typical saying reflects this: “robber kills a person without knowing him, but the *bania* kills the victim knowingly.”²⁶ How much dishonour ordinary people had to bear and how badly they were exploited is also reflected in references that due to lack of food their bodies became shrivelled and their speech halting. Men and women ceased adorning themselves as they were compelled to sell their ornaments, as evident in the following:

*‘Sukhal gat bat bhi latpat - ketak bat ab sahna,
nar nari sab san tiya gal - bikri bahal ab gahna’*²⁷

It should be emphasized that selling of women’s ornaments is considered inauspicious in Indian culture, as it signifies poverty and destitution, and is equated with selling one’s honour. Jewellery and utensils were often the only assets controlled by women, and their loss therefore had special consequences for them.

*Do Asivan do Bhadom, do Asadh ke mach
sona candi bekar, naj beco saha*²⁸

²⁵ Srivastava, *Folk Culture*, p.62.

²⁶ Crooke, *The Native Races of the British Empire: Natives of Northern India* (London, 1907), p. 170;

Srivastava, *Folk Culture*, p.63.

²⁷ Faturilal, ‘Song of the Famine,’ *JAS*, extra number, I, 1880-2, p. 26.

²⁸ Pandey, *Gagh* (Benaras, 1957), p.20.

That is, when in the same year there are two *Sawans* or two *Asarhs*, there will surely be famine. In that case, dear husband, sell the gold and silver in your possession while these still fetch a good price.

*Mang tika, khuti, au, tarki, - nakmuni nahim nak,
katsari, bichya, au jhijhimya, bajubund aur bak.*

Mangtikas (forehead ornaments), *khutis* (ear ornaments), *tarkis* (ear rings) and *nakmunnis* (small noserings) were no longer seen in their proper places; *katsari* (necklaces), *bichia* (toe rings), *jhijhimis* (tinkling toe ornaments), *bajus* and *baks*, (two kinds of armlets), *chandrahars*, *haikals*, *sikaris* (three kinds of necklaces) *satis* (neck rings), *nagrahas* and *pach kharis* (two kinds of armlets), and *lasunis* (bracelets) were all sold off at a discount.²⁹

Popular perception displays an understanding of the causes of famine, in climatic, ritual and moral terms. Steps were taken to placate the gods by praying together, particularly participating in rain making rites; when these failed to produce rain, the drought was explained as punishment for wickedness, particularly the quarreling and disunity of a village Brahmin populace.³⁰ Another popular explanation for the occurrence of famines was the slaughter of the sacred cow, which was projected as an act that aroused the wrath of the gods.³¹ So widespread was this belief that at several places petitions were signed by hundreds of people, and forwarded to the Gov.-Genl. representing that, “ the hands of

²⁹ Faturilal, ‘Song of the famine,’ *JAS*, extra number, I, 1880-2, pp. 26, 30-31.

³⁰ Torry, ‘Anthropology of food,’ p.138.

³¹ Crooke, *he Native Races*, p.170.

an incensed God was upon them, and as they had now at last, after many fruitless attempts, discovered the real cause of this anger of the deity, they trusted we would listen to their prayers and restore plenty and all its blessings.”³² Accordingly, famines were popularly linked with the conquest of the province by the beef-eating British: moreover, famines were associated with high revenue assessments and alien rule and the nationalist economic critique ate its way in popular famine consciousness. A poem titled ‘*Firangiya*’ (The Foreigner) highlights this theme. Under alien rule, the fertile land of India ceased to be productive: grains, wealth, wisdom and prowess deserted the land, which the poet likened to a cremation ground. The once happy and prosperous farmers, who earlier produced million of tons of grain, viewed with resignation their barren lands.

*Sundar sudhar bhumī Bharat ki rahe Rama
Aj uhe bhail masan re firangiya
An, dhan, jal, bal budhi sab nas bhaile,
kavano ko rahal nisan re firangiya.*

*Jehanva thor hi din pahile hi hot rahe,
lakhom man galla aur dhan re firangiya
uhovo par aj rama mathva par hak dhake,
bilkhi ke rovale kisan re firangiya*³³

In the popular perception, the moral duty of a ruler was to provide for the suffering people. Hence, the latter attributed famines to the sins, failures and also ill-luck of their

³² Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, i, p. 260.

³³ M.P. Singh, ‘*Firangiya*’, as quoted by K.D. Upadhyaya, *Bhojpuri Loksahitya Ka Adhyayan* (Varanasi, 1960), p. 357.

rulers “*Raja papi praja nasti*” that is, when rulers sin and misrule the populace suffers.³⁴ Abrogation of moral duty, it was warned, could lead to rebellion.³⁵ This shows a consciousness even amongst the poor Indians of their rights and the will to implement these by force if need be. Such expectations generated fear and nervousness among the colonial officials while dealing with famine crisis. The indifference of the rich to the suffering around them implied the rupturing of moral-cultural norms, a theme reflected in several poems and songs, including the poem of Munshi Durage Sahini, of Jehanabad, in which the poet deplores the indifference of the richer classes to the suffering of famine victims. According to this poem, suffering is aggravated by the railways which, exported the already scarce grains out of the vicinity.³⁶

Oral sources tell us the story of famine from the perspective of the affected - the weak voice in history, usually silent or unheard in the traditional, written sources. It comes to us in their words and conveys their feelings, experiences and interpretations some with an intensely practical basis. This collective memory can form the basis for understanding how the affected people related to famine, and expose their past mental and material world, which is not found in written, records and is therefore otherwise inaccessible.

Propitiation Strategies

³⁴Crook, *The Native Races*, p.170.

³⁵*Zamanah*, (Kanpur), 11 February 1897, p.115.(L/R/5/74,OIOC).

³⁶*Anis - i - Hind*, (Meerut), 24 March 1897, p 226. (L/R/74,OIOC).

Literature on popular responses emphasizes that regardless of culture and environment, suffering people exhibit certain universal tendencies to cope with famine-related stress; these are systematically related and functionally analogous, the variations being conditioned by the intensity and duration of famine, as well as by the economic and food systems of the societies concerned.³⁷ In the Indian context, anthropological studies have examined popular perceptions and responses to famine in Bengal, Rajasthan, Madras, and Gujarat; no significant study, historical or otherwise exists for NWP&O.³⁸ This chapter attempts to construct a model of popular perceptions and responses along the triphasic model which paralleled the alarm, resistance, exhaustion and famishment phases of the famine process.³⁹

Some social scientists have projected the image of the Indian famine sufferers as 'passive' 'inert' and 'fatalistic.' The laziness of the Hindu peasant was supposedly legitimized by the religio-cultural values of obedience, passivity and austerity, and the caste system:

Once enough food has been produced to satisfy their basic nutritional and communal needs, Indian peasants are little interested in expending more labour to produce commodities for market sale, and thereby earn a money income ... if a household has enough land to meet its subsistence needs, all members will reject all wage earning opportunities.⁴⁰

³⁷ Sorokin, *Hunger As A Factor*, p.137.

³⁸ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*; Jodha, 'Famine and Famine Policies,' *EPW* (October, 1975), pp. 1609-1624; Epstein, 'Productive Efficiency' in Firths, (ed), *Themes*, pp. 229-52.

³⁹ H. Selyes, *The Stress of Life* (New York, 1956); 'Jodha,' 'Famine and Famine Policies,' *EPW* (October, 1975), pp.1609-24.

⁴⁰ Seavoy, 'The Indian Famine,' *Famine in Peasant Societies*, p. 259.

Seavoy's cultural interpretation ignores evidence such as the ancient social code of *Appadharma*, which prescribed the laying aside of cultural taboos, and put a premium on energetic action, *dana* (charity), *tapa* (austerity), and sacrifice on the part of people, community, and rulers to combat famines. *Arthashastra*, even justified the robbing of the rich to subsist during famine.⁴¹ In the case of the NWP&O, the recognition of the struggle for food was recorded by district officers and famine administrators, and later by the Famine Code, as well as scholars including Sleeman, William Digby, Vaughan Nash, William Crooke. They noted the willingness of the needy to work hard and take unaccustomed risks. Famine did take a heavy toll on life, but not before the victims had striven and struggled for life and sustenance. In what follows I examine the popular perceptions and the activities of the affected people, and the nature of these activities.

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Religious and cultural adaptations

It was widely believed that famines occurred because of divine wrath and mystical disturbances. The fourteenth century famine in northern India was for generations recalled as the *Durga Devi* famine as it was popularly believed to be the result of the wrath of the Hindu goddess *Durga*. Arnold argues that famines were interpreted as "signs and portents having a significance far beyond the phenomena itself."⁴² There was increased performance of and participation in religious rites and white magic to ward off demons, evils and curses, and bring rain by appeasing the rain God on a community and

⁴¹ S. Shastry, (translation), *Arthashastra*, 4 book (1967), pp. 237-8.

⁴² Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 13.

village basis, many of these being organized by Christian missionaries, who preached that famines were divinely ordained to punish the infidels.⁴³

Crooke, gives elaborate descriptions of some of these white magic and rain making rituals concerned with promoting community interests. In a most interesting rain making rite in NWP&O, women went at night with a plough in the fields, stripped off all their garments, and dragged the plough some distance into the soil, with invocations to the rain God to remove the drought and permit regular ploughing to proceed. These ceremonies were elaborately organized and conducted in strict privacy, with no male intrusion. It was believed that male presence would break the effect of the spell. Women were the sole participants because their fertility and re-productiveness were inter-linked. Such a ceremony was performed at Chunar, in Mirzapur district, on 24 July 1892, after the prolonged failure of rains. Between 9 and 10 pm. a barber's wife went from door to door and invited women to join the ploughing. They collected in a field from which all men were excluded, stripped off their garments, and then two of them were yoked to a plough like oxen, while a third held the handle. The removing of clothes was regarded as an extreme act of submission to the deity they addressed.⁴⁴ Thus commenced their ploughing operations. The woman who held the plough shouted "Oh mother earth! bring parched grain, water and chaff. Our stomachs are breaking to pieces from hunger and thirst." When the mock ploughing stopped the landlord and the village accountant came and laid down some grain, water and chaff in the field. Crooke recorded that after the

⁴³See Appendix,1, pp. 432-3.

⁴⁴Crooke, *An Introduction to Popular Religion And Folklore Of Northern India*, i (London, 1896), pp.71-2; *The Native Races*, p.250;

ceremony the weather changed and there were plentiful showers.⁴⁵ Reports of such ceremonies being performed at Gorakhpur were also received.⁴⁶ Similarly, at the Sarahaul festival, an Oraon priest visited each house and was doused with water by the women, the intention being to secure abundant rain.⁴⁷ At some places, a *Brahmin* or *fakir* was immersed up to the lips in a tank, and made to invoke the rain god, until the god responded with a downpour.⁴⁸ These ceremonies gave a crucial place to *Brahmins*, who were equated with piety; it was believed that sacrifices and sufferings of holy men moved the Gods to relent. At other places the *lingam* image of *Siva* was doused with water; also water was poured on the *samadhi* (grave) of a *Brahmin* bachelor.⁴⁹ In Mirzapur in 1893, people contributed to pay labourers who brought water to pour on the *Shivlinga*, as it was believed that *Shiv* was a thirsty deity and had to be kept continuously moist and cool to avoid drought.⁵⁰ Yet another device was to seize the blacksmith's anvil and pitch it into a well or village tank. The connection was between wells and rainfall.⁵¹ Even to date these ceremonies are performed even as famine was being anticipated.⁵²

Such practices indicate the popular belief in supernatural forces to solve human problems. They also reflect the anxiety of farmers for good crops which depended on adequate rain. There was a fear that if these rituals were not observed, conditions might worsen. The voluntary participation of entire villages, various castes and communities,

⁴⁵ Crooke, *Religion and Folklore*, i, p.72.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.69.

⁴⁷ Crooke, *The Native Races*, p. 250.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.251; *Religion and Folklore*, p.i, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Crooke, *The Native Races*, p.250; *Religion and Folklore*, i, p.76.

⁵⁰ Crook, *Religion and Folklore*, i, p. 76

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.74.

⁵² *Times of India*, 20-31 July 2004, reported many such ceremonies performed in states anticipating famines.

in such collective activities demonstrates that for the sake of collective good and common interests, social and cultural inequalities were set aside.

If such strategies did not yield the desired result, they were abandoned, especially if they involved offerings,- both as a measure of economy and also as a reflection of the belief that famine would now run its course. Evidence indicates that caste distinctions lost their rigidity and, many religious norms and prohibitions were set aside in the struggle for food. Such digressions, interestingly, had the sanction of religious authorities; in the legal code of *Manu*, acts committed in a state of starvation and hunger are excusable. Forbes noted, that during the 1783 famine, “Religious boundaries were annihilated, and castes and sects were seen to devour what their tenets taught them to respect, or abhor.”⁵³ Such an example is cited by Major Conran, the biographer of Capt..Wheler. During the 1896-7 famine, the collector of Allahabad recorded that a friend of his killed a *nilghai*, and was immediately surrounded by begging *Brahmins*.⁵⁴ *Brahmins* who rejected their own cooked food if the defiled Christian came too near were seen stealing scraps of food from the dogs.⁵⁵ Another official, Capt. Pitcher, added to the curiosities of the food controversy, when he recorded coming across a *Chamar* child, about two years old, sucking milk from the dugs of a pariah bitch that had pupped. Two of the child’s relatives were looking on unconcerned.⁵⁶ In Rajasthan it was reported that during famines Hindus took to eating beef and thence onward became numbered amongst the non- Hindu

⁵³ J.Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, p.60.

⁵⁴ *Englishman*, 7 June 1897, pp. 57-8.

⁵⁵ Girdlestone, *Report*, pp.57-8.

⁵⁶ *Report On the Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78 & 79, Pitcher, Report*, p.326.

tribes of the jungles.⁵⁷ Famines, to some extent, became social levellers; barriers of caste and creed, which, segmented society were temporarily broken and viewed to be morally right.

The setting aside of cultural norms was also rationalized on economic and medical grounds. The disposal of the dead was an important matter but funeral rites of both Hindus and Muslims were officially and popularly set aside during the 1837-8 famine. At Agra the daily burials by the police averaged nearly four hundred- still numerous dead were found lying near the river and alongside roads.⁵⁸ The Agra magistrate rationalized that due to excessive mortality, the usual death rites were to be done away with as a economic measure. He instead ordered mass cremations.

To burn them in the usual manner is now unpalpable, but I believe were they to be put in a quick lime pit, they would be effectively destroyed without any apprehension from malaria or hurting the feelings of the community.⁵⁹

He further observed, “pits might be instituted and heated at a comparatively small expense and their bodies carried to them.”⁶⁰ At Kanpur, resourceless people left their dead by the roadsides or pushed them behind bushes or into the river, which became so studded with corpses that, people ceased to drink its water or eat its fish despite severe hunger; special ‘*kungla* guards,’ were employed to push corpses down the river and bring those left on the wayside for disposal.⁶¹ Such was the profusion of the dead that the

⁵⁷ IFC Report, 1880, ‘Miscellaneous Papers Bearing Upon the Condition of the Country and the People Of India,’ Appendix 1, p.118.

⁵⁸ B.Smith, Report, 1A, 1860, pp. 30-1.

⁵⁹ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 53, serial 5, list.1; to Mansel, magistrate ,Agra, from the commissioner, Agra Div, 20 April 1838.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Girdlestone, Report, p.50.

Commander-in-Chief of the army stationed at Simla, ordered the Kanpur division on 6 April 1838, to hire a small establishment with boats, exclusively for removing or throwing ashore, some distance below the station, the numerous dead bodies which had collected on the river bank, for as long as necessary.⁶² This has close parallels with the Irish famine, where deaths became so common that there was paucity of resources for proper burials. At Louisburgh in Mayo, in January 1847, there were coffinless burials, corpses interred in but a handful of shroud. At Skibereen, such was the stress on resources that a reusable coffin with wheels was constructed to convey the bodies wrapped, in calico bags, quickly to the churchyard.⁶³

Not only religious rituals but traditional religion itself was forsaken by the sufferers, for the sake of food. During the four case study famines, Christian missions had food, material resources, and a measure of control over relief operations; as a result a large number of non-Christians took to participation in Christian rituals, and used their membership of the Church as a qualification to receive food.⁶⁴ Again, this has parallels in the Irish famine, where the Protestant Church offered relief on the condition that suffering people join their denomination, a practice that came to be dubbed as 'souperism' because of the acceptance of money and soup in exchange for religious affiliation.

⁶² B. Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.31 fn .

⁶³ T. P.O' Neil, 'The Organisation and Administration of Relief', 1845-52, in R.D. Edwards, T.D. Williams, (eds). *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History* (Dublin, 1956), pp. 232 -33.

⁶⁴ See.chs.VI,VII.

Once famine was over, affected people reverted to traditional cultural norms. In fact the breaking of taboos was regretted, and atonement's made; for example, after the 1866 Orissa famine, the question of loss of caste arose in reference to people who had resided at the poor houses and relief works where caste rules were not observed. The issue was deliberated upon by learned *Brahmins*. Their verdict was that, since food was taken at the poor houses and relief centres to save life, there could be no permanent loss of caste. A simple '*prayaschit*' (atonement) was enjoined to those wanting to be accepted back into the caste fold. Nonetheless the prejudices against those people remained.⁶⁵ Similarly, it was reported that the practice of ex-communicating those who went to poor houses was resorted to by the lower castes, particularly *Ahirs*, *Kurmis*, *Julahas*, *Koris*, *Kahars* and even the *Jatya Chamar*. The sole exception were '*Chammar Chamars*.'⁶⁶ In one instance, the *Kurmis* even resorted to ex-communicating those members of their caste who had been to the relief works.⁶⁷ Those who converted were subjected to harassment and ridicule and socially ostracized. They were given the epithet of 'rice Christians,' for allegedly converting for a bowl of rice.

Dietary changes

By piecing together scattered references in famine reports, a model of the processes of physiological and economic resistance and changes in consumption patterns emerge, which parallels the triphasic model of famine development. Worth mentioning are the

⁶⁵Geddes, *Report*, p.173.

⁶⁶*Report On the Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877&78-79, Pitcher, Report*, p.322-23.

⁶⁷*ibid.* p.323.

similarities between the resistance offered by victims in Rajasthan, NWP&O and elsewhere in the world.

In the initial phase of famine coping strategies focused on the domestic sphere. There was a perceptible fall in standards of living; affected people economized on diet, by reducing the number of daily meals, the amount of intake and diluting the quality of food. Changes included a shift from solid to more liquid diet, the staple food being replaced with cheaper alternatives, as also a reduction in the quantity of food consumed.⁶⁸ Some subsisted on just one meal a day; anything considered 'luxury' was abandoned. For example, liquor was liberally consumed during normal times. With the onset of famines a sharp fall in its consumption and sale was recorded in gallons since 1880's. Figures show that at the beginning of the 1890s, consumption was recorded at 11,00,000; but with the onset of scarcity in 1894-5, the issue of liquor fell to a mere one million gallon. In 1896-7, the liquor issues were recorded at less than 700,000 gallons. In 1898-9, a year of recovery, liquor consumption picked up and was recorded at 11,00,000 gallons; in 1900-1, it exceeded over 1.25 million.⁶⁹ Officials observed the marked decline if not stoppage of trade in all articles except grains. A fall in the consumption of tobacco, opium, hemp, drugs and luxuries like clarified butter, milk, sugar and vegetables was noted though accurate statistics for these are unavailable.⁷⁰ Demand for cloth ceased, and weavers manufacturing for local markets were reduced to beggary; but those catering to

⁶⁸ *A Collection of Papers Connected with an Inquiry Into the Condition of the Lower Classes Of the Population Especially in the Agricultural Tracts of the NWP&O, 1887-88*, pp. 6-10, 13, 31.

⁶⁹ Scarcity deptt, August 1902, f. 488; *Decennial Report On the Material Condition of the People of United Provinces of Agra and Oudh During the Ten Years Ending 1901-2*, p.20.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* pp.19-20.

foreign markets were hardly affected. For example the export of fabrics abroad from Shahjehanpur and Folklor declined by twenty-five per cent only. It illustrates the connection between pressure of famine and the economic vulnerability of indigenous markets.⁷¹ Once famine was over, as noted during 1887-8, demand for cloth internally increased perceptibly.⁷²

The collector of Kanpur noted that the escalation in grain prices compelled considerable sections of the population to reduce their daily ration.⁷³ During 1837-8 wheat sold at ten *seers* per rupee at Banda, and its consumption was confined to the very wealthy.⁷⁴ It was reported from Rohilkhund that wheat and rice, as staple foods were replaced by gram and barley, with sugarcane, the green tops of gram, *sag*, and various roots substituting for vegetables. Fruits from *Gular*, *bargad*, *pipar* and, *pakar* trees substituted for those usually consumed. In normal years vegetables and *sag* were prepared with onions, garlic, ginger, chillies, cumins and cardmoms; during famines district officers noted that *sag* and wild leaves were boiled, salt added and, eaten with or without coarse grained *rotis*. If suffering people could get four *chittacks* of grain a day they could survive, while eight *chittacks* was considered comfortable.

Also, needy cultivators repeatedly sowed and planted inferior crops. High-value crops requiring careful watering and other infrastructural inputs such as sugarcane, rice and wheat, were replaced by subsistence crops like *jwar*, *bajra*, pulses, gram, or a mix of

⁷¹ IFC.1880, Appendix, iv, chapter ii, views of Kennedy, p.20. UPSAL.

⁷² A Collection Of Papers, p.19.

⁷³ *ibid.* p.31.

⁷⁴ Girdlestone, Report, p.43.

them; and later, by *sag* and even wild leaves. The cultivation of these inferior or reserve crops was encouraged by authorities even during 1896-7, and regarded as a coping measure. For instance, MacDonnell informed Viceroy Elgin in 1896:

I have gone in largely for pushing for cultivation of root crops, potatoes, carrots, and have bought up the seeds I could find for distribution in *tucavee* (advances recoverable). Carrots are much liked.⁷⁵

In Agra, during 1877-8 famine, the demand for field labourers ceased and many retrenched labourers eked out a living by gathering and grass roots for sale for fodder was dear. Where there were jungles the sale of wood was a great resource. In one village *Chamars* were seen collecting thislets (*satyanasi*), which grew in abundance; its seed was crushed to produce an excellent variety of oil, resembling mustard oil, for sale.⁷⁶ This did not require any capital input and provided basic subsistence.

As famine matured, there was chronic underfeeding: availability of food from familiar sources dwindled; hungry people wandered in search of unconventional food, exploring unexploited sources, and there was competition even for these. Wild food consumption assumed importance. Collection of *bargud*, *bathua*, *semul*, leaves, roots and barks of various trees, seeds, wild plants and fruits became an important activity. During 1837-8 *singhara* and the bark of wild fig were dried and pounded into *chappatis* which, were widely consumed.⁷⁷ Dried *Mohowa*, not normally consumed was selling at six pice a *ser* at Hamirpur as noted by Adams, Deputy. Collector of Hamirpur; he observed in July 1869:

⁷⁵MacDonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896, p.22. (Ms.Emg.hist.C.353).

⁷⁶ *Report On the Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Roberts, Report*, p.381.

⁷⁷ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 50.

Grain has to a large extent disappeared as the chief staple of diet of the poorest classes, and for sometime past, even those above the poorest have largely substituted other things for it. It has been replaced by things such as the refuse of the mohowa, (not the flower but the fruit, which is not usually eaten here) and the stems and the roots of the lotus, and other water plants, and in some villages the bark of the burgud and semul. The poorer Mahommedans have also largely eaten of the flesh of the starving cattle, which have been brought for a nominal price and slaughtered, and the beef is the cheapest food they can obtain, costing only one pice for two sers or more; grain sells at 12 sers for the rupee.⁷⁸

During the 1837-8 and 1860-1 famines, in the western Rohilkhund, and some parts of Meerut division, hungry people were forced to use the stones of the mango fruit as food.⁷⁹ In Mathura, starving people collected certain description of nutritious grass seeds for consumption.⁸⁰ The roots of the lotus were eagerly sought after in Lalitpur, even though they grew at the mud bottom of tanks and were difficult to reach, as noted by Lloyd, commissioner of Jhansi division, during the 1868-9 famine.⁸¹ Hungry people ate nuts, weeds and mango kernels ground into flour, whilst infants were fed on mango fruit, which had cropped in abundance.⁸² During 1896-7 too various fruits, roots and edible grass seeds were fully utilized by the starving.⁸³ The district officers themselves did not regard consumption of these as unexpected or abnormal during famines, as is reflected in this comment of the collector of Allahabad, in a confidential report dated 22 July 1869: "The rains having set in, the people would be able to collect wild bulbs and edible roots

⁷⁸ Henvey Report, p. 55.

⁷⁹ Srivastava, *Famines*, p.31.

⁸⁰ Revenue Administration Report, 1860-1, no. 84 of 1861, box 10, serial 5, list 19; from H.D. Robertson offg. collector of Mathura, to G.Y. Harvey, commissioner, Agra div, 3 October 1861.

⁸¹ Henvey Report, p.64.

⁸² *ibid.* p.32 fn.

⁸³ *A Collection of Papers Connected With An Inquiry*, p.31.

for fruits.”⁸⁴ Worldwide governments are known to have supplied unconventional “famine meals” to feed their starving populations: famine foods sold in rural Mozambique and Uganda in 1943 consisted of naturally occurring plants, fruits and, berries which were not normally consumed.⁸⁵

At the terminal stages of famine, there was sustained deprivation,-even these unconventional foods were no longer available. Foraging for yet more unconventional,wild food became an important economic activity; even though the consumption of some of these was medically dangerous often resulting in death or life long debilitation. For example, in Banda and Mirzapur, Barah and Khairagarh in Allahabad district, poor people suffered from paralysis after eating a poisonous grain called *Kesree dal*.⁸⁶ By 1896-7, with the expansion in the scope of relief, the sale of *Kesree dal* was officially forbidden; but such was the demand that it continued to be grown as a regular crop and was consumed by the starving without caring for the adverse consequences. Reportedly even in current times this *dal* is consumed during famines. The fall out was that there was such a increase of paralytic cripples that poor houses had to be specially established for sheltering them. Such houses were established at Sheorajpur, Surwal, in Barah, Khera and Koraon and Meja in Khyragrah, and were supported by contributions from wealthy landlords. H.M. Court wrote of the Meja poor house:

⁸⁴Henvey, *Report*, p.43.

⁸⁵ It was not possible to import food due to war conditions, the only surplus available in the country were some grains and cassava. Arrangements were made to purchase dried cassava and this and the grain were milled and mixed into a meal. Its protein content was further increased on the advice of the medical authorities, by the inclusion of a percentage of ground oil cake derived from the groundnut and sesame. This meal was sold in the distressed areas and saved many lives. See G.B. Masefield, *Famine Its Prevention and Relief* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 68-9.

⁸⁶Henvey, *Report*, pp. 49-50.

The rooms ...are filled with beings, some of whom are unable to move except on their hands and knees, and that with difficulty; the best of them are scarcely able to walk with aid of crutches. They are chiefly male adults, women and children...they form but a small percentage of those afflicted by paralysis...by poverty and disease...most of them are homeless and friendless.⁸⁷

In Agra division, starving people eagerly consumed a weed called '*Polanga*,' which was so deleterious that even cattle would not eat it. Observers commented: "Many people died of painful swelling of the whole body, induced apparently by the inferior diet they had been using."⁸⁸ In Rohilkhund, starving people were reportedly subsisting on herbs, wild leaves, pounded bark and roots mixed with grain, and made into a chappati of sorts and eaten with green leaves treated as "*sag*," which in the course of time produced diarrhoea, dysentery, and other diseases.⁸⁹ Such conditions created social unrest and instability. In desperation the needy exploited common and private property resources. Officials argued that the reserved forests and lands should be thrown open to the poor for the gathering of wild foods; in fact, during the 1896-7 famine, affected people petitioned and demanded that this be done as a matter of right.⁹⁰

Resource resistance

The triphasic model of economic resistance was primarily geared towards preservation of productive assets. This included measures such as borrowing money, mortgaging, and

⁸⁷ *ibid.* pp.50-1.

⁸⁸ *Report On The Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Roberts, Report*, p.380.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p.42.

⁹⁰ See pp.332-6.

then selling non- productive assets and lastly productive assets like cattle, implements, and land in a falling market. In the popular perception the selling of jewellery, utensils and furniture, while these fetched a remunerative price, is an important theme of resistance. Women urged their husbands, even while famine was apprehended, to dispose of jewellery and other valuables like utensils and furniture, while these fetched a good price; and to buy and hoard grains, while they were available at reasonable prices. Selling these at mature stages of famine meant disposing them at throwaway prices, and buying grain very dear. Similarly, in early 1896, extensive selling of jewellery was reported by Ferrad, collector of Banda:

There is no credit available in the district, and excessive pressure of land revenue would be ineffectual. Most of the jewellery is already with the pawn- brokers, and the stock commands no price in the market.⁹¹

It was also usual to seek additional jobs to supplement income, like working on communal facilities such as digging *kuccha* wells, and laying roads, and borrowing inferior grains like *jowar*, *maize*, *bajra*, and pulses to be paid back with interest within a stipulated time period, or sometimes with physical labour. The result was that affected households paid a very high price for bare subsistence. However, the postponement of mortgaging and selling of land, implements and cattle till the last, the preference for mortgaging rather than sale, demonstrates that the aim of adjustment mechanisms was the preservation of current and future sources of subsistence. The relief policy, with its aim of preserving minimal levels of sustenance and, from 1868 prevention of starvation deaths, did not complement popular adjustment mechanisms or their aims.

⁹¹*Report of the Revenue Administration, 1895-6, NWP&O*, p. 13.

The second stage of famine was crucial in the economic resistance; by then distress deepened, food prices rose unchecked, and individuals were driven to raise cash to purchase food. Amidst sinking family support, they found themselves at the mercy of outside agencies like moneylenders, who advanced loans at high interest rates. Affected people anxious to keep their family alive sold their agricultural implements, animals and livestock. During the 1837-8 for instance, artisans disposed of their tools at a quarter of the cost price in Kanpur district.⁹² The customary demand for cloth ceased to be a means of support for weavers; high prices induced by famine further depressed their condition. So widespread was the selling of looms that it attracted the attention of Baird Smith during the 1860-1 famine. As a result of his recommendations special measures for relief to artisans and craftsmen, especially weavers, was provided for in the 1880 Famine Code. Newspapers reported currency becoming scarce at Gorakhpur, and needy people parting with their gold and silver jewellery at half their value.⁹³ *Banias* and moneylenders benefited by acquiring jewellery, utensils and other valuables at throwaway prices. Popular discourse reinforces this. The widespread alienation of land during famine and the long term structural changes it brought in NWP Society have been noted.⁹⁴

Cattle mortality

Famine reports also refer to strategies for retention of livestock; *ryots* knew that their family's welfare depended on their ability to retain their piece of land and keep their

⁹² Girdlestone, *Report*, p.50.

⁹³ *Alwaqt*, (Gorakhpur), 17 February 1897, p. 152. (L/R/5/74, OiOC)

⁹⁴ see pp. 98-9, 417-21.

livestock alive, especially bullocks, whose loss meant a permanent and expensive loss of productive output. During 1837-8, cattle reportedly died by the hundreds at Kanpur.⁹⁵ During 1860-1 Baird Smith noted the heavy mortality of cattle, bullocks and other animals. In Meerut alone of the estimated 80,000 pair of cattle, 40,000 perished.⁹⁶ The loss of cattle through death and sale is an important feature of the famines, especially 1868 when,

Want of grass and fodder for the cattle is at present the chief cause of distress. Cultivators are selling their bullocks for anything they can get, and many are leaving their villages in search of food for them.⁹⁷

Lack of fodder in Mathura drove many to strip the trees of their leaves and bark to sustain their cattle, or drive them as far as to Rohilkhand or, sell them at low prices to butchers.⁹⁸ It is estimated that 500, 000 pairs of cattle died or were sold, representing at moderate estimate, a loss of about £500, 000 and the power of cultivating no less than two million acres.⁹⁹ From Hamirpur it was reported that starvation claimed cattle in great numbers, seventy-five per cent deaths being the result of cowpox.¹⁰⁰ By July 1869, more than 4,520 head of cattle had perished in Mahoba alone.¹⁰¹ The total losses at Hamirpur were 85, 335 or twenty per cent of the whole stock of the district.¹⁰² In Jhansi, of the estimated 300,000 pair of cattle, 150,000 perished.¹⁰³ During the 1877-8 famine at Aligarh, there was severe loss of cattle as they were sold at ruinously low prices because of lack of

⁹⁵ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 46.

⁹⁶ B. Smith, *Report*, i, p. 24.

⁹⁷ Misl no. 261, part 11; Prospects of the Harvest and Prices Current; From H.M. Chase, Collector of Etawah, to the Secretary to the Government, NWP, 11 September 1868.

⁹⁸ Henvey, *Report*, p. 19.

⁹⁹ *ibid.* p. 126.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 55 fn.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 55.

¹⁰² *ibid.* p. 55.

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p. 72.

fodder. The fall was roughly estimated at 34, 450 or 28.7 per cent of the district stock.¹⁰⁴

Table.15 shows the loss of cattle by death and sale during the 1868- 9 famine.

Table. 15

District.	Cattle loss by death and sale.	Percentage of the stock.
Ajmer	171, 648	59%
Jhansi	150, 000	50%
Lalitpur	102, 603	44%
Jalaun	102,603	40%
Saharanpur	265, 433	29%
Mathura	103, 921	29%
Agra	105, 932	22%
Hamirpur	85, 335	20%
Bijnor	31, 000	11%
Etah	35, 000	11%
Moradabad	60, 000	10%
Banda	50, 122.	7%.

Source: Henvey,*Report*, p.126.

The loss of cattle and bullocks had long-term implications; it meant a loss or reduction in agricultural output; even among cattle that did survive, non-conception due to

¹⁰⁴*Report of the Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-8 &9, p. 38.*

underfeeding during famines meant low or no calving rates in normal years, further reducing the productive capacity of livestock enterprise. Not to mention reduced yields and short lactation periods of milking animals.

Of no less Importance is the question of recovery and future vulnerability of dues and loans. While recovery in terms of harvests, grain stocks, and obtaining credit, may have been comparatively easy for peasants in the post- famine years, repayment of loans and replacement of animals and agricultural implements were difficult, while getting back land that had been mortgaged or sold was virtually impossible. With the commencement of rains agricultural activities resumed, but not to pre-famine levels as the majority of sufferers- particularly low cultivating castes, agricultural labourers, artisans, having lost their implements and productive resources lacked purchasing power; demand for the services of non-agricultural labourers and artisans, did not immediately pick up. The process of recoupment of assets was uncertain and heavily weighed against the poor peasants. It meant paying exorbitantly. Such peasants were therefore caught in a cycle of buying dear, selling cheap and then repurchasing at high prices. Productivity reducing impact was many-sided and had long-term implications. Loss of draft power during famines resulted in steep fall in production due to non- cultivation of cultivable land, delayed sowing and adoption of less intensive methods of cultivation in normal years. Suffering people, therefore, kept sliding down the economic ladder. This is reflected in transition into lower status occupations, for example, those who had a small piece of land became share-croppers, and the share-croppers became casual and attached field labourers. Officers observed that if the district and population was large, recovery was

quicker. But in small districts like Jhansi and Lalitpur, desertion and migration of the already scanty population left large tracts of land uncultivated for years, making recovery of agricultural prosperity difficult, as evident in the aftermath of the 1837-8 and 1868-9 famines.¹⁰⁵ Here even after a decade the districts had not recovered from the effects of the 1868-9 famine. What is important in this analysis is that famines not only perpetuated but also reinforced existing inequalities in society, and so brought to the fore the latent conflicts and contradictions of NWP&O society. These findings complement those of Arnold, who found that famines were seldom a leveller of existing disparities and inequalities.

Migration

Migration has been a constant response to famine world over. Studies on famine-related migration and its implications have not been carried out for NWP&O, even though evidence suggest that there was extensive movement of people and consequent dislocation and suffering. District officials and famine administrators noted that, “ In all times the population of India has been notable for its mobility under pressure, whether personal or fiscal. When crushed under a bad season, it intuitively seeks the same form of relief ”¹⁰⁶ and that “ ... emigration was the first resource of the starving multitude.”¹⁰⁷ The Famine Code cited unusual and aimless wandering of herds of people as diagnostic of an approaching famine. Habib, in his study of pre-colonial India, hints at the crucial

¹⁰⁵ *IFC.Report*, 1880, Miscellaneous Condition, ‘ The After Effects of Famine On the Country,’ reply of Story, p. 355.

¹⁰⁶ B.Smith, *Report*, i, p.20.

¹⁰⁷ *Girdlestone Report*, p. 58

social implications of the phenomenon. “The capacity and mobility on the part of the peasant ... is one of the most striking features of the social and economic life of the times. It was the peasant’s first answer to famine or man’s oppression.”¹⁰⁸ These reports, however, do not go into the details of the number of people who migrated, the state of their well-being, mental and physical health, gender, age, class, and the kind of occupations migrants originally had and were able to secure after migration. One can infer all this from oral and empirical evidence. The same was the case in Ireland, where migration overseas has acquired a crucial place in famine historiography.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, during the 1920-1 famine in Russia, the inhabitants around the Volga river fled in large numbers and descended like “an avalanche.” It was recorded that “A catastrophic migration of the starving population takes place. Whole villages move from their homes.”¹¹⁰

Though hunger and poverty were the most cogent and common reasons for migration, evidence suggests that for most the decision to migrate was based on chances of good economic conditions elsewhere, as reflected in the proverbs and sayings of the time.¹¹¹ Impelling such migration was the peasant’s inability to pay over-assessed land revenue on time, rejection of their pleas for suspension and remission of revenue, Officials

¹⁰⁸ I.Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (London, 1963), p. 117.

¹⁰⁹ Many landlords like Sir John Walsh, Lord Monsell, Lord Stanley looked upon it as an opportunity to get rid in a humane and satisfactory manner of the cottiers and establishing peace and tranquillity on their estates. See O’ Macdonagh, ‘Irish Emigration to the United States Of America, and the British Colonies During the Great Famine,’ in Edwards, and Williams, (eds). *The Great Famine, Studies in Irish History*, p. 334.

¹¹⁰ Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor*, p.197.

¹¹¹ See above, pp.292-3.

advised leniency, as fear of government exactions and demands would drive away the remaining cultivators:

The cattle scantily fed on the leaves of the trees have died in hundreds, villages have become depopulated by famine and emigration, and at the present time immense tracts of land remain fallow, there being neither men nor cattle left to cultivate the ground.¹¹²

Yet other compulsions may have been the drying up of credit, the need to avoid harassment and exploitation, which heightened with the onset of famines, to save cattle from perishing as fodder and water became scarce or unavailable, as during the 1868-9 famine.

The timing and direction of migration was important. Evidence indicates the drift of the people from Bundelkhund was towards Malwa and Gujrat while from the southern parts of the Gangetic valley it was towards the *terai* region.¹¹³ Malwa and Gujarat, were the lands of plenty and prosperity where the crops never failed as reflected in popular perceptions; a couplet attributed to Sahdeo, one of the five Pandava brothers of the *Mahabaharata*: “If you hear not the thunder on such and such a night, you, father, go to Malwa and I to Gujarat.”¹¹⁴

1837-8

¹¹² Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, February 1838, 140; from the offg. commissioner, Allahabad div, to Lowther offg. commissioner of Revenue, Allahabad, 19 February 1838.

¹¹³ *Report of the Condition of the People and the Country of India*, p.116.

¹¹⁴ Sleeman, *Rambles*, i, p.193.

The 1837-8 famine saw migration at a level unmatched during any of the three subsequent famines. Migration was especially extensive from Hamirpur, Kalpi, Banda, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Agra, Mathura, and Kanpur. However, in the absence of any systematic compilation of statistical data, it is impossible to know the numbers who migrated or died in the process. Interestingly, there is no mention of migration organized along caste, village or even religious lines. Extensive movement of people was recorded from Bundelkhund. Hamirpur witnessed continuous migration from 1833-4, and the trend continued unabated till 1837-8. According to Muir, who later compiled the settlement report, in the former famine “35 villages were desolated in Julalpur, and by both 72 in Kalpi and Hamirpur, were laid waste, and left without an inhabitant.”¹¹⁵ The collector of Hamirpur noted that a number of estates in this *zillah* were in deplorable condition, as some of them had been entirely deserted.¹¹⁶ The officiating magistrate of Etawah observed with alarm that “throughout 3/4 of this district, the villages are nearly depopulated of the inferior classes, and everywhere a great proportion of the cultivators have been driven from their homes from the impossibility of continuing their only mode of subsistence.”¹¹⁷ These multitudes flocked towards Kanpur, in a manner that baffled all efforts to afford employment and support.¹¹⁸ Such was the extent of migration and desertion from Etawah that when estates that were heavily in arrears were put up for sale, there were hardly any bidders and the government could not obtain a satisfactory price

¹¹⁵Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 60.

¹¹⁶Procs. of the Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP&O, 1838, 123; To Lowther, commissioner of Allahabad div, from I.W. Taunton, collector of Hamirpur, 29 May 1838, p. 150.

¹¹⁷Pre-Mutiny, commissioners office, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8; vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner of the Agra div, from I. Cummine, offg. magistrate, Etawah, 29 March 1838.

¹¹⁸Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial 1837- 8; vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; to Cummine, from Thomason, offg. secretary to the Gov.-Genl. 18 March 1838.

for them.¹¹⁹ From Kanpur also, there were reports of heavy migration and mortality especially in *bhaichara* and *pattidari* villages. Records indicate extensive migration from Mathura and Farrukhabad as well, with suffering people fleeing their villages in quest of food.¹²⁰ From Fatehgarh, suffering people from Jugnair and Khyragarh deserted their villages en masse. The officiating commissioner noted:

The extent to which the desertion and emigration has taken place in all the districts excites apprehension for the future prosperity of the villages, all but the *zamindars* and their immediate family, the aged who could not travel, and the *banias*, had moved off¹²¹

Given the severe distress there should have been a clamour for jobs, but in certain villages and *parganas* of Agra, so extensive was the migration that officials could not get enough people for essential tasks.¹²² The collectors of Gurgaon and Ferozpur similarly noted that thousands of affected people had emigrated to Malwa and still continued to do so.¹²³

1860-1

During the 1860-1 famine, Baird Smith recorded extensive movements of population. He noted:

¹¹⁹Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial 1837 -8, To the offg. commisssioner, revenue, from the collector of Etawah, 20 December 1838.

¹²⁰ Board collections, E/4/160, judicial and rev depts, 16, October- December 1837, 16 October 1837; Narrative of the procds of the Lt.-Gov. NWP, during the third quarter of 1837.

¹²¹Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP, April 1838, 117; from the offg. commissioner Agra div, to Hamilton, 31 March 1838, p. 223..

¹²²Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP, February 1838, 114; to Thomason, offg. Secretary to the Lt-Gov. NWP. Agra, from Lowther, offg. commissioner, Allahabad, 27 December 1837, p.729.

¹²³Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP. 1838, 123, to Metcalfe, commissioner of Delhi, from the Dy.- collector. of Ferozpur, 17 June 1838, p. 70.

even before any special arrangements for their relief had been made, the people of the famine tract had adopted their traditional course, and were streaming out of the bad districts into those more or less near in which the crops had been good, and food grain was cheap.¹²⁴

Yet, this large-scale movement of suffering people may not have been as extensive as in 1837-8. While varying migration figures are cited by different scholars, Baird Smith estimated the number at about 500,000, including 120,000, from the western districts, 255,000 from the central districts of the lower Doab, 125,000 from the eastern districts.¹²⁵ Loveday, however, estimated the total emigration at only 160,000. But this figure is disputed by Srivastava, who calculates that about 500,000 migrated from the three worst affected tracts. Another 160,000 emigrated into canal villages; that is, a total of 660,000 shifted from one place to another.¹²⁶ The migration was heaviest from Mathura and Aligarh. Smith recorded, "The country seemed denuded of inhabitants and the emigration had been extensive .. it was the labouring classes that were thrown out of 2/3 of their usual fields of employment, and on them the burden fell heaviest." From Meerut and Bulandshashar, cultivators fled in large numbers to Malwa, Gwalior, and Awadh.¹²⁷ From Saharanpur too, thousands emigrated to Malwa and further east where there was hope of employment and cheaper food. From Aligarh there was heavy migration to Rohilkhund and Rajasthan.¹²⁸

1867-8

¹²⁴B.Smith, *Report*, i, p. 23.

¹²⁵*IFC Report, 1880-5, iii*, pp.36-7; B.Smith, *Report*, i, p.23.

¹²⁶Srivastava, *History of Famines*, p. 46.

¹²⁷GAD Procds, NWP, no.79, from commissioner Meerut div to secretary, NWP Govt, 16 November 1860, p.255. UPSAL.

¹²⁸GAD Procds, NWP, 79, March 1861; from G.Couper, secretary, NWP to commissioner, Meerut div, (no.479A), 26 March 1861, UPSAL.

During the 1867-8 famine, “a considerable proportion of the rural inhabitants was obliged to leave the afflicted region and flee with their cattle... up to a million people migrated at that time.”¹²⁹ Fear of starvation prompted migration from the districts of Bundelkund and Doab. In Jhansi alone, between January and July 1869, 15,000 people migrated towards Malwa, and 30,000 to Gwalior and Duttea.¹³⁰ Villages were perceptibly thinned and land between ten and fifteen per cent was thrown out of cultivation. So heavy was the migration from this district that the 1872 census noted the fall in population by 12.42 per cent, the bulk of this decrease being ascribed primarily to migration to Malwa.¹³¹ Similarly, following the failure of rain in 1877, afflicted people took flight en masse to Malwa, apprehending yet another famine. Some reached the borders of Gujrat while others went as far as Bhopal, Sagar and Jabalpur, and beyond Gwalior “some villages were entirely deserted, the zamindar, a tenant or two, and the *chaukidars* alone remaining.” The exodus was fuelled by the memory of ‘*Chauranwe*,’ and the choice of destination was influenced by the recollection of elders that Malwa had been the preferred refuge of migrants.¹³² From Etah even the respectable cultivators emigrated to Malwa while they still had some money or property left, or sought relief from their better-off relatives.¹³³

By the 1890s it was evident that mass migration went against the interests of the state. First, any large-scale movement of affected people posed a threat to law and order, and

¹²⁹ *The Imperial Gazeeteers of India*, 3, p. 487. It was recorded that during this famine from the province of Marwar, out of a total population of 1.5 million, 1 million migrated. as quoted by Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor*, p. 191.

¹³⁰ Henvey Report, p. 72.

¹³¹ *Gazetteers, Jhansi*, xxiv, p. 62.

¹³² *Report On The Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Roberts, Report*, p. 371.

¹³³ *ibid.* p.381.

also had a profoundly disruptive effect on the trade and agriculture. There was a substantial loss in revenue, as land lay deserted and uncultivated. In fact, the peasants used migration as a threat to get their demands of suspension and remission of revenue accepted and to obtain loans to tide them over a crisis. District officers pleaded for liberal relief to thwart migration, to placate and retain the moral confidence of the affected, and prevent outbreaks of epidemics that could result in increased mortality. Thus by the 1890s, the prevention of migration was adopted as a policy. Yet, during the 1896-7 famine, many villages began to present a half-deserted appearance inspite of the expansion of village relief.

The timing of migration has been a source of some controversy. While the British administrators took 'large scale movement of people' to be the surest indicator of an approaching famine, some social scientists argue that migration actually occurred at the mature or terminating stages of famine and represented the last survival option for starving people. They tend to portray famine migrants as largely destitute, dying, diseased and wretched. However, the material I have examined and some of the oral culture of the NWP&O suggests that not all migrants were depressed, destitute, or wretched. Again, as opposed to established literature on the subject, such analysis reveals that migration of male adult members of families generally occurred at the initial stages of famine, while other family units migrated later. It would appear that it was the aimless wandering of the helpless, the old, and deserted women and children, a phenomenon that largely occurred at the terminating or famished stages of famine, that may have been misconstrued as migration. It may be reasonably argued that by this stage

most suffering people would have been so physically and psychologically weakened, rendered so resourceless and destitute, that migration to distant unaffected places could not have been easily organized and undertaken. Perhaps there was no definite juncture at which migration was resorted to; rather, people migrated whenever it suited them, which could be at any stage of a famine. While some took a well considered decision at the first indication of famine, empirical evidence as well as the oral culture of the NWP&O indicates that the most probable juncture at which migration occurred was the onset of the second stage of famine; by this time scarcity and deprivation fully set in and needy people had explored most avenues of raising resources for survival.

Conclusion

Analysis of famine literature on adaptiveness shows that peasant strategies were a reflection of peasant culture and understanding of famines, as well as a reflection of their resource base and position in society. Popular sayings, songs and proverbs reflect the discriminatory impact of famines; it depicts the centrality of climate, soil fertility, the role of alien government, astrology and also powerful groups in society; and fragmentation of family and community support in famine causation and exacerbating its effects in time and space. The popular strategies, therefore, had a socio-economic context, which was indicative of class character and reflected affected people's deepest fears and expectations arising from their socio-economic milieu. Famines provided opportunities for the affected people to act for themselves. The scaling down of the quantity and quality of diet and migration reflected a rational economic approach, but others like propitiating

deities stemmed from emotional impulses. In the materials consulted for this study, I have found instances of religious rituals and ceremonies performed by members of the same religion and sex, but not caste. As regards migration while whole families and villages are mentioned to have migrated, there is no mention of particular castes or members of the same religion migrating, from a village or region. There is not even a mention of richer members of a particular caste or community assisting the poorer members to migrate. Significantly, relief being dispensed on the basis of religion, and competing religions vying with each other to gain adherents through alleviation of distress, was a cause of serious official concern. It became a platform for religious mobilization and propaganda.¹³⁴

While the picture of the Indian peasant drawn by Seavoy makes them out to be colourless and dull, their actions and behaviour predictable and passive, the foregoing discussion provides ample evidence to contradict this. The peasants made rational and calculated choices. The struggle to hold on to their land, implements and cattle reflects their desperation as also a will to survive. They were aware that their basic resource base ought to be preserved at all costs. It demonstrates awareness that relief offered would be inadequate and that government would not aid them in protecting their resource base. There is emphasis on timely action. But their actions were constrained by political and economic factors. They lived in a society in which the interests of the weak were subordinated to the rich and powerful. Suffering people also challenged and questioned the authorities and threatened the established order. How they did this and what their objectives were in doing so is conclusively discussed in the following chapter.

¹³⁴ Chs. VI, VII.

Chapter IX: Perceiving And Confronting Famines- A Moral Dimension

Introduction

Several excellent studies in the European context have comprehensively discussed the popular perceptions, attitudes and responses-social, cultural, economic and political to famines. In the process the concept of 'Moral economy' has been discussed thoroughly.¹

Prolonged famine, it is argued, saps the sense of moral duty, and traditions of patronage, charity and family support, while social customs dislocate and break down. What is the moral economy and what constitutes its breakdown?

At its simplest, the moral economy relationship is an exchange relationship based on the power equation between the elites and the poor, in which the elite undertake to provide basic subsistence needs as well as physical protection to poor dependents who reciprocate by offering their services including loyalty and support. The question of subsistence, dependency and responsibility lies at the heart of the moral economy question.

In the South-East Asian context Scott credits village communities with highly-developed networks of mutual aid patterns, which enables them to share material resources; yet he concluded that these aid networks, both moral and material, collapsed when faced with a prolonged subsistence crisis. Similar conclusions have been arrived at for Botswana, Bangladesh, China and Russia.² In contrast, Vaughan's study of the 1949 famine in

¹E.P.Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, no.50 (February 1971), pp.76-136; L.A.Tilly, 'The Food Riot as a Form Of Political Protest In France,' *Journal Of Interdisciplinary History*, 2, 1 (1971), pp.23-57.

²R.K. Hitchcock, *The Traditional Responses to Drought in Botswana*, in Proceedings on Drought in Botswana, Clarks University; Alamgir, *Famine in South Asia*, pp.151-89; Sorokin, *Hunger As a Factor*; pp.135-50; Scott, *The Moral Economy Of The Peasant. Rebellion And Subsistence* (Yale, 1976).

Malawi concludes that, though kinship and patron–client ties loosened considerably, they did save many from starvation and death.³ She found that during the 1862-3 famine in Malawi those who suffered the most were without patrons.⁴ Firth too stresses the socio- cultural continuity and argued that the basic structure of society can survive famines as in Tikopia.⁵

In the case of India, the most romanticized and idealized, version of village collectivity is to be found in official discussions and writings of British administrators. They envisaged that the Indian village, community and family life functioned on the moral premise of sharing resources and mutual reciprocities; these were credited with in-built mechanisms and a high degree of adaptiveness and were, therefore, admirably equipped to fight adversities. This idealized version of the village collectivity and moral-cultural constructions of Indian society resonated throughout the nineteenth-century famines; these reinforced economic rigidity, and justified government's limited relief efforts and non-interventionist stand. Officials emphasized the notions of cohesiveness and self-reliance and that the relief of the poor, infirm and women was the traditional moral responsibility of the society's rich.⁶

It is unquestionably the union of village communities, each one forming a separate little state itself, which has contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India, through all the revolution and changes that they have suffered, and is in high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the employment of a great portion of the freedom and independence, not without

³ Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*, p.156.

⁴ *ibid.* p.156.

⁵ R.Firth, *Social Change in Tikopia. Re- study of a Polynesian Community After a Generation* (London, 1959), p.105.

⁶ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, ii, p. 85; R.Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford 1990), pp.137-42.

reason. Therefore may the wish be expressed that the village constitutions may never be, and dread be anticipated from everything that has a tendency to break them up.⁷

Invoking moral responsibility was viewed by some officials as yet another solution of supplying subsistence needs, based on customary and moral requisitioning, as in normal times they tolerated and even encouraged dependency. Salisbury observed:

The business of the community is to protect itself. The business of the state is to see that all obstacles are removed that would interfere with this, and all needful help given that will facilitate it. It is not the function of the State to feed people, but only to see that they mutually aid one another in doing this, in a manner that is compatible with the existence of a compatible community and that the obligation is so far enforced.⁸

Such views with some modifications were reiterated by the Orissa Famine Commissioners, the 1868 Memorandum, and the 1898 Famine Commission. The 1880 Famine Code emphasized the joint family system and the patron-client relationship-landlord-tenant, master-servant, employer-labourer, that offered protection and some insurance against calamities.⁹ There was hesitation to admit that, "The community's sense of its responsibility for its poorer members could not be enforced in times of scarcity."¹⁰

The crucial question in this discussion is - to what extent did the support system in the NWP&O, hold together during the famines? Did it remain intact, collapse entirely, or,

⁷ Procds.Sud.Bd.of Rev, NWP, March 1838,116; to Thomason,offg.secretary to the Gov.-Genl. NWP, from I.H.Eliott, Secretary, Sud.Bd of Rev, 20 March 1838.p. 11.

⁸ *Condition Of the Country and the People*, p.111.

⁹ *IFC Report*,1880-5,ii, p.85.

¹⁰ *IFC,Report*, 1880, i, p.48.

showed resilience despite ruptures? In what ways did the afflicted people fight for the enforcement of their rights and preservation of the much acclaimed moral economy.

Constitutional responses

A glimpse of afflicted people's efforts to protect themselves from famine can be obtained from the numerous appeals they made to the government. Faced with a major existential crisis, they questioned social and moral relationships through petitions, protests, demands, and demonstrations. These petitions reminded the government of its moral duty to provide the needy with subsistence and employment, prevent their exploitation at the hands of entrenched local powers, and stop corruption and mal-practices at relief works. These appeals represent collective action and reflect individual desperation, and portray the belief of the petitioners in the legitimacy of their demands. Importantly, these petitions questioned the very structure of social relations and political governance. Famines were not taken for granted; their articulations do not lend credence to the picture of "powerless victims."

During the 1837-8 famine, there were innumerable petitions which, pressed for the reducing, suspending or remitting revenue as the petitioners were unable to pay. These were usually endorsed by local officials who advised government to give relief for reasons already detailed; but usually these petitions were turned down.¹¹ The severity of the 1837-8 famine led even wealthy landlords to petition for help. Butwar Singh, brother

¹¹ Ch. IV, pp. 139-41.

of Meher Lal, a wealthy landowner from *mauza* Jarna in Ghazipur district, which represented that

in consequence of the prevailing drought the kharif crops had totally failed, and that the *rabi* sowings from the same cause had been suspended, that the whole village had been destroyed by fire, and that the assamees had fled, the petitioner alone having remained on the estate, and that notwithstanding a representation of these calamities you have issued a proclamation for the enforcement of the first kist of the year in default payment of which the estate is to be sold.¹²

This petition was termed 'grossly exaggerated,' and no remission of revenue was granted.¹³ During 1860-1, over sixty villages in Khyr, Tuppul, and Inglass *tehsils* in Aligarh district collectively petitioned the government for advances to enable them to feed their families and cattle.¹⁴ A petition in 1897 from Gokul, Gangadin, and others of *mauza* Deogaon, Hamirpur represented their distressed condition on account of famine and asked that they be helped with ploughs, bullocks and seeds to enable them to cultivate their lands.¹⁵ Similarly there were petitions referring to the hypothecation of land holdings for the payment of rent during famine.¹⁶ These reflect the anxiety of the cultivators to retain their land; they viewed the government as patron and expected moral and material help, just as they did from traditional patrons-the *mahajans* and the *zamindar*.

¹² Procds. Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP, 1838, 123, from Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, to R.B.Morgau, collector of Hamirpur, 17 November 1837, p.146. UPSAL.

¹³ Pre-Mutiny, Sud Bd of Rev, NWP.1838, vii,123; to Morgau, offg.collector, Hamirpur, from R.Low, commissioner, Allahabad div, 29 January 1838, p.147 UPRAA.

¹⁴ GAD Procds,NWP, no..473; from offg..collector. Aligarh to offg. commissioner, Meerut div, 7November 1861, p.253.

¹⁵ Revenue and scarcity procds (summary), B,ii, June 1897, NWP&O, p.1. (P/5131,OIOC).

¹⁶ Revenue and scarcity procds (summary), B, ii, July 1897, NWP&O, p.1. (P/5131,OIOC).

Of particular importance are the petitions highlighting increased exploitation of the suffering people by the *banias*/ moneylenders/landlords in terms of withdrawal of credit, hoarding of grain, export of grains, and the consequent price rise.¹⁷ These petitions were made not only to the government but also to their oppressors asking them to discontinue their mal-practices and warning them of dire consequences if they did not. In doing so they were enforcing the acclaimed moral order that got displaced during famines.

Another set of petitions highlighted the corruption and high-handedness of the local officials. It was recorded that, "there were repeated complaints from parties that they had not been fully paid by the *darogah* in charge of the poor and on my being repeatedly beset by different bodies of the emigrants, who said they had come for work and had been refused by the *darogah*."¹⁸ Similarly, an anonymous petition from the recipients of the charitable relief at Mahoba alleged extortion of money from them by the *tehsildar* Nawab Mirza.¹⁹ There were petitions which asked that the petitioner be accommodated on some petty administrative posts such as of accountants, clerks or supervisors at relief works. Such help would enable them to tide over the crisis with dignity; the petitioners had some education, and belonged to middle and lower middle classes. The government turned down the majority of such requests.²⁰

Another set of petitions highlighted the grievances of people arising from the actions of

¹⁷ See, pp. 401-17.

¹⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 55, serial 7,1 list 1; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra, from Mansel, magistrate of Agra, 20 January 1838. UPRAA.

¹⁹ Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, vii, f. no. 1, bundle 281, box 388; to the collector of Hamirpur, from the commissioner of Allahabad div, 1.9.97.UPRAA.

²⁰ Scarcity procds (summary, April, 1897), B,ii, April-July, 1897, NWP, p.2.(P/5131.OIOC)

officials. An example of this is the anonymous petition from “ the residents of Bhinga, Tulsipur & C, district of Bahraich, in which the complaint was made that the free use of forest produce was prevented by the local contractors, and prayers for redress was submitted to the commissioner of Fyzabad division.”²¹ Another petition highlighting corruption was received from Ahmed Khan, *mohalla* Jehanabad, district Rae Barelli, complaining about the proceedings of local relief authorities, and praying that in view of his distressed circumstances, some relief be provided to him.²² Then there was an anonymous petition from labourers in Hardoi, complaining that they had been thrown out of employment by relief work authorities, and asking for justice. This petition was forwarded to the commissioner of the Lucknow division.²³ Another very interesting petition from the employees at the relief works in Jaunpur brought charges of corruption and maltreatment against Munshi Ram, civil works inspector, and demanded an enquiry into the matter. This was forwarded to another inspector for disposal.²⁴ A petition was also received from one Shiblal of Meerut, in which he complained against the highhandedness of officials employed in famine relief operations in the Meerut division. An anonymous petition was received by the commissioner of Allahabad division, alleging extortion of money from recipients of charitable relief by the *tehsildar* of Mahoba.²⁵ Similarly, in Rohilkhund during the 1877-8 famine, the workers on relief projects struck work, demanding two annas per man daily as wages and no measurements, and when the authorities refused to comply, they went on strike and

²¹Revenue and scarcity, procds (summary April 1897,) B,ii: April-July, 1897, NWP&O, p.3. (P/5131, OIOC).

²²Revenue and scarcity procds(summary), B, July 1897, NWP&O, p.3 (P/5131,OIOC).

²³Revenue and scarcity procds, (summary, August 1897), B, ii, August 1897, NWP&O, p.1.(P/5132,OIOC).

²⁴Revenue and scarcity procds(summary), B, ii, August 1897, NWP&O, p.4. (P/5132,OIOC).

²⁵Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, deptt. vii, f.no.1, bundle no. 281; from the commissioner, Allahabad div, to the collector of Hamirpur, 1.9. 97. UPRAA

“marched off in a body.”²⁶ They represented that the task demanded of them was beyond their power to do, urging that during the 1868 famine the government supported them without imposing any conditions, and they wanted the same treatment.²⁷ When adequate relief was not forthcoming certain villagers in Dathia became so militant that they attacked Lt.-Greenstreet, Royal Engineers, on famine duty in Jalaun district.²⁸ Such petitioning had its lighter side too. In one instance, during the 1896-7 famine, a “victim” in Jalaun, who could not get relief according to the procedure, despite constant entreaties for relief, in an astounding move, made his way into the deputy collector’s bedroom at night, and petitioned him in person. His demand for relief was sanctioned by an amazed but concerned deputy collector, who also generously extended him immediate monetary assistance. The petitioner, in his delight, and much to the amusement of the officer, performed an impromptu ‘*pooja*’ right in the bedroom, and then waved a rupee over the collector’s head as a blessing and gave it as ‘*bakshish*’ to the waiting *punkha* coolie.²⁹ But the reality underlying this incident was serious- corruption by petty bureaucrats like *patwaris*, *daroghas*, *quanungoes*, and gangmates was highlighted in numerous petitions and demands during all the four famines. By the 1896-7, the press was highlighting the corruption on relief works, and the way affected people organized themselves to demand redress.

²⁶ *Report On the Scarcity and Relief Operations, 1877 -78 &79*, p.176.

²⁷ *ibid.* p.175.

²⁸ Political dept, political and police procds, B, ii, vol.5136,NWP&O; tabular Statement of Matters of Routine, May 1897, p.2.

²⁹ Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, vii, bundle 224, box 307, f. no.61,1897; from the Dy.-collector, Jalaun, to the commissioner of Allahabad div, 25 October 1897. *Brief Notes Showing the Number of Cases of Fraud and Dishonesty on the Part of the Famine Staff in the Jalaun District*. UPSAL

Of particular significance and interest were petitions from upper class, impoverished *parda-nashin* women. These emphasized their superior status in society, and demanded the government for financial assistance. One example was the collective petition from *parda-nashin* of Lucknow, asking that their allowances be continued, until the prices of foodgrain fell.³⁰ A petition from Zukra begum, Lucknow, to the deputy commissioner, requested subsistence allowance to tide her over the crisis.³¹ A similar petition was received from Mussamat begum & Others, of Kasha *bazar* district Kheri.³² Of particular relevance was a set of collective petitions seeking remission of revenue rents accruing to petitioners.³³

By the 1890s, issues that were frequently highlighted related to the policy of laissez-faire, the activities of grain dealers,³⁴ effects of the railways, and increasing hostility in the landlord-tenant relationship. The petitioners became more aggressive. Threats were held out that affected people would revolt if their rights were not respected or justice was not meted out to them.³⁵ It was recorded during the 1877-8 famine that “day by day the cutcherry and even the magistrates houses were thronged by persons petitioning against the export of grains.”³⁶ Petitioning became institutionalized, with pressure groups and political parties like the Indian National Congress emphasizing the political aspects of

³⁰Revenue and scarcity procds, political, B, October 1897, NWP&O; petitions from Wair begum and others, Lucknow; also Abbasi Kahanam, Mehdigaanj, Lucknow, p.2.(P/5132,OIOC).

³¹Revenue and scarcity procds, (summary B), ii, April 1897, NWP&O, p.3. (P/5131,OIOC).

³²Revenue and scarcity procds (summary B), ii, July 1897, NWP&O, p.1.(P/5131,OIOC).

³³Revenue and scarcity procds (summary B), ii July 1897, NWP&O; petitions of Nabi Baksh Khan & others, *mauza* Korwan, *pargana* Thappar, district Fatehpur; also from Kalka Prasad, *mauza* Hamirpur, *pargana* Chail, Allahabad, p.1. (P/5131,OIOC).

³⁴Post-Mutiny, revenue deptt, box 95, bundle 64, serial. 15, f. no. 353, 1879. *Famine Administration Report*, from the offg. collector Jaunpur to the commissioner, Allahabad div, 3 December 1879. UPSAL

³⁵*IFC Report*, 1880, Appendix,iv; reply of. Sandys and Colvin; evidence in reply to the *IFC*, 1880, p. 2

³⁶Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, revenue deptt, box, 95,bundle 64,serial.15, f. no. 353, 1879. *Famine Administration Report*, from the offg. collector, Jaunpur. UPSAL

famine, the politics of relief policy, and its limited nature under the British. Comparisons were made with relief and preventive measures taken during famines, both elsewhere in the world, and by past Indian rulers, as reflected in the resolutions of the Indian National Congress.³⁷

An analysis reveals that the petitioning was more or less in the nature of a survival strategy, relating as it did to remission and suspension of revenue, to exploitation at the hands of petty bureaucracy and relief staff, charges of corruption mainly siphoning off their wages. It shows that, the colonial government was increasingly viewed as a patron and an ultimate authority. It may be inferred therefore that the experience of famines contributed to the solidifying of the political and moral authority of the British. The varied nature of these petitions and the petitioners reveals that they were aware of the various avenues for highlighting their grievances and demanding redress. There was popular political awareness of the responsibilities and duties of the state, and the assertion of people's own rights. Popular notions of fair play and justice were expressed through the assertion of customary rights. The notion of self-respect and dignity was predominant, and the tone was neither piteous nor cowering. They depict affected people's ability to act in a restrained and constitutional manner in a crisis, and their response as dynamic and legal. At the same time they were also not averse to taking hard and difficult tasks to improve their situation.

Crime and the moral order

³⁷ see.pp.208-15.

The study of the extent of socio-economic breakdown during famines has assumed great importance.³⁸ Sorokin observed that during the 1921-2 famine in Russia, nearly the entire population became 'criminal,' regardless of sex, age, status and profession. Crimes of all kinds, including swindling, bribery, theft and murders increased greatly.³⁹ During the Irish famine, hunger led to numerous acts of aggression, especially thieving, greatly increased. No garden, it was observed, was safe, and the well-off had watch-houses installed to guard them. The sight of food streaming out of the country was unbearable; hungry and enraged men rioted at several places: troops had to be called in to quell anti-export riots, as for example at Youghal in Cork, and Dungaravan in County Waterford.⁴⁰

These 'criminal' activities had a wider and more important context-the breakdown and rupturing of traditional moral obligations, the withdrawal of support by the elites, and even more so the exploitation of the existing crisis for profit and consolidation of interests. The suffering populace contested this through breaking laws and by show of brute strength. Scholars have established a co-relation between failure of harvests, and consequent rise in food prices and popular upheaval especially increase in crimes as a characteristic feature of famines in India.⁴¹ Forbes noted with reference to the 1783 famine in the NWP&O, perhaps with some rhetorical exaggeration:

³⁸Dirks, 'Social Responses,' *Current Anthropology*, 21, 1(Feburary 1980), pp.31-40; Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, pp.31-7, 119-47; Epstein, 'Productive Efficiency' in Firth (ed). *Themes*, ch.IV; Sorokin, *Hunger As A Factor*, pp.135-50.

³⁹Sorokin, *Hunger As a Factor*, p. 230.

⁴⁰Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp. 125- 6.

⁴¹Crooke, *The North western Provinces of India*, pp.141-2; J.Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, iii (London, 1813), p.58; Arnold, 'Crime and Crime Control in Madras,' 1858 -1947, p. 68; Arnold, 'Dacoity and Rural Crime in Madras 1860-1940,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6, 2 (January 1979), pp. 140-70; Sharma, 'The 1837-8 famine in U.P. Some Dimension Of Popular Action,' *IESHR*, 30, 3 (1993), pp.337-72

The hordes of the famine wretches who patrolled the country made no distinction of property, but urged by the imperious calls of nature, plundered alike the savings of the provident, and the accumulations of the monopolists." Further, he noted, " In the moment of phrenzy (sic) and despair, many granaries were burnt. Resentment overcame even the principles of self- preservation and impelled them to the perpetuation of follies such as indicated the wish not to obtain redress, but to involve all under one general ruin."⁴²

Crooke noted that during famines there was a spurt in criminal activities, especially thieving.⁴³ This co-relation has been reinforced by police and administrative reports as well as observations of Famine administrators. These documented the influence of crop failure on the rise in incidence of crime.⁴⁴ Dearth of food and consequent high prices of grain resulted in the collapse of afflicted people's entitlements and purchasing power, the restoration of which was viewed by the hungry as being their moral right. When help from their patrons and government was not forthcoming they forged their own survival strategies, which were very often "illegal" and "criminal." Thus, the commissioner of Kanpur observed that failure of crops, scarcity of provisions, and the consequent deprivation of the common necessities of life sufficiently accounted for the increase in crime.⁴⁵ Nearly twenty years later Henvey echoed similar sentiments: 'In times of famine, it is usual to expect an increase in the number of crimes against property.'⁴⁶ The government was alerted to an impending famine when district officers reported spurt in outbreak of grain robberies, showing unmistakably that the crisis was now rapidly approaching, when it would be desirable for the government to intervene.

⁴²J. Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, iii, p.58.

⁴³Crooke, *The North Western Provinces of India*, pp.141-2.

⁴⁴Arnold, 'Dacoity And Rural Crime In Madras 1860-1940, *JPS*.6 (January 1979), pp.140-70.

⁴⁵Pre-Mutiny, basta 51, box 164, serial 13; Police report of the commissioner, Allahabad div, for the last six months of 1837; to J.Thomason, offg. secretary to the Gov.-Genl. NWP, 20 March 1838. (UPRAA).

⁴⁶Henvey, *Report*, pp.126-7.

Certain themes run through the crime records of the period under study. The administration was concerned with identifying the motives that impelled the law abiding people to the perpetration of crime: their socio-economic standing and who the victims of popular wrath were and why? Officers were careful to distinguish between “paupers” and “criminals.” In underlining this, they sought to delineate the socio-economic context, and emphasized the purposes and assumptions behind such crimes. For example, ordinarily law-abiding people were driven by unemployment, high prices and resentment to commit crimes such as pilfering of grains, looting of granaries, grain caravans, riverine grain trade and highway robbery; the usual victims were the *banias*, moneylenders, and *zamindars* who were popularly seen as oppressive and exploiting the subsistence crisis for consolidating their own interests. There was an awareness of the unfairness and cruelty of these manipulations, and their redressal was viewed as appropriate and moral. For instance, the authorities saw in dacoity, ‘the form of crime to which the Bundela Rajput always resorts to when pressed by hard times.’⁴⁷ Reports indicate that the bulk of the participants were not generally criminals.⁴⁸ Men, women and children joined indiscriminately in attacks on granaries and grain carts without any attempt at concealment, any one on the spot could note down the quantity of the spoil being taken by each plunderer.⁴⁹

⁴⁷*Gazetteers, Hamirpur*, p.160.

⁴⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 164, list 1, serial. 1; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner Agra div, from the offg. secretary to the Gov -Genl, NWP, 31 December 1838.

⁴⁹*Report on the Scarcity and Relief Operations, 1877-8, and 1879*, p. 3.

To deal with the situation certain remedies were recommended by local officials. Firstly, they suggested liberal relief measures, emphasizing that crime and disturbances would not cease until subsistence was provided for the affected population. They argued that needy people deliberately committed small offences in order to find a place in prisons where they would be assured of some subsistence. Robinson noted,

the fact that the criminal in jail receives one and a half per diem, while the ordinary wages of the labourer without its walls is 3/4 of an anna and thousands would be without that pittance but for the employment afforded by the government must have the worst effect on the lower order.⁵⁰

To Promise general tranquillity or anything like tranquillity till food is obtainable for the starving population, I do not pretend. It is very true that grain, though dear, is not at famine price, but the cheapness or dearness of grains matters little to men who have no means of procuring it except robbery ...till these men can obtain employment and subsistence, the present outrages cannot be put down by the ordinary strength of the police.⁵¹

Having rationalized criminal activities officials were faced with a moral dilemma, whether or not to punish these starving offenders and what punishment to adopt? In meting out punishment they had to keep in mind practical considerations such as the possible overcrowding of prisons and the expenditure involved in the maintenance of inmates being more than at relief works. In view of this, officials were inclined to be tolerant of petty crime and were instructed to deal leniently with it.⁵² Offenders involved

⁵⁰Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, vi, 50, serial.2, 1838; to Hamilton, commissioner Agra div, from Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, 12 February 1838. UPRAA.

⁵¹Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 54.

⁵²Post-Mutiny, vii, box 360, bundle 263, f. 1, 1897; from C.D. Steel, collector of Jhansi, to the commissioner Allahabad div, 6 March 1897.

in looting vendors and *banias* were to be punished on the spot. If caught the property was restored and the offender given a few stripes in the presence of onlookers; this demonstrated the moral and administrative authority of the *Raj* as well as a deterrent to further crime. Officials were concerned not only at the collective challenge posed to their authority but also that trade was being disrupted which meant financial loss as well as threat to the interests of their allies- the *bania* and landlord. The number of prosecutions was essentially symbolic, and demonstrated that the authorities were vigilant and protecting the interests of property owners. Another important concern was that the performance of the administration, especially police, should not be viewed unfavourably because

That period cannot be taken as a standard of comparison whence to deduce a favourable opinion as to the improvement of the administration of your division in reference to the present returns.⁵³

1837-8

The pattern of crime during the four famines indicates that districts most severely afflicted were also marked by spiralling crime rates; needy people could be spurred to crime merely on the apprehension of an approaching famine, as in Rohilkhund during 1837-8. Besides petty crimes, serious crimes like dacoity, murder and theft with intentional wounding, and suicides also increased. Additionally, grain riots became endemic during this and the 1896-7 famine, and cattle theft during 1868-9.

⁵³Pre-Mutiny, judicial, 164, list 1, serial 1; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div, from offg. secretary to the Gov.-Genl. NWP, 31 December 1838. UPRAA.

Lawlessness and crime touched unprecedented heights during 1837-8 when, “ from Bareilly to Etawah, the whole country is one scene of confusion and plunder...”⁵⁴ Reports of widespread disturbances came from the worst affected districts. Murders, dacoities, burglaries, theft, cattle stealing, kidnapping of children for ornaments, and counterfeiting of coins, were rampant while dacoity, looting of riverine trade and plundering of granaries, became collective actions. Suicide increased. By the first half of 1837 as many as twenty-five suicide cases were reported in Hamirpur alone, reflecting the desperation of the suffering people.⁵⁵ Anxious officials reported that the *banias* commenced hoarding of grains and simultaneously withheld subsistence loans in grains and money, at the first signs of the impending famine, aggravating the prevailing distress. The enraged poor, indulged in systematic plunder and looting of grains in transit, granaries and merchant’s homes.⁵⁶ Such reports came from Bareilly, from where the contagion spread and a war-like situation arose. An alarmed magistrate reported he had information that large bodies of plunderers, organized along army lines, was about to commence operations in Bareilly and surrounding areas. He asked for additional deployment of police and possibly army assistance.

On 24 August 1837, ten boats laden with grain were plundered at Saheswan and in another instance seven boats carrying grain worth Rs 8,500 were plundered. By mid-August 1837, riverine trade had to be suspended at Farrukhabad, extra police posts

⁵⁴ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, vi, box 562, basta 192 serial.12; to, Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div, from F. Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, 20 August 1837. UPRAA

⁵⁵ Pre-Mutiny, judicial, 1837-8, vii; box 562, basta 192, serial. 12; to, Lowther, offg. commissioner, Allahabad div, from the magistrate of Hamirpur, 20 July 1837. UPRAA

⁵⁶ Board collections, E/4/60, judicial and revenue departments, October-December 1837, 16 of 1837. Narrative of the Procds. of the Lt.-Gov. during the third quarter of the year 1837, 16 October 1837. UPRAA

established, and boats carrying grain heavily guarded.⁵⁷ In Delhi, despite extra deployment of the police and army, twenty-grain boats were looted "by large bodies of people."⁵⁸ In the clash three people lost their lives and grain worth thousands of rupees was plundered. Earlier, the plunderers had represented to the commissioner, Metcalfe, to interfere and regulate trade and prevent the *banias* from raising the grain prices. When Metcalfe refused to intercede, citing laissez-faire, angry people took the law into their own hands.⁵⁹ A chastened commissioner apprehended more trouble "unless the grain merchants were disposed to be more considerate to the wants of the people."⁶⁰ These attacks denote not only moral indignation but are also a protest against laissez-faire. In yet another daring episode the people of Assodia village actually went and apprised the village *lambardar* of their intention to plunder carts laden with grains passing through their village, and cheekily invited him to join their expedition. The matter was, instead, quickly reported, enabling the local administration to act promptly and prevent the outrage. The *lambardars* was awarded Rs two hundred for responsible and public-spirited conduct.⁶¹

As the distress deepened, law and order reports assumed an alarming tone. A boat-load of grain valued at Rs 1,600 was plundered at Farrukhabad; here violence and plunder were frequent and of such magnitude, that life, property and trade, especially riverine, were so endangered, that all navigation on the Ganga near Khyrah had to be suspended.

⁵⁷ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, vi, box 562, basta 192, serial.12,1836-8; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div, from Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, 25 August 1837. UPRAA

⁵⁸ Board collections, E/4/161, judicial and revenue depts, f.2 of 1838, NWP, 26 January 1838.

⁵⁹ Pre-Mutiny, criminal judicial Procd. 73, 11 October 1837, NWP, from T.T. Metcalfe, commissioner, Delhi div, to J. Thomason offg. secretary to the Lt.-Gov. UPRAA

⁶⁰ Board collections, E/4/161, revenue and judicial depts, f.2 of 1838, NWP, 26 January 1838. UPRAA

⁶¹ *ibid.*

In desperation, grain merchants at several places like Kanpur and Farrukhabad, demanded that the government give adequate protection to their lives and property; otherwise they threatened to suspend all dispatches of grain and other commercial activities which would further aggravate the crisis.⁶² This decision caused alarm amongst officials: first, obstruction and suspension of trade would aggravate the famine and fiscal situation; secondly, the decision reflected a lack of confidence in government to tackle the crisis. Privately, local officials acknowledged their inability to control the situation by force and coercion alone; they blamed the deteriorating situation to inadequate relief measures, and the inhuman behaviour and manipulations of the *banias* and landlords, which was justified on grounds of laissez-faire. They concluded:

The crisis cannot be met by the police. They are active and successful in arresting offenders.. but the disturbances will not cease till the means of subsistence are provided for the agricultural classes.⁶³

The rapid commission of such serious crimes showed that “the success of the police in protecting life and property failed lamentably.” Reports indicate that police officers themselves were gripped by panic, spurring Hamilton, the commissioner of Agra division, to direct the magistrates to adopt quick and assertive measures “to re-establish the power of the executive and to suppress the panic which seems to have seized on your police officers.”⁶⁴ Officers were reluctant to ask for army deployment as it demonstrated their inability to control lawlessness, and would be an admission of emergency, which

⁶²Pre-Mutiny, Criminal-judicial procds,NWP, September 1837, no.8; Petition of ChainSukh, Bakshi Ram & Others. UPRAA

⁶³ ibid.

⁶⁴ Pre-Mutiny, commissioners office,judicial, vi, list 1,1836 -8; to Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, from Hamilton, commisssioner, Agra div, 18 August 1837. UPRAA

did exist in several districts. Local *zamindars* could not be relied on to control agitating, enraged people, as officers suspected their complicity in the commission of these crimes motivated by fear that government would extract revenue from them despite the famine. It would give them some satisfaction to point out to the collector, “their bare and plundered fields.”⁶⁵ Also, many of these *zamindars* were popularly perceived as oppressive and exploitative and therefore a foe of the poor. Obviously their injunctions would carry little weight. The magistrate of Agra requested five hundred additional *burkandazes* at a salary of Rs three per month till the end of June 1839.⁶⁶ Similar requests came from Farrukhabad, Saheswan, Bareilly, Mathura, Kanpur and Delhi. The Etawah magistrate asked for additional police assistance for the purposes of more effectually watching the fords of the Yamuna and the Chambul, and thus guarding against the threat of dacoit gangs from the Maratha territories, until these rivers rose so as to be no longer fordable.”⁶⁷ Desperate to contain the situation, some officers proposed, besides additional deployment of police, such unprecedented measures like harnessing anti-social elements into useful instruments to counter threats of insurgency, and many successfully did so: for example, a counter force of five hundred *goondas* or anti-socials was raised with the express purpose of, converting them into useful elements to repress outrages. These countermeasures helped to some extent to contain the threats of widespread insurgency. The district officer reported with relief:

The parties that are threatening me from Oude, fell back on the approach of my men, one hundred of the newly raised

⁶⁵ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 55, serial 7, list 1; to Hamilton, commissioner Agra div, from Mansel, magistrate Agra, 13 March 1838. UPRAA

⁶⁶ Board collections, E/4/162, judicial, revenue and general deptts, f.4, 1838, 15 May 1838; narrative of the procds. of the Gov.-Genl. NWP, for the first quarter of 1838. UPRAA

⁶⁷ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 56, list 1; to Hamilton, commissioner Agra div from I. Cummine, magistrate Etawah, 29 April 1838. UPRAA.

burkanduzes, which I have posted along the frontier will I trust protect the district on that side.⁶⁸

In Farrukhabad, law and order could be controlled only by army deployment. The seriousness of the situation can be gauged from crime figures for just two days 12-14 August 1837: twenty-two serious crimes were perpetrated, which included, two dacoities with murder, seven dacoities with wounding, five dacoities without aggravated circumstances, one burglary with wounding, five thefts without wounding, and two highway robberies. The number of prisoners under trial increased from forty-two to ninety-four, with fifty more on their way to court.⁶⁹ Twenty-two crimes translated into ninety-two in a week, (14 to 22 August 1837); and 979 in three months (1 August and 1 November 1837); annually there were 3,439 crimes (August 1837-July 1838); burglaries, robberies, and thefts occurred, of which one hundred and seventy-nine were attended with violence; grain dealers and granaries being specially targeted. The grain dealers lamented the inability of the government to protect them, and threatened suspension of trade. A shaken magistrate unable to control the situation, reported, “ the roads are all dangerous and even the camel *sawars* I sent to the *kotwal* were fined on their way. The cost of the maintenance of extra police deployment during the period increased to Rs 7,342. Still the situation remained serious “ an extensive and formidable combination for the purposes of plunder,” “especially of the thakur tribe... and that they had manufactured such a large number of arrows, especially the zamindars,” that the magistrate

⁶⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 1836 -8, vi; to Elliott, Secretary Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP. Allahabad, from Hamilton, commissioner, Agra div, 17 August 1837. UPRAA.

⁶⁹ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 1836-8, vi; to Elliott, Secretary Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP. Allahabad, from Hamilton, commissioner Agra div 17 August 1837. UPRAA.

apprehended further insurgency.⁷⁰ This is interesting as it is the only instance found of popular mobilization along caste lines for committing crimes. Even as late as February 1838, when the *rabi* crops had ripened, the feeling of insecurity remained. Officials feared the crops would be systematically plundered and requested additional police deployment.

In Mathura district, in contrast, the various *thanas* reported a spurt in petty crime, especially robbery. For example, *thana* Jullasyur reported that in the second half of 1837, the total number of crimes perpetuated within its jurisdiction was 443, as compared to 276 in the corresponding period of 1836. Most *thanas* reported similarly.⁷¹

In Agra also “the success of the police in protecting life and property failed to a lamentable extent.”⁷² A spate of organized *dacoities* and highway robberies of an aggravated nature were reported, and there was a pattern to these crimes: it was officially regarded as an evil endemic to the season.

Parties returning from the fairs, and travellers at the fall of the evening are observed by a few starving wretches, and the facility of committing an offence at a spot on the highway or crossroad is a temptation too great to withstand.⁷³

Regarding the rise of burglary and theft attended with violence, the administration

⁷⁰Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, vi, 1836-8; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div, from Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, 14 August 1837. UPRAA

⁷¹Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, Mathura, judicial, 129, serial 3, list 1; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra, from the offg. magistrate, Mathura, 4 September 1838. UPRAA.

⁷²Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 56; to Hamilton, commissioner, Agra div, from Mansel, magistrate Agra, 13 March 1838. UPRAA.

⁷³Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 7/122; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner, Agra div, from Mansel, magistrate, Agra, 7 February 1838. UPRAA.

explained it away “as a species of offence that necessarily advances during a period of agricultural distress.”⁷⁴ Affrays relating to grain-fields were rampant and usually involved one party contesting the right of the other to cut what little grain there was.⁷⁵ Parties sleeping out at night to protect their grain-fields frequently woke up to discover thieves making away with some sheaves of corn and bucket, or such like articles. “Wounds are inflicted on the owners though not originally intended.”⁷⁶

The situation was no better in Aligarh district. It was reported from Maherrah that starving people united to break open granaries and commit extensive outrages on property and persons.⁷⁷ Here burglaries in 1836 were 519, thefts, 1237; by 1838, the figure had increased to 722 and 1,935 respectively; by 1839 they had fallen to 456 and 1,012.⁷⁸

In Banda, *tehsildars* and even the *cutcherry* were attacked-and the treasury carried away.⁷⁹ Thus, symbols of power considered oppressive were swept away by popular ire. Moneylenders were commonly attacked and frequently killed. The pattern of attacks may be seen in an instance from Fatehpur. On 16 April 1837 in *mauza* Dumonnie, *thana* Kirdoojah; a *havaladar*, a prisoner, and a resident of Goodrowlee village, were visiting

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial.12; judicial statement from the magistrate of Fatehpur, 13 July 1837. UPRAA.

⁷⁶ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 7/122; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner. Agra div, from Mansel, magistrate, Agra, 7 February 1838. UPRAA.

⁷⁷ Board collections E/4/160, judicial-revenue depts, f. 160, 1837, October-December 1837; Narrative of the procs. Of the Lt.-Gov. NWP. during the third quarter of 1837. UPRAA.

⁷⁸ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 59.

⁷⁹ Procs of Sud Bd of Rev, NWP, 120, 1838; to Lowther, Revenue commissioner, Allahabad div, from W.P. Masson, offg. collector, Banda, 8 May 1838, p.44. UPRAA.

another village, to where the resident had been summoned on the excuse that his *vakeel* (advocate) wished to see him; the man was murdered on his way home around eight in the evening. The deceased was a moneylender of Goodrowlee whose inhabitants, were deeply indebted to him and unable to repay their loans, had plotted the murder. His attendant was also severely wounded.⁸⁰

In several districts, including Allahabad, Agra, Aligarh and Mainpuri the most pervasive crime was the counterfeiting of coins. Every description of the rupee was counterfeited, and even the rupee with the British king's head was well executed and in circulation.⁸¹ In the Allahabad division, the last months of 1837 showed an increase in – petty and heinous crimes. Of the 1,058 crimes, there were sixteen murders, two cases of homicide, fifteen dacoities, 225 burglaries, 560 thefts; nine assaults with injury, and 230 miscellaneous offences.⁸² In Kanpur heinous crimes increased in the first six months of 1838; fifteen murders, fifteen homicides, six dacoities, 494 burglaries, and 708 thefts compared to seven murders, five homicides, one dacoity, 205 burglaries, and 368 thefts in the first half of 1837.⁸³ Reports from Hamirpur demonstrate that a total of 427 crimes were committed in the first half, and 627 in the second half of 1837, and 745 in the first half of 1838.⁸⁴ The magnitude of crime was immense, given the smallness of the district.

⁸⁰ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8, vii box 562, basta 192, serial.12; to Lowther, offg. commissioner, Allahabad, from the magistrate, Fatehpur, 13 July 1837. UPRAA.

⁸¹ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, Mainpuri, judicial, iii, serial 3, list.1; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner Agra div, from magistrate of Mainpuri, 10 June 1838. UPRAA.

⁸² Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial 1837-8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial.12; to I. Thomason, Secretary, Gov.-Genl. NWP. from Lowther, 20 March 1838. UPRAA.

⁸³ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, 1838-9, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial. 12; to, Thomason, Secretary, Gov.-Genl. from Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, 25 August 1838.

⁸⁴ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1838-9, box 560, basta 192, serial.5, viii; from the magistrate of Hamirpur, to Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, 23 July 1838. UPRAA.

Twenty-one cases of suicides occurred, reflecting the desperation of the afflicted, or possibly the intent to die honourably. Besides, there were 116 burglaries, 258 thefts, and five murders.⁸⁵ With the lessening of famine intensity crime figures fell in most districts. The authorities took this to indicate that the division was recovering from the affects of famine.⁸⁶

Gang attacks on granaries, grain-fields, on carts and boats laden with grain, followed a common pattern: One such example was recorded by the collector of Hamirpur. The incident occurred in *thana* Modha on 3 February 1837. The prosecutors were proceeding to Banda during the night with some bullock-carts laden with grain; they were attacked by five men who had clubs in their hands. Three of the attackers drove away the carts, while the other two remained to prevent the prosecutors from raising an alarm. The police failed to trace the culprits.⁸⁷ In yet another instance in Hamirpur, in *thana* Panwari, on 5 June the prosecutor in company with others, was travelling with twenty-five camels laden with sugar when they were attacked at night by twelve men. Some of the attackers drove away three camels carrying sugar, to the value of Rs 108. The police again failed to trace the robbers. On 1 February 1837, one Bhola *bania* and his wife put up for the night under a tree in a village, when a thief came and carried off their belongings valued at Rs twenty-seven, four annas. Bhola pursued the thief and caught him, when another accomplice came up and wounded him with a spear, while other two thieves made off

⁸⁵ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8; vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; to Thomason, Secretary to the Gov.-Genl. NWP, from Lowther, 20 March 1838.

⁸⁶ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, 1838-9, viii, box 560, basta 192, serial.5; to Lowther, commissioner Allahabad div, from the ofg. Jt.-magistrate, Hamirpur, 14 January 1839. UPRAA.

⁸⁷ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8, vii, box, 562, basta 192, serial.12; to Lowther, offg. commissioner, Allahabad div, from the magistrate, Hamirpur, 20 July 1837. UPRAA.

with the bundle. No one was arrested.⁸⁸ The pattern indicates that while a few looted grain and other valuables, others prevented victims from raising an alarm. The intention was not to cause physical injury. The pattern of robberies and thefts also indicates that these were mostly performed by co-travellers, who initially struck up a friendship with the victim and won their confidence. They offered them food or drink, which was administered with '*dhatūra*', making the person unconscious. The victim was then robbed and the culprits fled. Usually bodily injury was not inflicted. So pervasive were such crimes that a special category of crime recorded: 'Thefts with drugs.'⁸⁹

1860-1

During the 1860-1, lawlessness did not assume the same proportions as 1837-8. Petty crimes, especially offences against property, were frequent. In Meerut division, however, a steep escalation in serious crimes like murders, highway robberies, burglaries, and crime against property was reported.⁹⁰ The increase was apparent in severely afflicted areas, and amongst classes who were in want. This could be attributed to the fact that this particular region was normally better off than the east of the province, and, as police reports point out was inhabited by *Gujurs*, *Mewatis*, and *Ahirs*; they were influential being landed proprietors, and were linked together by close ties of fraternity "as well as by the common bond of their predatory profession and practices." The report emphasized that "To break up a criminal combination so powerful and so extensive, must be regarded

⁸⁸ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; to Lowther, offg. commissioner, Allahabad div, from magistrate, Hamirpur, 20 July 1837. UPRAA.

⁸⁹ Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8; vii, box 562, basta 192, serial.12; from magistrate, Banda, to Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, 22 January 1838. UPRAA.

⁹⁰ *Report of the Police Administration In the North Western Provinces*, 1861, p. 56.

as an achievement hardly possible.”⁹¹ Crime reports are imbued with such cultural stereotypes, which moulded official response. While there was contempt and dismissal of *Chamars*, *Pasis* and *Gujurs*, there was apprehension and awe of the *Thakurs* and *Rajputs*. In Meerut division alone 10,776 offences were committed on village roads which the police, unaided by local people, felt unable to protect.⁹² Attempting to defend the unsatisfactory police performance, it was underlined that of 11,741 cases, 6,559 were non-cognizable offences, therefore non-prosecutable. The computed value of property stolen and plundered in 1860 was Rs 1,90, 605 as compared to Rs 312, 649 in 1861. The lawlessness was easily controlled as is reflected in the fact that there was virtually no additional deployment of police and certainly at no place was army help required.⁹³

1868-9

The same was true of the 1868-9 famine. Table 16, taking 1867 as the index year, the increase in reported crime was 57 to 100 in *dacoity*, 274 to 435 for robbery, 12,665 to 617,071 for lurking house trespass, and 10,218 to 12,196 for cattle theft; By 1869 *dacoities* were still on the anvil at 122, robberies fell to 509, and lurking home trespass to 23,297 cattle thefts to 6,751 and other thefts 32,090.⁹⁴ Cattle theft, however, was not endemic, working as there was a special organization for the suppression of this crime.⁹⁵

Table 16 shows the increase in reported crime during 1867-9.

⁹¹ *ibid.* p. 57.

⁹² *ibid.* p.56.

⁹³ *ibid.* pp.57-8.

⁹⁴ Henvey, *Report*, pp. 126-7.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p.127.

Table. 16

Year	Dacoities	Robberies	Lurking house trespass	Cattle theft	Other thefts
1867	57	274	13,665	10,218	18,699
1868	100	435	17,071	12,196	22,208
1869	122	509	23,297	6,751	32,090

Source: Henvey, *Report*, p.127.

1896-8

Records for 1896-7 and 1898 indicate that law and order situation was grim and officials feared another Mutiny. Petty grain crimes escalated in Mathura, Agra, Etawah, Kanpur and Bundelkhund, which were affected severely by famine.⁹⁶ As early as October 1896 there were reports of grain riots from Agra killing one person. But this was refuted by officials who deemed such reports “exaggerated.”

It is true that agitation exists (as it still exists) In Agra, among the poorer classes owing to the high prices that have suddenly surfaced and that some banias did close their shops for a short time fearing that they would be looted. It is also true that some grain –carts on their way from the railway station to the markets have been stopped in a few instances and that some petty looting did take place; but nothing of serious character which was not at once suppressed at the time.⁹⁷

Reports of other grain riots were also dismissed in a similar fashion.⁹⁸ Even as famine was being apprehended MacDonnell communicated to Viceroy Elgin,

⁹⁶*Report on the Administration of the Police of the NWP&O, For the Years Ending December 1887.* iii. Review of the District Working. Henceforth, *Police Administration Report*

⁹⁷From Lt.-Gov. Camp, NWP&O, to Woodburn, 3.10.1896, pp.3-4 (Ms.Emg.Hist.C 352)

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

I receive an increasing number of reports of grain thefts and technical grain dacoities of how a number of ryots who had received advances for digging wells, but against whom the dealers had enormously raised the prices of buckets for raising water, firmly but with no great violence swept the bazar of all the buckets, and distributed them, and proceeded to irrigate their fields.⁹⁹

Between October 1896 and September 1897, there was a 385 per cent increase in grain crimes. Often, grain shops located near relief works were plundered by gangs of labourers. The number of grain riots reported during the year was 855; the districts where rioting was most frequent being Azamgarh (forty-eight), Gorakhpur (forty-five), Allahabad (forty-four), Fyzabad (thirty-five), Ballia (thirty-four), Banda (thirty-three) and Barabanki (thirty-one).¹⁰⁰ The authorities, given their experience of famines, were aware that grain dealers were potential targets of plunder. The instructions to officers in charge of relief works provided that any cases of plunder by workers be dealt with as thefts, and, miscreants be summarily tried and punished in the presence of the whole body of labourers. There was also provision for immediate compensation of losses to grain dealer, from fines imposed on the guilty.

In 1896, dacoity rose markedly to 553 cases, as against 246 in 1895. Most affected were Mirzapur (twenty-eight), Goarakhpur (twenty-five), Bareilly (twenty-four), Hardoi (nineteen), Kheri (nineteen), Bahraich (nineteen), Agra (eighteen), Pilibhit (eighteen), Mainpuri (fifteen), Fyzabad (253), Moradabad (fourteen), and Saharanpur (twelve)¹⁰¹ As

⁹⁹Macdonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896, p.23. (emg.hist.c.353).

¹⁰⁰*Police Administration Report, NWP&O, 31 December 1896*, p.45.

¹⁰¹*ibid.* pp. 7-8.

many as 1,065 cases of robbery were reported as against 601 in 1895.¹⁰² The police, however, were successful in apprehending some wanted dacoits notably Elahi Baksh and Naneh Saiyed belonging to the notorious Rustam Mewati gang; these were sentenced for life.¹⁰³ There was widespread cattle thefts also, especially in the eastern districts - Allahabad, Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Fyzabad.¹⁰⁴ By 20 October 1896, 34,000 people were already in jail and this spurred the administration to start relief works in order to prevent crime from escalating and, thereby over-crowding in jails. Relief works were, thus, viewed as an economic, administrative and sanitary preventive. All but four districts in the province showed a sharp increase in convictions for offences against property, and this is reflected in the increase in short-term sentences delivered by the magistrates court. It was reported that in the *tehsils* of Hasanpur in Moradabad district, there was great distress: wheat was selling at six *sers*, and *makka* at seven *sers* a rupee.

thefts were committed in broad daylight. Incendiarism was at its height, fire breaking out in one quarter or another. It is said that the *kabaris* (those who purchase second hand articles for sale) whose goods do not sell in consequence of famine, are at the bottom of this nefarious business of setting fire to the houses.¹⁰⁵

In 1897, 2,73,817 cognizable crimes were reported against 2,33,478 of the previous year. There was a increase of about 40,339 cases. The chief increase of crime occurred under classes III and V (Serious offences against person and property and minor offences against property).¹⁰⁶ No less than 18,009 and 17,653, cases respectively, out of the

¹⁰² *ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ *Anis - i-Hind* (Meerut), 24 March 1897, p. 226. (L/R/5/ 4. OIOC)

¹⁰⁶ *Police Administration Report*, NWP &O, 1897, p.2.

increased 40,339 cases fell in these two categories. Cases of burglary also rose markedly. From 1,05,344 to 1,22,090 amounting to an increase of 16,746 cases. Cattle thefts increased in famine affected districts, chiefly for food-2,623 cases. Ordinary thefts were 9,224 cases, receiving stolen property 1,673 cases and criminal house trespass 4,045 cases.¹⁰⁷ 1,096 robberies were reported,-of these 217 were expunged as false and seventy-one proved to be cases not falling within the definition of robbery. In addition, thirty-seven cases of professional poisoning were reported.¹⁰⁸ The police admitted to large-scale concealment of petty crimes, so the figures computed did not represent the actual scale of this crime. This increase in crimes was noted in almost all the districts the most notable being: Aligarh from thirty-six to forty-eight; Dehradun thirty-five to fifty-five; Badaun thirty-two to forty-nine; Agra forty-one to fifty-two; Farrukhabad thirty-nine to forty-nine; Etawah twenty-nine to forty-four; Etah forty-six to sixty-two; Allahabad fifty-six to sixty-seven; Fatehpur fifty-one to sixty-three; Jhansi sixty-three to eighty-two; Banaras forty-six to sixty-five; Mirzapur forty-eight to fifty-nine; Ballia twenty-eight to thirty-nine; Jaunpur thirty-eight to fifty-five; Lucknow seventy-three to 105; Unnao sixty-seven to eighty; Rae Bareilly fifty-four to sixty-five; Hardoi seventy-seven to eighty-seven.¹⁰⁹

In 1897, dacoity again assumed menacing proportions: 711 cases were reported against 553 in 1896 and 246 in 1895. This included eight cases of river dacoity.¹¹⁰ Such a steep increase was attributed to the prevailing famine. Districts in which the greatest number

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* p.3

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* p.19.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. 31.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p.12.

of cases occurred were: Gorakhpur thirty-seven, Mirzapur thirty-six, Bareilly thirty-four, Jhansi thirty, Kumaun division twenty-five, Kheri twenty-four, Moradabad twenty-four, Pilibhit twenty-three, Mainpuri twenty-one, Jaunpur twenty-one, Shahjejanpur twenty, Agra nineteen, Hardoi seventeen, Etah sixteen, Fyzabad sixteen, Fatehgarh fifteen, and Meerut fifteen.¹¹¹ Meerut was ravaged by armed dacoit gangs; one being headed by the notorious Subte Rajput, while another was headed by Amir Ali (popularly referred to as Pirji), and at one time belonging to Jhunda's gang. However, excellent work was done in terms of detection and arrest of armed dacoits. In Aligarh on 20 June 1897, twenty-seven armed dacoits were arrested with guns and swords, travelling in camel carts. The notorious, Girwar Singh and Bhup Singh, long wanted by the police, were amongst those arrested. On 24 November 1897, an armed gang of fifteen dacoits was captured at Aligarh.¹¹² Overall there was an increase in the percentage of convictions of cases and persons in NWP&O from 85.75 and 78.53 in 1896, to 85.13 and 77.85 respectively in 1897.

Once distress eased crime statistics fell. Statistics for the year 1898 (when famine was declared to be officially over), show a decrease of thirty-three per cent upon the 1897 figures, the numbers falling from 273,817 in 1897 to 181,708 in 1898.¹¹³ Cases of dacoity decreased, specially in Jhansi, Mirzapore, Meerut, Kheri, Bareilly, and Pilibhit districts.¹¹⁴ The most notable variation was under the head of theft cases, which fell by nearly half, from 21,998, to 11,307; the number of cattle thefts were recorded at 4,286,

¹¹¹ *ibid.* p.13.

¹¹² *ibid.* p.15.

¹¹³ *Report on the Administration of the NWP& O, 1898-9*, p. xxix.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* p.xxx.

compared with more than double this figure, 8, 579, in 1897. This decrease was apparent everywhere except Meerut, which showed a trifling increase; this was attributed to a year of prosperity following a season of distress. There was also a decline in the number of cases of criminal trespass brought to trial.¹¹⁵ The number of simple imprisonments in the courts of the magistrates fell from 2,707 in 1897 to 1, 311 in 1898. The percentage of simple imprisonments on all offences was 5.0 per cent, the corresponding figure for the previous year being 7.7. It was noted that the crime figures reported were the lowest in many years.¹¹⁶ The percentage of crime fell from 82.4 to 78.4 per cent.¹¹⁷

Table 17 shows the number of persons brought to trial and convicted between 1895-8:

Table. 17

	Brought to trial	Convicted	Convicted under the penal code
1895	177,734	97,204	53,852
1896	166,615	94,451	56,116
1897	169,241	103,273	66,785
1898	140,035	79,270	40,102.

Source: *Criminal Statements of the NWP, for the Calendar Year 1898 in NWP Criminal statements 1886-1900*,p.3.

What specific information do we have of the crowd composition of the rioters? Officers emphasized that sometimes whole villages participated in these depredations, and that even ordinarily good people were driven to these crimes, although in several instances

¹¹⁵ *Criminal Statements of the NWP. for 1898, in the NWP.Criminal Statements,1886 1900*,p. 2.
¹¹⁶ *ibid*.p. 10, & xxxiii.
¹¹⁷ *Criminal Statements NWP&O, For the Calendar Year 1898, Criminal Statements,1886-1900*,p.2.

known criminals also participated and their inclination for plunder found full scope. Such activities included the participation of women and children.¹¹⁸ In many instances impoverished landlords took the lead, doubtless out of bitterness and in defence of their socio-economic entitlements which may have been further threatened during famines. This caused anxiety amongst officials who relied upon *zamindars* to maintain tranquility and control disaffected people. Mobilization of suffering people along caste lines for criminal purposes was occasional. References to *Pasis*, *Gujars*, *Ahirs*, *Thakurs*, *Mewatis* and *Rajputs* gives an idea of the castes of the participant; *Gujars* and *Pasis*, being poor and of inferior position in social hierarchy was highlighted as also their criminality. The common motivation of these diverse segments was the restoration of their moral right to subsistence.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Crimes committed may be divided under two heads. Firstly, those crimes associated with turbulence, violence, public disorder, or concerted outrages in which whole classes of people were involved; these denoted the administration's failure to protect life and property. Second, were the petty crimes which was the natural outcome of privation. These were taken as a measure of the intensity of the distress.

The looting of granaries, signified the challenge peasants posed to the moral authority of those who controlled food resources; they believed that they had a right to redistribute

¹¹⁸*Report on the Scarcity and Relief Operations, NWP & O, 1877- 78 & 79.* pp.3-4.

¹¹⁹Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund div, deptt. xii, f. no. 3/90, serial no. 11; from C.Robertson, Secretary to the Government, NWP & O, March 1879. UPSAL

food, even though to do this they had to resort to ways that were not legal and risk being labelled as 'criminals.' They did not consent to every action of the state. There were protests, dissent, complaints and widespread questioning and criticism of the motives and actions of government; this is reflected in the unwillingness of the needy to avail relief facilities especially at the poor houses. Although attacks on state symbols were few, protests against highhanded behaviour of officials was registered; innumerable grain riots broke out, especially during the 1896-7 famine, when hawkers and shopkeepers demanded prices that were beyond the reach of famine victims. The sufferers demanded that prices be reasoned, and when that was denied, acted in consort, swooping away the goods. In many instances needy people demanded their traditional rights as regards free grazing and forest produce. These demands and petitions indicate that the peasants made rational and calculated choices to maintain, and if possible enhance, their well-being, as also of their family; they had a fair idea of their rights and could enforce these, if need be, unconstitutionally. But their actions were constrained by political and economic factors, as also by their perceptions of the suitability of their actions.

These strategies were formulated at the level of the village, community, family, and sometimes caste. In the records studied, I did not come across details of collective efforts being made at caste level to combat famines, though this probably did take place. Crime records for 1837-8, noted that *Thakurs* were combining for purposes of looting and crime, and were known to be manufacturing arrows on a large-scale. Famine and other official reports elucidated the reasons for the pre-ponderance of certain castes at poor

houses and at relief works, the separate arrangements made for their stay at poor houses, the criminal traits of certain castes. However, in a later narrative it was observed:

In compact communities, consisting principally of one class of people, those people held together and afforded mutual help to each other, the result being that mortality was very low. On the other hand when community was considerably mixed as to classes, the mortality was heavy. Instances of the above, side by side were to be found.¹²⁰

The accusation of passivity, submissiveness, and inactivity is based on the premise that 'all hungry men must rebel' and that the self-defense of the Indian peasant did not reach the scale of insurrection or open rebellion as did the grain riots in England and France. True, the Indian peasants may not have been as well organized or cohesive as Hobsbawn's or Thompson's rebels; nor was there organized political mobilization or propaganda so important to the success of grain riots in England and France;¹²¹ An immediate economic motivation impelled their acts rather than any distant political objective or ideology. There was a consciousness of an ethical rationale, which spurred rioters on. They acted collectively out of a sense of solidarity often in concert with criminals, and wrested resources to assuage their hunger. Their actions were often violent and militant. They had a recognition of themselves if not along well-defined class lines, yet as fellow sufferers in hunger and poverty, with common oppressors, and viewed their acts as social and moral protests. This solidarity is reflected in the fact that police detection of property crime was very low, and recovery of goods even less. The

¹²⁰*Scarcity and Relief 1877-78, & 79*, Pitcher, *Report*, p. 314.

¹²¹E.P.Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,' *Past and Present*, no.50 (February 1971), pp.76-136; L.A.Tilly, 'The Food Riot as a Form Of Political Protest In France,' *Journal Of Interdisciplinary History*, 2, 1 (1971), pp.23-57.

perpetrators considered their acts to be morally right, which they thought, the government would condone given the circumstances. As a district officer testified

When the system of plundering the grain stores first commenced, an opinion prevailed among the lower classes how ever originated, that the authorities would not be inclined to take severe notice of such acts, provided the holders of grain, to whose rapacity they attributed the high prices of food were the only sufferers.¹²²

During famines while hundreds may have died and become listless and inert, thousands did struggle and strive for survival, and turned their little 'village republics' into scenes of frenzied activity. The extent of institutional dislocation- moral-cultural is conclusively discussed in the following section.

¹²² Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837 - 8, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; Police statements for the 6 months of 1837; from the offg. magistrate, Etawah, 28 February 1838. UPRAA.

Section II:

Women-the Moral Order and Famines

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that in stressful periods like famines there is bound to be extensive institutional dislocation, which tears the socio-moral fabric of society. To what extent did Indian family and community structures hold together? Whether the family as an entity broke down altogether, abandoning the aged, women and children for selfish reasons is open to question. Deserted women taking to prostitution or being forced into it by their relatives and husbands; the abandonment, sale and murder of children by parents and relatives, the refusal of traditional patron-landlords to help dependants, when they had resources to do so, and cannibalism. Additionally, officials often judged the functioning of the moral economy by the responses of women to famines.

B.M.Bhatia, reiterating the idealized version of village republics, argued that with the advent of colonialism, major structural changes like the growth of a capitalist economy undermined the largely self-sufficient, subsistence moral economy. It increased the dependency of the poor on their providers, who even in normal times breached their traditional moral obligations and during famines often ceased to operate.¹²³ Recent scholarship considers this view to be exaggerated.¹²⁴ Greenough, cites the abandonment by patrons and household heads of their dependents during the 1943 Bengal famine.¹²⁵

¹²³ Arnold, *Social Crisis*, pp. 81-2.

¹²⁴ *ibid.* pp. 81-3.

¹²⁵ Greenough, *Prosperity And Misery*, p. 210.

According to him, the most critical period of the famine began when patrons refused to support their dependents. Within families, distinctions were made between those who needed to be sustained and those who could be dispensed with. Principal earners of the family were given preferential treatment. Spouses were separated and children sold off.¹²⁶ Jodha's study of famines for Rajasthan, and Epstein's for southern India, likewise pre-suppose a collapse of mutual reciprocities and aid patterns.¹²⁷

Some scholars perceive famines as a process, which, during its course, intensifies routine exploitation. They argued that there is a general caving in of co-operative structures but not a total disintegration of society. Torry, for instance, argues for the limited fragmentary impact of famines, and erosion of moral values and ethical norms. According to him, "The mutual aid networks shrank rather than dissolved, and many destructive acts took place within the parameters of customs."¹²⁸ Therefore, the destructive impact of famines was primarily in the moral sphere. Arnold argues similarly, viewing famines as a social and biological process rooted in normal crisis heightened by social realities, its zenith being of exceptional potency and destructive power.¹²⁹ A film about the 1943 Bengal famine, 'The Distant Thunder,' is a vivid representation of this view.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ibid.pp 210-36. See above pp.7,14, below pp. 377-384.

¹²⁷Jodha, 'Famine and Famine Policies: *EPW*, X, 2 (11 October 1975), pp. 1609-23; Epstein, 'Productive Efficiency' in Firths, (ed.), *Themes*, pp.229-52.

¹²⁸Torry, 'Mortality And Harm,' *Social Science Information*, 25,i, March 1986, pp.128-9,142-53; Watts, 'The Heart Of Darkness, Reflections On Famine And Starvation in Africa' in Re.Downs, Donna O'Kerner and Stephen P.Reyna (eds). *The Political Economy of African Famine* (Amsterdam,1991), p.39;D.Rahmato, *Famine And Survival Strategies: A Case Study from North East Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa,1991), p.153.

¹²⁹Arnold, *Social Crisis*, pp. 6-7.

¹³⁰S.Ray, *Distant Thunder* (India, 1974).

This section examines the extent of breakdown of institutions – patron-client, family and community ties, and its repercussions on women. Whether women were able to get adequate relief in terms of employment, wages, the multiple roles they assumed during famines, and the processes, which brought this about. Whether women succumbed passively to the pressures of hunger, and a lonely deserted life.

The works of Vaughan, for the 1949 Nyasaland famine, and of Epstein, Greenough and Jodha, for southern India, Bengal and Rajasthan and Ali Mehtabunsia, for in the Indian context, have focussed on women's plight and responses of the economically and socially inferior classes.¹³¹ These indicate that women were at great risk and suffered immensely during famines. The works of Dirks and Torry, by themselves are excellent in their detail and analysis, but strangely omit making differentiation between male and female responses and adaptations to famine. Torry, has argued for the generally inferior status of women in Indian society which worsened during famines.

Consider wife abandonment. It extends the husbands moral license to restricting or enforcing restrictions on his spouse's basic rights. The food she eats, her position in jati, and her legal and political rights reflect the inferior status she occupied in relation to her mate. Under the compulsions of a food emergency, his super ordinate position arrogates to him the authority to cut deeply into the rights of his wife. Karmic reasoning, I suggest, gives the wife a deterministically based justification for accepting in a fatalistic manner her licensed harm as a duty beyond her power to contest, that is a more or less ascribed attribute of her conjugal role.¹³²

¹³¹ Ali Mehtabunsia, 'Women in Famine: their paradox status in India' in B. Curry G. Hugo (eds). *Famine as a Geographical Phenomenon* (Holland, 1984), pp. 113-31.

¹³² Torry, 'Mortality And Harm,' *Social Science Information*, 25,i, March 1986, p.148.

Notable among other sources of information Bankim Chandra Chatterji's, *Anand Math* and Bibhuti Bhushan's, *Ashani Sanket*.¹³³ These literary works set in famine setting highlight the multiple pressures on women during famines, as principal begetters of food, decision makers and, their nutritional and emotional deprivations; that despite severe limitations women resilience and adaptations to subsistence crisis was much more dynamic than men, yet there was a devaluation in their status in post-famine years. Despite the importance and contemporary relevance, till date women's position, perceptions, and responses to famines have not been studied in a historical or anthropological context for NWP&O. This section examines the extent of breakdown of institutions – patron-client, family and community ties, and its repercussions on women. Whether women were able to get adequate relief in terms of employment, wages, the multiple roles they assumed during famines, and the processes, which brought this about. Whether women succumbed passively to the pressures of hunger, and a lonely deserted life.

Some incidental though valuable information on women can be found in the famine reports of Baird Smith, Girdlestone, Henvey, Roberts, Benette and Pitcher, the Famine Code of 1880, and the Famine Commission Reports of 1898, and 1901, as also Sanitary Commissioners Reports. Of special value are the reports of female missionary nurses and doctors from 1870's, to whom the doors of many house-holds including that of *parda nashin* were thrown open. This not only paved the way for regular instructions in Christian faith, but their reports and accounts, highlight the plight and status women in

¹³³Chatterji, *Ananad Math* (1882).Eng.translation,.Roy (3 ed, New Delhi, 2002); B.Badopadhyaya, *Ashani Sanket* (Calcutta,1973)

their house-holds. A careful study of materials from the above sources, as well as Census reports, popular sayings and vernacular literature, one can come up with a qualitative assessment of how women fared during famines in the NWP&O.

Comments on the role and status of women in NWP&O, are made difficult by the many combinations of religion, caste and culture, regional differences and have their individual interpretations of women's status. The most notable variation would be between those who observed *parda* (veil) and those who did not. However over riding these variations certain generalizations can be made for the period of this study. Firstly, women had virtually no place in the wage earning economy; they were unlikely to be employed in factories or any commercial undertaking which, were very few in any case. They were not commonly employed even as field labourers and worked chiefly as domestic help; this could be taken as a cash earning activity. Women who did find work in agriculturally related sector, their employment was not always constant and they do not find mention in the sketchy statistical returns of the time.

Decision makers:

Evidence suggests that at the initial stages of famine the moral economy remained intact. Affected people drew together and strategized how best to get through the crisis; they co-operated in sharing resources and there was unity of action; for instance in performance of religious and magical rites, working on communal facilities like digging of *kuccha* wells, drawing up joint petitions, highlighting breach of customary rights and demanding

redressal, all these had the participation of women. These strategies aimed at preserving the existing entitlements of the afflicted. Officials testified to the charitable disposition, public spirit, resilience and self-sacrifice of the affected people.¹³⁴ Baird Smith noted that the Indian people “faced the calamity with steadier and stronger resolution and better success than any other people on the face of this earth.”¹³⁵ They reported that notwithstanding famine and misery, there was no mournful moral prostration amongst the afflicted. Gibson, collector of Unnao, noted the cheerful resignation of the people of NWP under trial.¹³⁶ In fact, some officers vehemently objected that a great deal was being made of the government’s emphasis on the readiness of the needy to sponge on government bounty.

However, there were transitions in their traditional obligations and role, most importantly of women. Women’s participation in religious ceremonies and white magic rituals became crucial, as discussed in an earlier chapter.¹³⁷ In literature and the popular sayings of the NWP&O, it is women who pressured their husbands to migrate, despite being aware that this was fraught with negative consequences for themselves.¹³⁸ Kalyani the central character of ‘*Ananda Math*,’ at first resists her husband’s suggestion to migrate from their village arguing that as long as she was alive she would fend for her husband and the child. But as famine deepened she decided to migrate counter arguing that were she to die, at least she would have ensured her family’s survival.¹³⁹

¹³⁴Sleeman, *Rambles*, p.193.

¹³⁵B. Smith, *Report*, i, p.7

¹³⁶*Report on the Criminal Justice in Awadh, ending 31 December 1887*; from W.Young, judicial, commissioner of Awadh, to the secretary, NWP& O, judicial criminal deptt, 31 August 1888, p.4.

¹³⁷see viii, pp.300-2.

¹³⁸ *ibid.* pp. 292-4.

¹³⁹Chatterji, *Anand Math*, (eng.transl.3 ed. 2002) , pp.26-7.

The high incidence and preference for selling jewelry, utensils and other household items had the backing of women. Such transactions were efforts to generate income to get food, while these fetched a good price. The loss of these would hit women particularly hard as these were the only assets owned and controlled by them, as part of '*stridhana*.' Subsequently, women would have virtually no resources to fall back upon in times of need. The justification for giving up her rights over women's property '*Stridhana*' lies in the *Dhramshastras* and *Arthashastra* which stipulate that the injunction on the inviolability over '*stridhana*' was relaxable during famines, and men could use it without obligation to refund it when normal times commenced.

Relief

Leaving their abodes and taking recourse to relief works and poor houses was a major transition especially for women, who had to labour along with their male counterparts and compete with them for food. Relief remained insensitive to female needs and discriminated against them along gender, caste, class lines as illustrated by the wage policy. Despite the discrimination, harsh conditions and, manual work, a significant feature of 1860-1, 1868-9 and 1897-8 famines, was the extraordinary preponderance of women and children on relief works. In Bundelkhund it was specifically noted that on large relief works the number of women and children employed far exceeded the number of men. It has been calculated that to every 100 men, 306 women and children were in receipt of wages. There was thus one man to every four or five women & children.¹⁴⁰ In

¹⁴⁰ *Accounts and Papers: Famine and Relief Operations, lxiv, 19 January-6 August 1897. NWP&O, no.3945s/1-58, Resolution Scarcity and Rev deptt, 20 October 1896.*

Bijnor's poor houses during the 1868-9 famine, women were in excess.¹⁴¹ This may be because male members of the family migrated or deserted their women leaving them to fend for themselves and the children. It is worth noting that women of socially inferior castes assumed new roles as carriers for men were usually employed as diggers; the traditional division of labour between the two sexes virtually broke down.

Instead of specially provisioning for women, gender discrimination in wages widened by the turn of the twentieth century. During 1837-8 this discrimination was at least opposed by some officials, but disparity in work wages was later uncontested and recognized as customary, and given the status of law by the Famine Code of 1880.¹⁴² Women labourers were treated with contempt and referred to in the local parleys as vagrants, 'wretched,' 'coolies' or even 'he.' For example, during 1896-7 famine, provincial government sanctioned some money for free distribution of clothing to destitute women and children. "*Dhotis, chadars, saris, lahengas, dupattas, pyjamas, kurtas* were freely distributed to the *wretched coolies*."¹⁴³ (italics mine) The notable feature was not the high rates of women on relief works rather, that they participated; that many who were normally only domesticated, did make a decision to labour and employment contributing to maintain themselves and their family, in social setting where work for wages was considered status reducing, and they were discriminated and treated harshly at three levels-by Indian society which discriminated along caste and class lines, by their male counterparts and by officials.

¹⁴¹Henvey, *Report*, p.31.

¹⁴²see ch IV, pp.160-3.

¹⁴³*Final Report, on Famine Relief Operations in the 2 circle, NWP&O*, by G.R.Mcdowell, offg. Superintending Engineer, 15 September 1897, p.139.

Relief to upper class impoverished women who lived in seclusion, was provided at their homes as custom and honour debarred them from appearing in public.¹⁴⁴ Spinning, weaving, embroidery and sometimes cleaning of grains and making caps, were considered suitable forms of work for them. Those accustomed to grind corn were employed in so doing, the grain being reached to their place. However if they were totally unfit to work then gratuitous relief was provided to them at their homes. By the 1890's European missionary women were also pressed into relieving these secluded, well-born, impoverished ladies. Francis Merewether, who toured the famine districts during the 1896-9, noted that at Agra, Mathura, Farrukhabad, European ladies had formed relief committees and were visiting the *parda-nashins* and providing relief to them. At Agra about 3,000 *parda-nashins* were being relieved at their homes at a cost of Rs 5,000 per month, half of which was contributed by the government the other half being contributed by philanthropic gentlemen, Indian and European.¹⁴⁵ At Lucknow about 15,000, *parda-nashins* were being relieved in this manner.¹⁴⁶ Thus the intensity and depth of female suffering varied in accordance to several permutations and combinations but overwhelmingly by their class-caste and much lesser degree their occupation.

At the second stage of famine, there is frequent mention of intra-households as areas where social customs and family ties were visibly dislocated and ruptured. There was a scramble for scarce resources, compounded by fragmentation of family and community

¹⁴⁴ *Accounts and Papers; Famine and Relief Operations*, lxiv, 19 January 1897-8 August 1897. NWP&O 3945s/1-58. *Resolution Scarcity and Revenue deptt*, Nainital, 20 October 1896.

¹⁴⁵ F. Merewether, *Famine Districts Of India: A Tour Through The Famine Districts Of India* (London, 1898), pp. 212-13.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.278.

networks, which had severe negative repercussions on women and children. However, even now, not everyone abandoned their family and still acted constitutionally. They often co-operated and acted in conjunction and shared resources.¹⁴⁷ They petitioned government sometimes collectively demanding that their existing entitlement and resource base be protected.¹⁴⁸ They toiled hard to somehow keep their families alive and together, and their resource base intact. At Moradabad affected people worked on *kuccha* wells, a task very difficult and tedious. Here the water failed after every two hours working and had to be rested for a couple of hours, after which the same process was repeated.¹⁴⁹ In desperation many mortgaged and sold off their assets, even land, implements, bullocks and cattle, to keep themselves and their families alive and together. When all avenues of help were tapped many chose to die rather than abandon their loved ones. Sleeman recorded instances where entire families sold off every worldly possession they had, ate one last wholesome meal with the money raised, then consumed poison and died together with honour.¹⁵⁰

Breakdown of family and community structures

It was at the later stages of famine “that the pressure was so great that the ordinary bonds of society were broken by it.”¹⁵¹ There was sustained deprivation, and afflicted people stood shorn of all resources including the ability to labour. Family networks virtually

¹⁴⁷ *Report on the Scarcity and Relief Operations, NWP&O, 1877, 78 & 79*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ See, pp. 331-6.

¹⁴⁹ Henvey, *Report*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁰ Sleeman, *Rambles*, p. 197; *Friends Of India*, p. 5 April 1838, p. 152.

¹⁵¹ *IFC, Report*, i, pp. 40-1; B. Smith, *Report*, ii, p. 30.

ceased to work as a protective and re-distributive entity. Patrons and household heads abandoned their dependents for selfish reasons. Family members, particularly women, elderly and children were left to fend for themselves. The jt.-collector of Agra, commenting on increase in abductions, stressed that the crime arose from the peculiarly distressed state of the country in consequence of which natural guardians made away with those who were incapable of supporting themselves, leaving women and children to the designs of the ill-disposed and often practiced seducers.¹⁵² Sometimes, in deserted villages, the only occupants were the old.

The ties of relationship appear to have been strained to the utmost ... Everyone had to look after himself or herself. "Parents refused to help their children and children their parents. Consequently anyone disabled by fever, dysentery or other causes and therefore unable to go to the works or fields in search of '*batua*,' was left to die, whereas in normal years they would have received help."¹⁵³

The collector of Bijnor recorded an instance when he found an old woman lying abandoned on the road in a totally emaciated condition. On her recovery she disclosed that her children had evicted her from the house as they could barely keep themselves alive. The collector remarked that "such cases were not uncommon."¹⁵⁴ Pitcher, reported that family members became indifferent to each other's welfare. To illustrate his point, he cited a number of examples; in a house at Sathrapur village, a man died of want, but his son shortly after got married and borrowed money to celebrate the wedding, though he had evidently not thought it worthwhile to borrow to save his fathers life.¹⁵⁵ At the village

¹⁵²Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 56, serial 8, list.1; to .Hamilton, offg commissioner Agra div, from jt magistrate, Agra, 16 Feburary 1839. UPRAA.

¹⁵³*Resolution On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877, 78&79, Pitcher, Report*, p. 313.

¹⁵⁴*Henvey, Report*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁵*Resolution On scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-, 78, 79, Pitcher, Report*, p. 314.

of Jaggat, a *Chamar* whose wife and two children had died under extreme privation, setting aside all norms of mourning, remarried shortly after and expected to be a father soon; at Marora village, a *zamindar* was said to have died from want in a joint Hindu family.¹⁵⁶ At Matipur village, two old *Chamars* came up to Pitcher and complained that their sons who were in good condition and earning wages at sugar mills, refused to give them food and starved them; they wished in consequence to be sent to the poor house.¹⁵⁷ What emerges is that family ties can be significantly undermined by severe and prolonged famine.

Women as provisioners

With the deepening of famines and fragmentation of family and community networks the plight of women worsened. We get glimpses of women's plight from female missionaries who reported that most of the houses they visited were very poor- so poor that, women, including, little girls, had to work and grind the whole long day to be able to get one meal a day for themselves. They therefore could not spare time to listen to the bible.¹⁵⁸ Missionaries reported a sharp decrease in the attendance of students especially in the girls school because of famine and plague.¹⁵⁹ The situation affected even the better off households. Famine literature emphasizes that on women fell the responsibility of provisioning for their families especially in the absence of the male members who may have migrated, deserted, died or disclaimed responsibility for their families.

¹⁵⁶ibid. p.314.

¹⁵⁷ibid. p.320.

¹⁵⁸USPG, CWW. Series, Lucknow diocese; *Thirty- third Annual Report, for the year ending 1898*; Women's Mission Association for the promotion of female Education in the missions of the SPG, p.13.

¹⁵⁹ibid, p.15

It has been demonstrated how afflicted people made nutritional adjustments even as famine was apprehended. Several studies of nutritional intake confirm that the burden of nutritional adjustment fell disproportionately on women. Greenough argued that women ate after men, receiving a smaller and poorer share even during normal times. This inequity magnified during famines. When food and medical supplies became short female children tended to be deliberately neglected and starved.¹⁶⁰ Their situation worsened in the event of a break down of the 'moral economy;' for example if deserted by spouse.

While some of Greenough's assertions are based on cultural misperceptions, it is indisputable that famine imposed enormous physical and emotional suffering on women. As famine intensified kitchen, pots and pans, continued to remain empty. The foraging for unconventional food in the wild was pre-dominantly carried on, as an officer observed by "deserted women" and children, though it was not uncommon to see men also compete for these. In Badaun, women and children were reportedly competing for picking a prickly thorn called 'gokroo,' and consuming the grass for the sake of the seed in it; the magistrate informed that, "after a whole days labour, two chittacks is the amount of grain which is sifted from the mass of the dust."¹⁶¹ Famine literature including reports and the Famine Commission reports of 1898, 1901, depict the gathering of wild foods as a woman's task.

¹⁶⁰ Greenough, *Prosperity And Misery*, ch.V; J. Dunbar (ed), *Tigers, Durbars And Kings: Fanny Eden's Indian Journals 1837-8*(London, 1988), p.105.

¹⁶¹ Girdlestone, *Report*, p.81.

Due to prolonged malnutrition, women became infertile, and there was a sharp decline in birth rates; rise in abortions was also observed.¹⁶² Some had become so emaciated that they looked as if they had been buried "their skulls and bones looked dreadful."¹⁶³ Women's plight was poignantly summed in the observation of the Bishop of Lucknow "skeleton mothers suckling skeleton babies."¹⁶⁴ Yet even in death many clung to their children. Despite severe, multiple pressures, officials observed that women fought famines more courageously, and, tenaciously than men and the mortality amongst them was lower.¹⁶⁵ In any case the issue of female mortality and sickness was overshadowed by more pressing visible problems - that of averting starvation deaths, issue of infant mortality and, averting epidemics. Undoubtedly attention to these problems was not misplaced, but this was not tackling the general problem of female ill-health.

Officials often judged the extent of the breakdown of the moral economy in terms of women's action. If women cared and fended for their children and made the necessary sacrifices then the moral economy was deemed to be intact. But if not, it betokened its breakdown, for example, when Nash witnessed mothers snatch away eatables from their children he took this to be symbolic of the breakdown in moral economy. For men no such yardsticks applied. It was believed that women were not always as helpless and not always as self-sacrificing as projected. Missionaries involved in relief work complained that:

¹⁶²See, ch. X, p.400.

¹⁶³Eden, *Up The Country*, p. 65.

¹⁶⁴USPG E53,1898A, Report of Revd. Hill, Banda, 'Famine A Retrospect,' p.8.

¹⁶⁵R. Dirks, 'Social Responses During Severe Food Shortages And Famines,' *Current Anthropology*, 21, no.1 (1980), pp.21-31; see above, pp. 167-8.

It is evident that mothers will often feed themselves and let their children want. Some, I fear, even keep their children in that state to excite pity. A number of women were badly in want of clothes; these with your help we are giving them, but it is very difficult to do so satisfactorily. If It gets known that you are distributing clothes, numbers will quickly slip away and put on rages so as to secure new ones from you.¹⁶⁶

Illustrative of this is the eyewitness account of Nash, who toured the famine-districts during the 1896-7; he reported that under the stress of famine, family affection had sapped, and children were abandoned, sold and robbed of food by their parents. “when the stomach presses hard against the spine, the heart may sometimes get displaced.”¹⁶⁷ For this reason the state government decided to distribute cooked food to children on relief works and this measure led to considerable improvement in the health of the little ones.¹⁶⁸ The magistrate of Bijnor posted extra patrols to pick up the deserted children, such was the extent of their desertion. Things had to be pretty bad, he remarked, “if maternal feeling ceases.”¹⁶⁹

Yet Nash also noted “instance after instance of tenderness and self-sacrifice, and to learn how suffering may be borne there is no better school than India. No famine does not always kill affection.”¹⁷⁰ Officers also noted the high percentages of women in the poor houses and relief works; their willingness to work hard, their sacrifices in securing food for the children, and drew attention to groups of women in helping with the

¹⁶⁶SPG, *News from the Missions*, 'The Famine In India,' November 1897, p5.

¹⁶⁷Nash, *The Great Famine*, p.85.

¹⁶⁸*Final Report On Famine Relief Operations, 2 Circle, NWP&O*, by G.R. McDowell, offg. Superintending Engineer, 15 September 1897, p.139.

¹⁶⁹Henvey, *Report*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁰Nash, *The Great Famine*, p. 85.

administration of gruel kitchen, and agitation for food supplies. Not all women became desperate or frustrated. Even at the height of famine the collector of Bijnor reported that at the occurrence of any festival the afflicted would desert the works and rush off to the Ganga to bathe. On one occasion in May 1868, when things looked particularly bad, out of 3,000 women and girls at relief works, 1,000 deserted the works to go the fair and amuse themselves with rides on the *jhoola*.¹⁷¹

Most women fought for survival and despite adverse circumstances neither killed, sold nor deserted their children. Even as they lay dying they clung to their children imploring passersby to take if even as slaves, so that the child would at least live.¹⁷² The case of Gyanee has been detailed in ch.VI. What stands out is the determination with which she got her child back from the convent- something which the police was not able to do. Those who had the means like Rani Kishori Kumar of Moradabad gave generous endowments for the upkeep of *parda-nashin* during famines.¹⁷³ Not only did they fight to preserve their families, they also fought to preserve their religious-cultural values. While instances of adult conversions have been discussed in previous chapters as a strategy of survival, most who converted for monetary gains were men. Women, it was recorded, were usually very bigoted and could be approached with the Gospel only by giving them secular instructions and sewing as an inducement.¹⁷⁴ Even under tremendous

¹⁷¹Henvey, *Report*, p. 32fn.

¹⁷²Sleeman, *Rambles*, p.196.

¹⁷³Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund div,xii,s-i-ii,f.4/90. Complete Narrative of the Scarcity and the Measures Taken to Afford Relief. From F.B. Tracy, collector, Moradabad, to H.M. Edwards, commissioner, Rohilkhund, 7 November 1897.

¹⁷⁴USPG, *CWW, Series, thirty- third Annual Report, 1989, Lucknow diocese*; 'Women's Education in the missions of the SPG,' pp.13-14.

emotional and nutritional stress women refused to change their faith. But it was imperative not to give up and go on influencing the women

for women of the house are generally the sole instructors of their children upto the age of eight or ten, and till the former are instructed in the truth, the difficulties in the way of conversion of the latter are immensely increased.¹⁷⁵

It was in this spirit that it was exhorted “ Women form the key of the fortress, which, we of the Church of God, have to attack in India. As, therefore, they are to be made the chief object of our approach.”¹⁷⁶

Desertion and sale of children

Abandonment and sale of children during famines was extensive enough to attract official attention.¹⁷⁷ Girdlestone noted that during 1837-8, starving parents at Farrukhabad were gladly selling their children to any one who would purchase them, the price varying from eight annas to four rupees a child.¹⁷⁸ Major Conran, the biographer of Colonel Wheeler who witnessed the 1837-8 famine, recorded that mothers sold their children to ‘despised foreigners’ or left them a prey to wolves, which fattened on the spoil. “Society was entirely disorganized and horrors of every kind pervaded the land.”¹⁷⁹ The widespread

¹⁷⁵CMD series; SPG and CMD 1888, Ladies Association, pamphlet entitled ‘ Delhi: Female Medical School. ’

¹⁷⁶CMD series 88, Missionary Conference held at St. James Hall, London, 10 July 1888; Pamphlet entitled “Grain of the Mustard Seed,” September 1888. p.166.

¹⁷⁷Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, Mainpuri, judicial, 1838, iii serial.3, list.1; to Hamilton, offg. commissioner. Agra div, from the magistrate of Mainpuri, 10 June 1838. UPRAA.

¹⁷⁸Girdlestone, Report, p.58.

¹⁷⁹ibid.pp. 57-8.

sale of children received extensive press coverage during 1896-7. It was reported that children were being sold for as low a price as two *annas* each.¹⁸⁰ The motive was not always profit, as in many instances parents thought that handing their children to missionaries would ensure their child survived the famine. Mothers having no means of sustenance tearfully abandoned their children in ditches and river banks or, on doorsteps of institutions hoping that some one would take care of the child.¹⁸¹ While kidnapping of children usually for the sake of ornaments, or to extract ransom from rich parents was recorded, there is no mention of children being killed by parents, either to do away with them or for cannibalism. In fact cannibalism is not mentioned in any of the records for the four famines.

In fact crime records highlight the rise in “Inward violence” or suicides primarily amongst women, who internalized their grief and ended their lives and that of their children because they could not endure the endless suffering. For example from Agra it was reported in 1838 that, a woman was tried for throwing herself and her three children into a well, in which however there was so little water that only the youngest infant was drowned. She was sentenced to three years imprisonment.¹⁸² Often in desperation many exposed their children. For example at Hamirpur, on 21 August 1837, a woman gave birth to a child, but having no means of sustenance exposed the child in the field. The

¹⁸⁰*The Rohilkhund Gazette*, 16 April 1897, p. 283. (L/R/5?74.OIOC).

¹⁸¹*News From The Mission*, 'The Famine In India,' November 1897, pp.2-3.

¹⁸²*Friends of India*, 5 April 1838, p.150.

village *chaukidar* found the abandoned child but could not save it.¹⁸³

Women as commodities

The neglect, abandonment and sale of women for selfish reasons has been discussed.

Such cruel acts were rightly interpreted as betokening the breakdown of the moral economy. An example of how women were sold and mistreated was reported from Moradabad. On the 19 December 1897, a Hindu male passenger with a woman alighted from the train at khandwa railway station. But he was arrested as he had travelled ticketless. He asked to be allowed to go to the town to bring the requisite money leaving the woman at the station as hostage. The man did not however put in his appearance again “and behold the oppression practiced on the woman.” She was auctioned for Rs. 3.60. The purchaser subsequently sold her at a profit for Rs.5/-¹⁸⁴ Women who escaped with their lives ended up in the brothels and were condemned to the life of degradation. While this does not seem to have constituted a problem in the earlier famines, by the 1896-7, it did become a issue and vernacular newspapers were highlighting how thousands of women were being forced into brothels and were being sent as far as Lucknow.¹⁸⁵ In sharp contrast male children who were abandoned or sold sometimes acquired the status of adopted sons and heirs. Indeed it was one of the most emphatic reminders of the physical, moral and social subordination of women, especially of poor

¹⁸³Pre-Mutiny, judicial, 1837-8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; from magistrate of Hamirpur to commissioner, Lowther, Allahabad div, 22 January, 1838.

¹⁸⁴*The Naiyyar -i- Azam* (Moradabad), 19 December 1897, p.788. L/R/5/ 74.

¹⁸⁵*Anjuman-i- Hind* (Lucknow), 21 August, 1897.vol.30. UPSAL

peasants and labouring classes. Their status was further devalued in the aftermath of famines.

Officials suspected that male relatives who could support their wives and female relatives often forced them to poor houses to relieve themselves of the burden of supporting them.¹⁸⁶ In several instances they used their wives residence at mixed relief camps and poor houses as a pretext for having broken with tradition to divorce them. Such was the fate of Must Nasiban, wife of Chidda caste Sheikh, resident of Bhunsia, in the Moradabad police station, who was compelled to reside in the poorhouse during the 1877-8 famine. When she returned home, she was disowned by her husband for having resided at the poor house. Dejected and harassed she attempted suicide but was saved. The court despite being aware of her circumstance, sentenced her to three months imprisonment for attempted suicide. She died of gripes in the prison. A similar fate was suffered by Hukumia, wife of Chidda caste *Bhangan*; she too had to resort to the poor house to save her life, only to be spurned by her husband for having resided there. Syed Imdad Ali noted that, such was the fate of the majority of the women, who had availed of poor house and relief facilities.¹⁸⁷ Women therefore were very vulnerable as they were under pressure to survive as well as under ideological pressure to maintain women's honour. Such crimes left women emotionally and psychologically scarred for life.

Women –victims and victimizers

¹⁸⁶Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, 1858-80, xii, Regulation C, f. 1; Abstract orders issued to on the occurrence of famines in the Bijnor district, 1877-8.

¹⁸⁷Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, xii, 1858-80, f. 82, serial ii, box 88. Translation of a letter from Syed Imdad Ali, Dy.-collector of Moradabad, 2 June, 1878.

What is not known is that often women victimized women. During 1837-8 in several districts, including Allahabad, Agra, Aligarh and Mainpuri the reported sale and physical assault usually of girls increased.¹⁸⁸ Women would entice away the girls and then strip them of their ornaments, sometimes inflicting physical injuries, though I did not come across any instance of the victim being killed. This became so rampant that the government contemplated passing an act to prohibit children from wearing ornaments during famines.¹⁸⁹

In the first six months of 1837, four cases of kidnapping of girls aged between seven to twelve years was reported from Kanpur.¹⁹⁰ At Banda, a woman named Sumkee, was carrying ornaments from *mouza* Khumonea, to *mauza* Sumrea, for sale; she was attacked in the morning by one Chhotu, who hit her with a stick, broke her arm and robbed her of ornaments valued at Rs. 2.4 annas. The accused was apprehended while in the act of selling the stolen ornaments.¹⁹¹ A typical example was reported from Hamirpur. A female child named Khemmea aged nine, went outside the village to ease herself. A woman named Hurkerrea, approached her, and enticed her away under the pretext of giving her fruits. She then took the child to a lonely spot and robbed her of her ornaments valued at Rs. three, maltreated and strangled her. She was however caught by

¹⁸⁸Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, 1837-8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial.12; to Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, the Jt. magistrate of Fatehpur, 20 July 1837. UPRAA.

¹⁸⁹Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial 1837- 8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial.12; from the magistrate of Hamirpur to Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, 22 January 1838. UPRAA.

¹⁹⁰Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad division, judicial, 1837-8. vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; from Wilson, magistrate, Kanpur to Lowther commissioner, Allahabad div, 20 July, 1837.

¹⁹¹Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8, vii, box 562, basta 192, serial 12; from the offg. magistrate, Banda, to Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, 22 January 1838.

the village *chukidar* with the ornaments; she was tried and imprisoned for six years.¹⁹² In yet another instance at Hamirpur, in *mauza* Soogra, on 25 October 1837, one girl named Sahibzadee, was asleep in her house. When it was dark, a woman named Bijree, dressed as a man, entered the house and snatched sahibzadee's nose ring, valued at Rs eleven. The victim woke up and raised an alarm, and caught the hand of the fleeing culprit, whereupon Bijree wounded her with a hatchet. The village *chukidar* however apprehended her with the stolen property in her possession. She was referred to the sessions court.¹⁹³ Similarly cases of "theft with drugs" often had the involvement of women. Records indicate that the task of lacing the drink with *dhatūra* and offering it to the victims was mostly undertaken by women.¹⁹⁴

Crime records refer to women's participation in grain riots, looting of granaries and shops. A few instances are being discussed. On 29 May a daring loot of bania shops occurred on Mirbala tank in the presence of Lt. Thomas. About twenty men and twenty-two women were arrested and were tried under section 379 of the Indian Penal Code. Similarly on 12 June 1897, the shop of Mussumat Lathari, was looted on the Girwan tank work near Hamirpur. The participants included a number of women. Particularly interesting was the fact that it was a woman's shop that was looted, by women. While in several cases men were punished on the spot under section 379 of IPC, usually with whipping, women were sentenced to short terms (one or two days) imprisonment.

¹⁹²Pre-Mutiny, Allahabad div, judicial, 1837-8, vii, basta 562, box 192, serial 12; from magistrate, Hamirpur to Lowther, commissioner, Allahabad div, 22 January 1838.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

Patron-Client relations

Another index of the breakdown of the moral economy was the considerable rupturing of the patron-client relationship.¹⁹⁵ The commissioner of Saharanpur observed that “hard times do not make relations between the landlord and the tenant easier.”¹⁹⁶ District officers often reported that needy people deserted their villages because of exploitation unleashed on them by the local *zamindar* and *banias*. It was reported from Bijnor during 1868-9, that the poor and small landholders were being hard pressed by their landlord for payment of revenue and other taxes. These small and middling peasants were being “swallowed up” in the demand for revenue and rent. The district, it was reported, was “pretty well gutted.”¹⁹⁷ MacDonnell was eager to share the burden of relief by ensuring that the elite discharged their traditional moral obligations. To enforce this he even toured the province. He nevertheless complained to Elgin ‘There is on the part of all natives—even the most respectable, an inclination to shrink their duty to their dependents, and throw them on the village relief lists. I have known wealthy *taluqdars* do this.’¹⁹⁸ Officials cautioned government to check the mal-practices of local power groups, as that would help maintain law and order.

However evidence indicates that philanthropy was not abandoned altogether despite the severity of the 1837-8 famine.¹⁹⁹ For example, in Kanpur, it was noted that so long as the

¹⁹⁵ See ch.V, pp.196-200.

¹⁹⁶ *Report on the Revenue Administration, NWP & O, 1895-6*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁷ Post-Mutiny, Rohilkhund, xii, 1858-80, f. 83. From Colvin, collector of Bijnor to Edwards, commissioner, Rohilkhund div, 15 August, 1878. UPSAL

¹⁹⁸ MacDonnell to Elgin, 16 February 1897, p.89. (Ms.Eng.Hist.C.353).

¹⁹⁹ see ch. IV, pp.173-6, ch.X, pp.385-7.

rich *zamindars* had the means they fed their poor neighbours and even went to the extent of selling their ornaments to raise money for purchase of food.²⁰⁰ Thakur Chandan Singh Somna distributed 100,000 *maunds* of grain in Aligarh and Bulandshahar districts during 1837-8; his memory and philanthropy were venerated here even in the 1860's.²⁰¹ In Farrukhabad, the Christian community formed a committee to dispense gratuitous relief. Non-Christians donated Rs 1,500 a month, and likewise dispensed relief.²⁰² It was estimated that about, 1,402 persons were fed daily, from private subscriptions, and a similar number from the government fund. Their exertions were lauded by the Lt.-Gov. in a letter to the magistrate, along with a donation Rs 1,000. Similarly, relief societies in Kanpur, Agra and Calcutta did commendable relief work, functioning for the most on private donation. In Kanpur, the number of persons charitably relieved in March 1838 was 1,500 per day, and in Agra, in February 1838, 40,000.²⁰³ The Agra Relief Society supported 3,800 persons daily.²⁰⁴ The work of relief committees expanded over the four famines. A pleasing illustration of charity was that some Hindus of Kassgunj during 1868-9, despite being in straitened circumstances, distributed 227 *maunds* of grain to 34,662 wayfarers. Similarly, people at Soraon, subscribed Rs 193 per month, and distributed eight *maunds* of parched grain to needy during 1868-9.²⁰⁵ In Bijnor, Raja Pratap Singh and Chowdhree Bassant Singh, raised subscriptions and opened works to employ the poor.²⁰⁶ During the 1877-8 famine, in Meerut, the relief afforded was entirely

²⁰⁰ Girdlestone, *Report*, p.50.

²⁰¹ *ibid.* p.59.

²⁰² *ibid.* p.54.

²⁰³ B.Smith, *Report*, ii, p.31;

²⁰⁴ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 57.

²⁰⁵ Henvey, *Report*, pp. 25-6.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 32 fn.

at the expense of a philanthropist, Shaikh Elahi Baksh.²⁰⁷ By the 1896-7, a large number of individuals engaged in alleviating distress, which to some extent became institutionalized.²⁰⁸

Conclusion

What inference can we draw from the above conflicting evidence? The discussion suggests official admiration for the peaceful and charitable disposition of the people in tackling famine; although as famine intensified, it stripped away the defences of many, who, violated cherished social and moral norms leading to a measure of social dissolution. There was escalation in crime; it was common for the poor-particularly, women, children and the elderly- to be abandoned by their patrons, family, and community, when they most needed to be looked after. The government did little to replenish the loss of moral, emotional and psychological entitlements even during 1896-7 famine. Though figures are unavailable as regards the sale of women and children, there is anecdotal and frequent mention especially in missionary records, though it did not denote any large-scale menace either. Women taking to prostitution is an issue that was not highlighted, though presumably this may not have been rare; in any event it never reached the scale and magnitude witnessed in the 1943 Bengal famine. Cannibalism is not mentioned in records consulted. Sleeman explicitly noted the total absence of all revolting acts, such as the living feeding on the dead, and mothers devouring their own children which characterized famines in other countries.²⁰⁹ Even Greenough, who argued

²⁰⁷ *Report on the Scarcity and Relief Operations, 1877 -78 and 79*, p. 36.

²⁰⁸ See appendix for a list of some of the trusts active in relief dispensation.

²⁰⁹ Sleeman, *Rambles*, i, p.197.

the break down of moral economy during the 1943 Bengal famine, does not mention cannibalism. Governments continued reliance on the services of the landlords as their spokesperson, in relief dispensation and maintenance of law and order during famines shows that the patron-client relationship had not completely ruptured, and that landlords wielded more influence and allegiance than government. It would be correct to assert that though many excesses were committed, no systematic pattern or evidence emerges that suggests a complete breakdown of the moral and social fabric of society. The disequilibrium, cleavages and anarchy witnessed in family and community relations were temporary and did not exceed controllable limits, the status quo ante being reverted to once famines were over. Economic and social disparities widened but there were no structural shifts in the functioning of social institutions and society did not move towards anarchy.

Chapter X:

Famines, Power and Profit

Introduction

The preceding chapters demonstrated the extraordinary contradictions characterizing the four famines studied. Certain sections of the highly stratified NWP&O society made social, religious, economic and political mileage. Famines were excellent opportunities for the furtherance of their particular agendas. Therefore discourse on famines emphasizing the phenomena in negative terms of victims and losses, starvation and death presents only a partial picture. Recent scholarship emphasizes the processual nature of famines in which there are victims and beneficiaries, liquidation as well as accumulation of assets; class and distributional analysis is the central theme of this argument. It probes deeply the part played by merchants, moneylenders, landlords and political groups in exacerbating the duration and implications of famines. This chapter identifies which groups were vulnerable to famines and why? who benefited at their cost and how.

The class interpretation of famine, and the benefits derived from it, were discussed as early as 917 AD. in Kalhan's classic *Rajtarangini*. It highlights how powerful groups exploited famines for personal profit.

The king's ministers and tantrins (guards), became wealthy as they amassed riches by selling stores of rice at high prices. The king would that person as

minister, who raised the sum due to the tantrins bill, by selling the subjects in such a condition.¹

It stresses the lack of political will to assist the needy during famines. Adam Smith also viewed famines to be advantageous for dominant power groups:

In all such disputes masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master, a manufacturer or merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks, which they have generally acquired. Many workers could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year, without employment.²

Lenin noted that in all imperialist countries, starvation of the masses offered the best field for the most unbridled profiteering.³ This argument has been reiterated by recent scholarship. Vaughan concluded that, during the 1949 famine in Malawi, the maize traders made huge profits primarily because they had the ear of the government.⁴ More recently Keen has considered the possibility that States and politically powerful groups promote and aggravate famine to further their own economic and political interests.⁵ In Ireland, the rich landlords exploited famine to consolidate their own interests. These works stress that proximity to political power was central to the exploitation of famines for ulterior purposes.⁶

Arnold too viewed famines as intensifiers of existing cleavages in peasant societies,

¹ Steins, translation of Rajtarangini, book V, pp. 272 -5, as quoted by Loveday, p. 11.

² A.Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth Of Nations* (Chicago,1976), pp.74-5.

³ Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, p.10.

⁴ Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, p.109.

⁵ Keen, *Benefits of Famine*, see conclusion.

⁶ Smith, *The Great Hunger*, p.165.

which established even more emphatically the subordination of poor peasants to moneylenders, traders, and landlords.⁷ Highlighting the class analysis of famine, Amartya Sen views entitlements as an individual's capacity and ability to command food, which varies in keeping with an individual's position within the wider system of production, exchange control, and distribution. As these changed so did a person's ability to command entitlement to get food.⁸ Rangasami has shown that among the major beneficiaries of contemporary famines in India were the sugar co-operatives in Maharashtra. They paid very low wages which were not negotiated directly with the peasant labourers, though the co-operative capital was put together by loans from peasants who were responsible for providing and maintaining the cattle essential to the production process. These, she points out, were subjects to criticism by industrial tribunals and courts but continued to be settled extra-legally against the peasants.⁹ In case of NWP&O, Forbes recorded, perhaps with some exaggeration, that, during the 1783 famine:

The inhabitants were reduced to utmost distress, the more opulent had hoarded up their grains; some perhaps did so under the prudent intention of securing their own families against want, while many foreseeing what was inevitable, neglected no means to procure corn of all descriptions, with the nefarious view of taking advantage of the times and bent on raising their fortunes on the miseries of their fellow creatures.¹⁰

⁷ Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 84.

⁸ See Introduction, pp. 12-13; Arnold, *Social Crisis*, p. 43.

⁹ J. Floud, 'Famine and Society: A Report of the Proceedings' in J. Floud and Rangasami (eds), *Famine and Society*, p. 16.

¹⁰ J. Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, iii (London, 1813), p. 58.

This was echoed in the eye witness account of 1896-7 famine by Nash.¹¹ The common argument in these works is that certain sections of society made extraordinary economic gains as famines involved a sudden change in the distribution of food and relatedly, income. This chapter examines how such changes occur or are deliberately brought about.

Vulnerability to famines: Areas and groups

Chapters I, II and V, emphasize that the intensity and impact of famines was conditioned by the socio-economic position of individuals in society, geographic location, gender and age, resource base and ability to enhance and maintain this base.

The labourers-industrial and artisans, who in 1880 numbered eight million in NWP&O were particularly hard hit. Weavers and potters numbered three and quarter million; landless labourers one and quarter million,¹² and workers and miners numbering 1,373,000 were the other categories on whom famine pressed most heavily.¹³ Thus Forty million people, constituting twenty per cent of the total population of British India, were identified as most vulnerable to famine.¹⁴ These lived on the verge of poverty even in normal times and, solely dependent on their skills to earn a living. When work was not obtainable, they lost their normal minimal entitlement to subsistence food. They were the

¹¹ V. Nash, *The Great Famine And Its Causes* (London, 1900), p.78.

¹² *IFC, Report, 1880-5*, ii, p.88.

¹³ *ibid.* p. 88.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.88.

first to fall on relief works or migrate to areas where there was a demand for their skills.¹⁵ Starvation led them to offer their labour at very cheap rates.¹⁶ In fact, one reason why gratuitous relief was discouraged was that it would have adverse effects on the private labour market.¹⁷ Bennett reported that, of the starvation deaths he investigated, sixty-eight per cent were day labourers, twenty-two per cent tenants with farms of less than five *bighas*, and only ten per cent with farms of more than five *bighas*. He estimated that day labourers contributed to eighty per cent of the total deaths from famine.¹⁸ These invariably belonged to the inferior castes like¹⁹ *Chamars*, *Lodhas*, *Koris*, *Pasis*, *Gureriyas*, *Julahas*, *Kahars*, *Bhattiaras*, *Dhobis*;²⁰ at poor houses and relief works they were unaccustomed to the work given, hence could not finish the allotted amount of work; consequently their wages were cut and lacked bare subsistence power. Starvation deaths were excessive from these groups.²¹ In comparison, *Brahmins*, who were by far the most numerous, suffered less. Out of a total of 5,920 inmates in the Moradabad poor house on 31 May 1861, 3,961 were *Chamars*, *Julahas*; most being agricultural labourers and artisans.²²

¹⁵ *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Pitcher, Report*, p. 312. He found that the two classes that suffered immensely at Shahjehanpur during the 1877 famine were the *Kahars* and the *Bhattiaras*: these castes monopolized the fishing in tanks. The *Kahars* carried on *singhara* cultivation and employed *Chamars* at liberal wages to collect the nuts: they were engaged in tending and gathering the crop for nearly six months (January to June), of the year. But with the drought the ponds and the tanks dried, thus depriving them of the means of livelihood. He found that the *Kahars* died in great numbers, during 1877 in Shahjehanpur district.

¹⁶ *IFC, Report, Appendix, iv; Evidence in reply to the Inquiries of the Commission*, pp. 18-21; *Report on the Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78-79*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *IFC, Report*, 1901, p.52.

¹⁸ *Report On The Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78-79, Bennett, Report*, p.349.

¹⁹ *ibid. Roberts, Report*, p.381

²⁰ *ibid. Pitcher, Report*, p.312; *Henvey, Report*, p.43

²¹ Post- Mutiny, Rohilkhund, xii, Reg c.1858-80;f.no.1; translation of a petition from Hiralal, *tehseeldar* of Suheswan, 28 May 1878. UPRAA.

²² *Geddes, Report*, p. 361.

Table 18 which shows the caste wise distribution of the inmates, at the Moradabad poor house on the 30 April and May 1861.²³

Table.18

Hindoos	30 April1861	31 May 1861.
Brahamins	28	32
Bania	1	3
Kayett	6	10
Jat	27	44
Tuga	4	1
Thakoor	4	17
Gujar	4	14
Aheer	38	92
Koomhar	102	133

²³ *Report On Scarcity,NWP&O,1877-78&79,Bennett, Report, p. 348.*

Kuhar	42	53
Baghwan	42	83
Bhaniyar	25	13
Hujjam	22	2
Guduriya	61	8
Dhabee	14	7
Lodha	0	27
Chohan	0	25
Khakrob	0	97
Chumar	1,364	2,829
Other castes	0	40
Total	1,794	3,547

Mahommedan

Sheikh	508	721
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Saiyyad	123	132
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Mogul	35	33
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Puthan	111	133
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Telee	66	65
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Chepee	8	7
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Baghwan	2	7
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Sukka	12	10
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Lohar	3	9
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Hujjam	23	18
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Other castes	39	71
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Total	1,920	1,206
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Grand total	3,714	4,753
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Source:Geddes,*Report*,p.362.

The table illustrates the comparative pressure on various sections of the community. It exemplifies the inverse relationship between caste and class; the direct co-relation between status and suffering especially among the Hindus. Worth noting is that among upper castes the *bantias* suffered the least, even less than the *Brahmins*. Among the inferior castes, *Chamars* and *Julahas*, suffered the most as exemplified by their overwhelming presence in the Moradabad poor house. Of the 4,753 persons in the poor house in May 1861, 3,961 belonged to these two inferior castes. But Muslims suffered more than Hindus, in proportion to their numbers. Amongst them higher castes/classes were in great difficulties- the number of *Sheikhs*, *Saiyyads* and *Pathans* relieved were more numerous than some inferior castes; their combined presence in the poor house being outnumbered only by *Julahas*- a very low caste amongst Muslims. The reason for this could be that upper castes but impoverished classes were maintained during normal times by their well-off relatives and friends. This generosity probably could not be continued during famines. Also they were unwilling to work at jobs they considered inferior and were unwilling to be in close proximity to inferior castes/classes even during famines.

Famine and official reports underlined that not only labourers and artisans but also middling and rich landowners were adversely affected during prolonged famines as 1837-8; they resorted to relief works in considerable numbers. Thus Smith noted:

the poorer landholders who in 1860-1, were just able to struggle through the time of greatest need suffered in 1837-8, as bitterly as the mere labourers and artisans now. Large numbers of them died and I find specially noted among the 80,000 paupers employed or supported by the magistrate of Agra, a very large proportion was that of small proprietors.²⁴

During the 1868-9 famine in Lalitpur, *Thakur zamindars* were in such in want that they expressed their readiness to work for their bread.²⁵ But usually even small *zamindars* and farmers, endeavoured to hold aloof, parting gradually with their household gear, their cattle and buffaloes, and lastly with their plough and cattle, falling into the trap of indebtedness and servitude.²⁶ Arguably then the lot of the majority of the cultivators was economically very fragile.

The first two-chapters demonstrate that, members of the same socio-economic groups especially in western Doab, withstood famines better because of commercialization of agriculture, some industrialization and better infrastructure, resulting in more diverse sources of employment. Access to additional wages was clearly a valuable fallback resource to many, as was an easy access to large markets and grain prices. One can go further and assert that it is for these reasons that the urban poor suffered less than their rural counterparts.

²⁴ B.Smith, *Report*, IA, p. 31.

²⁵ Henvey, *Report*, p. 73.

²⁶ *Englishman*, Roberts reporting on mortality in the Agra div, found that, few above the labouring classes availed relief during the 1877-8 famine. "In no village that I visited did any one of the higher castes however poor, admit that they had entered one; even among the lowest classes, loss of caste seems to have been occasionally the result of it. *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79*, p. 381.

Officials were unanimous that the traders, *banias* and moneylenders, prospered during famines due to diverse sources of income and, the manipulation of these sources for steep profits, expansion of resource base further enhancing their dominance in society.²⁷ Famines meant to them a scarcity of labour power, due to mortality and migration of the labouring classes, sometimes a moderate fall in income. Pitcher noted that in most villages of Rohilkhund, especially in several villages in Najibabad circle of Shahjehanpur district, there was high mortality and scarcely any births. In one circle only two births were registered as against forty-five deaths. Yet amongst the trading classes in most towns there was an increase in birth rates, which shows that these classes prospered.²⁸ Not a single starvation death amongst them was reported in the four large *bazars* of Mohanlalganj, Goshainganj, Digbijaiganj and Bachrawan.²⁹

Hoarding

Hoarding of food stocks caused an artificial scarcity in the face of increased demand, thereby pushing up prices. Earlier Indian rulers like Ala-ud-din, aware of this response, made hoarding and speculation an offence punishable by law. During the 1786 famine in the Coromandal coast, the diaries of Fort St George mention a group of merchants oppressing the poor by shutting up shops and selling grains privately by night in small measures and dearly, whereby the poor suffered greatly.³⁰ Warren Hastings prohibited

²⁷ Pre-Mutiny, criminal-judicial, v, from the offg. collector of Banda, to the commissioner, Allahabad div, 30 June 1838; *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Benette, Report*, p. 348

²⁸ *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Pitcher, Report*, p.324.

²⁹ *ibid. Benett, Report*, p. 348.

³⁰ W.W.Hunter, *Annals Of Rural Bengal* (London, 1868), pp. 35-6.

hoarding of grains, and had a proclamation issued to the effect. But, by 1837-8, in keeping with the *laissez-faire* ideology, officials usually refused to intercede. They feared such combinations, and remained at the mercy and goodwill of traders for supply and distribution of grains at fair prices. Merchants, *bantias*, moneylenders, exploited such dependence; their principal response during famines, was to hoard foodgrains, manipulate and control market forces, control needy people's accessibility to markets and foodgrain, and the use and distribution of resources.

Food grains were deliberately withheld and prevented from reaching the needy by merchants. Reports from Agra, Aligarh, Farrukhabad and Kanpur, during the 1837-8 famine, show that the prospect of a bad kharif harvest induced the *bantias* to commence removing the grains stored in the villages and the markets, and also to withhold the subsistence loans in grain and money on which the affected people were dependent. They would not release grains for sale even when payment was offered at their own exorbitant prices.³¹ At several places this fuelled popular protest leading to lawlessness and violence. At Farrukhabad due to such manipulations there was a hundred per cent rise in seed prices. Several petitions and appeals were made to restrain *bantias* in their manipulations, but the magistrate refused to intercede citing *laissez-faire*.

Several written and verbal statements were given by the zamindars the substance of which was that they sold their grain to the bania at 45 sers the rupee, and that now the buyers although they were ready to pay the exorbitant price of the day were withholding the usual advances, and preparing to carry off the grain necessary for the support of the village communities and dispose of it in the

³¹ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 43,

market. The petitioners impressed upon me the necessity of interposing to prevent this being done and obscurely hinted at the bad consequences of my neglecting their prayers. I could take no recourse but that of the banias in the exercise of their just rights, and shortly after the outrages began. They were committed by the whole population in the face of multitudes, but so strong was the feeling against the grain merchants, no one would give evidence against the perpetrators except in comparatively small number of isolated cases.³²

Government's strong adherence to laissez-faire emboldened merchants and *banias* in such mal-practices. Such was their grip that even the government was held a hostage to their whims. The NWP&O government could not obtain grains even to feed the troops for the garrison stationed at Almora which, it was estimated, consumed twenty-thirty *maunds* of grain daily. Rich landlords/ *banias* resolutely kept back their grains, and even offers of one rupee for ten or eleven *sers*, which was a higher price than ever obtained, would not tempt them.³³ The commissioner sent agents into the deep interior of the country to obtain grains, but without much success. In despair he was compelled to bargain with local traders to accept grain in payment of revenue.³⁴

During 1868-9, the surplus stores of the Doab poured into Bundelkhund. About 400,000 *maunds* were imported between June 1868 to July 1869 from Kanpur, Orai, and

³² Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, criminal judicial procds, NWP, 77, July 1838; from Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad to Hamilton, acting commissioner, Agra, 8 February 1838.

³³ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 61.

³⁴ *ibid.* p.61.

Etawah.³⁵ Thus grains were in plenty but grain dealers combined and refused to sell grains at any price, creating an artificial crisis at many places including Jhansi. Even the troops stationed here did not have enough food. The Dy.-commissioner pressed for making adequate provisions for troops, poor houses and jails. Stores in the city were exhausted and grain dealers held back their grains. Imports which had flowed in plentifully from the Doab and central India were deliberately stopped. An incensed commissioner authorized import of grains from Kanpur worth Rs 10,000, but avoided being seen as interfering with private trade; he instructed the collector of Kanpur to prevail upon some enterprising dealer to undertake the venture, and if this failed, only then to act on behalf of the government.³⁶ The commissioner circumvented the situation by importing 150 camel loads of grains from Kanpur. A *bazar* was opened and grains sold at about the cost price. This had a good effect. The grain dealers, deprived of unparalleled profits, opened their shops and did not attempt the same combination.³⁷ The Gwalior government proposed that Jhansi be ransacked for private stores, which on discovery be sold at current rates of the day. The suggestion considered too radical, was declined as such a step would have tended “to the eventual augmentation of the present difficulties by discouraging or alienating the principal traders of the locality.”³⁸ The commissioner, argued that like Jhansi, the populace of Gwalior too were unable to get food and resorted to the *bazars* of Nya Jhansi, because *bantias* declined to sell even for

³⁵ Henvey, *Report*, p.66.

³⁶ *ibid.* p.67.

³⁷ Henvey, *Report*, pp.67-8.

³⁸ *ibid.* p.68.

ready cash.³⁹ The pattern was the same at Meerut where large quantities of grains were hoarded mostly in huge “*khuttees*” or grain pits as in Meerut district. These pits were saleable and during 1868-9 kept changing hands frequently without ever being opened.⁴⁰ Similarly, with the onset of the 1896-7 famine, Lt.-Gov. warned his officers that hoarding of grains had commenced and the *banias* refused to sell.⁴¹ Instead of taking tough counter measures, MacDonnell appealed to grain dealers for consideration to the suffering people and assured them that his government would not regulate their activities. Ignoring his appeals, grain dealers resorted to hoarding and other malpractices for profit. This led to looting and robbing of traders, and food riots broke out in several famine districts. Holding back grain stocks in anticipation of famine itself reflects the assumption of price rise and potential profit. Thus, although trade was “free,” merchants could manipulate and control the “free movement” of grains.

Exports

Availability of foodstocks and retaining them in famine-affected area has to be a priority with government as it is the principal means by which grain prices and thereby famine can be contained. To some extent this could be accomplished by prohibiting export of foodgrains from afflicted areas. This was demanded by popular opinion, pressure groups, and endorsed by many officials. Such demands reflected the assertion of afflicted

³⁹ *ibid.* p.68.

⁴⁰ Home Public Progrs, NWP&O, Meerut div, December 1871, p. 14.

⁴¹ MacDonnell to Elgin, 20 October 1896, p.20. (Ms.Emg.Hist.C.352).

people's basic subsistence rights, and objection to free trade ideology. District officers reasoned that many of the low and middling cultivators mustered up resources to purchase grains provided it was available at moderate prices, but were unable to do so as the *baniyas* hoarded grains and raised the prices. Even the Bengal Chamber of Commerce noted that there were other causes at work besides drought to produce famine in NWP&O; one being that the districts beyond the afflicted areas were exporting their surplus grainstock to as far as Bengal and making huge profits.⁴² By the 1890s, pressure groups, press and popular opinion viewed such collusive trading tactics seriously and demanded that government control and regulate private trade and markets. The Congress itself recommended this. Vernacular newspapers warned that the harvesting of spring crops had not led to a fall in the grain prices as expected

The grain dealers will never lower the rates until the government interferes and regulates the grain trade. Wheat should be ordered to be sold at thirteen sers, and the coarse grain at sixteen sers per rupee.⁴³

Baird Smith noted that because of strict implementation of free trade policies, trading had picked up well from 1833-4, and even during 1836-7, free trade continued to facilitate the upward movement of trade. A four million sterling increase in aggregate imports and exports over 1833-4 was recorded.⁴⁴ Districts that had an average turnout of crops could, with some difficulty, have tided over the crisis, but when this average output was exported to places where prices were more remunerative, famine conditions were created. For example, during the 1860-1 famine at Jalaun, Hamirpur, and Banda, the outturn of

⁴² GAD Procds.NWP&O,VI, February 1861; From H.W.J. Woodburn, secretary, Bengal Chamber of Commerce to Secretary, Govt of India, Home deptt, 28 February 1861,pp.130-1.

⁴³ *Sajjan Vinod*, 1 April 1898,vol.31. (Vernacular News Tracts, UPSAL).

⁴⁴ B.Smith, *Report*, 1A,p.22.

the crop was slightly below the average. Still prices of foodgrain escalated and grains were not easily available because of heavy exports. It was recorded that trade in Jalaun and Hamirpur flourished.⁴⁵ Similarly in Etah, there was an average output of crops, but uninterrupted export of grains from here added greatly to the prevailing suffering.⁴⁶ During the 1868-9 famine in the Meerut, Saharanpur and Muzzafurnagar districts, scarcity conditions and high prices of foodgrains (both coarse and fine) prevailed due to heavy exports, rather than drought. Roughly fifty *lakh maunds* of grains was exported from Meerut in 1868, to the lower Doab, Punjab and Rohilkhund.⁴⁷ By November 1868, 3,000 *maunds* of grain had been exported to Rohtuck alone.⁴⁸ Great impetus was given to the production of fodder, called '*churree*' enabling cultivators to sell '*bhoosa*,' for cattle at immense profits and no cost; fodder and wheat were sold at the same price.⁴⁹ Despite normal harvests scarcity was created in Saharanpur where, by July 1869, 162,000, *maunds* of wheat and barley were exported to Punjab alone.⁵⁰ In all these places landlords made handsome profits by trading with distressed places where prices were more remunerative not only for foodgrain but also fodder. In October 1868, the collector of Badaun informed that the harvest prospects were good. Next month, however, mention was made of heavy exports to the Doab, leading to increased prices of wheat and barley

⁴⁵ *Revenue Administration Report*, 1860 -1, box 10, serial 5, list 19; from Major, T.N. Pinkey, commissioner Jhansi div, to H.M. Batten, offg. secretary, Sud. Bd of Rev, NWP, Jhansi, 18 October 1861; *Revenue Administration Report*, 1860 -1, box 10, serial 5, list 19; from A.W. Dashwood, collector, Banda, to C.B. Thornhill, commissioner, Allahabad div, Banda, 1 October 1861.

⁴⁶ *Revenue Administration Report*, 1860 - 1, box 10, serial 5; from Chase, collector Mainpuri, to Harvey, commissioner, Agra div, 5 October 1861.

⁴⁷ *Gazetteers Meerut*, iv (1904), p.59.

⁴⁸ Home Public Progs, NWP&O, Meerut div, December 1871, p.15.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.16.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.12.

quoted at twelve and thirteen *seers* to the rupee.⁵¹ From Aligarh exports of grain mainly to Hathras and Jullundhar continued despite the tract being declared famine afflicted.⁵²

From the onset of scarcity in 1894-5, imports exceeded exports by nearly 358,000 tons. During 1896-7, net imports were only about half a million tons; and with the onset of normal conditions from mid-1898, there were exports to the tune of 115,000 tons.⁵³ For these reasons officers treated the escalation in exports from scarcity hit high priced areas to low priced surplus areas as an index of an approaching famine.⁵⁴ During 1896-7, Meerut division had a fair crop output, but well-off cultivators held back their produce till prices escalated.⁵⁵ Such were the handsome profits that rich landlords are said to have actually prayed for famine conditions to continue.⁵⁶ The local traders found that it was more profitable to trade in the plains which were badly afflicted; for example, Due to famine and high prices, the grain dealers of *pargana* Palee who usually traded with Almora, transferred their dealings to Rohilkhund.⁵⁷ The government, which was in great need, had to coerce them to sell a certain portion of the grain at prices suitable to the local shopkeepers.⁵⁸ When foodgrain did reach famine-affected areas grain dealers would buy up available stocks and hoard them so that grain remained scarce and highly priced, thus prolonging the suffering. Wherever the government depended for supplies on the local

⁵¹ Henvey, *Report*, pp. 42-3.

⁵² Home Public Progs, NWP&O, Meerut div, December 1871, p.18.

⁵³ Scarcity deptt, f.488, August, 1902, *Report On the Material Condition*, p.15.

⁵⁴ *IFC, Report, 1880, Appendix, iv, reply of Pitcher*, p. 3. UPSAL.

⁵⁵ Scarcity deptt, 1902, f. 488, *Decennial Report on the Material Condition*, p.18.

⁵⁶ *Gazetteers Meerut*, iv, p.57.

⁵⁷ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 61.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.61.

traders they faced similar crisis. Exporting grains during famines was so profitable that many salt merchants of Kanpur changed their trade to grains.⁵⁹

Malpractices

This situation was further aggravated by moneylenders/*banias* who often took recourse to mal-practices to augment their resources. Girdlestone recorded that the practice of giving tickets to workers on relief works instead of cash to purchase foodgrains, had to be discontinued because “the banias were as ready to adulterate then as now, and the starving folks who depended on them constantly found half their dole to consist of sand or powdered bones.”⁶⁰ At Allahabad during 1896-7, suffering people complained that the *banias* were selling the poisonous Kesree flour. This sale was prohibited by the administration, to whom the *banias* confessed that they were in a position to sell quality flour.⁶¹ Similarly, American corn was distributed to needy people by the Methodists and the Church Missionary Society. The missionaries reported that the poor were not familiar with so many varieties of unparched grain and were persuaded by the banias to pass it on to them at very meagre prices. The *banias* later resold the grain at high prices and profited considerably.⁶²

⁵⁹ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsman*, p.293.

⁶⁰ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 55.

⁶¹ Post-Mutiny, Allahabad div, depts. vii, f.1, bundle 281; Inspection notes, Bharwari Karrali road, 4 January 1897; from J.B. Fuller, collector, Allahabad.

⁶² Revenue (Scarcity) depts., 1899. Procs. for August 1899, nos. 1-46, demi official letter, 19 September 1897.

The pattern that emerges is that grain dealers deliberately manipulated market mechanisms to aggravate and perpetuate famine conditions. Thus, any positive contribution of private trade could be marred by their collusive behaviour. They often acted as a clique, and prevented prices from coming down by restricting the movement of grain, through speculation and hoarding. Also, increasing exports inevitably caused a general rise in prices, without a corresponding rise in wages, needy people were subjected to food and labour famine.

Price rise

District officers considered the practical effects of famine to depend, however, on its actual pressure as indicated by rise in prices of grains,⁶³ as its persistence and escalation deepened intensity, especially in areas of acute famine, mortality and migration. During the 1837-8 famine, Baird Smith noted the average price of grains in famine affected districts: Allahabad, 17.5 sers per rupee; Kanpur 13.5 sers; Aligarh, 18 sers; Fatehgarh 11.75, Agra 11.5, Mathura twelve sers; and Karnal twelve-fourteen sers, per rupee.⁶⁴ The price of wheat varied between ten-six sers to the rupee in the famine tract whereas in unaffected such as Malwa, wheat sold at fifty-sixty sers for the rupee.⁶⁵ In contrast in Calcutta, also not afflicted by famine, tanks were empty and grain merchants had doubled the price of foodgrain, which escalated sharply because of continued exports and the

⁶³ *IFC, Report, 1880, i, Appendix, iv; evidence of Leeds, p.3.*

⁶⁴ *B. Smith, Report, 1A, p. 29.*

⁶⁵ *IFC, Report, 1880-5, iii, p. 22.*

intermediary and profiteering activities of merchants.⁶⁶ During the 1860-1, Baird Smith found grain prices no higher than 11.5 sers per rupee; at Banda, wheat was sold at ten sers per rupee, in August 1860, limiting its consumption to the wealthier classes.⁶⁷ At Kanpur wheat sold at less than eight sers for the rupee and half a ser of the cheapest grain cost one anna.⁶⁸ Bulandshahar and Muzaffurnagar were not famine-afflicted but due to heavy exports, and consequent high prices, poor people starved.⁶⁹ Wheat and gram sold at eight sers for the rupee. At Agra, between 1861-70 the prices of foodgrains rose by thirty per cent, but even after post- famine prosperous harvests, prices failed to return to their former levels because the grain dealers were able to hold the price line; wheat averaged 17.8 *sers*, barley 28.04 *sers*, and *bajra* 23.27 *sers* to the rupee.⁷⁰ The enhancement in foodgrain prices rose steadily till 1888.⁷¹ During 1868-9, despite a favourable harvest, due to heavy exports from Meerut, Saharanpur, Bulandshahar region prices rose steeply and even coarse grains such *jwar* and *bajra* were sold at a higher price than wheat.⁷² The prices of grains were regulated not by local prospects, but by markets in upper Doab, which was in the grip of famine. Even in famine immune Dehradoon wheat sold at eight to ten *sers* per rupee due to exports and manipulation of traders.⁷³ From Aligarh, it was reported that with the lowering of grain exports, the prices were moderated.⁷⁴ The net result was steep escalation of grain prices, in areas not hit by drought and where harvest

⁶⁶Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 43.

⁶⁷*ibid.* p. 43.

⁶⁸*IFC, Report*, 1880-5, iii, p.22.

⁶⁹GAD depts, NWP&O, f. 217, from the mag. Muzaffurnagar to commissioner, Meerut div, 14 November 1860, p.93.

⁷⁰*Gazetteers, Agra*, viii, pp. 48-9.

⁷¹*Gazetteers, Mathura*, vii, p.60.

⁷²Home Public Progs, NWP&O, Meerut div, December 1871, p.14.

⁷³*ibid.* p.12.

⁷⁴*ibid.* p. 18.

output was normal. Thus the famine and scarcity area was enlarged. There was a further spurt in food grain prices during 1896-7 famine; at Banda, wheat sold at seven *sers* per rupee, *jwar* ten *sers*, gram nine *sers*, *urd* and *moong*, at seven *sers* and quarter *chittacks*, per rupee. The crisis deepened as grain prices escalated.⁷⁵ Prices rose not only because of the 1896-7 and 1900 famines, but also because of heavy export of grains. Wheat averaged 13.4*sers*, barley 20 *sers*, gram 18.55 *sers*, and *jwar* 19 and *bajra* 17.12 *sers* to the rupee.⁷⁶ Given the nature of paltry subsistence wages, the entitlement to purchase food would have collapsed completely as is reflected in the devastating mortality and migration that characterized these famines.

Withdrawal of credit and indebtedness

The situation was further aggravated when creditors refused to give credit, on which the majority of *ryots* were normally dependent. Literature on credit and indebtedness abounds in examples of the extortionate dealings of the moneylenders, especially during famines giving them the power of life and death. Obtaining credit was dependent upon landownership, economic status and mutual trust. Officials cited the contraction of credit and a visible restriction in the circulation of capital as indication of approaching famine.⁷⁷ Officials urged the need for government to step in and extend loans, as lack of credit ruined even the rich and was an important cause of the alienation of assets, especially

⁷⁵ *Gazetteers Banda*, p. 65.

⁷⁶ *Gazetteers, Agra*, viii, p.49.

⁷⁷ *IFC.Report, 1880, replies of Sandys and Kennedy Appendix, iv*, p.2.

land, and of migration, which left large tracts of land uncultivated for long periods depriving government of land revenue.⁷⁸ Besides, wherever government extended loans, however small, this had the desirable effect of inducing *mahajans* to make advances.⁷⁹ Importantly the withdrawal of credit was a crucial reason for the rise of crime and popular wrath was vented against the *bantias*. In the initial phase of the 1837-8 famine, *bantias* did not withdraw credit, but

The drought continuing and the appearances being anything but favourable, no advances for subsistence was extended afterwards. The consequences has been that the assamees have neglected their sowings, which have perished and multitudes of them have fled to other parts of the country”⁸⁰

From Rohilkhund and Delhi, it was reported:

All credit is at a standstill, and the *bantias* refuse to give that assistance which the people have hitherto been accustomed to receive; threats and angry words are first used by the *ryots* to induce the *bantias* to part with their grain, and on their proving ineffectual, a dacoity is usually committed.⁸¹

At Aligarh, the *ryots* could get no advances for seed from moneylenders, unless they possessed irrigated lands.⁸² Similarly from Farrukhabad it was reported that moneylenders and *bantias* refused to give loans to needy cultivators.⁸³ Government should

⁷⁸ GAD deptt, NWP&O; from Offg. Collector, Aligarh, to Offg. Commissioner, Meerut div, vol.473, 7Nov 1861,p.253.

⁷⁹ Post -Mutiny, Allahabad div, deptt vii, f.1, bundle 23,1897; from T.Stokes,secretary NWP&O, to all commissioners, 5April 1897.

⁸⁰ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 52.

⁸¹ Pre-Mutiny, judicial criminal procds. 183, August 1837, NWP; R. H.Clarke, offg. magistrate Saheswan, to T.H.Turner, offg. commissioner, Bareilly div,14 August 1837.

⁸² Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 43.

⁸³ Pre-Mutiny, Agra div, judicial, 1837- 8, vii; to B.Taylor, offg. commissioner, Agra div, from Robinson, magistrate, Farrukhabad, 28 December 1837.

have come forward with a liberal policy of loans, but their fiscal concerns and fears that money lent might never be recovered overrode humanitarian concerns.

With the onset of the 1860-1 famine, *bantias* in Rohikhund refused to make the usual advances. In the western *parganas* of Kanpur, no one would risk lending even a rupee. The district collector himself discouraged the government from extending loans, recommending that were the advances extended from the public chest, it would be risking the money to extreme speculation, which even Indian traders and *mahajans* were not willing to incur.⁸⁴ His reasoning was that, firstly, government ought not to incur revenue losses and, secondly, if-well-to-do Indians failed morally to help their fellow countrymen, there was no need for the government to do so. Underlying this was also the necessity not to displace the Indian elite from their position of patronage, and not tread on *laissez faire*. At Meerut, the *bantias* anticipating the continuance of drought refused to loan seeds for sowing, especially in areas where canal irrigation was lacking. This aggravated the distress.⁸⁵ During 1868 the commissioner of Jhansi reported that moneylenders stopped all advances in cash or grains, as there was no harvest from which they could recover loans.⁸⁶ Officials complained that even when the 1896-7 famine was over, suffering people had little power of recovery as private capital was no longer available.

⁸⁴Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 47.

⁸⁵GAD, Procds, NWP&O, from commissioner of Meerut div to Secretary, Govt, NWP&O (no.79), Muttra, 16 November 1860, pp. 254-5.

⁸⁶Henvey, *Report*, p. 63.

When credit was given, unscrupulous moneylenders exploited the increased dependence on subsistence loans by driving ruthless bargains aimed at getting a grip over afflicted people's income-generating resources like bullocks, agricultural implements, and especially land. These loans were for a specific period of time, at ruinously high rates and terms, and to extract money the moneylenders often resorted to force, coercion and fraud. La Touche cites the example of a man who borrowed money at thirty-six per cent, interest pledging his landed property, but agreed that it would become an absolute transfer if he was unable to pay the principal of his debt, with an interest at a rate of twenty-four per cent, in a year. In another case the proprietor with a debt of Rs five hundred agreed to mortgage his estate to the creditor for ten years, meanwhile paying rent as a cultivator (i.e. double the land revenue.) with a draw back of Rs sixty and unless at the end of ten years, he repaid the principal sum and the interest at six per cent, the land was to become the creditors.⁸⁷ Sleeman, during the course of his conversation with a *Jat* cultivator in Aligarh district, found that he had five *bighas* of land which he had to mortgage to the local *bania* during a season of scarcity. He borrowed Rs eighty at twenty-four per cent interest. He told Sleeman that, over the past seven years, he had been unable to pay the interest, and now served the *bania* as a labourer at two rupees a month, and had not a clue as to when he would be freed of his debt.⁸⁸ Nash observed caustically:

A month in India has been enough to teach me one thing-
that the farmer lives by the bania's sufferance and toils for

⁸⁷ *Condition Of The Country And The People of India - The Indebtedness of the Landed Classes* by C.A. Elliott, p.186.

⁸⁸ Sleeman, *Rambles*, ii, p.180.

the bania's benefit. The land system, law system, revenue system, are the parlour furnitures of bania spider; and that the railway, canals, officials, roads, police and even the general apparatus of the government down even to the famine organization, makes for the enrichment and greater power of this sinister person.⁸⁹

It is obvious that the man who holds the produce can make the pinch of the famine felt pretty much as and when he chooses ...⁹⁰

In fact, he went to the extent of dubbing the moneylender as "the famine making agent."⁹¹ Bennett noted that during famines the *bania* /moneylender had

Unexampled opportunities of lending money on the best terms and the best security, and driving advantageous bargains in the purchase of ornaments and household property from men who were compelled to part with them on any conditions.⁹²

Similarly Pitcher, noting the immense benefits to the trading classes, recorded, that these classes amassed wealth by grain trade and by the purchase of ornaments... from agriculturists at very low prices.⁹³ During the 1837-8 famine, gold and silver were parted with at less than half their value, and brass and copper were valued at half their price in grain.⁹⁴ Weaving looms were sold for the price of a meal. It was keeping this in mind that Pitcher proposed that to alleviate suffering the government purchase bullion during famines at a fair price, sending it to the mint to be coined, instead of leaving the needy

⁸⁹ Nash, *The Great Famine And Its Causes* (London, 1900), p.78.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p.78.

⁹¹ *ibid.* p.246.

⁹² *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Bennett, Report*, p.354.

⁹³ *ibid. Pitcher, Report*, p. 324.

⁹⁴ Girdlestone, *Report*, p. 50.

people at the mercy of the *banias*, who drove hard bargains and refused to give more than six to eight annas, in one rupee for silver ornaments.⁹⁵ Reflecting this Ferrad, the collector of Banda warned early in 1896,

There is no credit available in the district, and excessive pressure on land revenue would be ineffectual. Most of the jewellery is already with the pawn brokers and the stock commands no price in the market.⁹⁶

Land alienation

In chapter II the reasons for land alienation and its acceleration during famines have been discussed. The process of land transfer was at its peak between the 1830s and 1870s, a period marked by famines and scarcities.⁹⁷ Matters came to a head with 1837-8 famine, which was very severe affecting all classes. It was linked primarily to prevailing agrarian and commercial depression and over assessed revenue, paid in cash and rigidly collected.⁹⁸ Yet the Sudder Board insisted on full collection of the revenue, success in which reflected an officer's merit and promotions.⁹⁹ In Hathras and Mursan, the important trading marts in Aligarh, arrears mounted up to Rs. 36,000 during 1837-8, and when by 1841 despite remissions of Rs 22,000 these arrears could not be recovered, nine villages were sold.¹⁰⁰ The chief beneficiaries of land between 1839 and 68, at Aligarh, were

⁹⁵ *Report On Scarcity, NWP&O, 1877-78&79, Pitcher, Report*, p. 325.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Revenue Administration, 1895-6 NWP&O*, p.13.

⁹⁷ In the Punjab the rate of land transfer was about 90, 000, acres yearly, in the 1870's, and this increased to 338,000, acres a year between 1890 -94. An even greater amount was mortgaged each year. Mc Lane, 'Peasants, Moneylenders,' *IESHR*, i, no.1(July-September 1963).

⁹⁸ Siddiqui, *Agrarian Change*, p.132.

⁹⁹ *Gazetteers Hamirpur*, p. 71; *IFC, Report, 1880-5*, ii, p.127.

¹⁰⁰ Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, p. 109.

the *Vaishyas*, or the trading classes, who possessed a mere 3.4 per cent of the land in 1839 but 12.3 per cent, in 1868. *Thakurs*, were the main losers: their holdings fell from thirty-eight per cent in 1838 to twenty-eight per cent, in 1868.¹⁰¹ “Rajputs, Jats, Brahmans and Kirars, were the other principal losers, and the moneylenders of Hathras, Sasni and Koil, have stepped into their places.”¹⁰² Between 1872-98, transfer of land by private agencies or under decree of the civil court became endemic; about 346,118 acres were transferred and 133,768 acres were mortgaged.¹⁰³ *Banias* and moneylending *Brahmins* increased their holdings by some 58, 340 acres, while the *Rajputs*, lost 74,640 acres, and the *Jats*, as much as, 10, 356 acres.¹⁰⁴ Burkitt noted, “the rich zamindars have on the whole gained, (and) all the loss (of land) has fallen on the smaller men and the (village) communities.”¹⁰⁵ Intermediate cultivators, following the loss of their assets, fell into the lower category of cultivators; poor peasants were sucked into the ranks of occupancy tenants or landless labourers. Between 1842-72, in Mathura district, roughly one-third of the land changed hands.¹⁰⁶ The pattern was similar at Aligarh, Hamirpur and Kanpur; many cultivators deserted their lands as they were unable to meet the high revenue demand, which the authorities were bent on collecting.

Table 19 illustrates land transfer in the Aligarh district, 1839-68.

¹⁰¹ *Aligarh SR* (1874), p. 66.

¹⁰² Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive*, p. 560.

¹⁰³ *Gazetteers Aligarh*, vi, pp. 136-7.

¹⁰⁴ *Aligarh SR* (1874), p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Aligarh SR* (1903), p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Gazetteers Mathura*, vii, p. 151.

Table. 19

Period	Transfer by revenue process	Transfer by other modes	Total
1839-48	92, 285	316, 809	412, 094
1849-58	19,779	248, 823	268, 602
1859-68	19, 488	305, 085	324, 573
Total	134, 552	870, 717	1, 005, 269

Source: *Settlement Report of the Aligarh district*, 1874, p.65.

During 1860-1, land alienation assumed alarming proportions. Proprietary court orders trebled and private sales increased considerably. It was noted that “a number of persons have been obliged to part with their lands, to satisfy the demands of their creditors.” It was further recorded: “Owing to famine landed property is at a discount.”¹⁰⁷ Massive land transfers took place, between 1843 and 60, the trend accelerated during the 1860-1 famine,¹⁰⁸ and 1864-8.¹⁰⁹ During the 1867-8 famine at Gorakhpur, private sale and transfer of land increased, and the majority of *zamindars* incurred debt. Bundelkhund was particularly afflicted. In Banda, the revenue arrears that accrued during 1837-9 could not be recovered till the 1840s; the situation worsened during 1867-8, leading to a fall in the cultivated area in Banda, by sixteen per cent in five *tehsils* alone.¹¹⁰ *Marwari*

¹⁰⁷ Post-Mutiny, Meerut div, xii,f. no. 3/1861, box 9,serial 4; *Revenue Administration Report*, 1 May to 3 September 1860. From G.W. Colledge, offg. collector, Bulandshashar to F. William, commissioner, Meerut div.

¹⁰⁸ B.Smith, *Report*, 1A, p.33.

¹⁰⁹ *Oudh Selections From The Records*, 1868 -9; *Indebtedness Of The Cultivator*; from A.Young,Dy.-commissioner, Rae Bareli div, 20 November 1868, pp. 64 -5.

¹¹⁰ *Gazetteers Banda*, xxi, p. 132.

moneylenders gained control over extensive tracts of land especially in Jhansi.¹¹¹ In Banda, *Rajput* communities held 3/5 of the district in proprietary right; they were reduced to a quarter by 1874; and were replaced by a group of substantial auction purchasers.¹¹² In Hamirpur, the revenue demand was fully collected (with the exception of Rs 280) leading to a sharp increase in sale and transfer of land, both privately, and by orders of court.¹¹³ Officials attributed the depressed condition of the landowners primarily to the severe enforcement of land revenue in unfavourable seasons, compelling *ryots* to sell their land at ruinous low prices.¹¹⁴ In Jalaun, between 1886 and 1902, about thirty-six per cent of the land had been sold or mortgaged.¹¹⁵

Table.20 shows the net losses and gains of the principal castes in Jalaun district between 1886-1902.

¹¹¹ *Jhansi SR* (1871), p. 49.

¹¹² Stokes, 'Peasants, Moneylenders and Colonial Rule; an Excursion into Central India,' in Bose (ed.), *Credit, Markets*, p.60; *Banda SR* (1881), pp. 31-4.

¹¹³ *Revenue Administration Report*, no. 345 of 1868, box 9, serial 4, list 19; from C, Grant, collector, Hamirpur, to M.H. Court, commissioner, Allahabad, 10 October 1868.

¹¹⁴ *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, ii, p.127; Memorandum submitted by Elliott and Buck suggesting alteration to the Revenue System of the NWP. *IFC, Report*, 1880-5, ii, p.183.

¹¹⁵ Hailey, *Jalaun, SR* (1906), p.14.

Table. 20

	Net gain	Net loss
Caste	Acres	Acres
Brahmins	26934	
Thakurs		28,766
Banias	21,456	
Kurmis		12,375
Gujars		11,140
Kayasthas	2,230	...
Lodhis		9,490
Khattris	1,579	
Goshains	...	905

Source: *Final settlement Report on the Revision of the Jalaun district*, 1906, p.14

This table is illustrative of the general pattern of land alienation. It demonstrates how small and middling landowners- *Kurmis, Lodhas, Gujars* and *Ghosains* were the losers. The heaviest losses however accrued to the high caste *Thakurs*, families whose plight was worsening all over Bundelkhund-*Brahmins* and *Banias* gained at their cost. Table 21 reinforces the pattern of table 20 and shows the similarity in trends of land alienation in Kanpur and Jalaun. The impact of the displacement of these high caste, old landed families has been discussed in Chapter II. In Kanpur, moneylending castes held nearly sixteen (15.7) per cent of the land in 1802; this increased to approximately forty-two (41.7) per cent by 1900.

Table 21 shows the percentage of land held by different castes during the course of the nineteenth century at Kanpur;

Table. 21

	Rajputs (Thakurs)	Brahmins	Moneylending Castes	Muslims	Kayasthas
1802	50	11.2	1.5	12.6	7.8
1840	38.4	18.8	3.7	15.7	6.1
1873-4	31.6	29.6	6.3	12.4	6.8
1907	30.3	33.2	5.2	6.8	4.5

Source:Kanpur Settlement Report,1870, Appendix X.

The settlement officer of Mainpuri, observed during the 1896-7 famine,

In the last 27 years land representing over 38 per cent, had changed hands ... the transfer by private sales had been heavy throughout the last 25 years, and they were heaviest from 1892-7.”¹¹⁶

The loss of land meant that the cultivators were deprived of productive resource base, and trapped forever in debt, servitude and exploitation, for it was almost impossible to recover alienated land. (see detailed discussion-chs II and VII).

Conclusion

Two crucial factors- the pattern of food supply not measuring up to the requirements, and insufficient purchasing power, which the government did little to replenish- combined to

¹¹⁶*Mainpuri SR* (1906), p.15.

create a major crisis. Even if food was available, due to hoarding and heavy exports, the poor and middling classes were unable to keep up with spiralling prices. Migration and mortality were the inevitable consequences. NWP&O government, during the four famines, remained averse to imposing any direct control over private trade, or to checking professional speculation and hoarding. One effective thing to do would have been to store grain and sell it at reasonable rates through government agencies, as is done in present-day India through fair price shops which have been effective in delivering grain to the affected people, stabilizing prices, retaining popular confidence, and marginalizing the collusive tactics and malpractices of speculators. The existence of public stores would to some extent have diminished the grip of landlords/moneylenders and *bantias*, over vulnerable groups. But such measures were not undertaken. One of the reasons the government did not interfere in private trade was the monetary advantage and the handsome profit made in the form of freight charges and custom dues. The activities of the grain dealers led Bertolt Brecht to comment, 'Famines do not occur, they are organized by the grain trade.'¹¹⁷ One can conclusively argue that free trade did not ameliorate famine conditions, on the other hand it exacerbated it as experienced during the famines studied. It is argued that the activities of some aggravated the conditions of famine in space and time.

¹¹⁷ Dreze and Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, p. 93.

Conclusion

This study has moved away from the established conception in which famines were perceived solely as negative phenomena, with starvation and mortality as their defining features. The related explanation of famine occurrence being attributed exclusively to climatic factors, demography, colonial misrule and cultural factors is also not helpful in explaining why famines occur. Till recently, discussions on famine occurrence centred on the study of food production patterns and their relationship with population growth. The work of Amartya Sen brought changes in that famine studies began to focus on factors affecting an individual's ability to command food, wherever food might exist. The main focus was on the way that trends in market prices might affect this ability to command food. What has largely been missing so far, is a proper consideration of perceptions, strategies and agendas of not only politically powerful groups in relation to famine, but also the victims. This is where this work will be of crucial importance.

The present thesis argues that famines are the result of a combination of all the above factors. Famine is the culmination of a long term process in which there are not only victims suffering, mortality and starvation, there are also the beneficiaries who prosper and profit giving famines a momentum which stretch them in space and time. This thesis highlights both these aspects. It emphasizes the active promotion of famine by beneficiary groups and the gains that accrued at whose cost and why?

Arguably, therefore, famines had a mixed impact. This study has situated this impact in long-standing political, economic and social imbalances and the uneven pattern of

development. These caused the impact of famine to fall on already vulnerable sections, further dispossessing and impoverishing them. These trends offered economic and political benefits to a narrow upper class. Economic integration exposed the *ryots* to the manipulations of market. Market mechanisms were actively shaped and controlled by collusion, intimidation, as well as direct forcible expropriation of assets by powerful constituents of society-landlords, moneylenders, *banias* and petty bureaucrats. The inducement to grow cash crops and market them in order to pay land revenue was a particular source of rising indebtedness and consequent impoverishment. It is argued that the vulnerability to famines also lay in price rises, alienation of land and other assets, including livestock.

The government did little to check the underlying long-term processes creating famines, or the power structures that aggravated them. Moreover, relief continued to target the utterly destitute and displaced; those with some assets were not considered needy, and had to fend for themselves. This negligence by the government resulted in the alienation of coveted assets which shifted to the powerful groups, whose resources and powers were further augmented. It pauperized and dispossessed the not-so -poor class ensuring these could hardly ever recover their former resources and status, as their productive assets had either been completely alienated or their hold considerably weakened.

Vulnerability to famine lay not just in poverty but also in the inability to claim support from family, patrons and village communities. The abandonment by patrons, and the fragmentation of community and family structures had a negative emotional,

psychological and social impact most visible in the steep rise in crime and lawlessness, rise in suicides, abandonment, desertion and sale of women and children, and atomization of family units. Cherished norms and values were set aside to preserve life. The erosion of socio-moral entitlements helps explain why even the relatively well off also suffered during prolonged famines, as in 1837-8. Local mechanisms offering protection against exploitative processes ought to have been strengthened. Only by the 1890s, government realized the importance of the preservation of family and community structures and initiated the policy of decentralized relief, whereby needy people were to be relieved in their own villages, to thwart uprooting and migration; it was rationalized that employment programmes were not a heavy price if one took into account the terrible social and economic effects of widespread migration, which have been discussed in chapters II, IV, VIII.

It was imperative that the government provide relief that adequately attended to the needs and cultural susceptibilities of famine victims. Relief should have reinforced and strengthened existing social security structures and the indigenous survival strategies of the affected; these were primarily geared towards conservation of land, implements and cattle. Had the government taken steps to preserve these basic entitlements, it would have helped in the recovery psychological and economic of the suffering populace once normalcy returned. This would have prevented groups living hand-to-mouth even being reduced to pauperism. But this was not to be. The relief offered was out of step with the requirements of sufferers, and largely failed to alleviate their distress.

This thesis builds on De Waal's work on victim strategies. It investigates popular understandings and perceptions of famine and the strategies forged by the victims to combat them. Therefore the stage at which relief is offered and the nature of relief would thus have had a considerable impact, as popular responses varied with the length and severity of food shortage. The range of consequences on society varied for example fragmentation and break-up of family and community ties, alienation of assets led to society being overwhelmed by migration, crime, chaos and violence. It details the steps taken by affected people to cope with such emotional and multiple pressures; not to forget economic stresses like being retrenched and forced to sell and mortgage assets like land, ornaments, utensils, implements, livestock and land in a falling market. This study counters the argument that famine victims in India remained helpless and passive.

A sub-section of this chapter highlights the ways in which famine victims perceived and famines and fought for survival. Special focus has been on women. It has been argued that famines were catalytic processes that helped in bringing to the forefront the traditional suffering women and radicalise and galvanize many of them into action. A consciousness and activism-political economic and cultural, was brought about both during and after famines. Famines created gender specific awareness amongst officials as well.

Another important component of the 'gains' and 'benefits' derived from famine was religious in nature. It has been demonstrated that starvation, relief and relief camps were used as tools by some missionaries to propagate the Christian message and gain converts

to Christianity. The processes by which these religious conversions were brought about have been detailed. Evidence has been provided to show that these were often 'induced conversions.' Force and other illegal methods were often employed to gain converts, in open defiance of the law. Missionary efforts met with visible success in converting the needy to Christianity. Several Christian villages, orphanages, churches, printing presses and schools were founded and existing ones expanded during famines. Such perceptible gains not only generated widespread tensions in society, but gave a fillip to the growth of communal consciousness, to rise of reform movements and Indian nationalism which, the administrators feared, would lead to another Mutiny. Importantly, the overzealous activities of some missionaries, particularly their defiance of laws, led to tensions between government and missionaries,

Rangasami has made a connection between inadequate relief policy and the economic benefits of famine. She has argued that the failure of the government to intervene at an early stage in the economic sphere contributed to dispossession, widespread pauperization, and recurrent famine. It is, therefore, important to take into account the factors that thwarted the formulation of a generous, liberal relief policy and contributed towards the consolidation of the economic, political and socio-cultural interests of a narrow elite.

This study has significant practical implications in connection with relief practice. The conventional practice continues to be to identify the neediest and then despatch a quantity of relief considered sufficient to keep them alive. Relief during all four famines was

of relief considered sufficient to keep them alive. Relief during all four famines was based on the protection of basic subsistence entitlements through public works programmes. This was based on the government's assumption that the only correct response was to directly provide bare subsistence to the needy, and prevent starvation deaths. Even this could have proved an effective countermeasure to entitlement loss had the wages paid been adequate to sustain normal nutritional levels. Moreover, such operations were usually mounted after famine had struck, and were only partially successful in identifying and providing aid to victims, it being conditional on not disturbing the natural food supply mechanisms. Survival of vulnerable groups also depended on basic civic amenities like potable water, sanitation, adequate and accessible medical facilities, and cleanliness in housing areas. A comprehensive and generous relief policy was required. But prevailing political, cultural and economic ideologies and fiscal constraints thwarted the emergence of such a policy.

It has been demonstrated how the economic and moral dangers embedded in Poor laws of England were stressed in the formulation of famine relief. Administrators were concerned that liberal relief policy was not only a drain on imperial coffers, but would also discourage self-reliance and impede the functioning of the moral economy which, as has been suggested, ceased to function effectively during famines. Moreover, a generous relief policy would adversely affect the labour market, which the government was concerned not in conformity with *laissez-faire*. Such a callous policy aided the economic accumulations of the rich landlords and moneylenders on whose support the colonial

government depended for political stability. The political will to remedy the situation was lacking.

This study emphasizes the complexity of international (London), national, regional and local interests and priorities in relation to famine and relief. There was conflict of interest amongst and within these various levels. I have argued that powerful vested interests wielded considerable influence within the bureaucracy and affected the decisions and policies of the government. It has been demonstrated how these vested interests ensured that even in normal times the policies of the colonial government were shaped by a narrow range of class interests. It was, therefore, far-fetched to hope that the colonial government would overlook elite class and caste interests and function in the interests of the needy.

This is illustrated in some senior administrators inability to move away from established ideologies such as laissez-faire despite advice to the contrary from district officers who were aware of ground realities. The results of asserting and implementing the laws of political economy largely failed to deliver the results expected and desired, and added to the suffering. These prohibited any interference and regulation of grain markets even during famines. It has been demonstrated how this approach was concerned with protecting the interests of powerful groups at the cost of the poor and needy. This component remained important in shaping and limiting the scope of relief.

Thus, relief implementation suffered from lack of co- ordination due to ideological, personal and bureaucratic differences, further compounded by race animus. Additionally, central, state and more importantly local actors used relief to achieve important goals and benefits-ideological, economic, political and monetary. There were difficulties in reaching relief to the needy because there was little understanding of the politics of relief and even less the benefits. Often relief did not reach where and when it was most required. Instances of corruption, nepotism and confusion have been detailed in chapters IV,V and X. In such a situation proper vigilance should have been mounted and substantial resources allocated to monitor the fate of relief. But this was not done. The result was that relief was manipulated and obstructed at various levels including the grass roots. The processes and mechanisms by which relief was used as a weapon for extracting important benefits by powerful constituents has been analyzed in detail. The local power structures, through which relief was to be dispensed, tended to undermine the expressed aim of alleviating distress. The claims and official portrayal of relief operations as ‘successful’ was nothing but misplaced optimism which further thwarted objective assessments of radical innovations in relief programmes. This flaw continues to plague relief policy to this day in India. As recently as the years 2000, 2002-3 when famine conditions prevailed in parts of Rajasthan, Saurashtra and Gujarat, media highlighted how relief resources were being embezzled by the very people entrusted to dispense relief.

It is evident that the groups that suffered most during famines could not assert their rights to relief, which was channelled through local political institutions and power

relationships. There was virtually no accountability of local power institutions manned by local entrenched elites. Thus lack of political accessibility and powerlessness worsened the suffering of victims. Meanwhile the beneficiary groups accumulated resources from transfer of assets, from manipulation of relief, proclaimed policy of laissez- faire and from political prominence attached to them during famines, clearly benefited because of access to higher power structures. The political and economic significance in propping up landlord and money lending interests has been discussed. In fact as demonstrated in chapters IV,V, X, government policies offered opportunities to dominant groups, to be particularly self- serving during famines.

This thesis suggests that the concerns that have been highlighted remain important even in modern times. If governments, aid agencies and the United Nations were to pay attention to these concerns and redress them while designing and implementing their relief policies, then the contribution of this thesis would have a particularly crucial role to play in understanding and containing famine.

Appendix: 1

Prayer during prevalence of famine

The following prayer has been sent by the Bishop to all the clergy of the diocese, with a circular directing them to use it both at the morning and evening service, and should the rains be again delayed to use also as prayer for rain.

A Prayer: *To be used at the diocese of Calcutta during the prevalence of famine in the upper provinces.*

“O Almighty Lord, father of mercies and God of all comfort, who has taught us in their holy word that thou dost not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, we draw near to thee in this season of distress and perplexity and offer up our humble intercessions on behalf of all those in this land who are now suffering from dearth and scarcity. Deliver them O’Lord, from the gates of death, look with pity on their weakness and necessity, and in thy own good time relieve them: and so increase the fruits of the earth by thy heavenly benediction, that their want may be turned into plenty, and their sorrow into joy. And as thy blessed son Jesus Christ had pity upon us sinners and came to seek and save the lost, so fill us by their holy spirit with true compassion for the needy and the afflicted, that we may willingly deny ourselves and help them without grudging. We acknowledge that for our negligence and misdoing we justly deserve thy chastisement. Yet O’ Lord, we beseech thee, for thy mercy’s sake forgive us, and grant that the grievous calamity with which thy providence has visited this land, may so unite all who dwell in it by the bond of charity, and loving kindness, that it may issue in thy

glory and in the enlargement of thy blessed kingdoms; through Jesus Christ our lord,
Amen.

Source: *Christian Intelligencer*, 1861, xxxiv, p. 197.

Appendix: II Saiyyad Ahmad Khan attributed the 1857 Mutiny to the following causes:

Cause.1

Interference in Matters of Religion

There is not the smallest doubt that men whether ignorant, or well informed, whether high or low, felt a firm conviction that the English Government was bent on interfering with their religion and with their old established customs. They believed that the Government intended to force the Christian religion and foreign customs upon Hindus and Mussulman alike. This was the chief among the secondary causes of the rebellion. It was believed by everyone that government was slowly but surely developing its plans. Every step it was thought was being taken with most extreme caution. Hence it is that men said that government does not speak of proselytising Muhammadans summarily, and by force; but it will throw off the veils it feels itself stronger, and will act with greater decision.

Events, as I shall presently show, increased and strengthened this conviction. Men never thought that our government would openly compel them to change their religion. The idea was that indirect steps will be taken, such as doing away with the study of Arabic and Sanskrit, and reducing the people to ignorance and poverty. In this way, it was supposed, the people would be deprived of a knowledge of the principles of their own faith, and their attention turned to books containing the principles of Christian creed. It was supposed that Government would then work on their cupidity, and poverty of its

subjects and on conditions of their abjuring their faith, and offer them employment in its own services.

Secundra Orphan Asylum

In the year 1837, the year of the great drought, the step which was taken of rearing orphans in the principles of the Christian faith, was looked upon throughout NWP as an example of the schemes of government. It was supposed that when government had similarly brought all Hindustanees to a pitch of ignorance and poverty, it would convert them to its own creed. The Hindustanees used, as I have said, to feel an increasing dismay at the annexation of each successive country of the Hon'ble East India Company. But I assert without fear of contradiction that this feeling arose solely from the belief in their minds, that as the power of the government increased, and there no longer remained foreign enemies to fight against, or internal troubles to quell, it would turn its attention inwards, and carry out a more systematic interference with their creed and religious observances.

Religious discussion being carried to a great height during the present time

In the first days of the British rule in Hindustan, there used to be less talk than at present on the subject of religion. Discussion on this point has been increasing day by day and has now reached its climax. I do not say that government has interfered in these matters; but it has been the general opinion that all that was done was according to the instructions and hints of government, and was by no means displeasing to it. It has been commonly

believed that government appointed missionaries and maintained them at its own cost. It has been supposed that government, and the officers of government, throughout the country were in the habit of giving large sums of money to these missionaries with the intention of covering their expenses, enabling them to distribute books, and in every way aiding them.

The Covenanted Officers Assumed Missionary Functions

Many covenanted officers, and many military men have been in the habit of talking to their subordinates about religion; some of them bade their servants come to their houses, and listen to the preaching of the missionaries and thus it happened that in the course of time no man felt sure that his creed would last even his own life time.

Preaching of the Gospel by the Missionaries

The missionaries moreover introduced a new system of preaching. They took to printing and circulating controversial tracts, in the shape of questions and answers. Men of different faiths were spoken of in a most offensive and irritating way. In Hindustan these have always been managed very differently. Every man in this country preaches and explains his views in his own mosque, or house, and people hear what he has to say. But the missionaries, plan was exactly the opposite. They used to attend the places of public resort, markets for instance, and fairs where men of different creeds were collected together, and used to begin preaching them. It was only fear of the authorities, that no

one bade them off their business. In some districts, the missionaries were actually attended by the policemen from the station. And then the missionaries did not confine themselves to explaining the doctrines of their books. In violent and unmeasured language they attacked the followers and the holy places of other creeds: annoying, and insulting beyond expression the feelings of those who listened to them. In this way too the seeds of discontent were sown deep in the hearts of the people.

The establishment of missionary schools and the covenanted officers attending examinations of them

The missionary schools were started in which the principles of the Christian faith were taught. Men said it was by the order of the Government. In some districts covenanted officers of high position and of great influence used to visit the schools and encourage the people to attend them; examinations were held in books which taught the tenets of the Christian religion. Lads who attended the schools used to be asked such questions as the following: 'Who is your God'? 'Who is your redeemer'? And these questions they were obliged to answer agreeably to the Christian belief; prizes being given accordingly. This again added to the prevailing ill will. But it may be said with some justice, 'If the people were not satisfied with the course of education, why did they let their children go to school'? The fact is that we have here no question of like or dislike. On the contrary we must account for this by the painfully degraded and ignorant state of the people. They believed that if their children were entered at schools, they might have employment given them by Government, and enabled to find some means of subsistence. Hence they put up

with the state of affairs in reality disagreeable to them. But it must not be thought that they ever liked those schools.

Source: Hafeez Malik, and Morris Dembo, The History of The Bijnor Rebellion (English. Trans) Michigin State University, Asian studies Centre pp. 124-26.

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