

Beyond Famines

Wartime State, Society, and Politicization of
Food in Colonial India, 1939 – 1945

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Abstract

This thesis explores the origin of one of the most engrossing concerns of the post-colonial Indian state, that is, its extensive, intricate, and expensive feeding arrangements for the civilians. It tracks the colonial origin of the post-colonial welfare state, of which state-management of food is one of the most publicized manifestations.

This thesis examines the intervention of the late colonial British state in food procurement and distribution in India during the Second World War, and various forms of such intervention, such as the introduction of food rationing and food austerity laws. It argues that the war necessitated actions on the part of the colonial state to secure food supplies to a vastly expanded British Indian Army, to the foreign Allied troops stationed in India, and to the workers employed in war-industries.

The thesis brings forth the constitutional and political predicaments that deprived the colonial central government's food administration of success. It further reveals how the bitter bargaining about food imports into India between the Government of India and the War Cabinet in Britain hampered the state efforts to tackle the food crisis.

By discussing the religious and cultural codes vis-à-vis food consumption that influenced government food policies, this thesis has situated food in the historiography of consumption in colonial India. In addition to adopting a political approach to study food, it has also applied sociological treatment, particularly while dealing with how the wartime scarcity, and consequent austerity laws, forced people to accept novel consumption cultures. It also contributes to the historiography of 'everyday state'. Through its wartime intervention in everyday food affairs, the colonial state that had been distant and abstract in the perception of most common households, suddenly became a reality to be dealt with in everyday life within the domestic site. Thus, the macro state penetrated micro levels of existence. The colonial state now even developed elaborate food surveillance to gather intelligence about violation of food laws.

This thesis unravels the responses of some of the political and religious organizations to state intervention in quotidian food consumption. Following in this vein, through a study of the political use of famine-relief in wartime Bengal, it introduces a new site to the study of communal politics in India, namely, propagation of Hindu communal politics through distribution of food by the Hindu Mahasabha party. Further, it demonstrates how the Muslim League government's failure to prevent the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44 was politically used by the Mahasabha to oppose the League's emerging demand for the creation of Pakistan.

* * *

In fond memory of

*My parents
Late Upendra Nath Sarkar
& Late Suniti Sarkar*

&

*Maternal grandmother
Late Bimala Ray*

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Source: Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Ernest Benn, London, 1966, p. 30.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| ARP | Air Raid Precautions |
| BPC | Bengal Provincial Committee, Communist Party of India |
| BPHM | Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha |
| CPI | Communist Party of India |
| CPWD | Central Public Works Department |
| CSAS | Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge |
| DEHL | Department of Education, Health, & Lands |
| DOF | Department of Food |
| DOF (R) | Department of Food (Rationing Branch) |
| FIC | Famine Inquiry Commission |
| FPC | Foodgrains Policy Committee |
| GOI | Government of India |
| ICA | International Council on Archives |
| ICS | Indian Civil Service |
| KPP | Krishak Praja Party |
| NAI | National Archives of India, New Delhi |
| NCL | Nuffield College Library, Oxford |
| NMML | Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi |
| PFIC | Proceedings of the Famine Inquiry Commission |

Glossary

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Akhara</i> | Gymnasium |
| <i>Aman</i> | An ecotype of rice used for the main winter crop |
| <i>Anna</i> | Unit of currency, 16 to the rupee |
| <i>Annadata</i> | Provider of rice / food |
| <i>Atta</i> | Whole wheat flour |
| <i>Bargadar</i> | Sharecropper |
| <i>Behaya</i> | Shameless / devoid of shyness / devoid of feminine sense of decency |
| <i>Bhadralok</i> | Bengali gentlefolk |
| <i>Brahmin / Brahman</i> | Highest caste Hindu, part of the traditional social elite |
| <i>Chapati</i> | Unleavened flatbread |
| <i>Chattak</i> | A unit of measurement for mass, equivalent to approximately 58.32 grams, or approximately 2.057 ounces |
| <i>Crore</i> | Ten million |
| <i>Dacoit</i> | Bandit |
| <i>Dacoity</i> | Banditry |
| <i>Ghat</i> | A flight of steps leading down to a river, pond, or lake |
| <i>Ghee</i> | Clarified butter |
| <i>Goonda</i> | Hired thug or bully |
| <i>Gurdwara</i> | Place of worship for Sikhs, literally means in Punjabi 'door to the Guru (spiritual leader)' |
| <i>Halwai</i> | Traditional Indian sweet maker |
| <i>Kharif</i> | Monsoon crop |
| <i>Lajja</i> | Shame / Shyness / feminine decency codes |
| <i>Lakh</i> | One hundred thousand |
| <i>Maida</i> | White flour |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>Maund</i> | A unit of measurement for mass, equivalent to 40 seers |
| <i>Mofussil</i> | Areas outlying a city |
| <i>Muktears</i> | Law clerks |
| <i>Nan / naan</i> | Leavened flatbread |
| <i>Nirlajjo</i> | Shameless / devoid of shyness / devoid of feminine sense of decency |
| <i>Para</i> | Neighbourhood in Bengal |
| <i>Parantha</i> | Unleavened flatbread sautéed in edible oil or butter or <i>ghee</i> |
| <i>Pice</i> | Unit of currency, 12 to the <i>Anna</i> |
| <i>Phulka</i> | Unleavened flatbread |
| <i>Poori</i> | Unleavened deep-fried bread |
| <i>Posya</i> | Dependent |
| <i>Praja</i> | Subject / peasant |
| <i>Raagi</i> | Millet |
| <i>Rabi</i> | Winter crop |
| <i>Seer</i> | A unit of measurement for mass; equivalent to 1.25 kilogram |
| <i>Tacavi</i> | Loans from the government for agriculturists, mainly for agricultural improvement |
| <i>Taluka</i> | Sub-division of a district |
| | <i>Tebhaga</i> Three-fourth. <i>Tebhaga</i> movement was an armed agrarian movement in Bengal in 1946, whereby the sharecroppers demanded for three-fourth of the crop from the landowners |
| <i>Thana</i> | Police district; the smallest unit of police jurisdiction |
| | <i>Vanaspati</i> Vegetable <i>ghee</i> , an edible hydrogenated oil-compound produced from groundnuts. Popularly used as a cheaper substitute for butter or <i>ghee</i> |
| <i>Zamindar</i> | Large landlord |
| <i>Zamindari</i> | Landlordism |

Note: Local units vary sometimes; values given are standard.

Introduction

I. India and the History of Food

The history of India, like the history of so many other areas is a story of food. Any really deep analysis of the past will show that metabolism was, and still is, the mainspring of politics. Had the feeding arrangements of the Bourbon France given satisfaction, the Bastille would probably never have been stormed. Had the steppes of Central Asia been able to feed all their rapidly breeding tribes, neither the Aryan nor the Mogul invasions of India might have occurred . . . The revulsion against surfeit can be as powerful as the politics of hunger. It is a fascinating theme which would repay much further investigation, but we have seen enough to show that there is a definite link between diet and destiny – a link which the leaders of India cannot afford to ignore.¹

Despite the obvious element of exaggeration and oversimplification, the afore-quoted words by Michael Brown, a contemporary independent observer who in 1944 wrote a polemical study of the food crisis in India during the Second World War, are worth attention as they confidently talk of a definite link between food and politics, and link between diet and political fate. These are links that are often overlooked in the historical studies of food in the context of colonial India; and these are the links that this thesis sets out to explore. Brown's words point to the potential and scope of doing a historical study of food in wartime India from a politico-social angle, in addition to studying food from an economic angle, an angle that has dominated historical studies of food in the context of colonial India.

¹ Michael Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, with a forward by Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1944, p. 3.

It is worth noting that the food situation unfurled in such a fashion during the war that it forced a contemporary such as Brown to talk of the 'politics of hunger'. Unlike most of his contemporaries who viewed wartime food scarcity mainly through the prism of wartime economics, Brown's understanding was able to draw a connection, albeit in an obviously oversimplified way, between an everyday item of consumption like food and macro level political fate, such as the fall of the Bastille and the Mughal invasion of India in earlier centuries. This thesis explores this line of connection between everyday management and consumption of food on the one hand, and macro level politics on the other in Brown's contemporary India. It discusses the politicization of food-issues in a time marked by overall heightened politicization caused by three igniting factors – the war, the decolonization process, and India's impending partition. It demonstrates a simultaneous and twofold political development in late colonial India on the site of food. On the one hand, it shows how the British colonial state penetrated the Indian households through intervention in everyday food procurement, distribution, and consumption. On the other, it demonstrates how the inability of the same state to manage food successfully ended up contributing to the erosion of its political hegemony and sway over India, which was already under severe strain in this age of overall decolonization in Asia.

Food has obviously been vital to human history, but only marginal in the body of scholarly history of India. This thesis is based on the understanding that writing a history of food is considerably different from writing a history of the lack or complete absence of food, that is, famine. Until very recently, whenever food found place in the historiography of India, it was mainly famines, that is, short and intense periods of deprivation and their tolls that received attention. The main driving force behind the 1980s studies of the food policies of the British colonial government in India during the Second World War lay in the quest to determine the causes of the Great Bengal

Famine of 1943-44, the degree of government responsibility in causing the famine and the extent of socio-economic and gender bias in famine victimization and mortality.²

Broadly speaking, much of the 1980s literatures on the Bengal Famine has followed either of two streams. One revolves around the role of distributional shifts in food, entitlement losses, and around the performance of food markets during the famine. This stream is most famously represented in Amartya Sen's seminal work on entitlement and deprivation.³ The second stream presents the famine as something more than a crisis of the economy, and in turn situates the famine within a long-term cultural context. This stream also shifts the focus from the causes of the famine to the responses to it. It places the victims' reactions within the specific cultural construction of prosperity and misery in rural Bengal. Paul Greenough's work is perhaps the most famous representative of this stream.⁴ Blending methods of history with that of anthropology, Greenough shows that responses to the Bengal Famine, and treatment of the famine victims, were dictated by 'implicit rules for crisis conduct, rules which prescribed who was to be saved',⁵ rules that the Bengali society had developed over centuries according to its cultural and social values and practices with regard to food (particularly rice) and feeding. Thus, the famine was 'culturally patterned in its onset, crisis, and denouement.'⁶ By discussing the collapse of the customary *Rājā-prajā-sambandha*, that is, the patron-client ties between the landlords and their dependents (some landlords even murdered peasants demanding food⁷),

² Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981. Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982. Paul R. Greenough, 'Indian Famines and Peasant Victims: The Case of Bengal in 1943-44', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, Apr. 1980. Paul R. Greenough, 'Indulgence and Abundance as Asian Peasant Values: A Bengali Case in Point', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, Aug. 1983. Sugata Bose 'Starvation amidst Plenty: The Making of Famine in Bengal, Honan and Tonkin, 1942-45', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, Oct. 1990.

³ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*.

⁴ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁷ Greenough cites an account of the murder of nine peasants, who were demanding rice, by a zamindar, and the subsequent revenge-murder of the zamindar and eight of his family-members by the peasants in an unknown place in Bengal in 1943. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

abandonment of *Posyas* (dependents) by ‘authoritative, resource-commanding males’ within Bengali families, beggary, and loss of social status, Greenough presents the famine as a trigger for the disintegration of Bengali society and culture. When Bengal’s “‘destined providers of subsistence’” openly abrogated their customary role of *Annadata* (provider of rice/food), their dependents were left to fight the food battle on their own.⁸ The central thesis of Greenough’s work is that ‘In a social system largely constructed around bonds of obligation between superior providers and inferior claimants, abandonment was tantamount to social collapse.’⁹

Within the genre of more quantitative 1980s monographs on earlier Indian famines, Michelle Burge McAlpin’s study of famines in western India between 1860 and 1920 is striking, as, contrary to the dominant view in Indian economic history, it presents a very positive image of the colonial government’s economic policies.¹⁰ The entire study, heavily dependent on government records and statistics, is shaped by a stated aim, that is, to contradict a widely-accepted critique of the British rule put forward more than a century ago by civil servant turned nationalist politician and economic historian Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848 – 1909),¹¹ which subsequently found strong support in the works of historians like B. M. Bhatia and Bipan Chandra.¹² Dutt forcefully argued that extortionate increases in land revenue demands made by the colonial state outpacing

⁸ Ibid., p. 265.

⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁰ Michelle Burge McAlpin, *Subject to Famine: Food Crises and Economic Change in Western India, 1860 – 1920*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983.

¹¹ Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, vol. I, *Under Early British Rule: From the Rise of the British Power in 1757 to the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837*, original publication by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London, 1902, second edition 1906, first Indian edition 1960, with a critical introduction by Prof. D. R. Gadgil, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi. Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, vol. II, *In the Victorian Age: From the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 to the Commencement of the Twentieth Century*, original publication by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London, 1904, second edition 1906, first Indian edition 1960, with a critical introduction by Prof. D. R. Gadgil, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi.

¹² B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India, A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India with Special Reference to Food Problem, 1860-1990*, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 3rd rev. edn., 1991. Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1966.

agricultural expansion, in combination with ‘forced commercialization’ of agriculture resulting in the rise of cultivation of cash crops replacing food crops, and indiscriminate export of food crops for higher profits taking advantage of the expansion of railroads, caused widespread famines in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Challenging Dutt’s formulations, McAlpin argues through a case study of western India that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Bombay Government actually started differentiating between lands while fixing land revenue demands, and consequently assessed lower taxes on lands of lower quality. Further, because of the steady rise in prices, the peasants now had to sell much less crop than earlier to earn the money that was needed to pay the land revenue. Thus, the farmers now retained a larger portion of grains for their own consumption.¹³ Therefore, argues McAlpin, ‘increased sales of grain were voluntary rather than forced by the need to meet rising real values of revenue collections.’¹⁴ Particularly regarding exports, she argues that exports were small in comparison to the increased output. She then advances three arguments to establish that stopping of export would not have prevented famines. Firstly, prohibition of export would have lowered prices of foodgrains and thereby served as a disincentive for the expansion of food cultivation, and consequently would have increased land under cash crops like cotton. Secondly, lower foodgrain prices would have forced the cultivators to sell more of their food produce to pay the land revenue, leaving less with them for their own consumption. Thirdly, fall in agricultural income would have reduced the agricultural sector’s demand for consumer goods and other necessities like clothes, thereby raised unemployment in non-agricultural industries.¹⁵

Regarding the role of railroads in famines, McAlpin argues that railways made it easier, faster, and cheaper to move grain from surplus to famine-stricken areas,

¹³ McAlpin, *Subject to Famine*, pp. 198-202.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

which in turn reduced the local rise in price resulting from a local crop failure, 'as the produce of many local markets was pooled to create a more stable supply curve.'¹⁶ Thus, in her study, McAlpin takes it for granted that the expansion of railroads automatically meant a free flow of grains from surplus to deficit areas. In direct contrast to her assumption, this thesis will demonstrate that despite having a much improved transport network during the 1940s, political calculations in the surplus provinces severely hindered import of grains into deficit areas like Bengal from surplus areas like Punjab.

A question that naturally arises from McAlpin's neo-classical study is how does she explain the death of approximately 8 million people in frequent famines in Bombay presidency between 1896 and 1902? Her explanation, particularly in the case of Gujarat in the presidency during 1899-1900 and again in 1900-1901, is that the very high mortality 'resulted from (1) the severity of the drought and the harvest failure, (2) an unfamiliarity on the part of both the people and the civil servants with coping with such severe drought and crop failure, and (3) a shortage of alternative sources of income and employment for the distressed population resulting in part from (2) but also partly from longer-term phenomena'.¹⁷ In this situation, agricultural demand for consumer goods and other necessities like clothes dwindled, drastically reducing the income of the artisans and weavers.¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, a main theme of my thesis is the exploration of the link between food and politics. McAlpin's cliometrics has no place for the complex role of politics in the shaping of the famine policies of the colonial state. Accordingly, she disagrees with scholars like D. R. Gadgil and B. M. Bhatia who viewed increasing Indian representation in government administration as important factors in bringing in better famine-relief, and comparatively more farmer-friendly revenue policies in the period after 1900.¹⁹ For instance, Gadgil

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 206-208.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 210-211.

argued that “popular ministers in the provinces, industry, agriculture, forestry, etc. began to receive closer and more active governmental attention and assistance.”²⁰ Challenging this, McAlpin argues that decline in the real value of revenue collection due to rise in agricultural prices had been steadily going on for long in the nineteenth century, therefore it had no connection with the Indianization of the revenue administration in the twentieth century. Though this thesis will amply demonstrate the close relationship between politics and food, yet, contrary to the views of Gadgil and Bhatia, it will show that self-government in the Indian provinces often delayed establishment of an effective food administration, and hindered famine-relief.

McAlpin’s study has opened up a further dimension of Indian famine history that lies in the exploration of the links between famine and population. In *Subject to Famine*, she has traced the evolution of the demographic impact of food crises arguing, on the one hand, that the famines in the last decade of the nineteenth century were so severe that between 1891 and 1901 India’s population ‘increased by only a little over three million, while the previous decade had witnessed a population increase of almost 25 million. In Bombay Presidency the population actually declined between 1891 and 1901.’²¹ On the other hand, after 1921 deaths from famine ‘dropped off virtually to zero in the succeeding decades.’²² Between 1920 and 1947, ‘For the first time since 1872, when good population figures became available, there was sustained increase in population . . . an increase of about 1.2 percent per year.’²³ In a later article, McAlpin further examined the relationship between famines, epidemics, and population growth in India, arguing that the growth of population in India between 1921 and 1951 was not due to better nutrition and better medical facilities, but simply due to the lack of famines (except the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44).²⁴ Her approach

²⁰ D. R. Gadgil, ‘Introduction’ to Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, vol. I, p. xx, as cited in McAlpin, *Subject to Famine*, p. 212.

²¹ McAlpin, *Subject to Famine*, p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁴ Michelle B. McAlpin, ‘Famines, Epidemics, and Population Growth: The Case of India’, in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (eds.), *Hunger and History: The Impact of Changing*

has attracted significant controversy. For instance, in response to her article, Santhebachahalli G. Srikantia has suggested that the increase in food intake and availability of better medical facilities did indeed help to reduce mortality rate in India between 1921 and 1951, along with, of course, the decrease in the number of famines during the period.²⁵

Among the more recent studies of Indian famines, two works in particular stand out. Like most of the older scholarship on famines in India, David Hall-Matthews' micro history of famine in the Ahmednagar district in western India in the 1870s looks at the famine primarily through the lens of economics, rigorously establishing the causal relationship between landholding pattern, market structure, peasant indebtedness, and land revenue rigidity on the one hand and famines on the other.²⁶ However, Hall-Matthews' monograph is admittedly 'directly counterposed' against the 'teleological positivism' of McAlpin.²⁷ Contrary to her study, Hall-Matthews brings out the conflict between the 'developmentalist agenda' of the colonial state and the 'food insecurity of poorer landholders.'²⁸ Sanjay Sharma's monograph on famine and philanthropy in colonial north India in the early nineteenth century focusses rather on the link between the politics of the colonial state and famines, which is a notable departure from the older scholarship on Indian famines.²⁹ Notably, unlike older monographs on famines (with the limited exception of Greenough's study), both of these works dedicate considerable space to the discussion of relief measures initiated by the colonial state, more so in Sharma's work as his title suggests. One of the aims of this current thesis has been to focus on private, as opposed to government, famine-relief activities and their political dimensions in wartime

Food Production and Consumption Patterns on Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 153-168.

²⁵ Santhebachahalli G. Srikantia, 'Better Nutrition and India: A Comment', in Rotberg and Rabb (eds.), *Hunger and History*, pp. 169 – 172.

²⁶ David Hall-Matthews, *Peasants, Famine and the State in Colonial Western India*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁹ Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001.

Bengal, as opposed to the philanthropic dimension of famine-relief that concerns Sharma.

In addition to economic and social histories of famines, discussed so far, there is a very small body of art historical literature on the representation of the Bengal Famine in the art of the period. Nikhil Sarkar's *A Matter of Conscience* explores how famine 'struck' Bengali literature and visual art, leading to a permanent shift in favour of politically and socially sensitive 'popular' art and literature.³⁰ There were artists, such as Chittaprosad, Zainul Abedin, and Somenath Hore, whose works were influenced by the famine to such an extent that they came to be known as the 'artists of the famine'. In a recent study, Adrienne J. Fast contrasts the 'unrelenting visibility' of the famine in the art of these socially-engaged Communist artists with the 'blindness' or invisibility of the famine in the works of more renowned and more wealthy artists such as Nandalal Bose and Jamini Roy.³¹ Grappling with the possible reasons for such artistic blindness towards the famine in high art, Fast suggests that perhaps the elite artists wanted to insulate their personal lived reality, and that of their target wealthy viewers and patrons, from the traumatizing suffering of this particular subject matter, that is, the emaciated famine victims. Perhaps the bigger artists were further concerned about the salability of the art with the famine as subject matter. For the same reason, argues Fast, elite English language journal *The Modern Review* published virtually no photographs, but only sketches of the famine victims (though otherwise photographs were extremely common in the pages of the journal), so that real-life scenes of famine victimization could be 'abstracted to a safe, containable distance'.³²

³⁰ Nikhil Sarkar, *A Matter of Conscience: Artists Bear Witness to the Great Bengal Famine of 1943*, translated from Bengali to English by Satyabrata Dutta, foreword by Amartya Sen, Punascha, Calcutta, 1998.

³¹ See chapter 4, 'The Famine', in Adrienne J. Fast, *Printmaking and Professionalism in Early Twentieth Century Bengal*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2015, pp. 167-228.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to locate my study in the very broad field of existing scholarly literature on the subject of food (distinct from famines) in history. Many different genres stand out. One of the most striking among them are multi-authored global studies of food that span millennia, and have a global coverage. A notable work of this genre is *The Cambridge World History of Food*, first published in the year 2000.³³ Its approach is made clear in the arrangement of chapters, many of which are devoted to the history of one single food or drink item, such as individual chapters devoted to rice, potatoes, tomatoes, chicken, palm oil, chest nuts, rabbits, coffee, beer, ale, wine, and many other items; there is even a chapter on drinking water. In addition to discussing the history of particular food items, the volume also concerns itself with subjects such as food allergies, diseases like diabetes, and the relationship between nutrition and heart-related diseases, cancer and other diseases. Another part of the book mostly contains country and/or region specific discussions of the history and culture of food and drink, such as history and culture of food and drink in the Middle East and South Asia, in France, in north America, in the Caribbean, southern Africa, and in many other regions. Apart from the region-specific studies, this volume also contains interesting thematic studies under its wide fold, such as chapters on the themes of the social and cultural uses of food, food prejudices and taboos, the psychology of food choices, food as medicine, food substitutes, vegetarianism, the relation between state policies and nutrition, food lobbies, food biotechnology and many other themes.

A recent work of the same genre is *The Routledge History of Food*, which takes a global approach to the history of food during the period from 1500 AD to the present day.³⁴ Here particular themes are linked with regional histories. There are discussions, for example, of the relation between food production, consumption, and identity politics in Tahuantinsuyu and colonial Peru, and of how cookbooks and colonial memoirs serve as sources for the food cultures of

³³ Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Food*, part 1 and part 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

³⁴ Carol Helstosky (ed.), *The Routledge History of Food*, Routledge, Oxford, 2015.

British colonial personnel in Asia between 1850 and 1900. There is exploration of the relation between food, medicine, and institutional life in the British Isles between c. 1790 and 1900. This volume pursues some global themes also, such as the relation between industrialization of diet, food-technology, and the human body since 1750 AD. A further sub-genre within this genre consists of scholarly monographs that explore the global histories of individual food items, such as rice and potatoes.³⁵

A further major field in food studies is concerned with food in conflict zones. A recent example of this type of scholarly works is *Food in Zones of Conflict: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, which explores themes such as patterns of domestic food consumption in war affected households, and food rationing.³⁶ Another prominent study in this genre is the work of Lizzie Collingham on the history of food during the Second World War.³⁷ Collingham discusses the strategies and mechanisms employed by different warring countries to both keep their own army and civilian population fed, at the same time to starve the enemy, and sometimes to eliminate 'useless' eaters among their own population. She explores the battle for food as an indispensable part of the general war, and further studies the politics of food production, procurement, and distribution during the wartime emergency. She draws a connection between the political ideologies of the different warring nation-states and their respective food policies. As she treats food provisioning as a necessary weapon of war, her primary point of concern is food for the military. While discussing food situation in wartime India, she traces the Bengal Famine to British military calculations regarding food provisioning and consequent neglect of the deteriorating civil

³⁵ See, for example, Francesca Bray et al. (eds.) *Rice: Global Network and New Histories*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015. Redcliffe Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato*, revised impression, edited with a new introduction by J. G. Hawkes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985. See also John Reader, *Potato: A History of the Propitious Esculent*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2009.

³⁶ Paul Collinson and Helen Macbeth (eds.), *Food in Zones of Conflict: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2014.

³⁷ Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food*, Allen Lane, London, 2011.

food situation.³⁸ However, Collingham stops short of noting the enormous changes and novelties in the food policies of the colonial state vis-à-vis civil food management in India during the war. This neglected civil food administration occupies a major place in the present thesis.

Let us turn now towards India-specific works that explore food in the specific context of the Second World War in the sub-continent. Madhusree Mukherjee's highly polemical study of the Bengal Famine drew particular attention to the role of Winston Churchill's wartime government in the famine.³⁹ Thoroughly mining the official communications between London, Delhi, and Calcutta, Mukherjee sharply argues that Britain deliberately worsened the Great Bengal Famine by implementing a 'scorched earth' policy in coastal Bengal adjoining Burma. The army and the police literally burnt grain reserves and standing crops and boats in order to deprive the enemy Japanese soldiers of any readily available food and transport in case of a Japanese invasion of India.⁴⁰ As we shall see, these actions have in turn prompted further social histories of their social consequences for the later history of Bengal.

From the perspective of methodology, *Churchill's Secret War* has something novel to offer. Throughout the book, Mukherjee traces numerous personal accounts of sufferings, collectively producing a very moving thread conveying the multi-faceted and multi-level horror of starvation 'in the village' and 'on the street'.⁴¹ She discusses the adverse effect of starvation on the popular psyche, social fabric, and familial bonds, such as the greater tolerance of erstwhile social taboos like prostitution in the face of starvation.⁴² By graphically describing disturbing sights of famine victimization, Mukherjee brings home the physical

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 141-142.

³⁹ Madhusree Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War: the British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*, Basic Books, New York, 2010.

⁴⁰ For a discussion on the implementation of the 'scorched earth' policy, see the chapter titled 'Scorched', *ibid.*, particularly pp. 57-67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 7 and chapter 8 of the book are respectively titled 'In the Village', and 'On the Street'.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 158-162.

reality of famine in a way that few previous studies of the famine have done. She traces responsibility for these sufferings directly to Churchill's wartime government, to his refusal to allow adequate shipping to carry food from abroad to India (discussed in the book in great detail),⁴³ and to his racially-based conviction that "'Indians breeding like rabbits'"⁴⁴ was the key reason behind India's food scarcity.⁴⁵ The assignment of conscious responsibility to Churchill and the War Cabinet stands in sharp contrast to a section of established scholarship. Amartya Sen, for example, suggests that news of the famine did not reach the corridors of power in London as 'The Indian papers were severely censored, and in any case did not reach the rulers in White Hall and Westminster.'⁴⁶ This section of the scholarship attributes the inaction on the part of the colonial rulers to their 'misinformed callousness and indifference about what was going on'.⁴⁷

As mentioned earlier, one of the major highlights of this current thesis is a detailed study of the politics of famine-relief. The politics of famine-relief receives half a page in Mukherjee's book, whereby she argues that 'In Bengal the famine had aided – rather than hurt – the party's [Muslim League's] fortunes because the civil administration had relied on workers of the Muslim League and the Communist Party of India to distribute relief, and as the visible faces of succor both groups had gained traction in rural areas.'⁴⁸ However, this thesis challenges this understanding by demonstrating how the Hindu Mahasabha, a Right wing Hindu party, emerged as the largest private provider of relief, and used the failure

⁴³ For a discussion of shipping cut to India see *ibid.*, pp. 109 – 130, pp. 139-144, p. 149.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205. According to Secretary of State for India L. S. Amery, at the Cabinet meeting on 10 November 1943, while discussing Amery's demand for shipping to send food to India, Churchill made the comment that Indians were 'breeding like rabbits'. See the diary entry by Amery on 10 November 1943, compiled in John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, foreword by the late Lord Stockton, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1988, p. 950.

⁴⁵ Lizzie Collingham also points out, albeit in passing, that 'Prejudice and dislike seem to have made Churchill determined that India should not be helped', and reaches a broader conclusion that 'It is difficult to reach any conclusion other than that racism was the guiding principle which determined where hunger struck.' Collingham, *Taste of War*, p. 151, p. 153.

⁴⁶ Amartya Sen in his foreword to Nikhil Sarkar, *A Matter of Conscience: Artists Bear Witness to the Great Bengal Famine of 1943*, translated from Bengali to English by Satyabrata Dutta, Punascha, Calcutta, 1998, p. 10.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

⁴⁸ Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, pp. 257-258.

of the Muslim League government to prevent famine to politically undermine the acceptability of the government among the Hindu Bengalis. Nonetheless, Mukherjee makes some passing but interesting observations worthy of future research, such as how destruction of food stocks by the police to punish activists of the Quit India movement, and the fleeing of males to escape police atrocities disrupted famine-relief in the villages of the Midnapore district.⁴⁹

Janam Mukherjee's recent study claims an even more central place for the Bengal Famine in the overall history of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ His book marks a paradigm shift on many accounts, and therefore warrants a more detailed discussion than other works. It differs in three ways from established scholarship. Firstly, it is an attempt at writing a *longue durée* history of the Bengal Famine, albeit a much shorter *longue durée* than originally proposed and practiced by the French Annales school. It de-links the famine from the year 1943, and draws it on a considerably larger canvas.⁵¹ Mukherjee has a full chapter on the 'Second Famine', dealing with developments until 1946 after the official rhetoric of the 'end' of the Bengal famine was adopted in late 1943. He duly unpacks the political calculations and incentives of the colonial state as well as of the ruling party in Bengal behind their eagerness to adopt the rhetoric of 'end' of the famine, and the opposition's interest in attacking that purported 'end' rhetoric vis-à-vis the famine.⁵² He in fact sees the very appointment of the Famine Enquiry Commission as 'primarily an effort to punctuate the "Bengal Famine of 1943."' ⁵³

Janam Mukherjee pushes the margin of the famine as far as to the 1970s. In the first place, he argues that the armed *Tebhaga* Movement of 1946 in Bengal, whereby the *bargadars* (sharecroppers) demanded for three-fourth (*tebhaga*) of

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 92, p. 97, p. 163, p. 182.

⁵⁰ Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*, Hurst & Company, London, 2015.

⁵¹ Mukherjee argues that the "the silent violence of malnutrition" that defines the long trajectory of famine, had been at least a decade in the making.' Ibid., p. 11.

⁵² For the administrative calculations and politics behind the early declaration of the 'end' of the famine, see *ibid.*, p. 12, pp. 172-175.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 189.

the crop from the landowners, must have been influenced by the fact that all of the surviving *bargadars* had been hit hard by the famine. He further suggests that though the *Tebhaga* movement was violently crushed, it 'simmered below the surface for decades to come, energizing the Communist Party's rise to power in West Bengal three decades later.'⁵⁴ On another level, he argues that the boom in industry that accompanied the war was based on 'The claim of "priority" – in the face of war – both granted to and appropriated by the mill owners and commodity moguls of Calcutta'.⁵⁵ This 'priority' treatment in the cities 'was directly linked to the hunger, dispossession and despair of the countryside.'⁵⁶ The fortunes made during the time of the war and famine eventually became the backbone of the nationalist movement, and shaped the industrialist class' rise to political power and its long-term influence over Indian politics and policy-making.⁵⁷

The second point of departure from established scholarship is that Janam Mukherjee is the first scholar in the context of Bengal Famine who forcefully argues that 'The notion that famine victims died passively, without resistance and without a fight, however, is a claim that cannot live up to historical scrutiny'.⁵⁸ Many of the contemporary witnesses argued that the famine victims were physically so weak by prolonged starvation that they could not take recourse to seizure of food by physical violence, that the poor of rural and urban Bengal were already accustomed to chronic starvation, that two centuries of colonial oppression had made the Bengalis meek and docile, that Bengalis were fatalists by nature and consequently considered the famine as an act of the wrath of *bidhata* (fate / God), and that, unlike India's 'warrior races', such as the Punjabis and Pathans, the Bengalis were generally a law-abiding timid population.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

⁵⁵ Idem.

⁵⁶ Idem.

⁵⁷ Idem.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁹ The idea that the victims of the 1943 famine did not take recourse to looting of food was thoroughly ingrained into the understanding of the contemporary witnesses. Ian Stephens, the editor of the English Newspaper *The Statesman*, which caused a stir by extensively covering the famine, including publication of ghastly photographs of the famine victims, later commented about

later scholarship before the work of Janam Mukherjee did not challenge these reasons cited for the lack of violence on the part of the victims. For instance, Madhusree Mukherjee asked, 'why had the millions of starving people refrained from looting food from the shops, most of which were unguarded?'⁶⁰ Thus, her enquiry too is based on the assumption that there were indeed no such lootings. C. A. Bayly argued that 'Deference and hope that the authorities would ultimately deliver something kept food riots at bay during 1943 and 1944'.⁶¹ Paul Greenough concluded that 'One of the more characteristic features of the famine – a feature that many observers considered uniquely Bengali – was that the victims accepted, virtually without protest, their victimization. . . neither food rioting nor insurrection seems to have been a typical accompaniment of starvation.'⁶² However, Greenough has offered an extremely interesting interpretation of this

the famished Bengalis that 'There was no shouting, no violence, no looting of shops. By the time they arrived they were mostly too weak to be rough.' See Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Earnest Benn, London, 1966, p. 170. Further, a survey conducted in 1943 by the teachers and students of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Calcutta (belatedly published in 1949) discussed the issue in detail: 'Food of all sorts lay before their eyes, arranged in heaps, in shops all over the city. But no one attempted to seize it by force, though we definitely know that men and women were dying of starvation on those very streets within sight of such food which lay in abundance for sale. However religious minded one may be, hunger is a greater force to destroy religious scruples. Moreover, we know that many of them were not scrupulous enough, when any opportunity to grab other people's property came in their village home. Yet they did not make any attempt to save themselves from sure starvation. This can bear only one explanation that they were utterly exhausted and had no initiative left in them even to revolt against the condition imposed upon them by society. The attitude of the people themselves was that of complete resignation: they attributed their misery to fate or *Karma* alone which afforded poor consolation to them in their miserable plight.' See Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta*, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1949, p. 10. W. R. Aykroyd (1899-1979), a member of the official Famine Inquiry Commission, later argued in his book titled *The Conquest of Famine* that 'The victims made little attempt to loot food shops, and stores cornered by prosperous traders; sometimes they died in the street, just outside well-filled and locked storehouses. There was no organised rioting. Coming from different villages, the people lacked any corporate spirit which might have prompted efforts to obtain food by violent means. They belonged to the poorer sections of the population and were accustomed to accept misfortune passively. Moreover, they soon became physically incapable of such purposive action.' See W. R. Aykroyd, *The Conquest of Famine*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1974, p. 75. Manik Bandyopadhyay, the stalwart Bengali novelist, penned a short story published in 1947 with the title 'Chiniye Khayeni Keno?' ('Why Didn't We Snatch and Eat?'), clearly reflecting the assumption by the contemporary Bengali intelligentsia that the famine victims did not procure food by violence. Bandyopadhyay too argued that physical debilitation caused by starvation prevented forcible seizure of food. As cited in Srimanjari, 'War, Famine and Popular Perceptions in Bengali Literature, 1939-1945', in Biswamoy Pati (ed.) *Issues in Modern Indian History: For Sumit Sarkar*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2000, p. 282.

⁶⁰ Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, pp. 162-163.

⁶¹ C. A. Bayly, 'The Nation Within': British India at War, 1939-1947', Raleigh Lecture on History, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol.125, 2003 Lectures, 2005, p. 12.

⁶² Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 265-266.

lack of physical violence. In fact, he has seen a different type of violence beneath the seeming lack of violence. According to him, fatalism was 'in fact the most obvious piece of evidence we have for an active Bengali adaptation to the famine.'⁶³ He elaborated: 'In the European tradition, famine violence was turned "outward" and "upward" against offending landlords, merchants, and officials; in Bengal the tradition was to turn violence "inward" and "downward" against clients and dependents. This was the cold violence of abandonment, of ceasing to nourish, rather than of bloodshed and tumult.'⁶⁴

Contrary to all these views, throughout his book, Janam Mukherjee records how famine victimization was actively contested in Bengal, in the form of hunger marches, looting of private grocery shops and government ration shops, railway wagons, lorries of the Civil Supplies Department carrying grains, and the granaries and warehouses of the hoarders and landlords.⁶⁵ Further, the sick and destitute who were rounded up from the streets by the police and military to be deported to government camps outside Calcutta, actively resisted detention by evading capture or escaping from detention.⁶⁶

However, in this context it must be pointed out that the official Famine Inquiry Commission brushed-off the overall rise in banditries and thefts of rice during the famine as usual crimes by professional criminals:

There was a very serious rise in the number of decoities reported in Bengal in 1943. Thefts of rice, particularly from boats, were very common and in certain areas its transport was attended by considerable risk. It appears, however, that the decoits were not in general famine victims, but usually ordinary thieves taking advantage of the prevailing situation. Rice had become a very valuable commodity, selling at a high price, and hence well worth stealing. Violence and looting on the part of famine victims was thus not one of the problems with which the authorities had to deal.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibid., p. 270.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 270-271.

⁶⁵ For discussions of looting of grains by starving mobs, see Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, pp. 12-13, pp. 40-41, p. 62, pp. 75-76, p. 78, p. 80, p. 93, p. 106, pp. 199-201, p. 221, p. 226, pp. 230-234.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁶⁷ Famine Inquiry Commission (hereafter FIC), *Report on Bengal*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 68.

Even three decades after the famine, Wallace Ruddell Aykroyd (1899-1979), who was the Director of the Government of India's Nutrition Research Laboratories between 1935 and 1945, and a member of the official Famine Inquiry Commission,⁶⁸ reiterated the commission's position in his book that thefts of rice during the famine were routine thefts by ordinary thieves, and not by famine-victims: 'During the famine, indeed, thefts of rice from stores or in transport became very common. But this was largely the work of ordinary thieves, stealing rice because it had become well worth stealing.'⁶⁹

However, my research corroborates to Janam Mukherjee's findings that common hungry people, not only professional thieves, were carrying out looting or stealing of grains. For instance, while touring the famine-stricken Midnapore district, Chittaprosad, the noted Bengali painter and member of the Communist Party of India, encountered a couple in a depopulated village who had been beaten by the robbers, and robbed of, notably, 'half-boiled rice' from the oven, along with other small things such as two brass-wares and dirty rags that they were wearing.⁷⁰ That the robbers cared to rob 'half-boiled rice' from the oven is a testimony that satisfying hunger was a prime concern for the robbers. In another village, starvation made villagers so desperate that there were thefts of even the meagre rice sent to an orphanage by a relief organization.⁷¹ In another village, a country doctor complained to Chittaprosad and his colleague about the rise in robberies in the countryside, and lamented the confiscation of their private guns by the government. After intense arguments, wrote Chittaprosad:

We succeeded in convincing them that those who were to-day snatching away the last morsel of food from beggars' hands, snatching away the last rag from a woman's body, are not robbers, but ordinary peasants driven to desperation by hunger. Guns will not keep them in

⁶⁸ For the role of Aykroyd in Government of India's food administration, see W. R. Aykroyd, *The Conquest of Famine*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1974, p. 71.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District, by Chittaprosad, in November 1943*, New Age, Bombay, 1944, pp. 6-7 (N. B. the book contains no pagination. Page numbers have been added by me counting from the first page as page 1).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

check, guns will not save rice from their hungry clutches: it is only food that will keep them at home.⁷²

The connection between starvation and the rise in robberies is supported by the weekly intelligence summary from the General Headquarters, India, dated 20th August 1943. The intelligence summary noted that starvation had 'given rise to a widespread incidence of thefts and decoities.'⁷³ After a year, in August 1944, after looking at the crime figures furnished by the Home Department and the department's note on them, the Secretary of State for India Leopold Amery concluded that 'The connection between the crime situation and the economic – especially food – conditions in the various Provinces is very noticeable.'⁷⁴ H. B. L. Braund, the Regional Food Commissioner of Eastern India, observed that often the movement of private traders' grains to markets was restricted by the 'fear of looting or forcible sale at low prices by mobs in the hats' (open-air markets held on a regular basis).⁷⁵ Thus, Braund tells us that grain was often looted for distribution among the hungry mobs at low prices, instead of for sale for high profits, as the Famine Inquiry Commission and Aykroyd claimed. On 31 January 1943, Krishna Menon (1896 – 1974), the Secretary of the India League in London (an overseas Indian lobby to win public support for Indian independence), had told in a meeting that because of looting of food, Government of India had passed a law to shoot the looters. Menon lamented that in the law 'The looters are the people who are hungry, not the people who keep the food and who ought to be shot.'⁷⁶ In June 1943, a periodical article by Basudha Chakravarty on the situation

⁷² Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁷³ See the 'Extract from G.H.Q., India, Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 94, Dated 20th August, 1943 – Part III, Security Intelligence', marked 'INTERNAL', annexed to document no. 119, *War Cabinet Paper W. P. (43) 407*, 17 September 1943, R/30/1/4: ff 123-5, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7*, vol. IV, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1973, p. 272.

⁷⁴ *Mr Amery to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell*, marked 'PRIVATE AND TOP SECRET', 31 August 1944, L/PO/10/21, compiled *ibid.*, document no. 676, p. 1233.

⁷⁵ See appendix 'B', 'Reasons for slow flow of grain into markets and possible remedies', appended to H. B. L. Braund, *Memorandum of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund on Events from March 1943 to the end of 1943 in relation to the Food Situation in Bengal*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1944, p. 58, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi.

⁷⁶ News in the *Daily Worker*, London, dated 1.2.1943, NAI, M. F. Acc. No. 2430, compiled in Partha Sarathi Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1943-1944*, part II, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 1824.

in Bengal claimed that some of the starving middle class people were 'asking themselves and others if murder [presumably of the hoarders] will meet the situation.'⁷⁷ Chakravarty further feared that 'The intention to murder will develop class content.'⁷⁸

Janam Mukherjee's book suggests that even the violence practiced by the people during the Quit India Movement of 1942, immediately before the famine-year, had actually been augmented by hunger.⁷⁹ Mukerjee draws an insightful link between starvation and politics when he suggests that in the Midnapore district in Bengal, the issue of food scarcity was one of the factors that sustained and conditioned the severe Quit India Movement against the colonial state, whereas in other parts of Bengal the same food scarcity was among the factors that 'blunted overt political expressions among the peasantry, as the hardships of material scarcity began to unravel social networks and undermine political solidarity.'⁸⁰

The third point of departure from existing scholarship is that Mukherjee sees the famine of 1943 and the communal carnage in Calcutta in August 1946 in a single frame. In a highly original and insightful way, he argues that the Calcutta riots were also a result of the attempt to gain 'territory' or residence in Calcutta by the 'outsiders', that is, the famine-stricken rural mass that came to the city in search of food. These 'outsiders' were excluded from the privileges of the rationing system as they had no residential address in the city, and the countryside was 'un-rationed and starving'.⁸¹ In the summer of 1946, when the prospect of a 'second famine' was looming large, Bengal government was again forcibly removing the starving destitute to 'rehabilitation camps' outside the city (where there was no rationing) in order to keep the city clean and to avoid diplomatic

⁷⁷ 'Article by Basudha Chakravarty in *Independent India* – 'Bengal Awaits Revolution'', dt 13th June, 1943, *Independent India*, vol. 7, no. 24, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, compiled in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, p. 1855.

⁷⁸ *Idem.*

⁷⁹ Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, p. 96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 213 – 215.

censure over horrible sights of famine-deaths in the heart of the British empire. Against this background, for the ‘outsiders’, obtaining a residential address in Calcutta for a ration card became a matter of life-or-death. This gave birth to a territorial tension in the city. Obtaining or retaining a house in the city demanded the elimination of competitors in housing. Mukherjee suggests that the desperation to purge competition for residence, or territory, was one of the calculations that were responsible behind the gargantuan scale of the Calcutta carnage.⁸² He argues that ‘Arson was extremely widespread and has to be understood as a systematic effort to “de-house” an enemy sector of the population, rather than, for instance, simply an expression of political or cultural animosity against a rival community.’⁸³

From this perspective, Mukherjee draws the large scale looting that accompanied the Great Calcutta Killings of August 1946 into his frame. By the summer of 1946, steep rises in prices along with cuts in rations had already caused considerable labour unrest, expressed earlier through numerous industrial strikes often centred upon a demand for higher dearness allowance to cope with rising prices.⁸⁴ Consequently, many ration shops figured among the shops looted.⁸⁵ Furthermore, price manipulations in the market of raw jute, overwhelmingly dominated by the Hindu, particularly Marwari, dealers – hit the Muslim cultivators of eastern Bengal very hard, who subsequently suffered disproportionately from starvation.⁸⁶ To keep production running, the booming mills and factories in wartime Calcutta rendered ‘priority’ status to their regular workforce, overwhelmingly Hindu, granting them ‘preferential access to subsidized food grains that very easily could mean the difference between life

⁸² Ibid., pp. 213 – 215. In the words of Mukherjee, “‘Pakistan’ is only a somewhat provisional *casus belli* in a highly contentious socio-political context characterized by a multitude of anxieties and motivations. Above all else, this context was constructed in relation to differential access to scarce resources based on claims of rootedness to the city. The riots, in this light, are understood not as a nationalist battle for the promised land of Pakistan – which would be home to India’s 100 million Muslims – but as a much more specific, localized battle for the control of city blocks, alleyways, and neighborhoods in Calcutta, the city of survival.’ Ibid., p. 218.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 219.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 230.

and death.⁸⁷ Therefore, 'Competition to be *in* the mill had become especially fierce during famine',⁸⁸ as obtaining the employment of 'essential' labourer (as opposed to implied disposable labourer) simply meant physical survival. The Muslim workers, who formed the majority of the contract labour (as opposed to recognized regular labour), were without the safety of 'priority' benefits. This caused internal hostility within the workforce, which coincided with communal division.⁸⁹ Mukherjee demonstrates that even during the ghastly carnages around the mills, the mills still served as islands of safety for their recognized 'essential' regular workers, granting them the luxury of the protection of armed police and 'special arrangement' with Civil Supplies Department for food, while the unemployed and contract labour starved outside the walls of the mills.⁹⁰

Thus, in Janam Mukherjee's framework the colossal communal enmity that was unleashed during the Calcutta riots of August 1946, 'itself had been cultured in the petri-dish of war and famine.'⁹¹ He asserts that 'The over-determining factor, even in politics, and more specifically in communalist politics, leading up to this event was famine . . . Famine hardened the political discourse to a dangerous extent. It also hardened society at large.'⁹² The same famine-hit sections of Bengali population were later the primary aggressors as well as victims of the Calcutta riots, and, in Mukherjee's observation, this connection was by no means coincidental, this was definitely a causal connection.⁹³

Janam Mukherjee does discuss the politics of famine-relief.⁹⁴ However, his discussion of communalism on the site of famine-relief is exclusively based on the private papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, the Deputy Governor of the Indian

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 231.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 233. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 233.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 247.

⁹² Ibid., p. 248.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 248.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of communal politics vis-à-vis food administration and famine-relief, see *ibid.*, pp. 175-180, p.185.

Reserve Bank who wrote on rural economics,⁹⁵ and who was later one of the Indian members of the official Famine Inquiry Commission. Surprisingly, Mukherjee does not consult the papers of the Hindu Mahasabha, the most prominent Hindu organization active in providing relief, and its leader Shyama Prasad Mookerji, the central character in the whole process of communalization of food and relief in Bengal. In addition to consulting Nanavati papers, this thesis makes thorough use of the Hindu Mahasabha papers and the private papers of Shyama Prasad Mookerji to explore communalism on the site of famine-relief.

Among the very few full-scale studies of India's overall role in the Second World War, a very recent one is Yasmin Khan's *The Raj at War*.⁹⁶ Going a step further from discussing India's crucial contribution to the war, Khan also discusses 'how the Indian subcontinent itself was reshaped by the war',⁹⁷ placing her emphasis on the 'social costs of war'.⁹⁸ She duly counts the Bengal Famine among such costs. Much in the line of Madhusree Mukherjee and Janam Mukherjee's argument, Khan's brief engagement with the Bengal Famine is informed by the conviction that 'There is a strong case for integrating the dead of the Bengal famine into calculations of the global war dead, much as the casualties of Stalingrad and Hiroshima have become part of global war histories.'⁹⁹ She argues strongly that 'the lives of the people of Bengal had been sacrificed towards the greater global aim of winning the war. The lives of the famine victims were a cost of the Second World War but these casualties were not counted as such'.¹⁰⁰ The cruel irony for Bengal, as pointed out by Khan, was that the dying Bengalis were not considered for help by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) as Bengal was not an *official* war zone, and thus was

⁹⁵ For Nanavati's official position, see the letter marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET' from the Viceroy Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, dated 27 July 1944, L/PO/10/21, compiled in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 607, p. 1125.

⁹⁶ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A people's History of India's Second World War*, The Bodley Head, London, 2015.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁹⁸ *Idem.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

outside the jurisdiction of the UNRRA, an organization originally set up in 1943 (which later became part of the United Nations when it was founded in 1945), to particularly help civilian victims of the war.¹⁰¹ The complex ways in which hunger and food were inseparably knotted with the wartime anxiety receives much-awaited attention from Khan's insightful, albeit brief, treatment of the famine, such as her observation that in the months preceding the famine 'The tables were turned and fears about the death of sons in battle were equalled by the soldiers' own fears about their families facing high prices, malaria and even starvation back home.'¹⁰² However, as is expected from a study primarily concerned with the war, the extent of Khan's dealing with wartime food scene in India is limited to the Bengal Famine.

The present study argues that a shift of emphasis is due in studying colonial food policies in India. This thesis shifts the focus from famines or temporary ad-hoc government famine-relief to an examination of the more sustained routine intervention of the state in everyday food-matters throughout the year, irrespective of the occurrences of famines. State intervention of this kind has proved to be a much enduring feature of the post-colonial Indian state. This thesis explores in detail food austerity laws and civil rationing system, and the social and political consequences of such measures. However, as the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44 represents the apogee of civil suffering during the war, and as it triggered many changes in the government's and public's attitude towards food, and as the shadow of the famine loomed large in the remaining days of the British Raj, quite naturally the present study has frequent references to the famine. Further, the last two chapters of this thesis are aimed at exploring the political uses of the famine and famine-relief by a Right-wing Hindu nationalist party named the Hindu Mahasabha.

An area of food studies relevant to this thesis lies in histories of consumption. As

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 209. For a brief description of the food-relief activities of the UNRRA, see Aykroyd, *Conquest of Famine*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁰² Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 203.

Douglas E. Haynes and Abigail McGowan noted recently, 'The history of consumption is not an identifiable sub-field among South Asianists, nor are there any individual historians who are known primarily for their contributions to this topic'.¹⁰³ They suggested that, among other factors, the wholesale shift in focus towards the study of the subaltern lives since the early 1980s has meant a neglect of the study of the middle class, that is, the most important consumer class, which in turn explains the paucity of histories of consumption. The edited collection of essays *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* offers a number of studies of food consumption. For instance, Haruka Yanagisawa explores the emergence of new patterns of consumption of edibles among the lower classes in south India, such as machine-hulled parboiled rice and cheaper groundnut oil. This led to the growth of rice and groundnut mills in south India between the 1910s and 1950s.¹⁰⁴ In the case of Goa, Remy Dias argues that it was actually the imbalance between domestic output and the increasing local consumption of rice and other grains, sugar and jaggery, rather than the need of the capitalist enterprise to invest capital in trade, that explains the import-export relations between Portuguese Goa (Estado da India) and British India between 1850 and 1950.¹⁰⁵ In his study of colonial Bombay's middle classes, Prashant Kidambi examines the domestic consumption patterns of the Kanara Saraswats, a traditional Brahman service-community in the inter-war years. He shows how debates and discourses around the issue of 'thrift', such as the dismissal of paid cooks, curtailment of ceremonial dinners, and giving up the newly acquired habit of drinking tea and coffee, shaped and reshaped the discursive construction of middle class identity, and middle class notions of bodily purity and health in inter-war colonial Bombay.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ See the introduction by Douglas E. Haynes and Abigail McGowan to Douglas E. Haynes, Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy, Haruka Yanagisawa (eds.), *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Haruka Yanagisawa, 'Growth of Small-scale Industries and Changes in Consumption Patterns in South India, 1910s-1950s', in Haynes et al. (eds.) *Towards a History of Consumption*, pp. 51-75.

¹⁰⁵ Remy Dias, 'Consumption History of the Estado da India, 1850-1950', in Haynes et al. (eds.) *Towards a History of Consumption*, pp. 76-107.

¹⁰⁶ Prashant Kidambi, 'Consumption, Domestic Economy, and the Idea of the 'middle Class' in Late Colonial Bombay', in Haynes et al. (eds.) *Towards a History of Consumption*, pp. 108-135.

Related to these themes of consumption, a further body of scholarship explores culinary cultures in relation to class, identity, and bodily practices. Supriya Chaudhuri and Rimi B. Chatterjee's rich edited volume explores the politics of identity on the site of food as represented in literature, cookbooks, private memoirs and cinema, and as expressed through attempts to preserve authentic 'culinary repertoires' as part of the larger attempt to retain 'lost' identity by migrants, refugees, and diasporas.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the relationship between dietary codes on the one hand, and debility, bodily discipline and sexual appetite on the other, receives detailed treatment in this edited volume.

Culinary cultures also feature greatly in the recent work of Utsa Ray.¹⁰⁸ She describes the drastic transformation in gastronomic culture in Bengal, under the influence of colonial modernity, to understand the self-fashioning of Bengal's middle class. According to Ray, a distinct refined *Bengali* cuisine, along with refinement in music and literature and manners, 'embodied the essence of 'Bengaliness' for the middle-class.'¹⁰⁹ She suggests that the 'lack of commercialisation of Bengali cuisine actually became a marker of its aesthetic superiority, a cultural capital that went into the making of the Bengali middle-class.'¹¹⁰ However, she also warns us against labelling Bengali cuisine as merely 'indigenist', as in its appropriation of 'modern' and foreign food, alongside retaining the 'authenticity' of traditional culinary repertoire, it was remarkably cosmopolitan. In fact, 'The point was to cosmopolitanize the domestic and yet keep its tag of 'Bengaliness.' The resultant cuisine was hybrid, in many senses like its makers.'¹¹¹ As will be seen, I have drawn on some of the insights and approaches of these recent consumption histories in my own analysis of the responses of different communities of Indian consumers to wartime rationing

¹⁰⁷ Supriya Chaudhuri, and Rimi B. Chatterjee (eds.), *The Writer's Feast: Food and the Cultures of Representation*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

and food-austerity laws, to the restriction of some familiar foodstuffs and the availability of new ones.

A further body of scholarship that is of relevance in this thesis is that of the 'everyday state'.¹¹² Within this field, William Gould has taken rationing as an analytical tool to explore the everyday experience of the state in India. Corruption in India's rationing administration proves to be particularly useful in this direction. Rationing brought the urban popular classes in regular touch with the 'local state' in the form of lower echelons of government servants. Gould treats the various discourses that emerged around the issue of corruption in rationing administration as 'a key interpretive interface for popular local perceptions of the everyday state', and subsequently tries to historicize that perception.¹¹³ He explores the management of corruption, increasing political and media discussions about corruption, and changing representations (and changing publicity strategies) of corruption in the food supply and rationing bureaucracy in Uttar Pradesh (UP) from the mid-1940s to the 1960s. He shows how corruption became a political tool, and in turn marked broader changes in the concept of the public and citizenship in general, which subsequently brought the shift 'from a colonial stress on administrative authoritarianism, where corruption was presented as a regrettable but unavoidable facet of local power, to a sense of public accountability.'¹¹⁴ He also notes how food came to be linked to communalism in post-partition UP. The poorer refugees from Pakistan, of whom an overwhelming majority were Hindus, qualified for rationing in post-partition UP. This increase in the number of Hindu customers triggered accusations of communal bias against Muslim officers responsible for rationing and civil supply.¹¹⁵ As will be seen, while discussing the politicization of famine-relief in Bengal, this thesis will draw on some of these insights into the

¹¹² See, for example, Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, Sarah Ansari (eds.) *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi and New York, 2014.

¹¹³ William Gould, 'From Subjects to Citizens? Rationing, Refugees and the Publicity of Corruption over Independence in UP', in Sherman et al. (eds.) *From Subjects to Citizens*, p. 38.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 58 - 60.

politicization of food.

Finally, a much older, but no less valuable study has been important for this thesis. Henry Knight's *Food Administration in India* occupies a unique place in the historiography of food in wartime India.¹¹⁶ Knight (1886-1960) had a career of nearly three decades in the Indian Civil Service. He served as the Advisor to the Governor of Bombay in charge of food, agriculture, finance, and rural development during the whole duration of the war, and was the driving force behind the introduction of civil rationing system in Bombay, which subsequently served as a model for many other provinces. In 1945, he served as the Acting Governor of Bombay. In the following year, he was Acting Governor of Madras, Assam, and Burma. His connection with India did not end with the end of colonial rule. On his return to Britain in 1947, he assumed the role of Advisor to the Secretary of State for India.¹¹⁷ In 1954, almost a decade after the war, his monograph on food administration in India between 1939 and 1947 was published as an academic study by Stanford University Press. Though Knight's study includes insights from his first-hand experience in food administration, yet it is primarily a comprehensive scholarly narrative of the food administration of the central colonial government. As might be expected from such a work by a man personally responsible for food administration, it is laden with understatement about official failures. Nonetheless, Knight did situate the success and failure of the wartime food administration in the larger context of divided loyalties and constitutional and political deterrents, recognized the tension between military and civil hunger, and duly noted, albeit in passing, the implications that cultural and religious dictates had on wartime management of food and agriculture by the colonial government. Remarkably, however, there has been no further large study of general food administration in wartime India, as opposed to numerous famine studies, until the present thesis.

¹¹⁶ Sir Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India: 1939-47*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1954.

¹¹⁷ See the 'Director's Foreword' by M. K. Bennett, Director of the Food Research Institute at Stanford University, *ibid.*, p. vii.

II. Focus and Scope of the Thesis

As indicated earlier, this thesis is based on the conviction that we need a study of food in late colonial India discussing routine food policies and practices, outside situations of famine. India's wartime food administration represents a particularly important moment in the development of India's food policies. S. Bhoothalingam, a member of the Indian Civil Service who served during the war, correctly pointed out as late as in 1993 with regard to food that 'Practically every control which has been practiced in India since Independence, every control which continues even today, was started during the War'.¹¹⁸

This thesis seeks to address questions about government engagement in food on an all-India level. Nonetheless, I use three Indian provinces as samples to study food situation at the provincial level. Of these three provinces, provincial governments in Bengal and Punjab were run by a coalition of Indian parties led by the Muslim League and the Unionist Party respectively. Madras, on the other hand, was a 'Section 93' province throughout the war, that is, it was directly governed by the British colonial central government through the provincial governor. These two types of provinces have been chosen intentionally to deepen our understanding of the inter-state conflicts regarding food that arose during the war, and the relation that the centre had with provinces with regard to food. Further, it should be made clear here that feeding of the British Indian Army and the Allied troops stationed in India during the war is not a major focus of this thesis. Though the chapter 4 has a section on military food provisioning, yet, on the whole, food procurement for the army by governments has been discussed only when such a discussion is imperative to deepen our understanding of the feeding arrangement for the civilians. As studying food measures for both the civilians and army men would have been too big a topic to be covered within the scope of a single doctoral thesis, I focus principally on the state vis-à-vis food for the civilian population.

¹¹⁸ S. Bhoothalingam, *Reflections on an Era: Memoirs of a Civil Servant*, Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., Madras, 1993, p. 26.

This thesis studies the predicaments of the central colonial state in dealing with the Indian provinces on the site of food, as well as the complex relationship that it (already overburdened with the demands of the war) had with popular food politics in a period of overall wartime scarcity. Although the Bengal Famine is not the primary focus of the thesis, yet, the last two chapters treat themes related to it. These chapters offer new perspectives into the famine. They study the politics of famine-relief, which has not received much scholarly attention so far. Where my thesis departs from the enormously rich historiography of the Great Bengal Famine is that I mainly focus on the politics of the people during the famine, rather than on their suffering. All the previously mentioned streams of famine study try to gain insights into the famine from a discussion of the relationship between the Second World War and the central and provincial governments in India. My aim, on the other hand, is to examine whether a discussion of the politics of the people immediately before and during the famine can provide insights into the connection between the war and the government. An important conclusion of my thesis is that the actions of the central and provincial governments in India immediately before and during the famine are most illustrative of the predicaments and precariousness of the late colonial state in India.

III. Original Contributions to the Field

This thesis intends to contribute to the scholarly literature in a number of different ways. Firstly, in the case of food studies in India, as we have seen by now, the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44 has already attracted considerable scholarly attention. However, the wider question of the British colonial state's general management and administration of food in the Indian colony during the Second World War has been largely neglected in scholarly literature. This thesis aims to fill in this gap in the literature.

Secondly, this thesis looks at the Bengal Famine from a different perspective. It introduces a stronger political perspective, and highlights the predicaments of the colonial state in dealing with the famine. Though admittedly this thesis is concerned with neither army provisioning nor the famine per se, yet, it tends to agree with the recent works in their understanding that racial prejudices and colonialist attitude of the very 'top' of the British Government in Britain were considerably responsible in causing widespread starvation and consequent mass death in India. However, this thesis also argues that blaming the 'top' of the gigantic pyramid called the British colonial state in a sub-continent as huge as India, does not give us a nuanced picture, instead it paints the whole canvas in black and white. The reality was both more complex and confused, where developments at local level often made administration of food extremely difficult. This thesis explores the constitutional, political, and administrative predicaments that deprived the colonial food administration of success. It tries to highlight some of the internal political structures that made the handling of the Bengal Famine complex and challenging. It demonstrates how in Bengal the central colonial state became caught between two warring streams of politics, namely the separatist politics of the Muslim League and the Hindu nationalist politics of the Hindu Mahasabha.

However, this thesis does not attempt to put forth a revisionist argument along the line that the colonial state could not do enough to prevent or end the famine because of the restraints placed on it, such as the late colonial constitutional separation of power between the central colonial Government of India run from Delhi and the elected provincial government led by an indigenous political party, namely the Muslim League. This thesis does not argue that the intention of the central colonial government was to protect the civilians from hunger. Instead, even while highlighting the predicaments of the complex constitutional and political arrangements in India towards the tail end of colonialism, this thesis continuously emphasizes that it was the colonial state's eagerness to keep the army fed at any cost, even at the cost of civilian stomachs, that led to the fatal fate of the civilian population in Bengal, and caused tremendous inconveniences

(sometimes near-starvation) for the civilians in many other Indian provinces. After all, in Bengal the British editor of the British-owned newspaper *The Statesman* had to appeal to his fellow countrymen that 'Thoughtful Britons in this country must realize that so long as their nation, their Parliament, and their Secretary of State maintain some responsibility for India's welfare, the ultimate blame unavoidably rests upon themselves.'¹¹⁹ This thesis strongly argues that the common civilians, except those engaged in war industries, were deserted and disowned by the colonial state as they were thought to be useless, even burden, for the war. However, as said earlier, while emphasizing this, this thesis also notes the hitherto neglected political factors that exacerbated the failure of the colonial state to save its subjects from starvation.

Following on from this, thirdly, this thesis initiates a related debate as to why the late colonial state's intervention in food even on the all-India level could not bring the intended results, just as it could not on the provincial level in Bengal. Many scholarly works have convincingly argued that the sway of the colonial state's authority and the efficiency of its organs declined considerably in Asia as a result of the severe demands of the war on the political and material resources of the British empire.¹²⁰ However, so far, no scholarly history of the last days of the British Raj in India has tried to apply this understanding of the macro level corrosion of the abilities of the British colonial state to an understanding of that state's management of an everyday issue like food. This thesis tries to do precisely that, linking the macro level corrosion of colonial state-power to its inadequate and inefficient management of food during the war. I try to explain why state intervention proved to be extremely inadequate despite a sudden outburst of state intervention in food. I argue that as state intervention in food emerged towards the tail end of British colonialism in India, such intervention was actually a lifeless project of a weak colonial state in the twilight of its days. Its intervention in everyday civilian feeding was reluctant at the best, particularly

¹¹⁹ 'Text of an editorial *An All-India Disgrace* published in *The Statesman* on August 29, 1943', appendix IX, Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 263.

¹²⁰ See, for instance, C. A. Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

as such quotidian intervention had clear potential to cause social and political anger against the state initially. Therefore, managing food in a country as big as India was particularly an overambitious project given the half-heartedness of the state. As the ambition was disproportionate to the ability and enthusiasm of the colonial state, the project was severely constrained from the beginning.

Fourthly, on a broad level, this thesis contributes to the history of consumption in India. The field of history of consumption in India, despite recent works discussed earlier in this introduction, is still dominated by histories of cloths, liquors, and luxury items such as perfumes and jewelry. This thesis particularly contributes to the history of food consumption, to an understanding of the wider social ramifications of wartime interventions in traditional patterns of food consumption. It points out how wartime scarcity shook the confidence of the Indian middle class (almost invariably consisting of upper caste populace) about household provisioning. It describes how the famine in Bengal forced the upper caste Bengalis to queue with lower caste manual labourers for food-relief, and to eat sometimes in public kitchens. Wartime developments forced Indian families to think differently about food, and to accept new food practices, which often had religious implications. Wartime scarcity and consequent austerity laws shaped everyday consumption of food, and thereby brought changes in the dynamics of Indian domestic life. As the colonial state arrived in the kitchens of its subjects, so they sought to find ways around its regulating presence. Further, through a history of wartime civil and military rationing, this thesis explores how rationing mediated class tensions on the site of diet. Ideas about scarcity were reshaped due to the wartime introduction of controlled consumption in the form of food rationing.

A fifth contribution of the thesis is to the expanding literature on the 'everyday state', through its focus on state interventions in civilian feeding. It pushes back the historiographical time-limit of exploring the everyday state from post-colonial to late colonial India. In the European setting, there has been path-breaking scholarship on the subject of diet and the everyday state during the First

World War. Belinda Davis, for example, has challenged the assumptions about the separation of high politics and macro state on the one hand, and everyday life on the other.¹²¹ Through an exploration of food scarcity caused by Britain's blockade of goods to central Europe, and the resultant protest by German women, Davis deciphers the German women's role as political actors, and the influence of the war on the home front under the Weimar state. To some extent, the current thesis applies this treatment to India during the next World War, whereby it discusses how the macro state became 'everyday state' through intervention in everyday food consumption.

Sixthly, this thesis introduces a new site to the studies of communal politics in India, namely, the spread of communalism through the distribution of free food to the victims of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943. I seek to demonstrate the power of food in politics, and the potential of famine-relief as a tool to propagate communal ideology. Studies such as that of Joya Chatterjee have provided in-depth treatments of Hindu communalism during the war, but this aspect of communalist politics remains little known.¹²²

Seventhly, this thesis aims to deepen our understanding of the origin of the post-colonial welfare state in India, of which food provisioning is an integral part. I argue that by intervening in food procurement, distribution, and consumption during the war, the colonial state set the stage for the future independent Indian state to intervene in provision of food to its own citizens. Once the benefits, or possible benefits, of the principle of state intervention in food became embedded in popular expectations, there was no way that the post-colonial state could withdraw from making such interventions. Even after seven decades since the end of the British rule in India, the Indian state still has a robust presence in food, at every stage from production to distribution, and it is politically unthinkable for any Indian government to withdraw from the management of food. The post-

¹²¹ Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin*, University of North Carolina press, London, 2000.

¹²² Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

colonial Indian state's extremely elaborate, complex, and expensive feeding arrangements are in very large part a legacy of the British wartime state in India.

Eighthly and lastly, this thesis brings back the state in the historiography of late colonial India. The over-emphasis on, often obsession with, the high politics of the colonial state in the nationalist historiography of post-colonial India until the end of the 1970s was suddenly (and fashionably) replaced by the negligence of the colonial state in the postcolonial, postmodern, and subaltern school of Indian history since the early 1980s. This thesis demonstrates how the attempt to have an understanding of the late colonial state is crucial for our appreciation of much 'subaltern' as well as middle class experience, from concerns such as religious propriety regarding food to the privations of night-long queues before ration shops. Any attempt to reconstruct popular experience of food-hardship without a simultaneous unraveling of the nature and calculations of the state would remain an overtly partial history.

IV. Methodology

This thesis is a politico-social analysis of state-intervention in wartime food, and of the political uses of food-scarcity and famine-relief, from a historical approach. The methodology is inter-disciplinary, drawing from history, politics, sociology, and political economy. As the food situation during the period under study was to a great extent shaped by the calculations and demands of a great war, this thesis draws insights from war studies too. This is not a quantitative study of food production and consumption, but rather it looks at food through lenses that are political, cultural and sociological.

While selecting and dealing with primary sources, I have tried to ask new questions to the conventional archives of official and institutional documents. In addition to treating these as sources of empirical data, I have tried to unravel the language of the official sources, to analyze the structure of official perception and

the visions of state power that lie embedded in such official sources. Though this thesis discusses official state actions in great detail, yet, throughout the process of research I have tried to ask new questions to 'old' archives, such as what social and political corollaries followed state action in food, and how such corollaries shaped further state action. Asking these questions has led me into examination of a wide gamut of non-official sources such as private papers, pamphlets, memoirs, and visual materials such as periodical photographs.

While exploring the responses of non-state actors to state intervention in food, my methodology makes a distinction between organized macro level non-state actors (such as the Hindu Mahasabha party in Bengal) and micro level respondents such as individual persons and individual households. To listen to the voice of individual persons and common households, this thesis places importance on the few available sources in vernaculars, such as letters by housewives written to political leaders asking for help during the Bengal Famine, and letters of relief-volunteers during the famine, which vividly convey the concerns of the common man when faced with scarcity. Methodologically speaking, the consultation of materials of this genre has brought a 'bottom-up' approach to the thesis. I have tried to set this perspective alongside my study of the state at local, regional, national, and international levels, so that both the 'bottom' and the 'top' enrich the understanding of each other, as it was only through its intervention in matters like food that the macro colonial state made its presence perceptible in subaltern lives.

V. Note on Primary Sources

This thesis consults large number of archival files at the National Archives of India, New Delhi, at the provincial archives in the provinces of West Bengal and Maharashtra, and at the India Office Records and Private Papers section in the Asian and African Collections section at the British Library, London. Documents of various departments of the central and provincial governments in India, particularly the files of the departments of food and civil supplies,

and of the Department of Education, Health, & Lands, have been used to construct the narrative of state intervention in food. In addition to unpublished archival sources, published collections of documents such as the multi-volume *Transfer of Power* series¹²³ under the chief editorship of Nicholas Mansergh (particularly volume IV on the theme of 'The Bengal Famine and the New Viceroyalty'), and the *Towards Freedom* series initiated by the Indian Council of Historical Research (particularly the volume for 1943-1944 edited by Partha Sarathi Gupta¹²⁴) have been very useful for this thesis.

Published reports, such as the *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, 1943*,¹²⁵ and the two reports of the Famine Inquiry Commission,¹²⁶ have been valuable sources for constructing a narrative of the development of food administration in India, as well as for exploring some of the policy debates regarding the overall management of food. Consultation of published speeches and memorandums by food officials on various aspects of the wartime food situation has shed light on their understanding of the food situation.¹²⁷ Memorandums, letters, and pamphlets by political parties such as the Communist Party of India and the Hindu Mahasabha party have enabled me to demonstrate the political uses of famine and famine-relief.¹²⁸ Published contemporary surveys such as the survey of the famine victims by the Calcutta University's Anthropology Department have furnished interesting data, in addition to informing this thesis about how the contemporary academia viewed

¹²³ Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, 12 vols, 1970-83.

¹²⁴ Gupta, *Towards Freedom*, 3 parts, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

¹²⁵ Foodgrains Policy Committee & Sir Theodore Gregory (chairman), *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, 1943*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1946.

¹²⁶ FIC, *Report on Bengal*. FIC, *The Famine Inquiry Commission: Final Report*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945.

¹²⁷ For example, Braund, *Memorandum*. Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943): Speech by the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council and Other Papers*, presented by the Secretary of State for India to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, October 1943, His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1943.

¹²⁸ For instance, Communist Party of India, *India's Food Crisis, Analysis and Solution: Memorandum of the Communist Party of India to the Government of the Indian Union*, People's Publishing House Ltd., Bombay, 1947. Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, with a forward by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, Calcutta, 1944.

the food situation.¹²⁹ Further, academic books published after the war on wartime food situation and famine by authors who were personally involved in India's wartime food affairs, such as Sir Henry Knight and W. R. Aykroyd, have been used in this thesis.¹³⁰ Consultation of articles and books authored by economists, journalists, newspaper editors, businessmen, published during the war or soon afterwards, has opened a hitherto untapped vein of data.¹³¹

Private papers of politicians and bureaucrats, such as Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the prominent Hindu Mahasabha leader, Manilal B. Nanavati, one of the Indian members of the official Famine Inquiry Commission, Henry Knight, one of the most prominent British food officials in India, and F. A. Lindemann, the Scientific Adviser to the wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, have also been consulted with due care. Through a consultation of these private papers, this thesis has explored the complex responses of the key Indian as well as colonial authorities to India's precarious food situation.

The search for the 'people' in Indian history since the meteoric rise of the Subaltern School in the early 1980s has led to the discovery of 'new' sources, and constitution of 'new' people's archives of the past. Therefore, in addition to consulting official files, this thesis pays due attention to this sort of sources in an attempt to go closer to popular perception of food in wartime India. Thus, pamphlets published by famine-relief organizations, propaganda publications including those with religious overtones (particularly useful for religious repercussions of practices like cow-slaughtering by the Allied troops for beef),

¹²⁹ Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of The Destitutes in Calcutta*, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1949.

¹³⁰ Knight, *Food Administration*. W. R. Aykroyd, *Conquest of Famine*.

¹³¹ For instance, book by Tusharkanti Ghosh who was the editor of the popular Indian Congress-leaning daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Tusharkanti Ghosh, *The Bengal Tragedy*, Hero Publications, Lahore, 1944. K. Santhanam, a Congress leader and joint editor of the *Hindustan Times* newspaper, wrote a book on the Bengal Famine. K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-Hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943. T. G. Narayan, a reporter of *The Hindu* newspaper, authored another book. T. G. Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, with a foreword by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, The Book Company Ltd., Calcutta, 1944. Freda Bedi (1911-1977), a British woman who toured famine-stricken Bengal in January 1944 on behalf of the newspaper *The Tribune*, authored another book. Freda Bedi, *Bengal Lamenting*, The Lion Press, Lahore, c. 1944.

have been consulted as a means to understand popular conceptions of the wartime food situation, which are largely inaccessible through official files. Letters in vernaculars by famine-affected persons, and by relief-volunteers, have provided insights into popular predicaments such as how the inability to eat as much rice as one wanted stamped a visible mark of poverty on Bengali households, and thus led to the decline of their social status in their immediate neighbourhoods.

Consultation of contemporary issues of three Indian daily newspapers in English, namely *The Statesman*, *The Tribune*, and *The Hindu*, and a weekly named *Behar Herald*, has further deepened my understanding of the popular fears and anxieties around food, and the political use of those fears and anxieties. Contemporary pamphlets and letters intercepted by censor authorities, archived at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, and at the National Archives of India, have been very useful in further revealing the political use of food-issues, and in exploring the network of food-smuggling.

Autobiographies and memoirs of politicians, newspapers editors, civil servants and other officials have also been used in this thesis. Those such as *At Freedom's Door*¹³² by Malcolm Darling, a British officer in the Indian Civil Service in the Punjab cadre, and *Monsoon Morning* by Ian Stephens, the editor of the newspaper *The Statesman*, provide vivid accounts of the food situation and state actions on the ground.¹³³ Noted painter Chittaprosad's rare account of his tour of famine-stricken Midnapore district in November 1943 has been very useful in understanding the political ground-reality and popular anxieties in famine-stricken villages.¹³⁴

Some of the photographs taken during the war, some reprinted in the collection of photographs taken by famous Indian photographer Sunil Janah (1918 -

¹³² Malcolm Lyall Darling, *At Freedom's Door*, Oxford University Press, London, 1949.

¹³³ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*.

¹³⁴ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal*.

2012),¹³⁵ and others archived in the online archive of the *LIFE* magazine hosted by Google, and on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photograph's of Indian Subcontinent* (www.oldindianphotos.in), have been included in this thesis to reproduce real-life sights of grain transportation, free-kitchens, government grain shops, and milk distributing centres.

VI. Chapter Plan

The first chapter of this thesis begins with a discussion of state intervention in food in the interwar years, and the constitutional changes that divided the responsibility of handling food between the central and provincial governments. Thereafter, it shows that in the initial years of the war until 1942, government intervention in food was confined to occasional hesitant steps to control the price of food. However, since 1942, there was a sudden and rapid growth of proper government food administration both at the centre and in the provinces. This chapter argues that the worsening of the war for the British in Asia in 1942 demanded additional deployment of Allied troops to India and further expansion of the British Indian Army, which in turn drastically increased the military demand for food in India. Further, a healthy work-force in the vastly expanded war-industries was essential for the war efforts. These developments forced the colonial state to initiate government procurement of food. However, this chapter demonstrates how constitutional constraints prevented the central government from unilaterally procuring grains in the provinces. Further, through a case study of procurement in Madras and Punjab, this chapter shows how different political and economic interests of different types of provincial governments as well as of the peasantry created serious problems in the way of government procurement.

Chapter two discusses how various state agencies came to shape popular consumption. The colonial state was initially extremely cautious in its dealing

¹³⁵ Sunil Janah, *Photographing India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013.

with the issue of food consumption, maintaining that food control should interfere *as little as possible* with local cultural or religious customs regarding food. However, the policy of accommodation soon gave way to a vigorous and carefully drawn system of controlling food consumption, designed to constrain 'excessive' consumption with a range of different austerity measures. This in turn brought the state almost literally into the kitchens of its subjects. In this connection, this chapter also discusses popular engagement with such state-imposed austerity measures vis-à-vis everyday food. Further, it examines state surveillance of food transactions in the princely kingdoms, as black-markets and illegal food-export activities were thriving in the princely kingdoms taking advantage of their legal protection, albeit limited, from direct intervention by the colonial state.

Chapter three puts Indian rationing in comparative perspective with rationing in metropolitan Britain. Through such a comparison, it brings out how closely Indian rationing was linked to the war calculations of the colonial state. Further, the differences between the metropolitan and colonial rationing in their ideological roots, motives, and implementations, expose the predicaments of rationing in India, and thereby help us to understand better the successes and failures of Indian rationing. This chapter also explores the initial policy debates about rationing in India, and the struggles to 'educate' the common consumers about the benefits of rationing to secure public opinion in its favour. It reveals how rationing in India, unlike in Britain, was subjected to tremendous political opposition as well as administrative feuds and confusion. Finally, this chapter tries to explain why rationing in metropolitan Britain and rationing in colonial India were to engender completely different outcomes – in the former, it strengthened the authority of the state, whereas in the latter it weakened the sway of the state.

Chapter four discusses the actual implementation of rationing in India. It

first discusses the fatal delay in its implementation in Calcutta, and the reasons for it. Then this chapter explores the prioritized feeding arrangements for the colliery labour, the police, and the employees of the central government, who were classified as 'essential' for the war effort. Through a discussion of the 'special ration' privileges of these employees, this chapter provides an understanding of how the central government's food policies were influenced by the need to have a smooth running of the war effort. It also discusses food provisioning for the vastly expanded British Indian Army, the families of the army men, and the foreign Allied soldiers stationed in India. It reveals how the higher quantity of army ration as compared to the survival-level rations allowed to the common civilians, caused displeasure, and even guilt, among the food officials in India, particularly when the civilians were starving in Bengal. Further, it studies the industrial corollaries of army demand for new food items, such as the establishment of processed food and *vanaspati* (vegetable *ghee*) factories. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how the issue of importing food to wartime India led to bitter contentions between the colonial government in India and the imperial government in Britain.

Chapter five switches the focus from the colonial state to colonial subjects. It demonstrates how the Bengal Famine fed Hindu communal politics. It looks at the way in which Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the top leader of the Hindu Mahasabha Party in Bengal, used the forum of the Bengal Legislative Assembly to assert the Mahasabha as the most effective critic of the central government's disastrous management of food in Bengal, simultaneously presenting the Muslim League government in the province as equally responsible for causing the famine. Thus the potential of the issue of starvation in high politics was fully realized by the Hindu Right. This chapter points out the Mahasabha's attacks on the alleged communal bias of the Muslim food officials, and its attempt to project them as saboteurs in the food administration. Further, this chapter examines the way in

which the Mahasabha used the issue of irregularities in grain-trade to argue against the Muslim League government that it was misusing state-powers to 'create' a new body of Muslim grain dealers at the cost of well-established old Hindu dealers. Finally, this chapter studies the political implications of the famine for the politics of partition. It demonstrates that the Hindu Mahasabha turned the issue of famine into a political sword that cut both ways - on the one hand, it was used to undermine the benevolence-claims of the foreign rule, and on the other it was used against the League's drive for Muslim political autonomy and the concurrent demand for the partition of India.

The last chapter introduces a new site to the study of communal politics in India, namely, the spread of Hindu communal politics through distribution of free food to the famine-victims by the Hindu Mahasabha. The weak handling of the famine by the Muslim League ministry in Bengal furnished other political parties with a political space waiting to be captured. After explaining this background, this chapter tries to understand why the Hindu Mahasabha's relief activities overshadowed the relief activities of other private relief organizations as well as of the Bengal government. Further, it examines the caste and class bias in the distribution of the Mahasabha's relief, and why its relief was more attractive than government relief to the Bengali *bhadraloks* (gentlefolk), who were the target audience of the Mahasabha's politics of Hindu communalism. This chapter demonstrates that through its relief activities, the Mahasabha greatly increased its mass-contact, and thereby tried to expand its political base. It explores the politics of religious conversion on the site of famine-relief. Realizing that the famine had thrown open a scope of religious conversion from Hinduism through distribution of food, the Mahasabha rushed to provide relief to the Hindu vulnerable to 'save' them from converting to another religion, and to the ex-Hindus to 'restore' them to Hinduism. Thus, famine-relief became fused with religious tensions. During the famine, when food-relief, desperately needed for physical survival, was politicized, it rendered political bellicosity ingrained in everyday existence, and thus made the already acrimonious communal

politics in Bengal more caustic. Finally, this chapter makes an attempt to ascertain whether the Mahasabha actually succeeded in converting its increased popularity through relief activities into votes in electoral politics, and what long-term impact its relief-activism had on its politics of aggressive Hindu nationalism.

* * *

Chapter 1

The Arrival of the State in Food

I. Introduction: The Interwar Years

In India, structured and continuous state intervention in civil food distribution and consumption arose directly out of the conditions of the Second World War. Uninterrupted state-involvement in food throughout the year during the war was fundamentally different from the ad hoc administration of famine-relief that remained the utmost extent of government intervention in food for the civilians in India until 1905-06 when famine broke out in Bombay and Bundelkhand. This was the last major famine before the reappearance of large-scale famine in the form of the Great Bengal Famine during 1943-44. To understand the sudden outburst of state interest in food during the Second World War, it is imperative to contextualize such interest with the constitutional, political, and administrative backdrop, particularly the gradual shifts in the responsibility to administer food in the inter-war period.

The seeds of permanent government food administration in India, lasting beyond the ephemeral crisis of periodic famines, had been sown during the First World War, 1914-18. Military historian Tan Tai-Yong estimates that 'From September 1914 to the end of the war in 1918, of two and one-half million men from the empire (outside the British Isles) who fought in the war, approximately one and one-half million men - combatants as well as service

troops - were soldiers of the Indian Army'.¹ According to the calculation of Aravind Ganachari, another military historian, during the First World War the Indian army made fresh enlistment of 7,91,000 personnel to the combatant forces, and 4,27,000 personnel to the non-combatant branches of the army.² The combined total number of Indian military personnel, including both the old and new recruits, was approximately 14,57,000.³ Of these 9,43,000 served overseas as per Ganachari's research.⁴

Though the majority of the Indian Army served overseas, yet, they often went through training in India, and thus were stationed in India for considerable lengths of time. The massive expansion of the army during the First World War underscored the need to improve the country's overall food production, and the need for the colonial state to get involved in the food affairs of the country to be able to procure adequate food for the army if a military emergency occurs again in the future. Therefore, towards the end of the war, the Delhi War Conference held on 29 April 1918, passed a resolution with regard to improving India's overall food situation.⁵ Consequently, on 10 May 1918, the Governor-General in Council decided to set up a Central Transport and Food Stuffs Board in Delhi. The main duties of the board 'were to suggest measures for more efficient exploitation of India's resources through animal and mechanical transport, and to develop production of food stuffs.'⁶ However, this board was short-lived and was wound up in 1919, soon after the war. It was replaced by a Food Stuffs Commissioner appointed by the Government of India to mobilise its post-war efforts in controlling movement of foodstuffs. The commissioner was required to submit periodical reports to

¹ Tan Tai-Yong, 'An Imperial Home-Front: Punjab and the First World War', *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 64, no. 2, Apr., 2000, p. 372.

² Aravind Ganachari, 'First World War: Purchasing Indian Loyalties, Imperial Policy of Recruitment and 'Rewards'', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 40, no. 8, Feb. 19-25, 2005, p. 779.

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ International Council on Archives (hereafter ICA), *Guide to the Sources of Asian History: India*, 3.1, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi, 1987, p. 56.

⁶ Idem.

the government about the domestic state of foodstuffs as well as the export of food.⁷

An important change took place around this time. Until the end of the war, the Government of India was unitary in form. But the additional work during and after the war was proving particularly cumbersome for such a centralized system of governance and administration. In the words of a historian of constitutional reforms in India, the war 'forced the deferment of many projects until the arrival of peace, with the result that an onslaught of work was predictable for the Government of India in the immediate future. The war record showed the impracticability of the existing system for handling such work . . .'⁸ Therefore, to move toward provincial decentralization, the British Parliament enacted the Government of India Act, 1919, whereby provincial councils were established in addition to the existing imperial legislature at the centre.⁹ This act granted 'limited self-rule' to the provinces through a system of diarchy in the provinces whereby two lists of subjects were drawn. Firstly, there were 'reserved' subjects, that is, subjects reserved for the sole control of the central colonial government, such as finance, law and order, police, judiciary, and army. Secondly, there were 'transferred' subjects, that is, subjects transferred from the sole control of the central government to partial control of the provincial councils, such as public health, education, local self-government, and agriculture.¹⁰ From the classification of the subjects, it became clear that the departments that were estimated to have more political weight and bigger budgets, were still kept under the sole control of the central governments. In contrast, only departments with little political value and funds were transferred to the provincial councils.¹¹

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Richard Danzig, 'The Many-Layered Cake: A Case Study in the Reform of the Indian Empire', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1969, p. 62.

⁹ For a detailed discussion on the Government of India Act, 1919, see *ibid.*, pp. 57-74. For a much briefer account of the intentions behind the act, and the responses it received, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 165-168.

¹⁰ Peter Heehs, *India's Freedom Struggle, 1857-1947: A Short History*, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 1988, p. 81. See also Burton Stein, *A History of India*, 2nd edn., revised and edited by David Arnold, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2010, p. 293.

¹¹ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 167.

However, as is widely known, the reforms in the structure of governance brought by the act of 1919 did not satisfy political demands of the majority of the Indian nationalists at that time.¹² The limited concession granted toward Indian self-rule was widely seen by the Indians as a betrayal of the strong support that they provided to the British war effort. Widespread protests followed, which were ruthlessly repressed by the central colonial state. In a nutshell, the provincial part of the 1919 act never took off.

After a while, at the centre, following recommendations of the post-war Retrenchment Committee, Department of Revenue and Agriculture was merged with the Department of Education and Health, and subsequently a new department named Education, Health, and Lands was set up on 16 April 1923. All business connected with foodstuffs, famine, civil veterinary, agriculture, forest, arboriculture, Botanical Survey of India, cinchona cultivation, and supply of quinine formed part of the job of the newly constituted department.¹³ This department remained responsible for administering food for the rest of the 1920s and for most part of the 1930s.

Initially, the colonial government set out with the intention of intervening extensively in food distribution. In reality, however, intervention was minimal during the interwar decades. It was limited to occasional slipshod attempts to control prices in the markets by imposing arbitrarily decided ceiling prices, quality-check, prevention of adulteration, and maintenance of hygiene at food markets and in food shops. There were mainly three reasons for such minimal and superficial state intervention in food. Firstly, as the years went by since the war, the possibility of going through another war was gradually fading out in the government circles in India. Therefore, the initial wartime enthusiasm to set up strong procurement machinery for military provisioning petered out with time. Secondly, the colonial state became preoccupied with the task of subverting the ever-increasing might of mass

¹² Heehs, *India's Freedom Struggle*, p. 82. See also Amales Tripathy, *Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom, 1885-1947*, translated from Bengali by Amitava Tripathy, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 69-70.

¹³ ICA, *Guide to the Sources*, pp. 56-57.

nationalism that started with the end of the war. In the 1920s and 1930s, contesting anti-colonial politics became the primary concern of the colonial state; food now got relegated to the position of a minor concern. Thirdly, until the Second World War, there was no major famine in India since the last major one took place in 1905–06 in Bombay and Bundelkhand.¹⁴ Therefore, nothing demanded immediate and concrete state intervention in food in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, which were free from any major famine, though small-scale famines occurred in Nagpur in 1920-21, in Bombay in 1927, and in Hissar in 1938-39. This third reason was later highlighted by the entry on famine in the *Times of India's* Yearbook for 1943-44, that is, for the year of the Great Bengal Famine: 'To the student of administrative history nothing is more remarkable than the manner in which great problems arise, produce a corresponding outburst of official activity to meet them and then fall into the background. This general truth is illustrated by a study of the history of famine in India.'¹⁵

However, in terms of officially dividing administrative responsibility, a major change occurred with the introduction of the Government of India Act, 1935, the last constitution of British India. This act provided for the establishment of the federation of India, and accession of the Indian princely states into that federation.¹⁶ More importantly, in addition to the federal legislature and federal executive, the act established provincial legislature and provincial executive in each of the 'Governors' Provinces', namely, Madras, Bombay, Bengal, the United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar, the Central Provinces and Berar, Assam, the North West Frontier Province, Orissa, and Sind.¹⁷ Though the provincial governor was to retain overriding powers, and even the discretion to suspend provincial legislature and executive, yet, this act devolved

¹⁴ W. R. Aykroyd, *The Conquest of Famine*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1974, p. 78.

¹⁵ See in the entry on 'famine' in *Times of India, The Indian Yearbook and Who's Who, 1943-44*, Bennett, Coleman & Co., Bombay, 1943, vol. 30, pp. 325-328.

¹⁶ *Government of India Act, 1935*, [26 GEO.5 CH2.], downloaded from www.legislation.gov.uk, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1935/2/pdfs/ukpga_19350002_en.pdf, downloaded on 10 July 2016, pp. 2-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

substantial legislative and executive powers to the provinces.¹⁸ The devolution of powers to the provinces had tremendous consequences on the handling of food situation at the provincial level, as would be discussed on many occasions in this thesis.

As is well known, for various complex reasons which are irrelevant to this thesis, the federal part of the act remained a 'paper federation', it never came into operation.¹⁹ Consequently, throughout the war, the central government in India continued to be run by the authority of the British Parliament through a chain of control from the British War Cabinet via the Secretary of State for India based at the India Office in London, to the Viceroy of India based in Delhi.

Nevertheless, unlike the previous Government of India Act, 1919, the provincial part of the 1935 act really took off. The provincial part of the 1935 act came into concrete being in 1937 when popularly elected governments were formed in the provinces.²⁰ From July 1937 until October/November 1939, the eleven provinces of British India were governed by their respective provincial premier (chief minister) and council of ministers. Notably, sustained state intervention in matters relating to food was an unheard of thing in India in those days; the country was still under the grip of *laissez-faire*. Accordingly, the indigenous parties in government in the provinces did not feel the need to come up with provincial departments of food. Consequently, whatever little state intervention was there in the provinces vis-à-vis price-control, quality-check, prevention of adulteration, and maintenance of food-hygiene, came from the central government.

II. Hesitant Steps to Price Control

In October and November 1939, in protest against the colonial government's unilateral decision to declare India a belligerent in the war without consulting the Indian political parties, the Congress Party ministries in seven of the

¹⁸ For details about the formation, functions, and procedures of the provincial executives and provincial legislatures, see *ibid.*, pp. 33-62.

¹⁹ For a discussion about the Government of India Act, 1935, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India*, 2nd rev. edn., Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 323-333. See also Stein, *History of India*, pp. 325-326.

²⁰ Peter Robb, *A History of India*, 2nd edn., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011, p. 160.

eleven provinces resigned from office. Consequently, the governance of Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces and Berar, Bihar, Orissa and the North West Frontier Province was taken over by their respective governors as per section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935, which provided for governor's rule 'at any time the Governor of a Province is satisfied that the situation has arisen in which the government of the Province cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Act'.²¹

Consequently, in these seven provinces, often referred to as the 'Section 93 Provinces', it was the central government that looked after food affairs directly during the war. In addition, the provincial governor and the Viceroy issued administrative directions at their discretion vis-à-vis food from time to time. However, in the provinces governed by non-Congress parties, such as Bengal, Punjab, Sind, and Assam, provincial ministries continued to function throughout the war. Therefore, the administration of food production, procurement, and distribution in these provinces legally remained primarily a responsibility of the provinces. Ian Stephens (d. 1984), the British editor of the British-owned *The Statesman* newspaper published from Calcutta and Delhi, which caused quite a stir by publishing series of gruesome photographs of the victims of the Bengal Famine, later effectively summarized the problem of this arrangement. He said that in Bengal "Government" presented itself publicly in three parts, geographically split: the Bengal provincial Administration on our doorstep; the Centre 900 miles off at Delhi; and the India Office in remote Whitehall. This in a way made it more difficult to deal with; each part could bewilderingly blame the rest.²²

The year 1939 witnessed the enactment of the Defence of India Act, 1939.²³ The emergency powers given to the colonial state by this act extended to the

²¹ Government of India Act, 1935, p. 61.

²² Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Earnest Benn, London, 1966, p. 187.

²³ *The Defence of India Act, 1939 (XXXV of 1939)*, Legislative Department, Government of India, published by the Manager of Publications, Government of India, Delhi, 1939, p. 1, compiled in *A Collection of the Acts of the Indian Legislature and of the Governor General for the Year 1939*, Manager of Publications, Government of India, Delhi, 1939, downloaded on 11 July 2016 from www.lawmin.nic.in, <http://lawmin.nic.in/legislative/textofcentralacts/1939.pdf>. The validity of the

whole of British India.²⁴ This act empowered the central government to make rules by notification in the official gazette on matters such as 'the control of any trade or industry for the purpose of regulating or increasing the supply of, and the obtaining of information with regard to, articles or things of any description whatsoever which can be used in connection with the conduct of war or for maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community.'²⁵ The act further empowered the central government to make rules related to 'the requisitioning of any property, movable or immovable, including the taking possession thereof and the issue of any orders in respect thereof.'²⁶ This act put substantial brakes on the powers devolved to the provinces under the Government of India Act, 1935. The Defence of India Act conferred powers 'upon the Central Government or officers and authorities of the Central Government as respects any matter, notwithstanding that that matter is one in respect of which the Provincial Legislature also has power to make laws'.²⁷ Further, the central government was now empowered to impose tasks on any provincial government, and on the officers of any provincial government, in any matter over which the provincial governments did not have any power to make laws.²⁸

However, the cooperation of the provincial governments was crucial for the war-efforts. Therefore, the central government had to practice moderation when exercising its emergency legal powers vis-à-vis the provinces, as wartime strategy necessitated avoidance of confrontations with the provincial governments to the possible extent.

Nonetheless, being empowered by the Defence of India Act, the central government issued the Rule 81, under which most of the wartime regulations regarding food supplies were framed in India. Rule 81 provided for:

Defence of India Act was abolished after the war, with effect from 1 October, 1946. See Sir Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India: 1939-47*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1954.

²⁴ Defence of India Act, 1939, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁶ *Idem.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁸ *Idem.*

(a) regulating production, treatment, keeping, storage, movement, transport, distribution, disposal, acquisition, use, or consumption of articles or things of any description whatsoever; (b) controlling the prices or rates at which articles or things of any description whatsoever may be sold; (c) requiring the keeping of books, records, etc.²⁹

Against the backdrop of these political and legal changes, we have to see the development of wartime food administration in India. The development was remarkably rapid. The rapidity appears to be stark if we compare it with the development of wartime food administration in Britain. In October 1936, Sir William Beveridge (1879–1963), a noted British economist and the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Food, had mentioned in his memorandum on the ‘Wider Aspects of Food Control’ four basic requirements for United Kingdom’s dealing with food in case there is a war–

1. A decision to appoint a Food Controller with full powers as from the outbreak of war.
2. A feeding policy, thought out in advance, for adequate total supply in the country at all stages of a possibly protracted war.
3. A control plan, prepared in advance, in regard to each essential food, for taking over supply, regulating prices, and directing distribution.
4. “Outbreak Plans” for the probable initial emergency resulting from air attack.³⁰

Thus, Britain started making plans for wartime feeding arrangements even before the start of the war. In this context, the observations of Sir Henry Knight, the prominent wartime food administrator in India, shed much light on the contrasts between rationing in Britain and India. He pointed out that Britain benefited from already having the experience of organizing food affairs during the previous world war. India, on the other hand, had

²⁹ As presented in Knight, *Food Administration*, p.11. See also Food Member of the Governor-General’s Council, *India (Food Situation 1943): Speech by the Food Member of the Governor-General’s Council and Other Papers*, presented by the Secretary of State for India to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, October 1943, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, London, 1943, p. 5.

³⁰ As quoted in Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 33.

experienced no significant additional difficulty in feeding her citizens during the previous World War, beyond her perennial mismatch between demand and supply. Consequently, the Indian administration gained no experience in managing food scarcity in time of a war.³¹

Despite having the necessary prior experience, there were confusions and difficulties that the British government and the concerned authorities had to overcome in order to decide on the exact modes of intervention in food distribution in wartime Britain.³² India, by contrast, faced much greater difficulties as a consequence of her immense geographical size, her regional differences, and her complex and often scanty administrative structures. Knight suggested that it was actually the consideration of the vastness of the country and its population (and resultant variations in the nature and strength of respective administrations) that ruled out any possibility of implementing anything in India along the line of Sir Beveridge's recommendation. In Knight's words: '... in any case the difficulty of putting into practice the policy and plans suggested by Sir William Beveridge, in a subcontinent of 350 million people under separate administrations of a dozen British Provinces and several hundred Indian States, must inevitably have seemed so great as not to be worthwhile, or have looked like theoretical exploration against an apparently improbable emergency'.³³

What stands out in Knight's observation is his understanding that an emergency was 'apparently improbable' in India. He pointed out that before the war most of the British administrators in India could not foresee that Japan would gain control of the Far Eastern Seas, and subsequently capture Singapore and Burma, and thereby end the import of Burmese rice to India.³⁴ The feeding of the people of India, particularly in eastern India, was immensely dependent on the supplementary imports of coarse rice from Burma, and to a less degree from the Far East. Before the war, the colonial

³¹ *Idem.*

³² *Idem.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

government did not take any policy precautions vis-à-vis food on the assumption that rice imports from Burma would continue as usual during the war.³⁵ According to M. Azizul Huque, the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, the normal annual net import of rice from Burma used to be 135,000 tons.³⁶ Leopold Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma gave a much higher figure of rice imports from Burma. According to Amery 'there is a constant import of rice from Burma in normal times amounting to 1,200,000 to 2 million tons. This was imported into Calcutta, and into Western and Southern India while Burma also fed Ceylon and other colonies.'³⁷

Nonetheless, when the rice imports from Burma came to a sudden end with the fall of Burma into Japanese hands in March 1942, it shattered the British confidence about being able to feed India during the whole duration of the war. When British India entered the war in September 1939, the widely held view in the government circles was that for a decade before the start of the war the Indian peasantry had suffered a 'raw deal' due to the drop in agricultural prices in view of the world economic depression since the slump in 1929. During the depression decade, the Indian farmers were often compelled to sell crops below the cost of production. Parakunnel J. Thomas, a contemporary observer and later to become the first Economic Adviser to the Government of India after independence, had noted in September 1935 that:

The immediate result of the slump was the breakdown of the country's purchasing power. The extent of this breakdown can be gauged from the fact that the value of the principal crops, which came to Rs. 1,018 crores in 1929, declined to Rs. 534 crores (by 52.5 per cent.) in 1933. . . . But the cultivator has to pay his land revenue and interest charges in money, and the burden of these fixed charges is crushing the agricultural classes to an extent unknown before. As a result, Government was compelled to make partial remissions of land revenue; rent disputes have increased; and the debts of agriculturists are hanging like a millstone round their necks.³⁸

³⁵ *Idem.*

³⁶ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 28.

³⁷ *Memorandum by Mr Amery*, 'The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains', undated but deduced to have been written on 8 January 1943, L/E/8/3297: ff 225-6, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7*, vol. III, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1971, document number 330, p. 474.

³⁸ Parakunnel J. Thomas, 'India in the World Depression', *The Economic Journal*, vol. 45, no. 179, Sep. 1935, p. 470.

The Government of India had tried to mitigate the effects of the Great Depression on the country by providing protection to manufacturing industries in the form of protective higher tariff on imported goods. However, the protection of industries damaged the position of the peasantry. A contemporary Indian journal on statistics elucidated the effects of industrial protectionism on Indian agriculture during the decade of the Great Economic Depression in the following words:

In a country like India, the burden of protection to manufacture, will be felt for years to come by agriculturists, who form the majority of the population of the country. We have already referred to the disparity between the prices of agricultural and manufactured products during the depression which has hit hard the agriculturist. He has to part with more of his goods in order to obtain the same quantity of manufactured products. Protection cannot bridge this disparity, but only widens it.³⁹

Therefore, when the war started, it was thought by most of the government servants that the wartime hike in agricultural prices was now giving the Indian peasantry a chance to make up for the losses that it suffered earlier during the economic depression. However, during the early months of the war, the Government of India had also to seek a balance between rocketing food prices and the resulting higher cost of living for populations living in the cities, particularly for the industrial population engaged in war industries, who, being non-growers, were completely dependent on markets to obtain food. Therefore, during the early months of the war, the preoccupying concern for the colonial government was the food price that the city or town dwellers had to pay for their daily food.

Consequently, the central government's attention first turned to prices rather than to supply. The First Price Control Conference convened by the central government took place in October 1939 in New Delhi. To keep the peasants

³⁹ H. Sinha and J. C. Sinha, 'India through the Depression', *Sankhyā: The Indian Journal of Statistics*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1938, Proceedings of the Indian Statistical Conference, 1938, p. 215.

pacified, the conference admitted that 'as agricultural produce had not yet recovered fully from the recent depression, the agriculturalist was entitled to an increased price.'⁴⁰ Therefore, this conference recommended against any state-imposed price-control.⁴¹ However, the need to avoid social discontent during the war, and the need to keep the armed forces fed, prompted the conference to adopt two important caveats to the overall sympathy for the peasantry –

... there might have to be imposed two limitations on the tendency for agricultural commodity prices to rise; the first with regard to the necessaries of life when prices rise so sharply as to bring about serious social discontent, the second with reference to Government supplies for war purposes when a steep rise would militate against an adequate war effort.⁴²

However, despite the adoption of the above caveats, little seems to have been done about food prices in the early months of the war. Later M. Afzal Husain, a professor of animal husbandry in an agricultural college and one of the five members of the official Famine Inquiry Commission in the aftermath of the Bengal Famine, lamented that the recommendations of the price conferences 'caused not a stir, till the situation was out of hand.'⁴³ Knight attributed the lack of state intervention in food prices to the overburden of additional work on government officers emanating from war related works, coupled with their sympathy with the plight of the peasants.⁴⁴ 'The comfortable theory seems to have been held that, until the war should restore prosperity to the agriculturalist, without of course causing any serious hardship to anyone else who had been profiting by the cheap food of the past ten years, no government action ought to be, or need be, taken to control food prices to the consumer.'⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Michael Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, with a forward by Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1944, p. 40.

⁴¹ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 5.

⁴² Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, p. 40.

⁴³ Minute by Mr. M. Afzal Husain, in Famine Inquiry Commission (hereafter FIC), *Report on Bengal*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 198. For a brief background of Husain, see Aykroyd, *Conquest of Famine*, p. 70-71.

⁴⁴ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ *Idem.*

However, rapidly changing market conditions did not allow this theory to last long. With the progression of the war, imported goods and grains were expectedly in short supply, naturally leading to expected rise in their prices. What took the Government of India by surprise was the fact that 'a justified rise in the price of any imported commodity immediately produced unjustified increases in a number of other commodities; and once such increases started among imported goods, they spread with little or no justification to many Indian products.'⁴⁶ This was true in the case of domestically produced grains too. The increase in the prices of foodgrains in the cities gradually started to affect labour in war industries by increasing the overall cost of living in the cities. The rise in the cost of living in the cities was very sharp during the war. For instance, Knight cites the case of Bombay where within six weeks of the declaration of the war the cost of living rose by 25 per cent.⁴⁷

Notably, the rise in the retail price of grains was not confined within the borders of urban India; it rapidly spread like a contagious disease to smaller retail markets in the villages. Such developments compelled the central colonial government to abdicate the earlier policy of pursuing Victorian *laissez faire*, and instead try its hands on price control. To curb unrestrained soaring of grain prices, the government fixed the ceiling prices at 20 per cent over the prices that prevailed on 1 September 1939.⁴⁸ To impose tighter brake on prices, this was soon reduced to 10 per cent.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁷ Idem.

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Idem.

III. Feeble Administration

Any quick implementation of price ceiling proved to be a challenging task for the central government. However, wartime conditions rapidly saw food scarcities spreading, setting up pressures not only towards price control, but towards procurement and public distribution too. Because of deteriorating wheat supply to the factory workers, there were threats of strikes in industrial areas.⁵⁰ Under these pressures, the Government of India set up the Department of Food on 2 December 1942 at the central level.⁵¹ The year 1942 witnessed deterioration in India's strategic position on almost every front. It was in this year that Burma fell into Japanese hands, and the Japanese started knocking at India's eastern frontier. The fall of Burma ended all rice imports to India from there, and vast numbers of Burmese refugees started arriving in India. According to the despatch of General Sir Archibald P. Wavell (the Commander-in-Chief in India) from the operations in the 'Eastern Theatre', some 400,000 civilian refugees from Burma came to India.⁵²

To make the situation worse for the colonial state, Indian National Congress launched the Quit India Movement against the British government in the same year, which received tremendous mass support in vast parts of the country. Michael Brown, an independent contemporary commentator on food, claimed in his polemical study of the wartime food crisis that at the end of 1942 he was told by a banker, 'who was in unusually close touch with the grain trade', that 'Most of the forces at Government's disposal are employed in combating this campaign [Quit India] and consequently they cannot enforce food control efficiently. At least, they cannot be as thorough as they could were there no disturbances.'⁵³ Interestingly, the actual beginning of a detailed and organized food administration in India coincided with such a turbulent time.

⁵⁰ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵² Compiled in *Despatches from the Front: The Fall of Burma, 1941-1943*, introduced and compiled by John Grehan and Martin Mace, Pen and Sword Military, Barnsley, 2015, p. 100.

⁵³ Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, pp. 67-68.

Map 1

Map redacted for copyright reason.

India, 1942 – 1943

Source: Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7*, vol. III, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1971.

Map 2

Map redacted for copyright reason.

The Bay of Bengal Fighting-zone, during the War with Japan, 1942-1945

Source: Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Ernest Benn, London, 1966,
p. 30.

The foundation of a separate department to tackle food problems was an elementary administrative necessity. Yet, the establishment of a Department of Food came so late. 'This time-lag over an elementary administrative obligation' drew sharp criticism from Ian Stephens:

But blame for the extremely grave situation rests heavily on the Government of India. We find ourselves amazed by their lack of vision or consistency in this vital matter. From the knowledge in their possession risk of a food-shortage and rocketing prices should have been discernible to an alert eye within their organization from the moment of Japan's belligerence. . . Yet a full year was allowed to elapse before a Food Department at the Centre was even set up. This time-lag over an elementary administrative obligation is beyond understanding. Long before the Department was inaugurated the Press and non-official publicists, exercising mere commonsense, were demanding its creation.⁵⁴

Stephens further wrote that even the British Chairman of *The Statesman*, in his capacity as the Leader of the European Group in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, had said that the creation of an independent Food Department came too late.⁵⁵ During the Bengal famine, in November 1943, during the debate in the Central Legislative Assembly on the motion regarding the food situation, Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan, member from Burdwan and Presidency Divisions (Muhammadan Rural), stated that the central government's 'delay of two years in setting up even a Food Department is a crime of the very first order.'⁵⁶ Even Sir Azizul Huque, the second Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, said 'Sometimes, I wonder whether we devoted sufficient attention in the past to the food problem of the country.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 179.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵⁶ See the speech by Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan (Burdwan and Presidency Divisions: Muhammadan Rural) in 'Motion regarding the food situation – Debate in the Central Legislative Assembly – November 1943', compiled in Partha Sarathi Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1943-1944*, part 2, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 1933.

⁵⁷ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 15.

Initially, after its foundation in December 1942, the Department of Food did not receive any member in the Viceroy's Executive Council solely in charge of the department; instead it was placed within the portfolio of the Commerce Member in the Viceroy's Council.⁵⁸ Michael Brown pointed out that in the Commerce Department food remained a mere additional frill to the already unmanageable plethora of heterogeneous works -

But the Commerce Department of the Government of India is surely the most crowded administrative pantechicon the world has ever seen. It embraces everything from Lighthouses to the Sugar Controller, plus the Superintendent of Insurance, the Nautical Adviser, the Textile Commissioner, the Industries and Civil Supplies Department, the Chief Controller of Imports, the Economic Adviser, Scientific and Industrial Research and the Controller of Patents. To expect one man to control this heterogeneous mass of activity plus an urgent subject like food is surely asking too much.⁵⁹

Thereafter, when the Food Department received a member in charge of the department, the member kept changing. First, Mr Nalini Sarkar was looking after food affairs until he resigned from the Viceroy's Executive Council on 17 February 1943.⁶⁰ Then Sir M. Azizul Huque was in charge of food until 11 August 1943.⁶¹ Finally, Sir J. P. Srivastava assumed charge of the department on 11 August 1943. About this 'Dreary processions of one Food Member after another,'⁶² *The Statesman* newspaper wrote on 29 August 1943: 'Some observers wonder whether so many comings and goings help.'⁶³ Furthermore, to what extent these Food Members were free to act on their own is doubtful. For instance, when Azizul Huque was the Food Member, in May 1943 the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow confided in Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, in a letter marked 'private and secret': 'I told him [Azizul Haque] I would run the Food Department myself, though not publicly,

⁵⁸ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 116.

⁵⁹ Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, p. xxiv.

⁶¹ Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, 1973, p. xxiii.

⁶² See the speech by Mr Jamnadas M. Mehta in 'Motion regarding the food situation – Debate in the Central Legislative Assembly – November 1943', compiled in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, part 2, p. 1920.

⁶³ 'Text of an editorial *An All-India Disgrace* published in *The Statesman* on August 29, 1943', appendix IX, Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 263.

for the time being, and he readily accepts that – public responsibility will of course be entirely with him, and he will have to defend the action of the Department in public, and of course keep in touch with what is going on inside it.⁶⁴ Thus, behind the curtain the department was actually being run by the British Viceroy, whereas in public the powerless Indian Food Member remained answerable for the activities of the department.

Nonetheless, despite the neglect that it received under the commerce portfolio, the newly formed Department of Food officially took over all duties regarding control of price and movement of foodstuffs, excluding tea and coffee. In May 1943, the department was divided into two parts – a Secretariat, and a Directorate General of Food. An Adviser on Food Rationing, directly deputed from the Ministry of Food in Britain, was attached to the Secretariat.⁶⁵ The Secretariat, in theory, was responsible for advising the Commerce Member in the viceroy's Council vis-à-vis food policy, and for obtaining the central government's decisions on food policy. The implementation of those decisions was the responsibility of the Director General of Food and his staff.⁶⁶ This impractical separation between the responsibility of policy-making and the responsibility to execute the policies, soon had to give way to a merger of the two responsibilities, as they were so closely related that such a separation was impossible to maintain in practice.

After the foundation of the Department of Food, in order to find a way forward to deal with India's deteriorating food position, the first All India Food Conference was convened by the central government on 14 December 1942.⁶⁷ The main agenda of this conference was to estimate the quantity of foodgrains required by the deficit areas to meet their needs. This conference for the first time accepted the idea that the central government would have to intervene to solve the food problem.⁶⁸ Subsequently, the second food conference was

⁶⁴ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery (Extract)*, marked 'PRIVATE' and 'SECRET', 2 - 4 May 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, compiled in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 681, p. 936.

⁶⁵ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 117.

⁶⁶ *Idem.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

held on 24-26 February 1943.⁶⁹ This conference mainly discussed the central government's plan for procurement, particularly the operational side of procurement.⁷⁰ But it was the third All India Food Conference held during 5-8 July 1943 that marked a concrete step in the evolution of a centralized food policy of the central government. It was this conference that recommended the formation of a committee to examine the food situation in India. Accordingly, the Foodgrains Policy Committee was constituted by the Governor General-in-Council in July 1943, under the chairmanship of Sir Theodore Gregory, a noted British economist with considerable knowledge of Indian agricultural economics.⁷¹ The committee comprised of 28 members, including secretary of the War Resources Committee, central government's economic advisors, representatives from the Food Department, the Finance Department, the Education, Health, & Land Department, representatives of 8 provinces and 3 princely states, nominee of the Chamber of Princes, members of the Viceroy's Council, and businessmen.⁷² The committee's published report tells us that its duty was to:

examine the past policy and present position in India in relation to the supply, distribution and price of foodgrains in the light of all relevant conditions including those imposed or liable to be imposed by the War, and to make recommendations both of policy and for administration, for securing, for the duration of the War, maximum supply, equitable distribution and proper control of prices in relation to foodgrains.⁷³

The Foodgrains Policy Committee, which immediately held its first meeting in Delhi on 8 July 1943, set out the functions of the central government's Department of Food.⁷⁴ Among many other duties, the most important duties of the department were specified as – 1. Enforcement, that is, review and management of the entire food administration, 2. physical procurement of

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁷¹ Foodgrains Policy Committee (hereafter FPC), *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee 1943*, Sir Theodore Gregory, Chairman, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1946, p. i.

⁷² For a list of the members and their positions, see *ibid.*, pp. i-ii.

⁷³ Ibid., p. i.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. ii.

foodgrains other than foodgrains procured on behalf of the Quarter Master General for the army, and directly by other central government departments, 3. anti-hoarding measures, 4. transport of foodgrains, and 5. rationing.⁷⁵

The report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee will be cited many times in this thesis, as it was the most important policy document regarding food policies during the war. In 1945, the Famine Inquiry Commission's *Report on Bengal* acknowledged that the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, 'which covered the whole range of the problems of supply and distribution of foodgrains, were accepted almost in entirety by all the Governments concerned.'⁷⁶ The Famine Inquiry Commission further noted that with the publication of the committee's report, 'The fundamental principles of policy and administration were firmly laid down and the country as a whole proceeded to build up the system of food administration which is functioning today.'⁷⁷

Such an important report by the Foodgrains Policy Committee described how the Department of Food, 'started in the fourth year of the war, had special difficulties in recruiting any reasonably adequate staff, both in numbers and competence. By this stage, the recruitment field, both Indian and British, had already become substantially drained by the all-embracing character of the war demands.'⁷⁸ Recruiting food officials later in the provinces proved even more difficult. For instance, later the Civil Supplies Department of the Bengal government complained that 'The Department began to look for staff at a time when other competitors, (e.g., the Army, the Supply Department of the Government of India, etc.), had already been in the field and taken over practically all suitable personnel available for recruitment.'⁷⁹ Further,

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 105 -106.

⁷⁶ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 52.

⁷⁷ Idem.

⁷⁸ FPC, *Report*, p. 104.

⁷⁹ See 'Extract from a note on "Arrangements for Reception and Despatches in Calcutta prior to the Formation of the Directorate of Movements in November 1943" supplied by the Civil Supplies Department, Bengal', annexure I to appendix V titled 'Distribution of Supplies in Bengal (1943)', in FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 223.

according to Ian Stephens, the central government diverted many officers from Bengal to Delhi, adding to the recruitment crisis in Bengal: 'It seems odd that, in an emergency when they [the Bengal Government] might be supposed to need every trained official they can get, New Delhi should continue to recruit or transfer experienced Bengal men to its own Secretariat.'⁸⁰ Towards the later stage of the Bengal famine, in March 1944, the Viceroy Lord Wavell, in one of his routine letters to the Secretary of State for India Leopold Amery, wrote that the Governor of Bengal 'Casey is hammering away at his staff problems, and pressing me to release more civil officials. I fear that this cannot be done; the Provinces other than Bengal are all in difficulties.'⁸¹ The performance of the already insufficient number of food officials was negatively affected by the strain on the overall administration caused by the war-related workload. W.R. Aykroyd, a member of the Famine Inquiry Commission later pointed out in his book on famines that 'At the beginning of the war in 1939, the leave of I. C. S. and other senior officials in Bengal was severely restricted. Home leave was, of course, impossible for the British, and even short breaks in Darjeeling were frowned on. Given the climate of Bengal, this cannot have made for vigour and efficiency when a formidable emergency arose three years later.'⁸²

In consequence of these difficulties, in India often the food staff was insufficient, or inefficient, or both. However, compared to the growth of food administration in India until mid 1943, its development in the subsequent period was remarkably rapid. The rapidity can be gauged by some regional examples. In the year 1942, in the Madras province, which had come under the direct administration of the central government following the Congress ministry's resignation in 1939, the entire food administration amounted to only a half of one official, that is, one official was responsible for overseeing food affairs in addition to responsibilities in a different department. However,

⁸⁰ 'Text of an editorial *An All-India Disgrace* published in *The Statesman* on August 29, 1943', appendix IX, Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 263.

⁸¹ *Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 29 March 1944, L/PO/10/21, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 447, p. 845.

⁸² Aykroyd, *Conquest of Famine*, p. 79.

just four years later, the number of food officials in the province grew to fifteen thousand. In 1942, the food administration cost virtually nothing in Madras; four years later the expenditure on food administration was 'almost a quarter of the provincial budget'.⁸³ Moving to eastern India, the Regional Food Commissioner of the Eastern Region H. B. L. Braund, who was appointed in 1943 by the central government's Food Department 'to ensure liaison' between the department and the administration of his region,⁸⁴ reported: 'When I first became connected with food in Bengal, its Civil Supply Department was a very small concern in dingy accommodation conducted by an able, but distracted, Indian Civil Servant with a staff, the actual size of which I cannot give, but of ridiculously small proportions.'⁸⁵ For food items other than rice, he wrote:

As late as April 1944 one relatively junior officer of the Bengal Government, with very little assistance, was attempting to deal with the import, supply, distribution and control of salt, mustard seeds, mustard oil, wheat and wheat products, sugar, gur and one or two other things as well. When one considers what each one of these subjects involved where sixty million people were concerned it gives some idea of the under staffing of the Directorate of Civil Supplies, Bengal.⁸⁶

However, within only two months, by June 1944, the Civil Supply Department became 'ten or twenty times' bigger.⁸⁷ All these point to the rapidity with which food administration grew in India during the later years of the war

⁸³ ICA, *Guide to the Sources*, pp. 47-48.

⁸⁴ About the appointment and duties of the Regional Food Commissioners, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow had informed the Secretary of State for India and Burma Mr Leopold Amery in March 1943 that 'The Food Department are now about to appoint six Regional Food Commissioners who will be officers of considerable standing intended to ensure liaison between the Food Department and the administrations of their regions each consisting of certain Provinces and Indian States, to assist and guide them in working the purchase scheme and to smooth out small points of difficulty.' See *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMPORTANT' and 'PERSONAL', 18 March 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/24, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 599, p. 827. The 'Eastern Region' consisted of Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Eastern Princely States, and Orissa. See the Food Department's list of representatives attached to the letter from the Food Department (Division III) to the Quarter Master General's Branch, 26.4.44, no. A-III/56 (2), file no. 49-W, 1944, on 'Coordination of Purchase of food stuffs for the Defence Services', War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

⁸⁵ H. B. L. Braund, *Memorandum of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund on Events from March 1943 to the end of 1943 in relation to the Food Situation in Bengal*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1944, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, NAI, p. 44.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45, see the third footnote.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

from almost non-existence before the war, and even in the initial years of the war. This sudden burgeoning of food administration in India stands in sharp contrast with the gradual but consistent development of food administration in wartime Britain, as we shall see in the third chapter. The Regional Food Commissioner pointed out that the colossal amount of work that the Bengal food administration was aiming to do during the war with a tiny staff until 1943, took in England, 'in far easier conditions', 'three years and a staff of nearly forty thousand to prepare for'.⁸⁸ The rationing of Calcutta alone was a task, the Food Commissioner pointed out, 'far more difficult' than rationing of London in an emergency. Whereas, ironically, Bengal, a dangerously exposed frontier province, had only a small fraction of the staff available in London.⁸⁹ The problems arising out of the food bureaucracy's small size were further aggravated by, as pointed out by *The Statesman* newspaper, the fact that it was 'racially mixed, having little experience of trade, and with undiminished belief in its own wisdom.'⁹⁰ These issues pointed out by *The Statesman* will be discussed in the third, fourth, and fifth chapter.

IV. Towards State Procurement

The foundation of a successful public food distribution system in any cultural context lies in effective procurement. Therefore, to understand the state-administered public distribution of food, it is absolutely essential to understand the bedrock of procurement upon which the edifice of the public distribution system stood. The war expanded the scale of state procurement massively. Before the war, state procurement was confined to procuring for the defence forces only, and the scale of such procurement was small in comparison to India's total crop output. In the pre-war days, the central government bought whatever grains it needed through a network of private agents operating in the provinces and princely states.⁹¹ Notably, even in the

⁸⁸ *Idem.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁹⁰ 'Text of an editorial *Reflections on Disaster* published in *The Statesman* on September 23, 1943', appendix X, Stephens, *Monsoon Morning* p. 266.

⁹¹ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 149.

wartime, immediately after the establishment of the Department of Food in December 1942, the first job that was assigned to the department with effect from 1 January 1943, was to procure all foods required by the army.⁹² This proves the prioritization of military hunger by the colonial state.

The beginning of the Food Department's dealing with civil food affairs came many months later. After long debates at the second and third All India Food Conferences, mentioned earlier, respectively in February and July 1943, it was finally decided that in addition to procuring food for the army, food for public distribution to the civil population would also be procured by the central government, or agencies under full control of the central government. The only rudimentary precedent that was discussed in government circles vis-à-vis state procurement was that of Kashmir, a princely state. In Kashmir, a compulsory levy of paddy from all growers, and a rationed supply to the townsfolk, had been in operation since 1921. The rudimentary Kashmiri model too had its origin in a war, that is, the previous world war. During 1917-18, wartime rise in food prices put the urban poor in Srinagar, the state's capital, in distress. Consequently, an outcry arose from the poor, urging the princely authorities to provide relief.⁹³ As a result, the Kashmiri model of procurement and distribution came into being.

To a considerable degree, the relative success of the Kashmiri model was due to the autocratic structure of governance prevailing in the state, which spared it opposition. Henry Knight cited an untitled report on the Kashmir experiment prepared as early as in August 1923 by Raja Sir Hari Singh (who became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir later in 1925), Sir Bertrand Glancy (who was later the Governor of Punjab from 1941 until 1946), and Major General Janak Singh (the Army and Revenue Minister of the Kashmir state, who was later the Prime Minister of the state between August and October 1947).⁹⁴ The report explained the reason for the smooth running of

⁹² ICA, *Guide to the Sources*, p. 57.

⁹³ See appendix note III, 'Grain Control in Kashmir Following World War I', in Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 283-284.

⁹⁴ Cited in Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 151.

state-procurement in the princely state, and revealed the disdain and resentment that the rural growers felt towards city folks when procurement for the city started.

It has been the tradition of an idle city population to demand cheap rice at the expense of the cultivator. It has been the practice of the administration to gratify these demands, and the cultivator has been expected to part with his best produce far below its value and reserve the coarser forms of grain for his own consumption. The adage of King Lalitaditya who ruled Kashmir in the eighth century may be cited as an illustration; his words as quoted in the Rajtarangini are as follows: 'Cultivators must be repressed and their style of living must be lower than that of the city people or the latter will suffer.' During the Sikh Raj of the first half of the 19th century as much as nine tenths of the produce is said to have been exacted from the zemindar.⁹⁵

However, as Knight pointed out, 'a system which worked satisfactorily in a remote Indian State with an uneducated and submissive rural countryside, and an administration not far removed from autocracy, could hardly have been applied to the independent and educated landowners and peasants of the Punjab, for example, by an administration dependent on the votes of the farmers.'⁹⁶ Further, the division of India between British India and the princely states complicated the task of administering food in India. The princely states comprised more than two fifths of India's total area and rather less than a quarter of the country's population.⁹⁷ Each princely state had its own laws, administration, and judiciary. Therefore, as Knight correctly pointed out, if the central government had attempted the introduction of any pan-Indian food plan, it would have had to secure not only the agreement of the eleven provinces of

⁹⁵ This report on procurement in Kashmir is cited in Department of Food, *Outline of Some of the Government Grain Monopoly Schemes Operating in India in 1944*, 1944, as quoted in appendix note III, 'Grain Control in Kashmir Following World War I', Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 283-284.

⁹⁶ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 151.

⁹⁷ 'Of India's area of 1,581,410 square miles with a population of about 390 million people, British India covered only 865,446 square miles with 295 million people, and the Indian States occupied 715,964 square miles with 93 million'. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

British India, but also the agreement of each of some five hundred princely states.⁹⁸ Quite understandably, it was a gargantuan task.

Moreover, procurement by force by the colonial government was bound to meet tremendous resistance by the landlords' lobbies and by the political parties, such as the Unionist Party in Punjab, whose core support bloc was the agriculturists. Under these considerations, an amendment was made to the third Food Conference's resolution that central government would procure food for the civilians. Now the Foodgrains Policy Committee ruled out central government's buying monopoly. Notably, instead of publicly accepting the political dangers of monopoly procurement by the central government, the committee merely argued that setting up a central buying monopoly throughout India would take long time, and time was a luxury in the wartime: 'To prepare the Plan, to secure agreement, upon the Plan, to recruit the staff, would all take *time* and *time* is the one thing that is not vouchsafed to us in this matter of food-supply.'⁹⁹ Moreover, the committee asserted that differences in local administrative conditions were detrimental to any uniform central system throughout India. In fact, no central agency could have worked satisfactorily given the enormous difference in conditions of production, structures of markets, and in administrative organization, strength, and efficiency. Also, only the provincial governments had the required local knowledge. Therefore, the Foodgrains Policy Committee emphasized that:

So long as the Procurement Agencies set up by the Provinces and States are functioning satisfactorily, we do not think that there is any need for a separate Procurement Agency to be set up by the Centre: indeed, since one of the essentials is to diminish competitive buying (especially for export from one province to another) as much as possible, all requirements impinging on all areas should as far as possible be met by the purchases of a single agency.¹⁰⁰

Accordingly, it was finally decided by the central government's Food Department that each provincial government would set up a procurement agency of its own

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁹⁹ FPC, *Report*, p. 40. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

that would buy grains for provincial civil needs as well as for exports to deficit provinces and princely states under the occasional supervision of the central Food Department.¹⁰¹ The provincial governments were more unprepared than the central government for this suddenly imposed task of procurement, and they had less financial strength and manpower to execute the task. Naturally, the provincial governments interpreted government procurement as an unprovoked challenge thrown at them by the centre out of the blue. Given the enormous area and population of each province, the scale of provincial procurement was to be huge even within the jurisdiction of respective provincial borders. Considering the required scale of manpower and state infrastructure needed for the job, the provincial governments were reluctant to control or substitute the existing systems of indigenous grain-trade. They were already overburdened with the plethora of additional work arising from the war efforts. Also, direct government procurement from the cultivators by weak and inexperienced staff was not likely to be very effective.¹⁰²

In view of all these, the provincial governments started searching for a middle path which would please the central government, but at the same time would spare them the burden of dealing with the multi-level intricacy of transactions that existed at all levels between the primary grower and the consumer. Accordingly, the provincial governments decided not to attempt at direct procurement by state machineries. Instead, as long as possible, they tried to buy grains through an indirect system, that is, through private buying agents.¹⁰³

In this connection, let us turn now to discuss the procurement systems in two of the major Indian provinces, namely, Madras and Punjab. The difference between these two provinces in terms of the administrative situation and procurement system was really stark. Therefore, a discussion of procurement in these provinces effectively demonstrates the enormous degree of regional difference

¹⁰¹ Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 65-66, p. 149.

¹⁰² For a concise discussion of the hesitancy of the provinces to intervene in indigenous grain trade, see *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

in procurement systems. Madras was a 'Section 93 Province,' where governor's rule had been declared as per section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935, following the resignation of the Congress ministry in 1939. Whereas, in Punjab the elected provincial government headed by the Unionist Party remained in office throughout the war. Madras was primarily a rice-growing and rice-eating province in south India, whereas Punjab was predominantly a wheat-growing and wheat-eating province in north India. Madras was a deficit province in all major grains, namely, rice, wheat, and millets. In 1942-43, parts of the Ceded Districts of Bellary, Anantapur, and Kurnool suffered from famine due to monsoon failure.¹⁰⁴ In contrast, Punjab was a surplus province and a 'large exporter of cereals', and the wheat crop there particularly in 1943 was a 'bumper' one.¹⁰⁵

A word of explanation is necessary for my not choosing Bengal as an example of rice-growing and rice-eating province. The reasons for excluding Bengal from the discussion on procurement are three – firstly, in the existing literature on the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, procurement in Bengal has already been studied in clinical detail. Secondly, even to fight the famine in Bengal, procurement outside the province, particularly in Punjab, was extremely crucial. Sir J. P. Srivastava, the Food Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, said about Bengal in an interview with the *Associated Press of India* in August 1943 that 'The only way to tide over the situation is to get whatever grain one can have either by seizing, borrowing or stealing from other parts of India. This is the only method to save the starving millions of Bengal.'¹⁰⁶ Thirdly, just like in Punjab, in Bengal too provincial government headed by Indian parties, first by the Krishak Praja Party and then by the Muslim League, continued to remain in charge throughout the war, except for only a month's governor's rule in March-April 1943. Hence, posing Punjab against a 'section 93 province' like Madras instead of Bengal is more likely

¹⁰⁴ Famine Inquiry Commission, *The Famine Inquiry Commission: Final Report*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Interview of Sir J. P. Srivastava, the Food Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, published by the *Associated Press of India* on 30 August 1943, as quoted in K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-Hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943, pp. 125-126.

to bring out the extent of difference in government procurement in the provinces.

V. Procurement in Madras

Madras was one of the earliest provinces to undertake state procurement. Here state procurement started, under the governor's rule, on 1 September 1942, roughly ten months before the Foodgrains Policy Committee officially recommended state procurement in July 1943.¹⁰⁷ The province was fortunate, unlike many other provinces and princely states, to have a very well developed revenue collection machinery at the village level, and therefore it already had some of the necessary staff who could be used to carry out the task of procurement.¹⁰⁸ This was particularly in contrast to permanently settled Bengal where there was little direct contact between the government and the cultivators, and therefore almost no local revenue staff and establishment were available under the government's control.¹⁰⁹ As Viceroy Lord Wavell pointed out in October 1943 following his tour of the famine-stricken province, 'Bengal being a permanently settled area, Land Revenue Organisation, which in other Provinces provides accurate intelligence of the situation in the villages, does not exist.'¹¹⁰

Madras thus was spared to a considerable extent the trouble of making fresh recruitments and training new staff in every village. The existing local staff in Madras had prior experience in dealing with grains as they had earlier worked as revenue assessors and collectors, often for generations, and thus had necessary local knowledge, and personal influence over the villages. Because of this, the Madras government could maintain comprehensive stock register in every village

¹⁰⁷ Appendix titled 'Provincial Procurement Arrangement' to chapter 6 titled 'Procurement', in FPC, *Report*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Idem. Governor-General Lord Cornwallis introduced the Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Bihar in 1793, whereby the land revenue payable by the landlords to the government was fixed in perpetuity instead of being subject to periodic revisions.

¹¹⁰ *Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 29 October 1943, L/E/8/3322: ff 125-6, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 193, p. 414.

throughout the province (except in Madras and Malabar district) which facilitated procurement by furnishing assessment of procurable surplus at a fast speed.¹¹¹

Noticeably, the single province of Madras had all three types of grain-districts - surplus districts, deficit districts, and districts in-between which sometimes needed imported rice and other grains to sustain. Henry Knight's account of procurement in Madras tells us that when in 1942 the import of rice from Burma came to an end, the surplus districts in Madras witnessed a rush of private buyers to them. The buyers came from the deficit districts within Madras, from other deficit provinces and princely states, and even from the neighbouring country Ceylon. Naturally, the Government of Madras under the governor's rule had to take steps to prevent the fierce competition in buying, and consequent rapid rise in prices.¹¹² Therefore, the government prohibited all exports of rice from the surplus districts without a permit, which was introduced to monitor and control exports.¹¹³ However, due to rampant violation of the permit system, and due to the continuance of fierce competition in buying, prices continued to rise steeply. Therefore, finally in September 1942, the governor's administration established a purchasing agency and made it the sole purchaser of rice in the districts within the province. Henceforth, all government purchases were made by special officers designated as Grain Purchase Officers.¹¹⁴ These officers were appointed by the Deputy Collectors from the provincial civil service.¹¹⁵ The Purchase Officers were authorized to buy by paying up to ceiling prices fixed by the governor's government.¹¹⁶ They were to buy grains mainly to supply to the deficit districts within the province, and partly for the army and for export to help the neighbouring deficit provinces and princely states.¹¹⁷ Notably, as I will discuss

¹¹¹ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 165.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 160.

¹¹³ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 27. See also *ibid.*, p. 5, p. 160.

¹¹⁴ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 5, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ Appendix titled 'Provincial Procurement Arrangement' to chapter 6 titled 'Procurement', in FPC, *Report*, p. 50.

¹¹⁶ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6. See also appendix titled 'Provincial Procurement Arrangement' to chapter 6 titled 'Procurement', in FPC, *Report*, p. 50.

soon, their purchases were not for supplying the civilians in any of the surplus districts.¹¹⁸

However, at the low ceiling price offered, rice was not coming forward to the open markets.¹¹⁹ The growers started hoarding in the hope of getting higher prices in the future. To break the deadlock in procurement, and to send out a strong message to the hoarders, the government forcibly requisitioned five thousand tons of rice held by a group of grain merchants.¹²⁰ The strategy worked for a short period. The fear of more forcible requisitioning made rice come forward to the open markets. It was not long, however, before traders reverted to hoarding. Therefore, again in February 1943, government resorted to compulsory requisitioning. In fact, as Henry Knight tells us, throughout the war forcible requisitioning had to remain an integral part of the government procurement system in Madras.¹²¹ However, as Knight pointed out, instead of actual requisitioning, sometimes mere threats of requisitioning yielded the intended effect of bringing out grains to open markets.

According to Knight's observation, requisitioning served different purposes in different types of districts. Firstly, in severely deficit areas, requisitioning helped to increase supply, and made supply more regular. Secondly, in slightly surplus districts which bordered on becoming deficit ones, the main purpose of requisitioning was to keep the prices low. Finally, in proper surplus districts requisitioning was used to procure exportable rice to export to deficit areas within the province.¹²²

However, except occasional requisitioning, normal rice trade in non-deficit areas in Madras was not a full government monopoly.¹²³ Unlike government monopoly procurement, the Madras government in the surplus districts did not aim at

¹¹⁸ Idem.

¹¹⁹ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 161.

¹²⁰ Idem.

¹²¹ Idem.

¹²² Idem.

¹²³ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 27.

procuring everything beyond the needs of the cultivator and his family. Instead, the cultivators in the surplus areas were instructed to sell their rice to licensed millers.¹²⁴ Only if the farmers or the grain merchants withheld surplus rice from the markets, they ran the risk of having their stocks requisitioned at the government price. Thus, the government's procurement system left local trade mostly undisturbed. This system spared the government a great deal of the tedious task of actual physical procurement.¹²⁵ For the government, as pointed out by the Famine Inquiry Commission in its *Final Report*, the concern in the surplus districts was merely 'to ensure that the marketable surplus, in so far as it is not required to meet local needs, passes into the hands of Government.'¹²⁶ Therefore, only in the case of export of rice and paddy from the surplus districts, the government enforced its monopoly.¹²⁷

However, unlike in the surplus districts, a system of 'full monopoly' procurement by the government was in practice in the heavily deficit districts such as Malabar, Vizagapatam, Tinnevely, Ramnad, Coimbatore, South Kanara and Nilgiris.¹²⁸ In these districts no private trade in grains was allowed to exist. Under this system, the farmers were required to sell their entire surplus produce to the government at the prices fixed by the government.¹²⁹ The erstwhile private traders were now employed by the government to purchase grains from the growers on its behalf.¹³⁰ To make government's buying monopoly a thorough affair, all movement of grains beyond the village boundary by private agencies was prohibited.¹³¹ Such a 'full monopoly' placed a huge amount of additional works on government administration which was already overburdened with war related works. The government now had to make assessment of the produce of the

¹²⁴ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 161.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

¹²⁶ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 33.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 27. P. 33.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 26-27, pp. 32-33.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹³⁰ Idem.

¹³¹ Idem.

millions of small producers in the deficit districts, calculate their surpluses and deficits, make the purchases, and physically collect the grains from them.¹³²

Despite the difficulties in the deficit districts, the Madras system of procurement worked somewhat satisfactorily through most part of the war 'so long as the rice-surplus districts continued to be surplus districts.'¹³³ However, towards the end of the war in 1945, there was major crop failure in the province due to drought in the Tanjore delta, and a cyclone in the Godavari delta.¹³⁴ In this situation the usual Madras system of procurement proved inadequate. Therefore, the Madras Government was now compelled to change the existing system, and introduce total government monopoly procurement all over the province.¹³⁵

I would now provide a very brief note on the procurement system for rice in the Malabar district, as it differed considerably from the rest of the province. In Malabar, a different set of conditions led to a different system. Malabar was densely populated and severely deficit in rice. Before 1942, to balance the severe shortage, the district was heavily dependent on the rice imports from Burma.¹³⁶ With the fall of Burma into Japanese hands in 1942, those imports ended. In addition to directly causing food shortage, the loss of Burma imports had adverse psychological effect. The knowledge that the 'safety-valve of imports' from Burma had disappeared, now shattered the sense of insurance against starvation.¹³⁷ To mitigate the impact of the loss of rice imports, finally in 1944, the Government of Madras introduced 'a comprehensive government monopoly purchase' scheme for paddy, rice, ragi and samai throughout the district, except Attapadi Ansam in the Walluvanad *taluk*, British Cochin and the Laccadive Islands.¹³⁸ Under this Malabar scheme of government monopoly, the entire

¹³² Ibid., p. 32.

¹³³ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 162.

¹³⁴ *Indian Food Statistics*, Ministry of Agriculture, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 1949, p. 9, as cited *ibid.*, p. 162.

¹³⁵ *Idem.*

¹³⁶ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 21. See also FIC, *Final Report*, p. 33.

¹³⁷ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 21.

¹³⁸ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 162.

produce of the farmers was 'at the disposal of the government', from which the farmers were allowed to retain only the amount required for their domestic consumption, plus some additional quantity for seed for sowing, and for payment of any rent payable in kind.¹³⁹

Unlike in the surplus areas of Madras where the actual procurement was carried out by the Grain Purchase Officers and their staff, in Malabar district the actual procurement was done by the private traders appointed as purchasing agents of the government.¹⁴⁰ In some exceptional cases, private cooperative organizations were appointed as purchasing agents.¹⁴¹ At the base of the structure of government monopoly procurement lay the village accountant, who had to inform the landholders as well as the local purchasing agents of the amount of surplus grains to which each landholder had been assessed.¹⁴² Thereafter it was the responsibility of the purchasing agents, or his staff, to buy the assessed amount of grains at the price fixed by the government.¹⁴³ In 1944, the government procurement price was fixed at Rupees 6 per maund.¹⁴⁴ To prevent evasion of government procurement, meanwhile, any movement of grains by the grower from the threshing floor to anywhere outside the village of production, was prohibited unless done under a permit from the government.¹⁴⁵ As for imports, the same purchasing agents functioned as licensed importers of rice from the surplus districts.¹⁴⁶

Interestingly, though procurement in Malabar district was 'a comprehensive government monopoly', yet, Henry Knight's account painted an unbelievably positive image of the landlords in the district. In Knight's words:

¹³⁹ *Idem.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁴¹ *Idem.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

It is worth recording that, generally speaking, the landlords cooperated fully with the authorities; one officer stated, "I found a remarkably high standard of integrity among the landlords, particularly in South Malabar. Their grain stores were always open for inspection; normally more was found than had been estimated in the field by the accountant, indicating that they did not 'black market' the excess, but kept it intact for inspection and sale to the Government purchasers."¹⁴⁷

Such an incredibly positive image of the landlords in Malabar portrayed by a British colonial administrator like Knight stands in sharp contrast to the sharp criticisms that Knight himself, as well as other colonial authorities, made against the landlords in Punjab, which I will discuss in the next section. Given the massive growth of black markets in food in India taking advantage of the wartime scarcity, it is difficult to accept Knight's curious claim about the landlords' unusual cooperation in Malabar as reflecting the reality. In this context, we must remember that unlike Punjab, Madras was a 'Section 93' province where the British governor was running the provincial government. Acknowledgment of black marketing under the governor's administration would have raised doubts about the efficiency and authority of the governor's rule in matters relating to food. Therefore, it is most likely that in order to save the face of the governor's rule, a colonial administrator like Knight was actually trying to hide the disobedience and non-cooperation by the landlords, and denying the existence of black markets in Malabar.

VI. The Punjab Predicament

Punjab was 'the principal wheat granary of India'.¹⁴⁸ In the food history of wartime India, the case of Punjab is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the difficulty of the central government in dealing with a provincial government run by an elected Indian party, and the resultant tension between the two. For instance, in January 1944, the Viceroy Lord Wavell lamented in his

¹⁴⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁴⁸ *Memorandum by Mr Amery*, 'The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains', in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 330, p. 475.

telegram to the Secretary of State in connection to food controls that 'the deterioration due to provincial autonomy and other changes in last 20 odd years make effective controls difficult even with reasonable public co-operation.'¹⁴⁹ Secondly, Punjab also demonstrates the constraints that were experienced by an elected provincial government in a surplus province while considering the needs of the deficit provinces. Viceroy Wavell had to acknowledge that 'Provincial Governments are under constant pressure from agricultural interests to maintain and even increase prices'.¹⁵⁰

In Punjab, the government headed by the Unionist Party continued to remain in office throughout the war, and rendered full support to the British war efforts. Punjab thus enjoyed political stability during the war; it was the only Muslim majority province which escaped frequent changes of parties in power during the war. Punjab's big role in the British war efforts was acknowledged by the highest British office in India. On 17 August 1943, in one of the regular letters from the Viceroy to the provincial governor, Lord Linlithgow wrote to Sir Bertrand Glancy, the Governor of Punjab between 1941 and 1946, that 'The Punjab Ministry have ever since the beginning of the war been splendid in their outspoken support of the war effort and we owe the Punjab an immense debt which is only partly on account of the Punjab's proud position as contributor of almost half the Indian Army.'¹⁵¹ According to military historian Tan Tai Yong's finding, Punjab contributed 36.67 per cent of the total number of combatants and non-combatants recruited in India during the war.¹⁵² Gajendra Singh's recent research provides an even higher number. According to Singh's finding, until 1 January

¹⁴⁹ Telegram marked 'PRIVATE' from the Viceroy Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, 12 January 1944, L/E/8/3322: f 35, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 321, p. 634.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 633.

¹⁵¹ Letter marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL' from the Viceroy the Marquess of Linlithgow to Sir B. Glancy (Punjab), 17 August 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/92, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 86, pp. 179-180.

¹⁵² Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 281.

1941, among all the provinces, Punjab alone provided 48 per cent of the combatants, excluding the non-combatants.¹⁵³

The ruling Unionist Party was mainly dependent on the rural electorate. Naturally, it was its political compulsion to support the interests of the countryside. It had to support every layer of the rural agrarian population — the landlords, smallholders, tenants, and sharecroppers. These sections of population suffered severely in the previous decade due to the low agricultural prices during the economic depression of the 1930s. Consequently, during the war they felt as if they were entitled to profit from the soaring prices of food-grains to make up for the losses that they suffered in the previous decade. The popular sentiment in Punjab villages was that other parts of India, particularly the industrial areas, had mitigated the impact of the depression on them by living on cheap Punjab grain. Further, during the war, unlike agricultural produces, the soaring prices of industrial products were left unchecked. Therefore, the Unionist Party leaders argued that the Punjabi agriculturists and grain-traders must be left undisturbed to make profits taking advantage of the wartime hike in agricultural prices, thereby to make up for at least some parts of the losses they suffered during the lean period of the 1930s.¹⁵⁴

Understandably, therefore, the Punjab government was in no mood to estrange its rural vote bank by coercing the farmers to sell their crops to the government at a fixed price. Instead, the government tried to fortify its rural vote bank by taking a strong public stand in favour of allowing the wartime grain markets to function on the *laissez-faire* basis. According to Tai Yong's study, Sir Chhotu Ram, the dominant leader of the Jat peasantry and the Minister of Revenue in the Punjab government openly advised the cultivators to hoard their wheat until they

¹⁵³ 'Class Composition of the Army in India', Asia and Africa Collections, British Library, L/WS/1/456, and 'Indian Army Morale and Possible Reduction, 1943-1945', Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/WS/1/707, as presented in 'Appendix II: Recruitment into the Indian Army during World War II', in Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 257.

¹⁵⁴ *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, Government of Punjab Press, Lahore, vol. 22, November 1943, p. 98.

received a price satisfactorily high enough.¹⁵⁵ A Urdu daily named *Milap* reported on 10th June 1943 that Chhotu Ram, while addressing a big public gathering of zamindars in the Lyallpur district, 'advised the zamindars that they should not be led by any sort of rumours and thus bring their stocks of wheat to the markets, but on the other hand they should sell their wheat at highest possible rates and let those people who want to buy their wheat approach them at their houses for the purpose. . . Sir Chhotu Ram's speech ended with loud shouts of 'Control Murdabad' – means control be condemned'.¹⁵⁶ In addition to rural landlords, many of the grain-traders actually came from urban areas. Therefore, in addition to the votes of the rural producers, the Punjab government had to consider the adverse effects that state interference in rising food prices would have on a section of the urban votes.

When the provincial government was reluctant to intervene in food, the central government found its hands legally tied as long as the provincial ministry existed in Punjab. The protectionist role played by the provincial government was made possible by the decentralization of colonial state-power. The Government of India Act of 1935 made it difficult for the central government to intervene unilaterally, as agriculture was a 'transferred' subject over which the provincial government had partial control. Against this backdrop, Sir Azizul Huque, the second Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, termed the protectionism of the Indian provinces in general as 'economic nationalism', and lamented that 'In Europe, the same conditions have led to the present war. In India, it has brought about the present food problem of the country.'¹⁵⁷ H. B. L. Braund, the Regional Food Commissioner of Eastern India expostulated that 'Practically every Province and every State placed a fence round itself, with notices that 'trespassers will be prosecuted'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Yong, *Garrison State*, p. 293.

¹⁵⁶ Translation from *Milap*, 10th June 1943, enclosure 2 to the letter from the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow to the Governor of Punjab Sir Bertrand Glancy, dated June 16th 1943, Linlithgow Collection, NAI, Acc. No. 2227, compiled in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, part 2, p. 1858.

¹⁵⁷ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p.17.

¹⁵⁸ Braund, *Memorandum*, pp. 2-3.

However, the central government had the support of the Defence of India Act, 1939, which had conferred emergency powers upon the central government to intervene in matters transferred to the provincial government.¹⁵⁹ However, despite having the legal authority in the form of the Defence of India Act, the centre was hesitant to intervene in Punjab. As mentioned earlier, rural Punjab was by far the main recruiting field of the British Indian Army. Therefore, the enlisting authorities made it clear to the central government that it must not take any action that might cause discontent among the Punjab peasantry and thereby stir up anger against the colonial state. Such discontent was bound to impair the Punjabis' will to fight for the Raj, and thereby hinder military recruitment. It would have also caused discontent and anger against the Raj among those Punjabi soldiers who were already in service.

Henry Knight's account of procurement in Punjab argues that the provincial government tried its best to fortify the hesitancy of the central government to intervene. According to Knight, at the Fourth All-India Food Conference held in October 1943, the representative of Punjab reminded the central government that almost half of the soldier ranks of the army at that time was drawn from the cultivating classes of Punjab. The representative warned that "grave administrative and political repercussions" would follow if statutory price control, requisitioning, and rationing were introduced in Punjab. In a not-so-veiled manner he went as far as warning the central government that if the centre disregarded the 'advice' of the Punjab Government, the provincial government would take no responsibility for public disturbances that might follow.¹⁶⁰ However, the representative did not bluntly refuse to help the deficit provinces; instead, he tried to strike a balance between paying lip service to the needs of the deficit provinces, and cautioning the central government against intervention. Accordingly, he declared: "We are prepared to go to the extent of even tightening our belts, within reasonable limits of course, in order to be able

¹⁵⁹ *The Defence of India Act, 1939*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ As presented in Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 158.

to help all deficit areas, but what we do not propose to stand is any arbitrary exercise of authority on the part of the centre or anybody else.”¹⁶¹

The stance of the Punjab government vis-à-vis state intervention in food received widespread publicity in the rest of India, particularly in the deficit provinces. Knight, who was the main administrative figure behind the introduction of civil rationing in Bombay, pointed out that the deficit provinces branded Punjab as a selfish province, which was first feeding itself gluttonously, and then ‘selling to the rest of India at extortionate prices the crumbs which fell from its table’ taking advantage of the insatiable demand from the hungry provinces.¹⁶² The Viceroy Lord Linlithgow conveyed the outrage against Punjab to the Governor of Punjab Sir Bertrand Glancy: ‘I understand that sir Chhotu Ram caused a certain amount of resentment and finally elicited an outspoken protest by his insistence that the one essential was to ensure the very maximum prices for the grower. I do hope that he will gradually modify his view as he is attaching to himself all the hatred that the profiteer incurs in war time.’¹⁶³ The deficit provinces argued that as Punjab was a part of India, she could not circumvent her responsibility to come to the help of fellow Indian provinces.¹⁶⁴ But the invocation of the unity of India, and the inter-dependence of the constituting provinces, did not move Punjab much.

Against this background, in November 1943, during the debate in the Central Legislative Assembly on the motion regarding the food situation, Jamnadas M. Mehta, a member of the Assembly demanded ‘If the Punjab zamindars come in the way, they must be taught their places.’¹⁶⁵ He further demanded about the Punjab Government: ‘I say, control them properly; shackle them if need be; force

¹⁶¹ As quoted *idem*.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁶³ Viceroy Linlithgow to the Governor of Punjab Sir Bertrand Glancy, Linlithgow Collection, NAI, New Delhi, Acc. No. 2227, in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, part 2, document no. 27, p. 1861.

¹⁶⁴ Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁶⁵ See the speech by Mr Jamnadas M. Mehta in ‘Motion regarding the food situation – Debate in the Central Legislative Assembly – November 1943’, in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, part 2, p. 1921.

them to behave properly.’¹⁶⁶ Widespread scarcity and the spectre of famine in Bengal created mounting pressures on Punjab. For instance, the same member boldly proclaimed in the Assembly that ‘The Punjab starves Bengal’, a proclamation that drew sharp opposition from the members from Punjab.¹⁶⁷

In August 1943, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow had written to the Governor of Punjab: ‘the success or failure of our food administration does in fact depend very largely on the result of the Punjab efforts . . . and of course it goes without saying that on the success of our food administration depends the control of inflation and in many respects our ability to make India a possible base for offensive operations against Japan.’¹⁶⁸ The hostile attitude of the Punjab government towards state-procurement and export to deficit provinces, destabilized the central government’s food project all over India. The Foodgrains Policy Committee, while commenting on the relationship between the central government and the provinces in matters relating to food, warned that in deficit areas ‘Public opinion will not tolerate a “hands off” attitude by the Centre’.¹⁶⁹ In addition to the famine in Bengal, the precarious food supply to workers in war industries, to ‘essential civil personnel’ such as the postal workers, and above all to the army, posed threats to the war effort.

Therefore, the need to mitigate the wider impact of food scarcity ultimately overrode the concerns to keep the Punjab peasantry and the Punjab government appeased. Accordingly, the central government started exerting pressure on the Punjab government to agree to state procurement. In August 1943, referring to Revenue Minister Chhotu Ram’s public incitement to hoarding by the cultivators, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow wrote to the Governor of Punjab: ‘I should have thought that the poisonous stuff put out by Chhotu Ram would need strong

¹⁶⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1922-1923.

¹⁶⁸ Letter marked ‘PRIVATE AND PERSONAL’ from the Viceroy the Marquess of Linlithgow to Sir B. Glancy (Punjab), 17 August 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/92, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 86, p. 179.

¹⁶⁹ FPC, *Report*, p. 127.

antidotes such as a vigorous counter-propaganda campaign under the lead of the bigger Zamindars including Khizar. It is disturbing to hear that the quantities of wheat forthcoming from such districts as Shahpur and Sheikhpura, where I understand there are big landlords, are very small.¹⁷⁰ The non-cooperation by the Punjab in the procurement of wheat infuriated Linlithgow to such an extent that he started tossing around the idea of taking the extreme political action against Punjab, that is, ending the political autonomy of the province altogether and making it a Section 93 province. In his above mentioned letter to the governor of Punjab, he further wrote: 'To put it quite clearly I mean that the procurement of the necessary surplus wheat from the Punjab is more important than any political considerations, any interests of the Ministers, and even, in the last resort, the continuance of Provincial Autonomy in the Punjab.'¹⁷¹

Against such increasing pressure from Delhi, the Punjab government gave way, but insisted that the provincial government would decide the quantity of grains for export, and fix the prices.¹⁷² In Punjab, the government price for grains was higher than in the rest of the Indian provinces. The Punjab government argued that the price should be such as to tempt the farmers to bring their produces to open market, instead of compelling them to hide the produces.¹⁷³ The provincial government further stipulated that the target for government purchases would not be the 'marketable surplus', instead 'exportable surplus', that is, the surplus that remained after feeding non-producing towns and cities, and all other deficit areas, within the province.¹⁷⁴ According to Henry Knight's narrative of procurement in Punjab, the representative of the province had said at the Second All-India Food Conference held earlier on 24-26 February 1943, that on an

¹⁷⁰ Letter marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL' from the Viceroy the Marquess of Linlithgow to Sir B. Glancy (Punjab), 17 August 1943, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 86, p. 179. Linlithgow was referring to Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana, the Premier (Chief Minister) of Punjab between 1942 and 1947. See Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana: The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India*, foreword by Roderick MacFarquhar, epilogue by Arend Lijphart, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2002.

¹⁷¹ Letter marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL' from Viceroy Linlithgow to Sir B. Glancy (Punjab), 17 August 1943, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 86, p. 179.

¹⁷² Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 155.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

average about 40-45 per cent of the total crop output of the province used to come to the grain markets. The Punjab government now claimed that most of this 'marketable surplus' was required within the province to feed the non-producing towns and the deficit areas.¹⁷⁵ The government argued that any attempt to procure and export more than what it presented as 'exportable surplus', would result in popular unrest, and force the grains to go underground.¹⁷⁶ But the figure of the exact quantity needed by the towns and deficit areas within the province was left vague. This vagueness enabled Punjab to retain grains far in excess of its actual needs.

However, under the pressure from the centre, to procure grains, the Punjab government employed the service of six firms of grain dealers.¹⁷⁷ As the purchasing agents of the government, these firms did the actual job of buying from the markets. Five of the six firms were in charge of buying for the civil needs of other provinces and princely states 'on the basis of allotment of Government of India supply orders made by the Director of Food Supplies.'¹⁷⁸ The remaining one firm had to do all the buying for the defence forces.¹⁷⁹ The stipulated commission for the buying agents was 9.9 pies per maund.¹⁸⁰ Notably, there was no government procurement to feed the common civilians within the province. Private trade channels were allowed to continue as before to provide for the civilian Punjabis.¹⁸¹ However, the Punjab government set up a provincial grain reserve, and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies was assigned the task of procuring for this reserve, which he did by employing buying agents on commission basis in the main grain markets.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁷⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷⁷ See appendix titled 'Provincial Procurement Arrangement' to chapter 6 titled 'Procurement', in *FPC, Report*, p. 53.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, p. 56.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁸² *Idem.*

The official ceiling price to be paid to the sellers by the purchasing agents was fixed by the provincial Director of Food Supplies. This ceiling price changed frequently as it was subjected to frequent reviewing to accommodate changing market conditions.¹⁸³ All the buying agencies, including both government and private agencies, conducted their operations throughout the whole of Punjab. The existence of more than one buying agency, and their common operation area, resulted in acute competition in buying, as every farm wanted to get as much pro rata commission as possible from the government.¹⁸⁴ Inevitably this competition led to unlawful incentives given to the sellers in the form of higher prices above the official ceiling price to beat the price offered by the other buying agents. Thus, producers again benefitted from this competition in buying.

However, the slim margin of higher prices paid illicitly by the buying agent over the price offered by other agents, was nothing in comparison to the price that the farmers would have received had an unrestrained free trade been permitted in the time of wartime inflation. Therefore, the Punjab peasantry on the whole was still very much against state procurement. As the private trade channels were allowed to continue as before to provide for the civilian Punjabis, the cultivators and the grain merchants were trying to evade government procurement as much as possible. They argued that when they were being prevented from profiteering, the prices of all agricultural implements were being left unchecked to skyrocket. The peasants felt that the colonial government was subjecting the Punjab peasantry to discrimination whereby it was feeding its subjects outside Punjab on cheap grains procured at the cost of the Punjabi peasants, whereas it was making no effort to control the price of farming tools, cart wheels, fertilizers, and fuel for irrigation pumps.¹⁸⁵ In fact, the importance of the war industries for the war efforts was much more, and more direct, than that of the peasantry. Therefore, military arithmetic demanded a strict no-intervention policy vis-à-vis

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 54, p. 56.

¹⁸⁵ Knight, *Food Administration*, p.157.

the industrial sector. Thus, in a way, the interests of the Punjab peasantry were sacrificed by the colonial state at the altar of British military interests.

To eliminate competition in buying, a significant reform was introduced in the procurement system by the Punjab government in 1944. Accordingly, by the next year, all purchases for the civil needs were now being made by the Director of Food Purchases, an officer directly under the provincial government. The director was buying through tenders which were guaranteed by certain firms appointed as clearing agents.¹⁸⁶ Thus, instead of having five firms acting as equal agents of the government, now all the firms were put under one supreme authority, namely, the Director of Food Purchases. So, there was now centralization of authority vis-à-vis purchases.

Notably, despite non-cooperation by the landlords, compulsory requisitioning of grains by the government was never resorted to in Punjab. There was political calculation behind this avoidance of compulsory requisitioning. A telegram about the food situation in India from the Central Government's Food Department to the Secretary of State on 11 January 1944 spelt out the political and military calculation clearly:

any attempt at such requisitioning in the Punjab would entail the resignation of the Ministry followed by a first-class political crisis which might extend to all the Muslim League Provinces, we could not proceed without the danger of widespread disaffection among the Muslims in the Army and the possible employment of large army formations (disaffection notwithstanding) in maintaining order in the rural districts. These risks appear to us to be so grave that we could not resort to requisitioning from the growers in the Punjab.¹⁸⁷

Thus, the triple fear of igniting a political crisis, causing disaffection among the Muslims in the army, and stirring up disorder in the Punjab countryside,

¹⁸⁶ FIC, *Final Report*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁷ *Governor-General (Food Department) to Secretary of State*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'SECRET', 11 January 1944, L/PO/10/25, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 316, p. 626.

prevented the wartime central colonial government from attempting at compulsory requisitioning of grains in Punjab.

Having discussed the procurement systems in Madras and Punjab, now I turn to look at a key connected issue, that is, transport. The Foodgrains Policy Committee's report pointed out that 'control of transport as an element in procurement machinery will be of increasing importance.'¹⁸⁸ Among the means of transport available for inter-province movement of grains, the most important was the railway. As most of the ships by 1943 had been diverted from trade operations to carrying soldiers and munitions internationally, the majority of the grain consignments had to be transported between regions by railways.¹⁸⁹ Railways were under the sole control of the central government. Often, to restrict the private merchants' attempts to evade government procurement, the central government ordered the railway authorities to refuse transport of grains without valid permit issued by the concerned provincial government.¹⁹⁰

However, sometimes procured grains could not be transported to the target region due to lack of transport or adequate freight space.¹⁹¹ By the middle of 1943, the railways in India were overburdened by the huge increase in traffic caused by the movement of the army and the supply services. With the progression of the war, and with the massive expansion of the army and the stationing of foreign soldiers in India, shortage of locomotives and wagons gradually set in.¹⁹² Due to the lack of storage facilities, often huge quantities of grain lay on station platforms awaiting wagons.¹⁹³ An unnamed official witness from the army to the Foodgrains Policy Committee admitted that "We certainly have to keep the stocks in the open in some cases, because the covered

¹⁸⁸ FPC, *Report*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁹¹ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹² FPC, *Report*, p. 62.

¹⁹³ See correspondence from War Transport Department to Procurement Branch of Department of Food, in Department of Food, Procurement Branch, Government of India, 1943, file P-1039/14, NAI.

accommodation does not exist and cannot be produced everywhere”¹⁹⁴. However, the witness added that ““when proper covering is not available, we are able to cover them with tarpaulins from the local material.””¹⁹⁵ In her recent study, Yasmin Khan offers important evidence from G. S. Khosla, a railway employee posted in Dacca in late 1943, who remembered how bags of grains piled up at the Dacca Station. The situation was such that Khosla was compelled to request the railway headquarter in Calcutta to stop sending more grains to Dacca, as arrangement for their onward movement was proving very difficult.¹⁹⁶ Khan tells us that when Khosla was interviewed many years after the war, ‘he was still moved by the memory of ‘stacks of gunny bags of wheat mounting up in various parts of the station’ and the place being ‘choked’ with food which had not yet reached the starving.’¹⁹⁷ Khan rightly observes that ‘The stresses on communications, administrative blockages and problems of railway freight (especially the prioritisation for military stocks) added to the difficulties of distributing food even when it was publicly and visibly available.’¹⁹⁸ In Bengal , to ease the congestion caused by the private grain merchants at the railway sidings at Howrah and Kantapukur, the government started confiscating private grain consignments that were not removed within a week of their arrival.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ As quoted in FPC, *Report*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁹⁶ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A people's History of India's Second World War*, The Bodley Head, London, 2015, p. 211.

¹⁹⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁹ See ‘Extract from a note on “Arrangements for Reception and Despatches in Calcutta prior to the Formation of the Directorate of Movements in November 1943”, annexure I to appendix V, FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 224.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Transportation of food grain'

Date photograph taken: December 1943. **Photographer:** William Vandivert.

Source: 'Calcutta and Bengal Famine', *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google.
<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/35e8241958af51d3.html>
Accessed on 26 November 2016.

However, in a smaller number of cases, sometimes when wagons were available, grain was not ready at the stations to fill the available wagons.²⁰⁰ The diversion of lorries from trade to military transport, and inadequate supply of petrol during the war, added to the difficulty of transport caused by the lack of railway freight-space.²⁰¹ Further, Sir Azizul Huque, the second Food Member of the Governor-General's Council pointed out that if some 'overzealous officer' sitting a thousand miles away from Delhi requisitioned foodgrains while in transit through his area, it took considerable time for the information to reach Delhi, and to decide remedies, and refer them back to the provincial authorities so that the grains could move again.²⁰² Due to the lack of coordination in procurement and movement, food authorities sometimes failed to bring grains in time to avail of the cargo space.

Further, lack of onward inland transport from the ports caused slowing down of unloading of the ships. However, as the ports had to be kept clear during the war, it was impossible to delay unloading the grains from the ships.²⁰³ Consequently, unloaded grains were often stored in the open in the absence of appropriate storage facilities. For instance, a grain depot was set up in the open in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Calcutta. As a result, 3,194 tons of rotten grains had to be destroyed by dumping on 1st September 1944.²⁰⁴ Thus, when people were starving in Bengal, grains were getting destroyed because of insufficient storage facility.²⁰⁵

Even for individual consumers, the overall dismal state of transport and roads raised enormous hindrances in the transportation of grains, and thereby diminished food availability in isolated villages. For instance, Chittaprosad,

²⁰⁰ FPC, *Report*, p. 78.

²⁰¹ See 'Extract from a note on "Arrangements for Reception and Despatches in Calcutta prior to the Formation of the Directorate of Movements in November 1943"', annexure I to appendix V, FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 224.

²⁰² Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 14.

²⁰³ See annexure II titled 'Storage in the Royal Botanical Gardens' to appendix V titled 'Distribution of Supplies in Bengal (1943)', in FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 225.

²⁰⁴ *Idem*.

²⁰⁵ For a discussion of the problems in transporting grains, see FPC, *Report*, pp. 64-66.

the noted Bengali painter and a member of the Communist Party of India, reported from his tour of famine-stricken Midnapore district in November 1943 how lack of motor-buses, and roads 'full of bumps and holes', were troubling the common consumers when they needed to transport grains from the railway stations to their homes in distant villages.²⁰⁶

VII. Conclusion

Both the initiation, as well as the actual development, of regular state intervention in food in colonial India had roots in wars. It was the need to have secure provisioning of the army during the First World War that gave birth to structured regular state intervention in food, distinct from the earlier ad hoc administration of relief during sporadic famines. However, with the end of the war, and simultaneous decline in the urgency for military provisioning, state intervention in food was largely put on hold during the interwar years. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the old need for secure army provisioning reappeared on a much bigger scale.

The sudden rapidity in the growth of food administration at the centre and in the provinces since 1942 had a lot to do with the worsening of the war for the British, particularly with the fear of a Japanese attack on India after losing neighbouring Burma to Japan. The worsening military situation on the Indian front demanded bringing foreign Allied soldiers to India to reinforce the British Indian Army, as well as further expansion of the British Indian Army. Thus, on the one hand, the army demand for food skyrocketed since the fall of Burma into the Japanese hands. On the other hand, with the end of usual rice imports from Burma to British India, the food situation for the civilians was becoming graver with each passing day.

²⁰⁶ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District*, by Chittaprosad, in *November 1943*, New Age, Bombay, 1944, p. 3 (N. B. the book contains no pagination. Page numbers have been added by me counting from the first page as page 1).

In this situation, the threat of popular discontent from hungry civilians in regions of scarcity impelled the colonial state to expand its operations with regard to food. Its first recourse lay in attempts at price controls. It soon became apparent, however, that without control over procurement, it was impossible to control prices. Therefore, the colonial state had reluctantly to undertake a role in the procurement of food, a role that was much more extensive than the superficial attempts to control prices. However, much had changed over the two interwar decades since the colonial government's plans to procure for the army during the First World War. The political landscape was now more intricate, with Indian parties in power in some provinces. As the cooperation of the provincial governments was extremely necessary for the war efforts, the central colonial state could no longer afford to act unilaterally to intervene in food in the provinces. Consequently, what emerged in this situation was food procurement by the provincial governments, albeit under the 'supervision' of the central government.

This arrangement led to occasional flaring up of tensions between the centre and the provinces. The central government found itself caught between the need to prevent mass starvation and the interests of the peasantry in surplus provinces like Punjab. The Punjab peasantry had suffered badly because of the sharp decline in agricultural prices during the Great Economic Depression in the 1930s. Therefore, they wanted to practice unrestrained profiteering in grains taking advantage of the wartime inflation, in order to make up the losses that they had suffered in the 1930s. Even the spectre of Bengal famine failed to convince the Punjab peasantry, and the Punjab government, to sacrifice their business and political interests respectively. It was with great difficulty that the central colonial government persuaded the provincial government in Punjab to launch state procurement of grains. The tension between the central government's attempt at a more equitable distribution system throughout India, and the income interests of the Punjab peasantry is demonstrative of the predicament of the wartime colonial state in India.

* * *

Chapter 2

Dining with the State

I. Introduction

This chapter explores the way in which intervention in food resulted in the colonial state's penetration of new social arenas – the household, small commercial food outlets, and religious institutions – in the quest to regulate food sale and consumption. This took place through two overlapping phases. In the first, the colonial government was extremely cautious in intervening in food, fearing social unrest that would worsen its already frail political control. As R.H. Hutchings, Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Food, described in his later review of the central government's food policies initially during the war: 'The Government of India desire[d] that food control should interfere *as little as possible* with local or religious custom'.¹

However, this stance did not survive for long amid the pressures of war and food shortage. Therefore, Hutchings also described how later it was felt by the central government's Food Department that:

when foodstuffs in India as a whole are in short supply, anything in the nature of extravagance in the use of food in connection with religious custom is wrong and out of place, and must not be allowed. Such provision as can be made, must, therefore, be subject,

¹ Letter by R. H. Hutchings, Esqr., Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Food, letter no. R-1000/24 dated 12th January 1945, file no. 48/45- G. G. (A) on 'Circulars etc. from the Department of Food (hereafter DOF). Monthly Reports on the All India Food position', Secretariat of the Governor General (Public), National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi. Emphasis mine.

at all times, to strict moderation as well as to the exigencies of the general or local supply position. Any attempt to make religious and social custom the excuse for the unnecessary or excessive consumption of foodstuffs which are rationed or in short supply, must be resisted.²

The wartime compulsion to prevent popular outrage around the issue of hunger forced the colonial state to enter a second phase, roughly in 1943-44, when it had to come up with various measures to restrict 'wasteful' consumption. This in turn led to an interesting situation; it brought the state directly into the kitchens, domestic as well as commercial, of its subjects.

The second section of this chapter discusses the first phase of the colonial state's engagement with food, and argues that at the initial stage, from the start of the war until roughly 1942, though the colonial state's engagement with the connection between food on the one hand, and religion and caste on the other, increased considerably, yet it never disturbed the connection or tried to change it. The central government paid considerable attention to the already existing connections between communities and food production, and sought to build on these pre-existing connections when it started getting involved in the process of producing food. In this context, official acceptance of the relation between religious rituals and food widened the space for religion to have an influence on government food policies. Thereafter, in the third section, I discuss how the war propelled the colonial state to put food transactions under strict surveillance as rigid state controls over food consumption were increased. In the fourth section, I discuss the later phase of the colonial state's engagement with food, and show how the policy of accommodating religious sensibilities in government food measures soon gave way to a vigorous and carefully drawn system of controlling food consumption. This section argues that this phase of state-intervention in food finally resulted in a meteoric increase in state control over everyday life, and examines the process by which this actually happened. Finally, the fifth

² Idem.

section switches the focus from the government to the subjects; it discusses popular responses to state intervention in food.

II. Government Engagement with Religious Cultures

Managing India in the field of food, given the country's enormous diversity in terms of caste, class, regional and religious practices, and given the particular link between food on the one hand and notions of purity and pollution on the other, was always going to be a very complex task for the colonial state. A whole range of subjective factors, such as religion, affected the arena of food. The complex relation between food and religion during a period marked by overall scarcity and socio-political instability provides a great opportunity to study food as a site where identities and sensibilities were formed, resisted, and contested. The game was played by both the state and different sections of the Indian population, particularly by religious communities and organizations.

As is well-known, in India, there has long been a connection between castes and religion on the one hand and food production on the other; certain castes and religious communities have been associated with the production of certain kinds of food and drinks. For example, in Bengal, the *Gwala* conglomeration of castes is largely identified with dairy, the *Jele-Kaibarta* caste with fishing, the *Namasudras* with farming (and to a lesser degree with fishing), the Muslims with poultry keeping and so on. The colonial central government tried to take advantage of these already existing ties, and consequently allowed non-economic factors to have a say in the state-run food administration.

Such considerations generated significant debate. This emerges clearly, for example, in considerations as to where the government poultry scheme should be implemented. Khan Bahadur A.R. Malik, Deputy Agricultural Marketing Adviser, Ajmer, pointed out in one of his official communications that 'the people in the neighbourhood of Delhi are not poultry-keepers, for

fancy or profit. Had they been so, there should have been a gradual increase in the poultry population in this area as a natural development with the growth of the urban population of New Delhi. The people round about Delhi are Gujjars and the population of Muslim cultivators, who keep poultry as a by-industry, is very small.’³ On the other hand, in Ajmer, Khan Bahadur Malik pointed out ‘The population is a mixed one and though the number of Muslims is low, that of poultry keepers or potential keepers is large. Here, the poultry are kept by Christians and Mehtars also beside the Muslims’.⁴ The association of poultry keeping with the Muslim community and the abhorrence of the Hindus (at least upper caste Hindus) towards keeping poultry and eating it have been strengthened in India over several centuries.

These perspectives were shared as much by the British as by Indian administrators. Malcolm Lyall Darling, the prominent Punjab civil servant, asserted that:

only here and there was there a sign of a more tolerant Hindu attitude towards the hen. A religious taboo was involved, and though the price of eggs had risen from half an anna to 2 annas each, characteristically that counted for nothing – a good example of the influence, always strong in India, of religion on economics. To the south of the Punjab we found little sign of change in regard to either vegetables or poultry. . . the suggestion that they should keep poultry was regarded as almost improper.⁵

What is interesting is that even government schemes allowed themselves to be modelled along these lines and thereby in a way officialised such socio-religious constructions. In many ways the colonial state used food to feed popular religious sensibilities. It was reported that even railway authorities supplied free food to pilgrims while they were on board on pilgrimage.⁶

³ Letter of Khan Bahadur A.R. Malik, Deputy Agricultural Marketing Adviser, Ajmer, to P.M. Kharegat, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, Health and Lands, D.O. No. F-12/83/42-G in Department of Education, Health and Lands (hereafter DEHL), Government of India (hereafter GOI), Section- Food Production II, file no. 9-4/44-P-II on the subject ‘Delhi- Scheme for the Development of Poultry Farming’, 1944, NAI.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Malcolm Lyall Darling, *At Freedom’s Door*, Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, London, 1949, pp. 333-334.

⁶ See the comments of Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, Minister in charge, Education and Public Health Department, Government of Madras, in the *Report of the Second Meeting of the Central Advisory*

The food measures adopted by the central and provincial governments during the war did not step beyond the limits set by the religious sensibilities of various communities. Therefore, the government meat dehydration factories run by the Food Department of the central government had to be divided into two categories – one producing dehydrated *halal* meat and the other dehydrated *jhatka* or conventionally slaughtered meat. There was one *halal* and two *jhatka* meat factories in Madras whereas there was one *halal* meat factory in North West Frontier Province and no *jhatka* meat factory in the province at all as the province was an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority one.⁷

Production of beef increased many times during the war because of army demand, mainly due to the stationing of non-Indian troops in India, and due to the increased number of Muslim soldiers in the army. Gajendra Singh's recent research shows that between 1 January 1941 and 1 February 1942, the number of Mussalman (Muslim) combatants (excluding non-combatants) in the Indian army increased from 155,237 to 239,000.⁸ During the war, in 1943 in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the prominent Hindu Mahasabha leader, complained that 'Cattle purchase for military requirements has also proceeded on an enormous scale.'⁹ The Allied troops stationed in India were accustomed to eating meat on a scale unknown to the Indians. Consequently, debates and conflicts over the issue of slaughtering of cows surfaced in public debate with renewed forces. During the lengthy debate in the Central Legislative Assembly on the motion

Board of Health, held in Madras on 9th and 10th January 1939, Government of India Press, Simla, 1939, p. 48, in DEHL, Health Section, file no. 29-2/39-H (part-III), 1939, NAI.

⁷ Letter from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India to all Provincial Governments and local Administrations, 5th October 1945, in file no. 356, 1945 on 'Post-war development of food industries', Mysore Residency, Bangalore, 1945, NAI.

⁸ 'Class Composition of the Army in India', Asia and Africa Collections, British Library (hereafter BL), L/WS/1/456, and 'Indian Army Morale and Possible Reduction, 1943-1945', Asia and Africa Collection, BL, L/WS/1/707, as presented in 'Appendix II: Recruitment into the Indian Army during World War II', in Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 256.

⁹ *Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, published by Prof. H. C. Ghosh, Calcutta, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee papers, 'Speeches/ Writings By Him', S. No. 20, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, p. 16.

regarding the food situation, Lal Sham Lal, a member of the assembly, argued that due to slaughter for beef for the military, India was facing shortage of cattle for ploughing land, and consequently the average price of a bullock had gone seven times higher than the earlier price.¹⁰ Lal further claimed that 'During last session, Government were asked as to how many cattle were being slaughtered daily to supply beef to military, but they refused to declare the number of cattle slaughtered daily, on security reasons.'¹¹

To understand the colonial state's role in the game, here we need to know a few particular aspects of the anti-slaughter arguments during the war as they influenced the state's action. Interestingly during the war, often the 'save the cow' campaigns did not overtly argue along religious lines. Rather, they came up with an alternative strategy of arguing that cows must be saved for economic reasons, that the country's 'cattle wealth' must be preserved. A contemporary report in the newspaper *The Hindu* is quite illustrative in this. *The Hindu* of Wednesday, April 7, 1943, reported under the heading 'Save the Cattle' that:

... it cannot be said that adequate attention is paid to the problem of the conservation of the cattle wealth of the land. The need for care is especially greater now because of the possibility of indiscriminate slaughter for meat necessary for the defence forces. . . .

. . . What machinery is there to see that the cattle offered for slaughter do not come under the category of cow in milk or working bullock and to ensure that abuses are not resorted to? Further, while the Government have adopted these principles to prevent indiscriminate slaughter inside the country, there do not appear to exist rules prohibiting the export of cattle of the categories which the Food Advisory Council has laid down should be preserved in the higher interests of the country. Exports for slaughter are permitted to be made to Ceylon. Some time back tenders were invited in India by military authorities in Ceylon 'for the supply of several thousand head of cattle (over three years and under five years of age) in prime condition for slaughter.' . . . The notification did not state that cows in milk or working bullocks would not be accepted.¹²

¹⁰ See the words by Lal Sham Lal in 'Motion regarding the food situation – Debate in the Central Legislative Assembly – November 1943', compiled in Partha Sarathi Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1943-1944*, part 2, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 1908.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² *The Hindu*, Wednesday, April 7, 1943, collected by the Bureau of Public Information, Government of India (hereafter GOI), in file no. 10-5/43-P, 1943 on the subject 'Restriction on

Notably, according to a novel manoeuvre in the anti-slaughter movement, nutrition was made to play a vital role in countering cow-slaughter for the army. It was argued that due to ‘the indiscriminate slaughter and export of cattle’, the masses were being deprived of milk and milk products, resulting in the ‘physical degeneration of the nation’. In the words of the same report in *The Hindu*:

The national diet is notoriously ill-balanced, being unduly rich in carbo-hydrates and poor in proteins. . . half of the 5,000 cows in the city are thus marched to the slaughter-house when at least 60 per cent of them are fit for the dairy. This is due to the high cost of maintaining them in the City and the lack of suburbs whereto they could, without loss to the *gowala*, be taken in their dry period and brought back when in milk again. Owing to these reasons, milk and milk products are becoming increasingly difficult for the masses to secure and the result is physical degeneration of the nation. If this process is to be arrested, then, the Government should step in, stop the indiscriminate slaughter and export of cattle and give facilities for the growth of a prosperous and efficient dairy industry.¹³

In the face of public criticism of this kind over the issue of exporting cattle to meet the demands of the army in other war-bases, the Government of India could not remain indifferent. A Press Note by the Food Department of the central government had earlier notified in November 1942 that, ‘in all future contracts for the supply of beef, a clause should be inserted to the effect that working cattle used for transportation will not be accepted and should not be tendered for inspection. Contractors with existing contracts are also being requested to comply with this restriction.’¹⁴ Thereafter, when opposition to the slaughter of animals grew further, the Food Department informed the

slaughter of cattle – Ceylon Army authorities’ tenders for import of cattle – Food Deptt’s general instructions regarding issue of licences – Press Note’, DEHL, Food Production Branch, NAI, New Delhi. The Press Note dated Nov. 18, 1942, by the Food Department had said ‘At its first meeting, held last August, the Central Food Advisory Council considered the increase in the slaughter of cattle resulting from the large-scale increase in the demand for meat due to the exigencies of the war and recommended that, to prevent permanent damage to the cattle wealth of the country, the slaughter of working bullocks in a good state of health below the age of 10 years, cows in milk and pregnant cows should be prohibited.’ Idem.

¹³ *The Hindu*, Wednesday, April 7, 1943.

¹⁴ Press Note dated Nov. 18, 1942 issued by DEHL, file no. 10-5/43-P, 1943, on the subject “Restriction on slaughter of cattle – Ceylon Army authorities’ tenders for import of cattle – Food Deptt’s general instructions regarding issue of licences (sic) – Press Note”, DEHL, NAI.

Export Trade Controllers in Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi, Madras, Peshawar, and Quetta that:

The Government of India have decided that the export of cattle (excepting sheep and goat) should be licensed in future up to the level of the exports from each port during the year 1941-42 . . . and that the following classes of cattle (excepting sheep and goats) should in no case be permitted to be exported:-

- (i) Cattle in milk, pregnant cattle and female young stock which have not yet calved; and
- (ii) all male cattle fit for being used for ploughing or transport purposes.¹⁵

Therefore, now the central government came up with detailed mechanisms such as licences, at least on paper, to ensure that the rules regarding slaughtering of cows were not being violated. In the same communication, the Food Department stipulated that 'In order to ensure that such cattle are not exported, no licence should be issued unless the exporter produces a certificate from a responsible veterinary officer to the effect that the cattle proposed to be exported do not belong to any of the classes mentioned above.'¹⁶ These restrictions bore some fruit. For instance, at the second meeting of the army's Central Command Economic Co-ordination Committee, held during 23-24 January 1945, it was pointed out by some authorities that at the army's food collection centre in Banaras in December 1944, a strict veterinary inspection was carried out, and consequently almost 50 per cent of the animals were rejected, most of which were rejected because they were pregnant.¹⁷ To reduce the demand for meat, the central government further

¹⁵ See the copy of Food Department's letter No. F. 1/43-L. S., 30th March 1943, to the 'Export Trade Controller, Bombay/ Calcutta/ Karachi/ Madras/ Peshawar/ Quetta', in file no. 10-5/43-P, 1943, on the subject 'Restriction on slaughter of cattle – Ceylon Army authorities' tenders for import of cattle – Food Deptt's general instructions regarding issue of licences (sic) – Press Note', DEHL, Food Production Branch, NAI.

¹⁶ *Idem*.

¹⁷ Appendix 'A', titled 'Statement by the B. R. I. A. S. C. Central Command Relative to the Difficulties Encountered in the Procurement of Local Produce', appended to the final agenda of the second meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-ordination Committee, 23-24 January 1945, in file no. 49-W, 1944, on 'Coordination of Purchase of food stuffs for the Defence Services', War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

asked the provincial governments to introduce some meatless days.¹⁸ Accordingly, for instance, the Bengal government declared Mondays and Thursdays as meatless days with effect from March 1945.¹⁹

At least for some time, the colonial state and sections of Indian society followed divergent routes with regard to religious sensibilities in matters relating to food. This led to an interesting paradox. While many Hindus sought to express their religious objections to cow-slaughter with reference to economic and nutritional concerns, it was the central government that remained overtly concerned with the relation between religion and food. Accordingly, the Department of Food was seriously pondering over the issue of supplementary quantities of rationed foods for religious and other festivals as Hutchings, the Secretary of the Food Department described. However, the responses from Regional Food Commissioners and Residents regarding the sanction of supplementary quantities of rationed foods for such festivals revealed 'a wide divergence of view and also of practice ranging from what may be described as an over-generous handling of the subject to a complete refusal to give any concessions whatsoever.'²⁰ Keeping in line with its policy that 'food control should interfere as little as possible with local or religious custom', Hutchings reported that central government would 'like at least some token provision to be made whenever possible' to religious and social functions.²¹ The Department of Food attempted at standardizing such policies and accordingly suggested that there should be 'a general policy applicable all over India'.²²

¹⁸ Sir Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India: 1939-47*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1954, p. 232.

¹⁹ *All India Monthly Report on Food Position for the month of March 1945*, file no. 1 (14)- IB/45, 1945, on the subject 'Monthly reports on food situation in India and Indian States', p. 4, Political Department, Intelligence Bureau branch, GOI, NAI.

²⁰ R. H. Hutchings, Esqr., Secretary to the Government of India, DOF, wrote a letter dated 12th January, 1945 to all 'Provincial Governments, Administrations and Residents' on the subject 'Issue of Supplementary quantities of rationed foods for Religious and other Festivals.' Hutchings's letter no. R-1000/24, 12 January, 1945, file no. 48/45- G. G. (A) on 'Circulars etc. from the Department of Food. Monthly Reports on the All India Food position', Secretariat of the Governor General (Public), NAI.

²¹ *Idem.*, emphasis mine.

²² *Idem.*

Along with this state-attempt at standardization, also came the official public acknowledgement that ‘feeding of the poor (through offerings, free kitchens and on religious occasions) is a part of religious ritual and practice’, and ‘feeding of friends, relatives and the poor on occasions of marriages and deaths is a necessary social and religious obligation amongst all the Indian communities which is difficult to avoid.’²³ This state-acceptance of the relation between religious rites and food further widened the space for religion to have a say on government food policies.

Keeping in line with its aim at standardization, the Department of Food provided a schedule outlined in the table on the next page, suggesting scales of supplementary ration for religious and other festivals with a view to eventually establish a near uniform scale all over India.²⁴

It is clear from the following scheme that on social occasions like marriage ceremonies or funeral feasts the amount of supplementary ration was more in the form of a token ration, as it was meant to provide two meals to only twenty-five people. The fact that this upper limit of twenty-five people included even the hosts, ensured that the actual number of guests that could be entertained on the extra ration was actually much less than twenty-five. Given the average big size of the Indian extended family, and that often it was the custom to invite the entire village or neighbourhood, this modest allowance was nothing but a token state acknowledgement of the additional need of foodstuffs on the days of the ceremonies.

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, see the schedule attached to the letter.

TABLE 1

SUGGESTED GENERAL SCALES OF ALLOCATION.

- (1) MARRIAGES : Foodgrains –
 Additional full basic size of adult ration of one day of the area concerned or 1 lb., whichever is less to each person up to 25 persons. (This will in effect mean providing for 2 meals for 25 persons).
- (2) DEATHS : Foodgrains –
 Additional half basis (sic) size of adult ration of one day of the area concerned or ½ lb., whichever is less up to 25 persons. (this will in effect mean one meal).
Sugar
 Half of the weekly adult size of ration or 4 ozs. per person for 25 persons (=6¼ lbs.) whichever is less.
- (3) RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS (sic) –
 A distinction is necessary between ‘free kitchens’ (langars) and ‘offerings’ (bhog, etc.) and token distribution of ‘parshad’ (in Gurdwaras). It may be noted that all religious institutions do not run free kitchens, but only few very important ones. Generally the poor and the visitors from outstations partake of meals here. In these cases the off-take of the town as a whole will not be much affected.
FREE KITCHENS : Supplementary quantities to be given on the basis of actual requirements calculated as in the case of catering establishments.
OFFERINGS : Foodgrains –
 (bhog etc.)
 24 lbs. to 50 lbs. according to the usual size of the congregation.
Sugar –
 2½ lbs. to 50 lbs. according to the usual size of the congregation.
PARSHAD : As in ‘OFFERINGS’.
RAMZAN for Mosque: Sugar to be given according to actual requirements, not exceeding 1 oz. per head per day of the estimated congregation.
- (4) CATERERS & HALWAIS: 35% TO 100% extra for each occasion based on actual average consumption.
- (5) INDIVIDUALS: ½ of basic weekly ration of sugar or 4 ozs. whichever is less.
Foodgrains – ½ of basic daily ration or 8 ozs. whichever is less.

* In cases where these limits are to be exceeded, Govt. of India should be consulted.

However, wherever the scheme of supplementary food for festivals was implemented, it was very helpful for the religious institutions as the basis of calculating additional amount of ration for them was either 'the usual size of the congregation' or 'actual average consumption'. The above scheme also reveals that the colonial state did not conceive religious occasions only as performance of rites within the boundary of a physical site such as temple or mosque; instead, it conceived such occasions as wider festivals. This understanding had influences on the state policy on supplementary rations. In addition to supplementary ration to religious institutions, the central colonial state was also talking of rations to caterers, sweet-makers, and individuals. As consumption of sweet accompanies all auspicious occasions in India, and sweet itself is considered auspicious, naturally the consumption of sweets increases in households on the days that have religious importance. Hence, the scheme had provisions of supplementary quotas of sugar to caterers, sweet-makers, and individuals.

However, in the matter of implementing the above scheme about the supplementary ration too, the division of responsibility between the centre and provinces was crucial. Technically, the Food Department of the central government introduced the above scheme as a guide only; it did not attempt to impose the scheme on the provincial governments. The provincial governments were given a degree of choice according to their respective supply positions. More importantly, though the central government chalked out the above scheme for allocation, it refused to shoulder the responsibility of providing such supplementary rations for religious and social occasions. Hutchings made it clear in unequivocal words that 'The Central Government will not, except under the most exceptional circumstances, accept any responsibility for making available special supplies for the above purposes.'²⁵ Thus, the entire burden of supplementary ration was intended to be shouldered by the provincial governments.

²⁵ Hutchings's letter no. R-1000/24 to all 'Provincial Governments, Administrations and Residents', 12th January 1945.

Interestingly, however, there were rather different trends emerging amongst the semi-official Indian civil servants, who revealed themselves to be much less wedded to 'religious custom' than officials of the Food Department imagined. At the fifth All-India Food Conference held in New Delhi on the 29th of January 1945, many delegates expressed the view that due to the general scarcity of food in the country, no relaxation of the rationing rules should be allowed to provide for supplementary rations for religious festivals. Subsequently, to the surprise of the central Department of Food, the Central Food Advisory Council in its meeting held in New Delhi on the 2nd March 1945, passed a resolution by a majority of votes that 'no supplementary quantities of rationed foodstuffs should be made available for religious and other festivals'.²⁶ The Department of Food had to step back, and subsequently issued circulars recommending the Council's resolution for acceptance by the provincial governments and princely states. It now promised that 'the Government of India will not, in future, make any provision for such concessions in allotments under the Basic Plan.'²⁷ This debate about supplementary food for religious occasions says a lot about the outdated notions of the colonial state with regard to the influence of religious determinants in food matters during the period of wartime scarcity.

III. The Gaze of the State: Food Surveillance

A pre-requisite for effective control of everyday food consumption lay in securing effective information. During the war, the changing food situation led the central government to develop an elaborate intelligence system reporting on food transactions. Significantly, government records contain extensive materials on this aspect in the independent princely kingdoms, but very little about intelligence surveillance in the provinces. This could be explained by the fact that the colonial gaze was indeed much more sharp and

²⁶ Letter no. RP-1000/24 dated 23rd March 1945, by R. H. Hutchings, Secretary to the Government of India, DOF, to all Provinces, Administrations (except Delhi and Ajmer-Merwara) and Residents, in file no. 48/45- G. G. (A) on 'Circulars etc. from the Department of Food. Monthly Reports on the All India Food position', Secretariat of the Governor General (Public), NAI.

²⁷ *Idem*.

continuous in the princely states as the black-markets and illegal export activities were thriving more in the princely kingdoms taking advantage of their legal protection, albeit often unclear, from direct intervention by the colonial state. Discussion here therefore focusses on the princely states.

Because of the surveillance over activities vis-à-vis food, the central government came in possession of hitherto unknown information about informal food markets. In addition to having an intelligence system, the rapidly worsening food situation made the colonial state aware of the necessity of having its own publicity machinery to disseminate information about food situation in the country. It was now thought that if given adequate publicity, the state's action to confiscate food stocks could have a two-way effect – it could serve as a deterrent, that is, the news of confiscation by government authorities might scare the grain merchants and thereby prevent them from hoarding. In addition, it could infuse confidence among the general consumers that the colonial state was sincere in its attempts to ease the food situation in the country. For instance, the 'secret' letter from the Resident for the States of Western India suggested in 1943 (a year that experienced the most severe scarcity during the war) that 'If the stocks referred to could be located and requisitioned, or if a prosecution could be instituted, under the local equivalent of the Foodgrains Control Order, it might have a very valuable effect locally, provided sufficient publicity is given to the matter.'²⁸

An important source of information about food situation in the princely states lies in the letters that were intercepted by the regional Censor Stations. These intercepted letters provide information about food smuggling, and also illustrate the often ambiguous role of princely state authorities, and the potential for rumours, allegations, and counter-allegations as local actors attempted to evade state controls, and in turn reported on those who did the same. An extract from a letter, intercepted in censorship, from one P.M. Mukhia, Latipur, Kathiawar, to Messrs. Mukhia Brothers, Grain and Provision

²⁸ The letter marked 'SECRET' from New Delhi., no. c.g-602/50, dated 14th July, 1943, DOF, NAI.

Merchants, Bahrain, reads: 'As for the stock of food-grains etc., we have stocked 2000 maunds of wheat in 2 underground cellars together with some jowari and millet and also 800 maunds till-seeds and groundnuts packed in gunny bags. There is fluctuation in the rates for these commodities. God willing we will be able to sell these after Dewali.'²⁹ However, His Highness the Maharaja Jam Saheb of Nawanagar informed the Resident of Rajkot that the said stock of 2000 maunds of wheat was kept by Mr Mukhia with the approval of the Darbar, 'in order to make distribution to the poor people of the locality as and when directed by the Darbar.'³⁰ The Darbar of the Nawanagar State supplemented this by a rather glib assurance that 'steps were being taken to see that he does not profiteer or hide the stock when there is a demand.'³¹ This sort of communication shows how the courts in princely states were often themselves piling up food stocks in collaboration with private merchants, and how they had a tolerant attitude towards hoarding.

The letter of an anonymous writer from Rajkot in March 1944 made direct and explicit allegations in this matter. The writer firmly asserted that it was not only the private traders who were involved in hoarding and profiteering, even the Darbars of princely states were involved:

The States have plenty but they are hoarding it up and making fortunes out of what they sell. I could give chapter and verse for this, but perhaps I'd better not. But there is an example: - a certain ruler, through a man of straw, bought up all the sugar in his capital early on in the war. The towns people are rationed at a lb. a month. That of course does not nearly suffice. The rationed pound is sold at six pence. The rest of what they require the people buy at 1 shilling in the 'black market'. That is a trifling example. Profits in some States are running into millions.³²

²⁹ Letter from P.M. Mukhia, Latipur, Kathiawar, to Messrs. Mukhia Brothers, Grain and Provision Merchants, Bahrain, intercepted at the Censor Station, Karachi, file no. DFS/C/21, 1945, on the subject "Censored Material: Gur and Sugar", NAI.

³⁰ Secret letter no. D/43-5(2) dated 27-7-1943 from the Resident for the States of Western India, Rajkot to W. H. J. Christie, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Food, DOF, NAI.

³¹ Letter no. D-756 dated 29th July, 1943 from the Nawanagar Darbar to the Resident for the States of Western India, Rajkot, DOF, NAI.

³² Letter quoted in the extract from Chief Censor's Weekly Report No. 45, 11 March 1944. DOF, NAI.

The same writer brought into question the 'deficit' status of the states. According to him, many surplus states, or, states with adequate food, provided false information to the central government in order to be counted as 'deficit' states. Referring to a speech by Baron Strabolgi (1886 – 1953), a leading Labour Party member of the House of Lords, in a debate in the House on the food situation in India, the same anonymous writer wrote: 'Strabolgi was quite right: the States are bursting with stored-up grain. So he would be interested to know that a few days ago the representatives of States that I know well, met for a Food Conference under a British Chairman, and each swore by all his gods that his State is this year in a deficit state. The total figures ran into many millions.'³³

Because of the above extract from the Chief Censor's weekly report, the Political Department in New Delhi had to intervene. It asked the Resident for the States of Western India to let the Political Department know whether his 'own information bears out the allegation of widespread hoarding by individuals and profiteering by Darbars'.³⁴ The Resident replied sharply with a tinge of racial stereotype saying 'The reference to the 'States bursting with stored-up grain' is sheer nonsense and is a typical example of Gujarati exaggeration and mis-statement.'³⁵ About the scant quota of sugar in ration, he said that 'The ration of 1 lb of sugar per head per month is what the Sugar Controller allows us and with this we have all to be content and it is no good complaining.'³⁶ However, it is noteworthy that the Resident did admit that 'with a multiplicity of State jurisdiction such as exist in Kathiawar it is inevitable that some Darbars are not so good as others.'³⁷

³³ Idem.

³⁴ D. O. No. F.3-I.B./44 dated 11th April, 1944, marked 'SECRET' from the Political Department, New Delhi, to the Resident for the States of Western India, DOF, NAI.

³⁵ D. O. No. D/29-67 dated April 17th, 1944, marked 'Secret' from the Residency for the States of Western India to the Secretary to His Excellency the Crown Representative, New Delhi, DOF, NAI.

³⁶ Idem.

³⁷ Idem.

Consequently, though the Residency dismissed the anonymous allegations as 'sheer nonsense', in actuality, it sent an Inspector of Supplies to study hoarding and profiteering in Kathiawar. The Inspector's report is extremely valuable for our understanding of some of the issues and challenges in food administration and distribution in one not too untypical region of the Indian empire.³⁸ In the first line of his report, the inspector admitted that 'It is well known that people in Gujarat and Kathiawar 'stock up' with a year's supply of grain at the harvest.'³⁹ As an example, he reported that 'Bhavnagar admitted that its 13 lakh maund deficit in millets could be partly made up by the fact that consumers were estimated as holding stocks amounting to 10 lakhs [maunds]. Other States say that they are unable to carry out searches, and they cannot alter traditions [of stocking up]. Their completely apathetic attitude does not tend to make things easier.'⁴⁰

This observation underlines the princely states' reluctance to enter into any confrontation with the hoarders. Often, when exposed, the hoarders were able to retain their stocks by claiming that the stocks were for domestic consumption only. Many princely states in the region showed themselves relatively unconcerned. For instance, the Chief Constable of the Rajkot Junction reported that Lohana Sunderji Nanji of Rajkot, originally resident of Dhrol State, hoarded huge stock of sugar and rice that he was selling in the black markets by instalments through a local grain-broker named Dahyalal.⁴¹ When asked to enquire into the matter, the officers of the Dhrol State found 89 bags of sugar and 85 maunds of rice at his house. As the items were in excess of the quantities legally allowed, they were seized by the Dhrol State. But, the tenor of the letter from the Dewan, Dhrol State, to the Political Agent, Western Kathiawar Agency, displayed a very lenient attitude to such hoarding of foodstuffs. The Dewan reported that 'Thakkar Sunderji Nanji's family is big and has a number of dependents and servants', and 'consequently stocked

³⁸ Report of the Inspector of Supplies working under the Controller General of Civil Supplies, Bombay, 15 April 1944, DOF, NAI.

³⁹ *Idem.*

⁴⁰ *Idem.*

⁴¹ See the translation of a report no. C/7 dated 21-3-45 from the Chief Constable, Rajkot Junction, DOF, file no. DFS/C/21, 1945, on the subject "Censored Material: Gur and Sugar", NAI.

*some articles of food and sugar for the use of his family . . . He does no business here.*⁴²

The report of the Inspector of Supplies is full of utterances against the princely states that they themselves were involved in hoarding and profiteering, in addition to private traders. Therefore, he suggested steps to put the states under harness.

The Food Dept has suggested Grain monopolies, and I have supplemented this suggestion by advising States to undertake procurement and distribution through a State Department and not through a Syndicate. A Syndicate is open to objection at once, because it is a cloak and can be used as a Whipping Boy. It is a cloak for the Darbar's vested interests and can be whipped when criticism begins. For this reason States are not willing to undertake a State monopoly, because they realise that criticism would be directed against the administration and if this criticism continued, we would be bound to interfere.⁴³

Interestingly, the report did not recommend any reduction in the quantity for private consumption. Instead, it said that consumers should be able to buy 'adequate' supplies. Not only that, the consumers should have these supplies guaranteed. However, the report did put a cap on uncontrolled stocking-up by suggesting that no individual should be permitted to hold for more than two months' needs at any time. Individuals could do so only under a permit, obtainable for a small fee. It seems that the inspector hoped to discourage unnecessary stocking-up by making consumers pay for a permit.⁴⁴

However, the inspector was thoroughly aware of the intractable realities on the ground. Therefore, he reported: 'I am afraid these proposals would not be accepted by States as they have neither the staff nor the inclination to take over such task. They will not tie up capital which could be used more

⁴² Copy of the D.O. letter No. 21 dated the 23rd May 1945 from the Dewan, Dhrol State, to the Political Agent, Western Kathiawar Agency, DOF, NAI. Emphasis mine.

⁴³ Report of the Inspector of Supplies working under the Controller General of Civil Supplies, Bombay, 15 April 1944, NAI.

⁴⁴ *Idem*.

advantageously in speculation. They will not stand the risk of suffering any loss, and they cannot understand that merchants and commission agents are not indispensable.’⁴⁵

As an alternative to outright refusal, the states also had the option of going for a token acceptance of the recommendations. The inspector was all too aware of the possible strategies for evasion. He suggested that the states might accept the recommendations in theory, but not comply in practice. And, if their comments were invited on the recommendations, they would claim themselves to have thought of the idea many months ago and have already put it into operation. Therefore, according to the inspector, the only way to move beyond this sort of verbal implementation was to take over one of the maritime states in western India and make an example of it.⁴⁶

Interestingly, unlike in the case of grains, traders were very much in favour of direct purchases by the government in case of some foodstuffs such as *ghee*, that is, clarified butter. For instance, an intercepted joint telegram dated 28th February 1945 from Natwarlal Solicitor, Bhaishanker Kanga, and Girdhar Solicitor, all of Bombay, to Jamsaheb, Palance, Jamnagar, read:

GOVT INTEND STOPPING PURCHASE OF GHEE FROM KATHIAWAR STATE STOP PLEASE WIRE HON MEMBER AS UNDER UNDERSTAND GOVT. HAVE DECIDED TO DISCONTINUE PURCHASE OF GHEE KATHIAWAR STATE STOP THIS AREA SURPLUS IF GOVT. PURCHASES ARE STOPPED ENTIRELY IT WILL CAUSE COMPLETE DISLOCATION OF GHEE TRADE AND HARDSHIP ON FARMERS WHO WERE ENCOURAGED TO PRODUCE GHEE FOR DEFENCE SERVICES STOP GHEE TRADE CANNOT GO ON DUE TO WAR CONDITION SCARCITY OF TINS STOP SHALL FEEL GRATEFUL IF YOU WILL PLEASE SEE THAT ATLEAST SOME QUOTA IS ALLOWED TO THIS AREA STOP GHEE PRODUCED IN KATHIAWAR IS CONSIDERED BEST QUALITY AND STATE GRADING STATIONS DEPEND ENTIRELY ON EXPORT TRADE STOP LETTER FOLLOWS STOP REGARDS⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Idem.

⁴⁶ Idem.

⁴⁷ Copy of the intercepted telegram dated 28th February 1945 from Natwarlal Solicitor, Bhaishanker Kanga and Girdhar Solicitor, Albert Building, Fort, Bombay to Jamsaheb, Palance, Jamnagar, enclosed to the copy of demi-official letter no. F-38(4)-I.B. / 45 dated the 13th March 1945 from

The reason for this strong support for direct state purchase was that in case of food items like *ghee*, direct purchase by the state actually helped the price to remain high. The censor's comment on the intercepted telegram corroborates to this situation. The censor noted 'Letter(s) recently intercepted from some of the Western States have contained bitter complaints of the high price of ghee, particularly in Baroda State, where it is alleged to cost Rs. 90/- a maund.'⁴⁸ Subsequently, a government note maintained that large government purchases of *ghee* in Kathiawar had the effect of pushing up the price for the public very steeply. The note observed that 'For months now the price of Ghee has ranged between Rs. 110/- and 85/- instead of Rs. 30/- to Rs. 35/- which it was in normal times.'⁴⁹

There were further contradictions in the situation. On the one hand, restrictions on the domestic movement of food stuffs often limited the scope of making profits legally. On the other, soaring food prices internationally during the war tempted the merchants to export food from India clandestinely, violating domestic restrictions. Due to wartime restrictions, trade activities that had been seen as normal before the war now came to be branded as 'smuggling'. As we will see in chapter 4, the extent of state attention that international movement of food from and to India received during the war is astonishing. The colonial state developed an elaborate machinery to detect the inter-country web of food smuggling during the war. But, often nothing much could be done to prevent such smuggling due to non-cooperation by the princely states, which became the points of illegal export as it was becoming more and more difficult to use the ports in British India for illegal export. For instance, after receiving a letter that was intercepted by the Censor Station at Quetta,⁵⁰ the Director of Food Supplies, Kathiawar,

the Political Department, New Delhi, to the Hon'ble the Resident at Baroda and for the States of Western India and Gujarat, DOF, NAI.

⁴⁸ Censor comment on *ibid*.

⁴⁹ Government note dated 23-3-1945, DOF, NAI.

⁵⁰ The intercepted letter read 'We have sent through Bank Mille Rials 600000/- to Moramal. At Bunder Abbas for purchasing Gur @ 25/- Rials per Kilo. In Zahedan it will cost us Rials 35/- per Kilo. Here Gur price has gone upto 46/- Rials per Kilo. Our profit will be approximately 30 %.

Rajkot, informed the Dewan of Porbandar State that he had received information about impending attempts to 'smuggle' *gur*, that is, jaggery, from the Porbandar State to the Persian port of Bandar Abbas. Consequently, the Director requested the Dewan to ensure that no *gur* was smuggled out of his state.⁵¹

The tenor of the reply from the Dewan is revealing; it demonstrates the indifferent attitude of the Porbandar State towards the possibility of having a domestic crisis of foodstuff because of rampant export due to the lucrative prices prevailing abroad. In addition, it also demonstrates how the state prioritized the need to maintain an efficient image of itself over and above the actual gravity of the concerns expressed by the colonial state. The Dewan replied:

It is reported that there has been no instance of any smuggling of *gur* from Porbandar either to Persian Gulf ports or to any other place. While trusting that no credence will be given to such baseless information, I feel that attempts to disseminate information which tend to mislead the authorities and create undesirable impression about the port should not be allowed to be made with impunity. I shall therefore be glad if you will please see your way to further scrutinize the sources of your information and let me know the steps you propose to take to discourage the spread of such unfounded rumours.⁵²

This episode illustrates how the wartime food problem, and its various ramifications, became an important factor in the relation between the Government of India on the one hand, and the princely states on the other. Further, food surveillance during the war demonstrated the general importance of gathering, controlling, and disseminating information on the food situation. The importance of publicity of food information was

Probably it will be more even if *Gur* is exported from India direct. It is now learnt that Boats are plying between Por Bunder and Bunder Abbas without any restriction.' Letter dated 24-2-44 (bearing postmark dated 1-3-44) from Verhomal Mohandas, Zahedan to Totaram, Hemraj, Shikarpur, intercepted on 8-3-44 at Quetta by the Censor Station, Major, Quetta. file no. DFS/C/21, 1945, on the subject "Censored Material: *Gur* and Sugar", NAI.

⁵¹ The letter no. N/1 dated 29th March 1944 marked as 'secret' from the Director of Food Supplies, Kathiawar, Rajkot, to the Dewan of Porbandar State. DOF, NAI.

⁵² See the letter no. C/3.11 of 1944, 13 April 1944, from the Dewan, Porbandar State, to the Director of Food Supplies, Kathiawar, Rajkot, DOF, NAI, New Delhi.

acknowledged in a different context by the Regional Food Commissioner of the Eastern Region, who, in the context of the acute food shortage in Bengal in 1943, observed that the Bengal government 'could not reach the ears and minds of the people of Bengal because it had, until too late, no publicity or public relations department.'⁵³ This admission suggests that government officials were gradually noting the significance of having, or not having, an active publicity machinery while dealing with a sensitive issue like food in a country where starvation was always a possibility for huge sections of the population.

IV. The State in the Kitchen

This section now turns to the second phase of state intervention in food that finally resulted in an extraordinary increase in state control over everyday life. As the war progressed, the rapidly worsening *civil* food scene became increasingly difficult to miss, and it forced the colonial state in India to re-think its theoretical position vis-à-vis food. Towards the end of 1942, the signs of scarcity became manifest, and the next year Bengal entered a period of one of the most disastrous famines in human history known so far, whereby more or less three million people died.⁵⁴ The colossal tragedy in Bengal led to questioning of the food policies of the Raj both in the colony and in the metropolis. Now, being compelled to deviate from the earlier policy of interfering 'as little as possible' with local or religious customs, the state decided to enter the arena of civil food with stringent laws. As we shall see later in this chapter, these laws affected everyday existence at the most micro

⁵³ H. B. L. Braund, *Memorandum of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund on Events from March 1943 to the end of 1943 in relation to the Food Situation in Bengal*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1944, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, NAI, New Delhi, p. 44.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the debate about famine mortality in the Bengal Famine of 1943, see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999 (first published 1981), appendix D, 'Famine Mortality: A Case Study', pp. 195-216. See also Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, appendix C, 'Famine Mortality, 1943-46', pp. 299-315.

level possible. Foodstuffs of every kind became subject to tight state regulation.

A very interesting and novel tool of state intervention in food consumption were the various 'austerity measures' that were to be followed during various social and religious occasions in order to stop, or at least reduce, 'wasteful consumption'. Of course, state intervention in this direct form did not find much favour with India's religious authorities, and was sometimes actively resisted. We would discuss that shortly. For the time being, let us just keep in mind that state control did estrange at least some sections of the civil population from the state. However, as the colonial state did not face any active opposition to austerity measures by the wider public, it decided to continue with its policy of controlling exorbitant consumption of food on religious occasions. And, quite understandably, it was impossible to differentiate between different religions in this matter. Consequently, in Bombay, the appeals of Fazal Ibrahim Rahimtoola for permission for the distribution of food on the occasion of Moharram was rejected on the ground that the authorities 'do not see how we can admit them as valid in favour of the Muslim community when they have been rejected in respect of other communities like Sikhs'.⁵⁵

Not only from the point of view of religion, the austerity measures are revealing from the point of view of class too. It seems that the colonial state was eager to give the impression that in restraining 'wasteful consumption' it was being fair to all classes. Blatant favour to any class could have mobilized popular sentiment against the state, a situation that the state had no intention to face in the midst of the war that had already thrown an almost unmanageable additional workload on its shoulder. It may have been for these reasons that the social and sporting clubs that offered respite to hard-pressed and mainly European civil servants in larger cities decided to comply

⁵⁵ 'Austerity Meals', DOF(R), file no. 1000/1, vol. 1, pp.18-19, NAI.

voluntarily, and with much fanfare, with the new 'austerity' rules regarding consumption of food.

Most of the clubs decided to stop serving eatables during entertainments and to restrict the number of guests. Many clubs stopped the practice of taking out food from their premises. Many of them stopped serving rice, sandwiches, and toasts, as these items required the two major grains - rice and wheat.⁵⁶ Some of the leading clubs in Bombay decided not to allow their members to invite guests to dinner; they also made attempt to curtail the number of dinners and monthly dance-nights. The Secretary of Willingdon Sports Club of Bombay wrote to the Regional Food Commission, Bombay: 'You will observe, that as a result of cuts we have made sure that the club draws no ration of rice and only utilises 70 % of bread permissible, and although Government permits parties to a limit of 24 we don't allow in excess of 20 persons per party.'⁵⁷ The Cricket Club of India, Bombay, informed the Food Commissioner that they ceased serving rice completely. 'The Club had decided that it will serve only one roll or one slice of bread during principal meals— breakfast, lunch and dinners. Apart from other measures, it also decided to cut out cakes, toasts and sandwiches'.⁵⁸

Interestingly, the wartime scarcity gave birth to new distinctions between 'luxury' food and 'indispensable' food. The Government of India asked the provincial governments to impose restrictions on the use of flour, milk, cream, and sugar in confectioneries and cafes making 'luxury items' like pastries, cakes, chocolates and ice-cream et cetera that were consumed only by the wealthy.⁵⁹ The central government's *raison d'être* behind this was that considerable amount of wheat and other ingredients could be saved by

⁵⁶ The Director of Civil Supplies, Bombay, to Secretary, Government of India, Department of Food , DOF(R), file RP 1085, 1946, p. 77, NAI.

⁵⁷ See the Secretary's letter dated 15 March 1946, DOF(R), file R.P.1085, 1946, p. 234, NAI.

⁵⁸ From the Cricket Club of India, Bombay, to the Regional Food Commissioner, Bombay, DOF(R), GOI, file. R. P.1085, 1946, p. 230, NAI.

⁵⁹ B. R. Sen, Secretary to Government of India, DOF, to all Provinces and Administrations, 23 February 1946, 'Economy in the use of Food stuffs', DOF(R), GOI, file R.P. 1085, 1946, p. 13, NAI.

prohibiting such luxury items. Many members of the public, such as Mrs. K. M. Routh, a lady from Bombay, had written about how wheat can be saved by prohibiting its use in 'unnecessary item of diet' like cake.⁶⁰ Many provinces, such as Punjab and Bombay, implemented the centre's directive in this matter. For instance, an order published in the *Extraordinary Punjab Government Gazette* banned the manufacture for selling purposes of cakes and pastries in which the flour of any cereal was an ingredient.⁶¹ Similarly, the Bombay Government prohibited the use of wheat products in the preparation of cakes, pastries, and sweetmeats 'intended for sale, or for service or distribution at a public place.'⁶²

Along with grains and flour, consumption of sugar and milk was also under strict state surveillance and control. For example, in 1945 the *Madras Milk Control Order* was issued which notified that:

use of milk in the manufacture for sale of products such as ice-cream, badam kheer, milk syrup, cream cakes, kova or other sweetmeats either wholly or in part out of milk is prohibited. The question of effecting cuts in the sugar quotas to bulk consumers like hotels, confectioners etc. is under consideration . . . In Madras city the Commissioner of Civil Supply has already prohibited the manufacture of more than 6 varieties of sweet preparations in hotels and sweet meat stalls per day.⁶³

Similarly, in Bombay, an order was passed banning the use of fresh milk of any kind in the preparation of tea, coffee et cetera by catering establishments, teashops, and hawkers of tea and coffee. In place of fresh liquid milk, only dried skimmed milk powder was allowed to be used.⁶⁴ The compulsory use of skimmed milk powder in restaurants and teashops released fresh milk for

⁶⁰ See the letter of Mrs. K. M. Routh, a lady from Bombay, to the Viceroy Lord Wavell, 15 February 1946, in 'Policy Regarding Supply of Rations of flour (maida) to Bakeries and Catering Establishments, DOF(R), GOI, file RP-1000/57, 1946, p. 18, NAI.

⁶¹ *The Tribune*, 9 March, 1946, p. 8.

⁶² Government of Bombay, *Food Advisory Council: 1942 – 1944*, with a foreword by Sir Henry Knight, Government of Bombay Press, Bombay, not dated, p. 11, in Henry Knight papers, box – 1, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

⁶³ DOF(R), GOI, file R. P. 1085, 1946, p. 51, NAI.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

rationing outlets, which resulted in the temporary increase in the quantity of milk-ration from 8 oz. to 16 oz. in Bombay.⁶⁵

There were further restrictive measures, with equally far-reaching consequences for patterns of diet. In Karachi, each ration card holder could buy maximum 3 eggs a day. To get their supply of eggs, hotels, bakeries, and even hospitals in Karachi needed to obtain permits from the Sind Government.⁶⁶ To reduce consumption of poultry exceeding supply, the Bombay Government prohibited the serving of poultry in any restaurant or eating house on Mondays and Fridays.⁶⁷ The central government issued directives to all the provinces that a strict three-courses meal must be enforced in all eating places open to public such as canteens and restaurants to stop wastage. Accordingly, many provinces passed necessary legislations or orders restricting 'wasteful consumption'. The Bombay Government, for example, passed an order prohibiting the serving of meals exceeding three courses at any catering establishments.⁶⁸ The Punjab Government passed an order completely banning consumption of bread at commercial eating-places, and by bread the order meant loaf bread, *chapati*, *poori*, *parantha*, *phulka*, and *nan*.⁶⁹ The order was supplemented by further notifications that informed general public that those found guilty of evading the order would be punished severely.⁷⁰

Everyday consumption patterns were deeply affected by such sudden state intervention in food consumption. Because of the aforementioned order, at any eating-place outside home, the people of Punjab had to give up their age-old habit of eating breads with curries and were forced to eat curries alone. Quite naturally, this measure proved extremely unpopular. Thus, the

⁶⁵ *All India Monthly Report on Food Position for the month of March 1945*, file no. 1 (14)- IB/45, 1945, on the subject 'Monthly reports on food situation in India and Indian States', p. 4, Political Department, Intelligence Bureau branch, GOI, NAI.

⁶⁶ 'All-India Monthly Report on Food Position for the month of February, 1945', file no. 1 (14)- IB/45, 1945, p. 4, Political Department, Intelligence Bureau branch, NAI.

⁶⁷ Government of Bombay, *Food Advisory Council: 1942 – 1944*, p. 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁹ *The Tribune*, 9 March 1946, p. 5.

⁷⁰ *The Tribune*. 23 March, 1946, p. 6.

austerity measures were often insensitive to the food habits of the locals. The state expected people to change their food habits overnight. In the particular case in Punjab, the fact was completely overlooked that unlike western countries the Indians were not accustomed to eat curries alone, they needed to team it with either rice or *roti*. Now, the fact that the Government of Punjab was not colonial in the conventional sense, as it was run by elected parties in the provincial legislative assembly led by the Unionist Party, makes this sort of restriction on consumption more difficult to understand. The only explanation could be that instead of enduring the pain of formulating orders according to local customs and situation in addition to a huge burden of war-related workload, provinces took the shortcut of imitating the central colonial state in formulating austerity measures.

The extent of the details in the Punjab order was astonishing. It minutely prescribed every possible detail of the restrictions such as how many dishes should constitute a meal, what should be the main and subsidiary dishes, how they should be served etc. As per the order, no biscuits, rusks, roll, or pastries could be served with tea or coffee. They could be served only with lunch or dinner as main ingredients of a subsidiary or a savoury or a sweet dish.⁷¹ Precisely, the very amount of details like this rendered government austerity measures incapable of accommodating modifications according to local customs and situation.

However, there were considerable differences in the treatment of 'wasteful consumption' by various provinces; not all provinces were enthusiastic about implementing food austerity measures. The economic consequences of austerity measures were not too easy for every province to overlook. In cosmopolitan cities like Lucknow, the absence of any alternative to the rigid three-course meal considerably hampered the business of the catering establishments, because the population of Lucknow comprised considerable number of Punjabis and Bengalis in addition to locals. As is common

⁷¹ *The Tribune*, 9 March, 1946. p. 5.

knowledge, their food habits differed from each other immensely and demanded different sets of meals. But, in the new situation, there was no scope for caterers to accommodate intra-population variations in food.⁷² In the face of rigid government controls, many catering establishments had to shut their business; and thus many were suddenly left unemployed. Because of these developments, the United Province government did not attempt to implement the austerity measures too stringently.⁷³

V. Popular Engagement with State Controls

Obviously, the food controls of the central colonial state and some provincial states attracted considerable amount of popular attention. Often the states were actively resisted from intervening in distribution and consumption of food as these were considered by many an autonomous area of life where the state should have no say. The reaction of the Sikh community in the city of Bombay is illuminating in this matter. By one of the austerity orders dated 6 June 1945, the Government of Bombay prohibited offering and distribution of raw foodgrains, eatables, milk and any beverage in which milk was used (except tea or coffee) to fifty or more people at any function in the city of Bombay and the districts in its suburbs.⁷⁴ However, in violation of the order, some leaders of Guru Singh Sabha were distributing food in Bombay from a gurdwara according to their religious custom. Police acted fast. The religious leaders were arrested.

However, the scale of reaction to the arrests completely surprised the Bombay Government. The arrests became a major issue with the Sikh community in Bombay; and quite unexpectedly, they succeeded in mobilizing the Sikhs in other parts of the country too. For instance, the Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Delhi passed a resolution on 20 July 1945 condemning the ban by

⁷² Letter from R. N. Smith, Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces, to W. H. Kirby, Rationing Advisor to the Government of India, 21 March 1946, DOF(R), GOI, file RP- 1085, 1946, p. 42, NAI.

⁷³ *Idem.*

⁷⁴ DOF(R), file. R. P. 1085, 1945, p. 30, NAI.

the rationing authorities on free distribution of food on religious occasions and demanding immediate withdrawal of the case against the Sikh leaders to 'appease the injured feelings of the Sikhs'. The resolution did not stop there; it also contained warning to the government that they must refrain from any such interference in religious matters in future.⁷⁵

Similar resentments were expressed by other sections of the population too. For example, in Bombay city, the *Gowlis* (milkmen) resented the restriction on the use of fresh milk as it was affecting their business, and once they resorted to an ingenious form of protest, whereby one morning they brought their milk to the Secretariat in Bombay and poured the milk out on its doorstep.⁷⁶ However, Henry Knight, the principal British food administrator in Bombay, saw this form of protest as a 'futile waste' of milk, and claimed that 'The resulting public indignation at this futile waste at a time when children were going short of milk was that thereafter the Bombay Government had public support for whatever further measures were necessary in trying to provide Bombay with more and better milk.'⁷⁷

In general, everywhere the sweets industry was hard-hit by the controlled supply of sugar. It prevented the *halwais* (traditional sweet makers) and confectioners from making additional amount of sweets for festival days, which had earned them great profit before the war. Some of the confectioneries even had to shut their business. For example, the Confectioners' Association of Kasauli in Punjab decided to close their business, because despite attempts, the association could not restore the 'drastically reduced' quota of sugar to the pre-war level of freely available sugar.⁷⁸

The closure of many hotels and restaurants due to stringent food austerity rules regarding procurement and use of cooking ingredients put particularly

⁷⁵ 'Austerity Meals', DOF (R), GOI, file. 1000/1, vol.1, 1945, p. 1, NAI.

⁷⁶ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 208.

⁷⁷ *Idem.*

⁷⁸ See *The Tribune*, 1 October, 1945, p. 9.

those sections of population in distress that had either no cooking arrangements or anyone to cook at home, and therefore were completely dependent on hotels and restaurants for cooked food. In big cities, particularly the migrant labourers, footpath dwellers, vagabonds, and beggars who were dependent on cheap restaurants or *pice* hotels, had to suffer considerably due to the austerity measures. In this connection, we have to keep in mind that the rapid expansion of cities during the war and the employment opportunities generated by the war in cities had already attracted such people to the cities on an unprecedented large scale.

From the official circles, it was claimed that overall during the years of wartime scarcity, significant sections of the Indian society felt that the austerity measures were, in the final analysis, in the interests of the country as a whole. In the context of the order passed by the Bombay Government on 30 January 1943, prohibiting the feeding of fifty or more guests at any religious or social gathering,⁷⁹ the prominent Bombay food administrator Henry Knight later claimed that ‘Though some few people resented the limitation of their well-meant hospitality, or of the exhibition of their social importance among the less well to do, the order was welcomed by the majority’.⁸⁰ The government orders armed those who did not want to, or, could not afford to feed a huge number of guests, but were forced to do so by socio-cultural pressure. Knight pointed out that ‘they could now plead “government orders” and avoid the ruinous entertainment of the large numbers of relations, friends, acquaintances, and strangers which custom imposed on various occasions’.⁸¹

It seems quite probable, therefore, that wartime austerity measures helped to bring in significant changes in patterns of family hospitality. In Knight’s words, ‘a useful social reform among both Indians and Europeans was thus a by-product of food control – at least during the war. The order had also the

⁷⁹ Government of Bombay, *Food Advisory Council: 1942 – 1944*, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 207.

⁸¹ *Idem*.

effect of preventing the ostentatious display of the rich feasting in sight of the poor and helped the people to realize that all were in the same food boat.⁸² Of course, Knight's certainty in claiming such credit for the colonial state might well be questioned. In November 1943, during a debate on a motion regarding food situation in the Central Legislative Assembly, an European member from Knight's province, that is, Bombay, pointed out that to dodge the limit of fifty guests, rich hosts were organizing feasts under the names of more than one ostensible host, and thus increasing the number of guests to hundreds.⁸³ However, despite taking Knight's bias as a colonial food administrator into account, it is difficult to refute the strong possibility that some reforms indeed took place vis-à-vis the food cultures of many Indians.

Notably, the wartime concerns with 'wasteful consumption', and the state intervention to stop it, did not end with the end of the war, but rather outlasted it. The rationing authorities did not view the 'austerity measures' as purely wartime ad-hoc measures; after the war they opposed the argument that as the war had ended, the idea of austerity should be scrapped. Instead, they argued strongly '... the end of the War has not brought any change for the better in the supply position; and we feel that measures which were devised with a view to avoiding wasteful consumption of food should continue to be enforced with the same rigidity as before'.⁸⁴ In accordance with this view, a further order came into effect from 17 March 1946, which prohibited the population of Bombay and suburban districts from entertaining more than twenty-five people at any function.

Regulations of this sort had a long afterlife under the post-colonial state. The Indian state after independence has continued with elaborate laws to curb wasteful consumption. S. Bhoothalingam, another civil servant who served during the war, wrote as late as in 1993: 'In fact, many of the controls had not

⁸² *Idem.*

⁸³ See the speech by Mr E. L. C. Gwilt, member from the Bombay European seat, in 'Motion regarding the food situation – Debate in the Central Legislative Assembly – November 1943', compiled in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom, 1943-1944*, part 2, p. 1942.

⁸⁴ 'Austerity Meals', DOF(R), file. 1000/1, vol.1, pp.18-19, NAI.

only come into being during World War II, but had developed to very nearly the present shape'.⁸⁵ For a long time after independence, at least on paper, the social and religious ceremonies in India were legally bound to restrict the number of guests. In 1950, the central government's Ministry of Food introduced the Food Economy and Guest Control Order applicable to all provinces, whereby the central government prohibited feeding of more than fifty guests at social functions and limited the number of dishes to be served to prevent 'criminal wastage' of food. Further, the order limited the number of courses served at commercial eateries, and stipulated the items in each course, and banned the serving of rice in 'European-style' eateries.⁸⁶ Though this central order was withdrawn in 1954,⁸⁷ yet subsequently many provincial governments issued similar orders such as the Bihar Limitation of Guests Order, 1959, Assam Second Guest Control Order, 1966, Andhra Pradesh Guest Control Order, 1972, and Mizoram Guest Control Order, 1972.⁸⁸ The theoretical and structural roots of all these laws sprouted during the war. Thus in India, the war made the permanent way for state intervention in one of the most fundamental prerequisites of human existence called food.

VI. Conclusion

The phased process of the state's growing presence in the eating arrangements of its subjects during the war is striking. When the colonial

⁸⁵ S. Bhoothalingam, *Reflections on an Era: Memoirs of a Civil Servant*, Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., Madras, 1993, p. 189.

⁸⁶ For a detailed discussion on the Food Economy and Guest Control Order, 1950, see Hayden S. Kantor 'A Dead Letter of the Statute Book': The Strange Bureaucratic Life of the Bihar Food Economy and Guest Control Order, 1950-1954', *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2016.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁸⁸ For full text of the Assam and Mizoram orders, see respectively annexure 1 and 2, Centre for Consumer Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, *Report on Assessment of Wastage of Food and Ostentatious Behaviour During Social Gatherings (Marriages/ Parties/ Meetings, etc) in National Capital Region Delhi*, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 139-150. For a brief mention of the Andhra Pradesh order, see Vivek Agnihotri, 'A Whistleblower's Dilemma: Deft Handling of the Violation of a Draconian Law in the 1970s', *The Hindu*, 7 September 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/a-whistleblowers-dilemma/article6386644.ece>, accessed on 30 December 2016.

state started intervening in food, it instantly earned itself popular attention in quotidian life. As food was unavoidable, so was interaction with the state managing it.

The phases in this journey of the state towards the kitchen of its subjects coincided with the phases in the politico-military calculations and needs of the war. As long as the war efforts could be maintained without intervening in civil food, the colonial state showed no interest in getting involved in the civil food situation of the country. Its engagement with food was limited to efforts to manipulate the already existing food cultures in order to have an opposition-free provisioning arrangement for the army. But later, when curtailing civil food consumption and ensuring somewhat equitable distribution of available supplies became a precondition for securing enough for the army, the colonial state entered the ring of civil food with the whip of food laws. However, controlling everyday food distribution and consumption required prior information about existing practices of food transactions and patterns of consumption. Hence the gaze of the state was now set on such transactions and patterns. When intelligence surveillance somewhat familiarized the state with the nebulous world of civil food, the state went ahead to actually dictate everyday distribution and consumption.

As mentioned earlier, state control over everyday food was conceived as a necessary wartime measure. Though initially vast number of Indians viewed such control as interference in native practices, and therefore often lamented the introduction of food control, yet, the continuance of such control far into the post-war period conveys that in the long run such state intervention was accepted as necessary. In a country like India with a long history of chronic civil hunger, malnutrition, and periodic famines, state intervention in quotidian food was long due. The war acted as a sudden push in bringing about that long overdue intervention. Of course, this intervention in civil food during the war was boxed in military calculations. But, with the end of the war, the core of state intervention was still found useful in mitigating continuing social disparities in access to food. Despite initial apprehension

and averseness in accepting state intervention in food, and despite its many imperfections, by the time the war ended, the state's legitimate role in food had taken deep root in popular expectations, and proved much longer-lasting than could have been predicted at the time.

* * *

Chapter 3

Indian Rationing in Comparative Perspective

I. Introduction

A rationing system manifests the typical characteristics of a social invention When rationing spreads throughout a society, a new state-way is emerging. Fundamental cultural attitudes regarding the appropriate methods of distributing goods are being revised. New modes of cooperation, voluntary or enforced, and new techniques of social control are being tested. The foundations of group morale during crises are laid bare. Rationing is urgent in its motivation and widely ramifying in its effects; it deserves to be called a major social invention.¹

These words during the war by C. Arnold Anderson, a contemporary social scientist, duly recognized that the introduction of rationing during the war was nothing short of a 'major social invention'. Rationing curtailed individual's right to purchase.² Consequently, it redefined the socially and culturally accepted limits of consumption, sparked debates about definitions of abundance and scarcity, and in turn dictated social action in situations that corroborated to those definitions. However, newer forms of social action regarding consumables such as food could not come into being without a gamut of political as well as

¹ C. Arnold Anderson, 'Food Rationing and Morale', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, Feb. 1943, p. 23.

² Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943): Speech by the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council and Other Papers*, presented by the Secretary of State for India to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, October 1943, His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1943, p. 21.

administrative inventions. Thus, rationing was not merely a 'social invention', it was very much a political invention too. This chapter explores the intricate economic and administrative morphology of this invention in India, against the backdrop of comparisons with British rationing.

The very idea of intervening in an indispensable necessity for the daily existence of humankind, namely food, marked a flash point in the ideas of governance in colonial India. When the central and provincial governments decided to control food, the limits of acceptable state intervention in everyday life were substantially pushed. Notably, at the initial stage, rationing in India had to face tremendous opposition. Before the war, even in the first few years of the war, the need to control food distribution and consumption was not felt in the government circles. The study of Indian food policies between 1939 and 1954 by S. C. Joseph, an Indian agricultural economist, provides the best summary of the reasons for the lack of any need for or intention to control the supply, distribution, and consumption of food in the first two years of the war in five points. Firstly, as India was geographically located far away from the main 'theatres of war', the colonial government did not feel any need to overhaul the existing food procurement machinery for the British Indian Army.³ The army was allowed to continue its existing practice of procuring foodstuffs through a vast network of indigenous buying agents, in the form of either trading houses or individual dealers. As there was no clash between civil consumption and procurement for the army, there was no need to prioritize supply for the army over the usual intake by the civilians. Consequently, private trade channels that catered for civil demand for food were left uncontrolled.

Secondly, until the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, an overall confidence reigned in government circles that the usual supply for the civilians would continue throughout the war. Thirdly, as indicated in the first chapter, the colonial state,

³ S. C. Joseph, *Food Policy and Economic Development in India*, Allied Publishers Private Limited, Bombay, 1961, p. 34.

indigenous political parties, agriculturalists, and traders all were under the tight grip of older *laissez faire* attitudes towards agricultural products. State intervention in food was abhorred by all parties. Fourthly, on the one hand, the political (and consequently administrative) division of India into eleven provinces that constituted the 'British India', and more than five hundred princely states, and on the other hand the vested interests of the grain-surplus provinces, prevented the central government from trying its hand at food control on an all-India level. Fifthly, in the surplus provinces, there was a broad popular consensus that the Indian peasantry deserved 'a fair deal now' with regard to the wartime hike in food prices, so that they could somewhat make up for the losses that they suffered due to plummeting agricultural prices during the world economic depression in the 1930s.⁴

Thus, during the first few years of the war, from the colonial state's side there was neither any necessity nor intention to intervene in established patterns of food distribution and consumption. However, suddenly in mid-1943, when the conduct of the war was at a critical moment, the colonial state introduced rationing in a hasty manner. Naturally, it is important to understand what caused this sudden change in the colonial government's stance with regard to food.

Between July and December 1943, approximately a million civilians, in excess of the yearly average number of deaths, died of starvation and starvation-related diseases, largely because of aberrantly high price of food.⁵ Such a huge number of famine mortality became a severe embarrassment for the British empire in both India and abroad, severely undermining the hegemony and benevolence-claims of the Raj. In addition, official anxiety about social unrest grew rapidly. This

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999 (first published 1981), p. 196. For monthly famine mortality for the period from July 1943 until June 1944, see *ibid.*, p. 214. For a detailed discussion of the debate about famine mortality in the Bengal Famine, see *ibid.*, appendix D, 'Famine Mortality: A Case Study', pp. 195-216. See also Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, appendix C, 'Famine Mortality, 1943-46', pp. 299-315.

anxiety was explicitly voiced in the report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee. While discussing the exorbitant inflation in food prices, the committee commented that 'Hungry men do not discriminate and social unrest does not stop at Provincial frontiers. The Centre, all the Provinces and all the States have a common interest in seeing that the situation does not get out of hand.'⁶ Against this backdrop, thoughts in favour of having some sort of state initiative to secure an equitable distribution of food gained currency within the Food Department of the central government in Delhi.

Before we discuss the details of rationing arrangements in India in length, a comparative study of the broader aspects of rationing in Britain and India would be highly beneficial for preparing the ground for our understanding of the purposes, nature, and outcomes of rationing in the Indian colony. When we compare rationing in colonial India with metropolitan rationing, we understand how closely Indian rationing was linked to the war calculations of the colonial state. Further, the differences between the metropolitan and colonial rationing exposes the predicaments of rationing in India. Comparisons with Britain often help us to understand better the successes and failures of Indian rationing.

II. Metropolitan and Colonial: Differences and Parallels

The Government of India's senior political leadership was sharply aware of the developments in the wartime food administration in metropolitan Britain. Accordingly, Lord Linlithgow, and then Viscount Wavell, as respective Viceroys of India, repeatedly requested Leopold Amery (1873-1955), the Secretary of State for India and Burma between May 1940 and July 1945, to send officers from the Ministry of Food in Britain to India to advise the Government of India on rationing and general food administration.⁷ In his later to the Secretary of State, Viceroy

⁶ Foodgrains Policy Committee (hereafter FPC), *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, 1943*, Sir Theodore Gregory, Chairman, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1946, p. 91.

⁷ See the communications marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL' dated respectively 19 December 1942 (MSS. EUR. F. 125/23), 5 January 1943 (MSS. EUR. F. 125/12), and 11 January 1943 (MSS.

Linlithgow admitted that the Government of India was utterly inexperienced in the job of implementing rationing: 'we may have to consider rationing in certain of the big cities (it is obviously not practical politics in the countryside) and we are of course very innocent here of any of the practical experience of handling that problem at home which would be so very valuable.'⁸ Therefore, the Government of India tried to learn from the British rationing system, and often sought guidance from the food officials in Britain. While requesting visits by the officers from the Ministry of Food in Britain, Linlithgow's successor Wavell argued 'the better our food problem is understood at home, the more likely we are to get adequate help.'⁹ Finally, two officials named Mr Vigor and Mr Kirby from the Ministry of Food in Britain was lent to the Government of India to guide them on rationing. Particularly Mr Kirby was subsequently 'in the thick of food administration in India.'¹⁰ Henry French, another food official from the Ministry of Food, spent six months in India in 1944.¹¹

We can understand the close connection that Government of India's officials charged with responsibility for food had with Britain if we consider the individual background of some of the most notables among them. The chairman of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, whose report was the most important guideline for the development of rationing in India, was Sir Theodore Gregory (1890-1970),

EUR. F. 125/12) from Viceroy Linlithgow to Mr Amery, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7*, vol. III, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1971, document nos. respectively 284, 315, 336, p. 396, pp. 455-456, p. 488. See also minute 2, L/E/8/3301: f 283, 'Food Situation', annexed to War Cabinet W. M. (43) 7th Conclusions, compiled in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 338, p. 492. See further letter marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET' from the Viceroy Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 12 June 1944, L/PO/10/21, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, 1973, document no. 535, pp. 1020-1021.

⁸ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL', 11 January 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 336, p. 488.

⁹ Letter marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET' from Viceroy Wavell to Mr Amery, 12 June 1944, L/PO/10/21, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 535, p. 1021.

¹⁰ *Mr Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow (Extract)*, marked 'PRIVATE', 11 January 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 337, p. 490. See also letter from Mr Amery to Lord Cherwell, the Scientific Adviser to the British Government under Prime Minister Winston Churchill, 22 April 1944, L/E/8/3323: ff 168-9, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 474, p. 913.

¹¹ See the War Cabinet's letter to the Paymaster General F. A. Lindemann on the subject 'Indian Food Grains', 11.10.44, H293/1, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, Nuffield College Library (hereafter NCL), Oxford.

a British economist who was educated at the London School of Economics and who was later a professor of economics at the University of London between 1927 and 1937. Gregory was the Economic Advisor to the Government of India from 1938 until 1946. Presumably, his in-depth familiarity with economic developments in metropolitan Britain coloured his understanding of rationing in India. Similarly, between 1935 and 1945, the Director of the Government of India's Nutrition Research Laboratories was Wallace Ruddell Aykroyd (1899-1979).¹² Aykroyd had medical degrees from the Trinity College, Dublin.¹³ Before coming to India, he had worked in London as a nutrition scientist.¹⁴ He had also worked in Geneva as a nutritionist at the Health Secretariat of the League of Nations.¹⁵ Later, Aykroyd was a member of the official Famine Inquiry Commission appointed by the Government of India in July 1944 to inquire into the Bengal Famine of 1943. He was concerned particularly with the medical side of the famine.¹⁶

Another major British figure in India's wartime food administration was Sir Henry Knight who bore responsibility for food affairs in Bombay. Knight graduated from Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge, and served in the British army during the First World War. In Bombay, he was first the Advisor to the Governor of Bombay in charge of food, and later in 1945 served as the Acting Governor of the province.¹⁷ Manilal B. Nanavati, an Indian member of the official Famine Inquiry Committee, later acknowledged that the rationing system that was introduced in Bombay under the guidance of Knight 'was widely acclaimed as the best in India and was in fact used as a model by several other Provinces in establishing their

¹² W. R. Aykroyd, *The Conquest of Famine*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1974, p. 71.

¹³ Kenneth J. Carpenter, 'The Work of Wallace Aykroyd: International Nutritionist and Author', *The Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 137, no. 4, Apr. 2007, p. 873.

¹⁴ K. J. Carpenter, 'Wallace Ruddell Aykroyd', *Encyclopaedia of Life Sciences*, John Willey and Sons Limited, 2001.

¹⁵ Carpenter, 'The Work of Wallace Aykroyd', p. 874.

¹⁶ Aykroyd, *Conquest of Famine*, p. 71.

¹⁷ See the 'Director's Foreword' by M. K. Bennett, Director of the Food Research Institute at Stanford University, to Sir Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India: 1939-47*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1954, p. vii.

own rationing systems.¹⁸ From India, Knight maintained close relationship with the imperial authorities in London, as proved by the fact that he managed to secure the position of the Advisor to the Secretary of State for India in the India Office in London immediately upon his return to Britain after India's independence in 1947.¹⁹

Another British official in the Indian Civil Service, Leonard George Pinnell (1896 - 1979), in his capacity as the Additional Commissioner of all the coastal divisions of Bengal, oversaw the implementation of the Government of Bengal's notorious 'Denial of Transport' policy in 1942. Thus, Pinnell was responsible the most for the destruction of the boats in coastal Bengal to deny the Japanese soldiers any readily available transport should any Japanese invasion of India took place.²⁰ Such destruction of boats had tremendous adverse effects on the grain trade in eastern Bengal, as the region had numerous rivers, canals, tidal estuaries, bayous and backwaters, and therefore country boats were often the only means of transporting grains in the region.²¹ Again, Pinnell, who played such a crucial role in deteriorating the overall food situation in eastern India, was a man educated at Balliol College in the University of Oxford, and was a veteran of the First World War.²²

As the uppermost stratum of the food administration in wartime India consisted entirely of British officials, they naturally compared the rationing system that they devised in the colony with the rationing arrangements prevailing in Britain. The *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee 1943* made such a comparison in

¹⁸ Manilal B. Nanavati, review of *Food Administration in India: 1939-47* by Sir Henry Knight, *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 3, Sep. 1955, p. 286.

¹⁹ See the 'Director's Foreword' by M. K. Bennett to Knight, *Food Administration*, p. vii.

²⁰ For Pinnell's version of the execution of the 'Denial of transport' policy, see L. G. Pinnell, *With the Sanction of Government: The Memoirs of L.G. Pinnell, I.C.S. (1896-1979)*, published privately by M. C. Pinnell, place of publication not mentioned, 2002, pp. 89-93, in L. G. Pinnell papers, Centre of South Asian Studies (hereafter CSAS), University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

²¹ H. B. L. Braund, *Memorandum of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund on Events from March 1943 to the end of 1943 in relation to the Food Situation in Bengal*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1944, p. 6 and the footnote on p. 6., in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi.

²² L. G. Pinnell, *With the Sanction of Government*, first page of the introduction.

unequivocal words and accepted that 'On many grounds thorough-going rationing is likely to prove more difficult in India than elsewhere, e.g., in the United Kingdom.'²³ It listed five differences between the food situation in the colony and in the metropolis. Firstly, there was 'a much greater homogeneity of consumption standard' in the United Kingdom than in India.²⁴ Unlike in Britain, the food habits and food cultures in India varied greatly according to the differences in region, class, and caste.

Secondly, unlike in India where mainly the staple grains had to be rationed, in Britain staples such as bread and potatoes were not rationed.²⁵ The list of rationed food items in Britain at the beginning of 1942 contained only non-staples such as bacon, ham, sugar, meat, cheese, eggs, and milk.²⁶ This is the fundamental difference between rationing in the metropolis and rationing in the colony. In Britain, there was no immediate shortage of the staple foods; consequently, there was no immediate threat of starvation. In India, in view of the total absence of the staple items in the open markets, those who could afford the high price of non-staples turned to auxiliary items like vegetables and fish, soon exhausting the supply even of these. For poorer Indians, non-staples had always been rarely purchasable luxury items. Thus, disappearance of the staple grains like rice from the open markets meant immediate starvation for them. Hence, mainly the staples were included within the purview of rationing in India.

Thirdly, the Foodgrains Policy Committee noted that in India 'the foodgrains coming on to the market are the marginal accretions, after personal needs have been satisfied, of the output of millions of individual cultivators, cultivating small units in the vast majority of cases, whereas in the United Kingdom . . . the cultivator is in general a capitalistic farmer.'²⁷ Thus, the net availability of

²³ FPC, *Report*, p. 66.

²⁴ *Idem*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

²⁶ J. Henry Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing in Great Britain', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 8, no. 1, Feb. 1942, p. 75.

²⁷ FPC, *Report*, p. 67.

foodgrains for government procurement was comparatively much lower in India.

Fourthly, in Britain actual preparation for wartime food-administration had started even before the outbreak of the war, 'in view of the certainty that an attack on Great Britain's "food lines" would constitute one of the most certain and most serious of the threats which she would have to face.'²⁸ In India, on the other hand, rationing administration developed suddenly in the shadow of the Bengal famine, without any prior preparation, except some earlier periodic conferences on food and food prices that talked about food-control only in theory, as discussed in the first chapter.²⁹ M. Afzal Husain, one of the five members of the official Famine Inquiry Commission in the aftermath of the Bengal famine, later stressed in his minute to the commission that 'On 'looking back' one is astonished at the unpreparedness of India to meet the food situation during an emergency.'³⁰ Husain argued that this unpreparedness was an outcome of the deliberate negligence of India's food situation by the colonial government, despite receiving repeated warnings about India's precarious food position from numerous economists, doctors, and nutritionists over the years.³¹

In contrast, within only four months of the outbreak of the war, Britain was able to introduce rationing in January 1940.³² An elaborate staff of 30,000 food officials could be readily set up to execute the elaborate system of rationing.³³ The appointment of 30,000 officials meant that there was one food official for roughly every 1,500 of the population.³⁴ Against this elaborate food administration in imperial Britain, food administration in wartime India looked particularly precarious given the fact that India had almost 8 times more

²⁸ *Idem.*

²⁹ For a discussion of the prior episodic 'Price Control Conferences' and 'Food Conferences', see Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 36-65.

³⁰ Minute by Mr. M. Afzal Husain, in Famine Inquiry Commission (hereafter FIC), *Report on Bengal*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 198.

³¹ *Idem.*

³² *How Britain was Fed in War Time: Food Control, 1939-1945*, published for the ministry of Food by His Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1946, p. 42.

³³ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', pp. 79-80.

³⁴ *Idem.*

population than Britain and only a tiny fraction of the rationing staff in Britain.

Fifthly and lastly, though the size of the urban population to be rationed in India was smaller than the size of some of the rationed populations in Europe, yet the urban population in India was scattered over an immense territory.³⁵ The long distance between any two rationed cities in India made coordination and management of rationing machinery difficult.

An academic study of British rationing by John Henry Richardson (1890-1970), a professor of economics at the University of Leeds, published in the midst of the war in 1942, provides a concise summary of the compulsion behind government rationing in wartime Britain: 'Until rationing is introduced shortages result in rush to buy supplies so that the shortage is aggravated . . . Queues are formed outside the shops and much annoyance and uneasiness results. These and other difficulties are avoided when rationing is introduced, and the psychology of the public towards the shortage is improved.'³⁶

This British concern about improving 'the psychology of the public towards the shortage' found clear resonance in the Indian colony when the Foodgrains Policy Committee in India too talked of holding 'food morale'. The committee argued that 'the queue is the breeding ground of panic and social unrest. If rationing did nothing else but kill the queue, its advantages would greatly outweigh its disadvantages.'³⁷ Thus, it was an accepted understanding both in the metropolis and subsequently in the colony that the clearing of popular fears about food scarcity was essential in order to avoid public commotion against the state in time of a war that demanded unquestioning loyalty towards the British state, both metropolitan and colonial. This eagerness to maintain a positive collective public psyche with regard to food-supply was one of the most instrumental factors behind food rationing.

³⁵ FPC, *Report*, p. 67.

³⁶ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', p. 6.

³⁷ FPC, *Report*, p. 67.

The Foodgrains Policy Committee mentioned only a few broad differences between rationing in India and in Britain; it did not care to mention many other important differences. A study of these additional differences helps us further in understanding the nature and purpose of rationing in the Indian colony.

British rationing overall aimed to reduce food consumption. However, in reality, for the poorer classes the stress on equitable distribution often actually meant higher consumption than the pre-war period. Jill Norman's analysis of the official instruction-leaflets published during the war tells us that though rationing was a 'necessary evil',³⁸ yet, the British government always had an underlying concern in rationing that 'the people in Britain should be fit to carry on the fight and for many this meant adopting a far healthier diet than they had ever enjoyed before.'³⁹ Ministry of Food's official account of how Britain was fed in the wartime observed that 'in the years immediately before the war . . . nearly half the population was not getting sufficient of the required nutrients.'⁴⁰ However, in 1944, results of surveys of working class households 'showed that on the whole the diet was up to the requirements.'⁴¹ Further, the Ministry of Food asserted that 'Similar surveys of middle class households showed that there was little difference between their diet and that of the working-class household, reflecting the general levelling out of food distribution during the war.'⁴² R. J. Hammond's detailed multi-volume official history of the food situation in wartime Britain argued that 'The levelling-down effect of food restrictions, and the levelling-up effect of the war-time expansion in employment and earnings, could not but make the average working-class consumption standard approach much nearer

³⁸ *Eating for Victory - Healthy Home Front Cooking on War Rations: Reproductions of Official Second World War Instruction Leaflets*, foreword by Jill Norman, Michael O'Mara Books Limited, London, 2007, p. 5.

³⁹ *Idem.*

⁴⁰ *How Britain was Fed in War Time*, p. 46. For a recent discussion about the nutritional divide between the various sections of the British population in the 1930s, see Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food*, Penguin Books, London, 2012, pp. 349-353.

⁴¹ *How Britain was Fed in War Time*, p. 49.

⁴² *Idem.*

the national average than it had in peace-time.⁴³ These claims in official publications have found support in the recent research by Lizzie Collingham into the 'battle for food' during the war: 'Britain certainly ended the war with a population which was eating a healthier diet than in the 1930s, and the nutritional divide between the wealthy and the poor had begun to close.'⁴⁴

In India too, as I will discuss in the next chapter, army rationing actually resulted in considerably higher food consumption for the soldiers. However, for the civil populace of India, the opposite was true. When civil rationing was introduced in India in the shadow of the Bengal famine, permissible quantities of food under rationing was fixed at the bare survival level, as they were intended to merely keep the civilian population alive. Unlike in wartime Britain, there was no conscription in the Indian colony. Therefore, civilians in India were only in some circumstances a priority for the colonial state. Consequently, unlike in the metropolis, rationing in the colony meant a much lower intake of food for a vast section of the civilians than in the pre-war era.

About British life during the time of wartime food rationing, a recent study has noted 'British life no doubt included queues, grumbling, and accusations about some retailers and a lack of diversity in the food, but the system worked to share scarce food resources throughout the population.'⁴⁵ An important question in this connection is why rationing brought a broad sense of equal suffering across all classes in wartime Britain, whereas the same rationing system in India contributed to exacerbate social divisions and mutual resentments between more and less affluent classes. There are two main answers to this question. One lies in the subjective domain of the colonial state's intention in India, and the other in the practicalities of rationing. Firstly, the intention behind rationing in

⁴³ R. J. Hammond, *Food*, vol. I, in the *History of the Second World War* series, Her Majesty's Stationery Office and Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1951, p. 226.

⁴⁴ Collingham, *Taste of War*, p. 385.

⁴⁵ Helen Lightowler and Helen Macbeth, 'Nutrition, Food Rationing and Home Production in the UK during the Second World War', in Paul Collinson and Helen Macbeth (eds.), *Food in Zones of Conflict: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2014, p. 112.

the British metropolis was to forge national unity on the site of diet, so that a united domestic front could be maintained against the enemy in the war. Naturally, any allegation of bias or privilege in favour of any particular class in the rationing system would have jeopardized the broad national unity across classes. Therefore, rationing in Britain was enforced on the basis of the idea of equitable distribution. Whereas in India, ordinary civilians could not be expected to make common cause with their colonial masters. Here, the colonial state was more dependent on the collaboration of the Indian upper classes to continue its war efforts. However, widespread shortages affecting poorer classes forced an unwilling state to introduce rationing. In India, therefore, the enforcement of civil food rationing was often piecemeal and negligent.

Secondly, unlike in Britain where rationing was in force through the length and breadth of the country, in India effective rationing was introduced mainly in cities and towns. Rationing of cities was considered unavoidable to keep the labour in war industries and war transport, which were invariably concentrated in urban areas, fed. The Secretary of State for India Leopold Amery's memorandum on 'The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains' made this calculation clear:

It is the urban population, dependent as they are on the marketable part of the crop, who are first to experience any shortage and, since it is the urban population on whose labour the Indian munitions and supply industries depend, any marginal shortage of food tends to reduce the output of those industries; such a shortage may have the effect of driving labour from factory centres back to the country where they may be lost to industry and constitutes a threat to law and order with a possibility of food riots.⁴⁶

In addition to this concern to keep the labour in war industries fed, there was a political incentive for the government for giving priority to feeding cities. On 13 December 1942, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow wrote in his telegram to Amery on the food situation that 'Fact that this is mainly a country of subsistence farmers

⁴⁶ *Memorandum by Mr Amery*, 'The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains', undated but deduced to have been written on 8 January 1943, L/E/8/3297: ff 225-6, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document number 330, p. 474.

encourage[s] me to believe that political reaction of any shortages might admit of being largely confined to towns and industrial areas. But those, as you know, are precisely the most inflammable areas in some ways from the political point of view.⁴⁷ Later, in September 1943, *Behar Herald*, an English weekly published from Patna, wrote in a news feature on the Bengal famine that 'Too much has been made of the conditions in Calcutta because the people are vocal there.'⁴⁸ Rationing of cities was needed to feed the educated and 'vocal' city-dwellers, whose criticism in the press of the colonial state's failure on the food front had great potential to embarrass the Government of India, and its imperial masters in London. This concern was amplified by the two months long press campaign run by *The Statesman* newspaper in the autumn of 1943 against the official management of the Bengal famine. The paper's extensive coverage of the famine appeared so damaging to British war interests that its editor Ian Stephens later felt that by running the 'famine campaign', they 'were inevitably giving propaganda-points straight to Goebbels and the Japanese; obviously a very risky thing to do in war-time.'⁴⁹ In contrast to the urban educated Indians, the mostly illiterate rural populace was not thought to have the potential to raise their voice against the colonial state regarding their food deprivation.

Considering the fact that undivided India was 16 times bigger than Britain in territory, rationed cities and towns were really drops in the ocean. In the map of hunger, the rationed cities started to be seen as the oases, and consequently attracted starving country folks from all sides, as in the case of Calcutta during the Bengal Famine. This internal starvation-migration led to the overburdening of rationing mechanisms in the cities, which often collapsed under the deadweight of food seekers from the un-rationed villages.

⁴⁷ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL', 13 December 1942, MSS. EUR. F. 125/23, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 269, p. 362.

⁴⁸ 'The Bengal Famine', *Behar Herald*, September 14, 1943, p. 9, microfilm, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), New Delhi.

⁴⁹ Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Earnest Benn, London, 1966, p. 183. Stephens was referring to Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945), the Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany from 1933 until 1945.

In India, the urban areas covered by rationing were all 'fully rationed', which meant they all had 'statutory rationing'. Under the statutory rationing, statutory orders were issued to deal with the enumeration of the local population, and with the procurement, storage, movement, and distribution of the rationed items. Any breach of the statutes was punishable by law. Statutory rationing meant that every ration-card holder was entitled to receive his or her full ration of grains from the ration shops at a fixed price.⁵⁰ In the statutorily rationed areas, no free market was legally permitted and there were restrictions on the 'import and export of even small quantities of foodgrains.'⁵¹ No one could obtain food items included in the list of rationed items without a ration card, except at authorized hotels and restaurants. By December 1947, 54 million people in India were under statutory rationing.⁵² Though this number was impressive, yet it represented roughly a mere 15 per cent of the total population of India.⁵³

Though full rationing was in force only in urban areas, yet, a semblance of rationing was put up in some rural areas. These rural areas came to be known as 'partially rationed' areas; rationing here was 'non-statutory.' Under this non-statutory system, the scale of ration was not fixed and guaranteed, and it was not consistently available throughout the year.⁵⁴ Subsidized food was sold by the ration shops only during lean seasons or when the provincial governments had stocks to spare.⁵⁵ Thus, people could fulfil only a part of their food requirement from this type of rations. Naturally, in these areas, a free market was permitted to continue, and ration-card holders were allowed the freedom to supplement their rations with whatever they could buy in the open market.⁵⁶ In these areas, in addition to non-producing customers, ration cards were issued to agricultural

⁵⁰ P.A. Gopalakrishnan, *India's Food Problem*, Eastern Economist Pamphlets, New Delhi, 1953, p. 10.

⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵² *Idem.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ *Idem.*

⁵⁶ *Idem.*

producers too whose production was judged to be below their own needs. The cards entitled their possessors to buy rations from a licensed retail dealer. Nevertheless, the ration shops in these areas were not under any legal obligation to supply this ration. In this non-statutory form of rationing, there was clear provision for the government to amend the permissible quantity of food from time to time, and even discontinue the rationing system altogether. Thus, the people in these areas were virtually dependent on the free market for their food requirements.⁵⁷

Thus, unlike in Britain, where the structure of rationing had a Pan-British monolithic shape, rationing in India did not function under a uniform structure in all areas that it touched. Of the 148 million people covered by rationing by December 1947, 54 million were under statutory rationing, as mentioned earlier.⁵⁸ Thus, more people were under the non-statutory rationing system, which was in force mainly in rural areas.

In addition to the two main types of rationing, in some rural areas there was a third type of government distribution system, namely 'controlled distribution'. Under this system, family ration cards, rather than individual ration cards, were issued to needy families for priority supply by private traders. Thus, in these areas, the government took no responsibility for actually providing food. Rather, it selected needy families for preferential treatment by private merchants. As can be expected under such an arrangement, the quantity of grains available to the selected families was to vary frequently according to the availability of stocks at the private warehouses.⁵⁹

In wartime Britain, there were much tighter controls over the black market. There were two thousand food inspectors in Britain whose sole job was to deal with

⁵⁷ For a brief account of non-statutory rationing, see *ibid.* pp. 10-11. See also FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Gopalakrishnan, *India's Food Problem*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ See Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 191.

offences under the Food Control Orders.⁶⁰ Mr Kirby, the Rationing Advisor to the Government of India, claimed that considerable prosecutions were made in India too under similar orders such as the Food Grains Control Order and the Anti-hoarding Order. In April 1944, he claimed that ‘the latest information shows that in Bombay alone there have been over 200 successful prosecutions for offences under these Orders monthly’.⁶¹ As we shall see, however, the widespread existence of black marketing in India demonstrated that contrary to Kirby’s tall claims, India lacked an extensive network of enforcement machineries with punitive powers. In Britain, as per the Food Control Orders, severe penalties, including imprisonment could be imposed for infringements of the orders.⁶²

However, wartime Britain was not completely free from the menace of black marketing, though the size of the British black market was of a tiny fraction of its Indian counterpart.⁶³ In contrast, in India, because of the colonial state’s half-heartedness in implementing rationing, and because of the utter inadequacy of the coverage of rationing arrangements, it was impossible to eliminate rampant black-marketing and private stockpiling. Consequently, those with plenty of money also had plenty to eat, albeit at a high cost. In view of these glaring differences with the British rationing system, Indian rationing could not generate a cross-class common sense of suffering and sacrifice on the site of diet.

There were predicaments in governing India, and resultant problems in administering rationing, that deprived rationing in India of popular support across all classes. Throughout the war, a democratically elected single government governed Britain. Whereas, India had a complex medley of the central colonial state, provinces directly governed by the central colonial government, provincial governments run by popularly elected (albeit elected by small electorates based

⁶⁰ Richardson, ‘Consumer Rationing’, p. 80.

⁶¹ See the note by Mr Kirby, enclosed to the letter from Mr Amery to Lord Cherwell, 22 April 1944, L/E/8/3323: ff 168-9, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 474, p. 914.

⁶² Richardson, ‘Consumer Rationing’, p. 80.

⁶³ For a description of black marketing in rationed Britain, see Maurice Edelman, *Production for Victory Not Profit!*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1941, pp. 145-146.

on select franchise) indigenous political parties (as in Bengal and Punjab), and numerous technically independent princely states. The division of wartime India into numerous political and administrative units, and the stark difference in the administrative strength of these units, made the implementation and administration of food rationing extremely difficult.

In Britain, in addition to the standard ration documents that were tied with their registration with a particular retailer, the Ministry of Food issued more flexible special ration books to customers who had to shift to new addresses, and consequently were unable to buy foodstuffs from the ration-retailer in their home town with whom they were originally registered.⁶⁴ In India, no such flexible ration card existed. Indians moving to a new address had to get their old ration card cancelled, and obtain a new one registered with the local ration-dealer in the new area. Thus, eligibility to subsidized rationed food was linked to the ability to demonstrate a permanent address within the jurisdiction of a particular ration-shop. As we shall see soon, this very rigid system had profoundly adverse effect on those who needed the subsidized food the most. As each ration-shop was allowed to register only a limited number of ration-cards, and as that registration-quota was always full because of widespread scarcity and virtual disappearance of open markets in food, the newcomers in a locality had almost no chance of being registered with the local ration shop.⁶⁵

As mentioned earlier, unlike in Britain, the countryside in India was mostly un-rationed. Consequently, when the starving villagers migrated to nearby cities in search of food, there ensued desperate competition to obtain a permanent address in the city. For instance, during and after the Bengal famine, obtaining a residential address in Calcutta for a ration card became a matter of life-or-death. As mentioned in the general introduction to this thesis, in his recent study of the

⁶⁴ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', pp. 75-76.

⁶⁵ The Viceroy Wavell admitted to the Secretary of State that 'some of the shops are said to have too many registered customers.' Letter marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET' from Viceroy Wavell to Mr Amery, 15 February 1944, L/PO/10/21, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 381, p. 730.

Bengal famine, Janam Mukherjee has demonstrated how in the aftermath of the famine, the necessity to obtain a house in Calcutta compelled the newly arrived villagers to launch a process of de-housing, whereby existing residents were violently eliminated to empty the houses. Mukherjee suggests that the desperation to purge competition for residence in rationed Calcutta was one of the factors that were responsible for the gargantuan scale of the Calcutta riots between the Hindus and Muslims in August 1946, only a year after the war.⁶⁶ He further argues that the widespread arson during the 1946 riots 'has to be understood as a systematic effort to "de-house" an enemy sector of the population.'⁶⁷

In Britain, at the base of the administrative pyramid of rationing lay the Local Food Offices. The Local Food Offices controlled the issuance of ration documents. These local offices were in turn responsible to the Local Food Committees. Similar local food committees were introduced in India, for instance in Bengal during the famine. However, the local food committees in Bengal were considerably less representative of the local consumers than in Britain. In Britain, each of the Local Food Committees consisted of fifteen members elected by the local authority. Out of them, five members had to be retailers, whereas ten members represented the consumers. Notably, out of these ten positions from among the consumers, two were reserved for women.⁶⁸ Thus, in the British rationing apparatus, there was representation of women, who, due to the traditional gendered separation of domestic labour, were much more in touch with hardship on the kitchen front. Giving women a voice in the rationing apparatus on the ground made British rationing more informed about the problems of the common households, and about their expectation from the British state with regard to food.

⁶⁶ Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*, Hurst & Company, London, 2015, pp. 213 – 221.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁶⁸ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', p. 76.

In India, on the other hand, local food committees became a site to settle scores with the political and/or communal 'other'. In every locality in India, the dominant community or political party tried to fill the food committee with their own members in order to exclude their communal or political rivals from subsidized food. Allegations and counter allegations of bias in the actions of the local food committees substantially contributed to the escalation of communal and political tension at the neighbourhood level. In Bengal, as we shall see in chapter 5, the Hindu Mahasabha party stirred up Hindu fears during the famine by claiming that Muslim League, the ruling party, was filling the local food committees with its cadres, and thus excluding the Hindus from food-distribution to the possible extent.⁶⁹ When the local foundation of the rationing apparatus was thus already hardened by male family members settling scores with their local enemies and rivals, the lack of women's representation in the system further ensured that officials remained ignorant of family food needs.

The only real similarity between rationing in the metropolis and colony lay in the differential system whereby the quantity of civil food rations permitted per capita varied for different sections of the consumers. In Britain, there were arrangements for rations to be made available to establishments serving collective consumption, such as boarding houses, restaurants, factory canteens, hospitals, orphanages, and prisons. In the case of collective consumption, the dietary needs of those whose labour was indispensable for the war, were prioritized. Accordingly, starting in late 1941, higher quantities of rationed foodstuff were supplied to factory canteens in war industries than what was permitted to catering establishments serving sedentary workers and public.⁷⁰ Even hospitals received a lesser quota of rationed items than the factory canteens.⁷¹ Special dietary habits of essential workers and labourers were taken care of. The 'bread-and-cheese' eating habits of miners and agrarian labourers,

⁶⁹ Speech of Dr. S. P. Mookerjee, the president of the Hindu Mahasabha, at the Town Hall meeting on 6th June 1943, p. 2, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installment II - IV, sub-file no. 119, NMMI.

⁷⁰ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', pp. 77-78.

⁷¹ *Idem*.

for example, meant that a considerably larger cheese ration than the basic ration was allowed to them. Similarly, higher supplies of meat were permitted for factory canteens in the heavy industries sector, than to catering establishments serving meals to the common public.⁷²

As the Indian colony became a major industrial base for the war operations in Asia, particularly against Japan, similar prioritization of the hunger of industrial workers was witnessed in India. As we shall see in the next chapter, therefore, the Government of India allowed extra quantities of rationed foodstuffs to colliery labour and police, whose work involved heavy manual labour. Keeping these special categories of population adequately fed was necessary to keep production in war-industries going, and to alleviate possible domestic unrest.

Interestingly, in addition to industrial workers, in the British rationing system there was provision for extra rations to expectant mothers and children under the age of five. In addition to her regular ration, a pregnant woman was entitled to a pint of milk every day at 1½ d. per pint. However, if her income was below a certain level, she received free milk.⁷³ For the children under the age of five years, if their parents had a low income, they received a free milk ration of 7 pints per week, which was otherwise priced at 1½ d. per pint.⁷⁴

Thus, it appears that even in the midst of the war and the accompanying scarcity, rationing authorities in Britain wanted to secure the health of the future generation of the nation by providing for mothers and children. The heightened demand for labour power created by the war underscored the need for a physically robust British population. So that poverty and class did not damage the health of future generations of workers, rationing authorities in Britain went the extra mile to make a distinction in the price of milk based on the parents' income. Doubtless, the provision of free milk based on income level resembled a welfare

⁷² Ibid., p. 72.

⁷³ See the leaflet titled 'Extras for the Expectant Mother and for Children under 5', in *Eating for Victory*, pp. 155- 156.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 156.

state in capitalist Britain, and this resemblance went a long way in giving the impression that Britain adopted 'a form of war socialism'.⁷⁵

Unlike in Britain, in the Indian colony there were few special ration arrangements for either pregnant women or children, except in Bombay, which was the first Indian city to introduce rationing.⁷⁶ As we shall see in chapter 6, the absence of special arrangements in state-run rationing for these vulnerable sections of the society furnished Indian political organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal, with an opportunity to attack the colonial government. The Mahasabha was to allege that official food policies were not only affecting the present generation of India, but also threatening the health of the future generations. The supply of milk to pregnant women, already malnourished by the lack of food, was crucial to ensure adequate nutrition to the mothers so that they could produce enough breast-milk for their babies. In wartime Bengal, milk had become a scarce commodity. Many livestock-farmers and milkmen had perished in the famine. As discussed in detail in the second chapter, the Indian army's need for beef and buffalo meat to feed the increased number of Muslim soldiers and newly stationed non-Indian soldiers further diminished the availability of milk. Cattle were also exported to war bases abroad for beef.

Against this background, the absence of an all-India scheme of preferential milk supply to pregnant women and children meant lack of milk for children and babies, and higher child mortality.⁷⁷ Intriguingly, when the rationing authorities

⁷⁵ I have borrowed the expression 'a form of war socialism' from its use by Lizzie Collingham in the context of food. See Collingham, *Taste of War*, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁶ For distribution of subsidized milk to infants under two years of age in Bombay with effect from August 1944, see Government of Bombay, *Food Advisory Council: 1942 – 1944*, with a foreword by Sir Henry Knight, Government of Bombay Press, Bombay, not dated, p. 12, in Henry Knight papers, box – 1, CSAS. Later the age limit for receiving special milk ration became higher in Bombay than in Britain. In March 1945, the age limit for milk-ration was extended to cover children up to the age of ten years. See *All India Monthly Report on Food Position for the month of March 1945*, file no. 1 (14)- IB/45, 1945, on the subject 'Monthly reports on food situation in India and Indian States', p. 4, Political Department, Intelligence Bureau branch, GOI, NAI.

⁷⁷ Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (hereafter BPHM), *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, with a foreword by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, Calcutta, 1944, p. 9, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installment V and VII, Printed Material category, S. No. 12, NMML, New Delhi. p. 9.

in Britain were prioritizing pregnant mothers and children in the rationing system, in Bengal the Hindu Mahasabha made a curious allegation that the provincial government was going in the opposite direction to disregard the food-needs of the children to calculate the net food requirement at an artificially lowered scale. According to the Mahasabha, while calculating surplus stock in the province, the Bengal government decided to exclude the rice need of the children below the age of four years from the official calculation to determine the figure of rice needed.⁷⁸

So far, I have done a comparative study of the distributive aspect of rationing in the colony and metropolis. However, distribution formed only the interface between rationing and the recipients of rations. Beneath this distributive interface lay a massive and intricate procurement machinery that formed the base of rationing. In Britain, in the case of more important items in the list of rationed foods, such as meat, sugar, butter, bacon, and tea, the Ministry of Food assumed the role of the sole importer.⁷⁹ To import food supplies in bulk from abroad, the British Government entered into long-term purchasing contracts with sellers abroad.⁸⁰

Interestingly, Britain's reliance on imports, rather than on home-grown food, was one of the reasons for the success of rationing. In her study of the role of food in the Second World War, Lizzie Collingham has pointed out that imports were more reliable than the domestic food sources in delivering the pre-fixed quantities in full.⁸¹ Irrespective of the variables in their respective countries, exporters abroad always handed over to Britain quantities that were already fixed through the import agreements made. In contrast, the domestic yield of crops, especially potatoes, was unpredictable, and naturally less reliable.⁸²

⁷⁸ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, Calcutta, 1943, pp. 3 - 4, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Printed Material, S. No. 9, NMML, New Delhi.

⁷⁹ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', p. 78.

⁸⁰ *Idem.*

⁸¹ Collingham, *Taste of War*, p. 108.

⁸² *Idem.*

Food rationing in India, on the other hand, was almost exclusively dependent on domestic procurement. At the peak of the Bengal famine, when rationing started in India, top colonial officers from Delhi started sending frantic telegrams to the War Cabinet in London begging for food imports.⁸³ However, citing lack of spare shipping, the cabinet never sent adequate food to India from abroad. Some other Allied countries such as Australia and Canada offered to send gratuitous food relief to India provided Britain arranged for shipping. However, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill refused to divert shipping from carrying troops, munitions, and food for Britain to carrying food to India.⁸⁴

In the absence of food imports, rationing in India had to make do with whatever was procurable domestically. Yet the domestic procurement field had been scoured by mid-1943 by the procurement officials of the army. They had been 'insatiable purchasers with a bottomless purse'⁸⁵ in the grain markets to provision the army that made about two million fresh recruitments during the war.⁸⁶ In addition, the army was purchasing food for the foreign Allied troops stationed in India, and for exporting food to war bases abroad such as the Middle East.

Adding to the scarcity caused by the military purchase, provinces like Bengal had been going through severe under production in agriculture due to monsoon failure and cyclone.⁸⁷ Moreover, as discussed in the first chapter, the horrors of

⁸³ For a detailed discussion on these telegrams, see section V in chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁸⁴ See *idem*. For a detailed discussion of shipping cut to India, see also Madhusree Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*, Basic Books, New York, 2010, pp. 109 – 130, pp. 139-144, p. 149.

⁸⁵ Braund, *Memorandum*, p. 34.

⁸⁶ For this figure, see the telegram marked 'PRIVATE' from Viceroy Wavell to Mr Amery, 12 January 1944, L/E/8/3322: f 35, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 321, p. 633. See also Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India (1939-1945)', *Past and Present*, vol. 176, no. 1, August 2002, p. 190.

⁸⁷ In Bengal, between June and September 1942, the *aman* paddy crop was considerably damaged by monsoon failure. Further, on the morning of 16 October 1942, a huge cyclone wreaked havoc in the coastal regions in south Bengal, particularly in the Midnapore district. The accompanying torrential rain and tidal waves caused a deadly flood. The FIC estimated that in total 3, 200 square miles were affected by the calamity, and the standing *aman* paddy crop and stocks of rice were severely damaged throughout this huge area. See FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 32. According to Michael Brown, the contemporary independent observer who in 1944 wrote a polemical study of

the Bengal famine created great anxiety in grain surplus provinces such as Punjab, who in consequence tried to place every possible hindrance in the way of government procurement in their respective provinces. The surplus provinces sought in particular to erect protective trade barriers around their respective provinces. In view of the convergence of these factors, often the ration shops in India were severely short of requisite stock. Thus, dependence solely on an exhausted and turbulent domestic food market for procurement was a major and crippling difference that rationing in the Indian colony had with rationing in Britain.

In Britain, even in the case of home-produced meat, sugar, and butter, the Ministry of Food assumed the role of the sole purchaser.⁸⁸ The ministry heavily subsidized the production cost of all food items produced on the British soil.⁸⁹ In return, the ministry took control over the produce at source.⁹⁰ There were control points at every juncture from production to distribution. Such extensive control mechanisms did not exist in Indian rationing. As the domestic sources of government procurement in India were so many in number, coming from all sorts of small, medium, and large farms and grain traders, channelling them through select checkpoints was inconceivable. Mr Kirby, the rationing advisor sent to the Government of India from Britain's Ministry of Food, found out that:

There are practically no bottlenecks for securing control of India's indigenous resources of foodgrain. Comparatively negligible quantities pass through the rice and flour mills. Most of it is grounded or pounded at home. What comes to the market comes on the heads or in the bullock carts of the 50 million small producers. Requisitioning from them on any scale at all is not possible. The administrative machinery for the purpose does not exist.⁹¹

the food crisis in wartime India, the cyclone ruined 1,500,000 tons of rice. See Michael Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, with a foreword by Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1944. p. 81.

⁸⁸ Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', p. 78.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹⁰ *Idem.*

⁹¹ Note by Mr Kirby, enclosed to the letter from Mr Amery to Lord Cherwell, 22 April 1944, L/E/8/3323: ff 168-9, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 474, p. 914.

The enormous multiplicity of sources was a recurrent theme in state food management throughout the war. The Famine Inquiry Commission noted in its final report that 'the problems confronting food administration in India are, first, the control, directly or indirectly, of the flow of these innumerable small streams of grain and the larger streams into which they coalesce'.⁹²

As discussed in the first chapter, in India the war was accompanied by a hike in the price of agricultural produce. Interestingly, the inflation in agricultural produce acted as a double-edged sword regarding the supply of food to the market. On the one hand, initially it tempted many primary producers to sell as much as they could in a desperate attempt to make quick money while the opportunity lasted. On the other hand, in subsequent times, the rise in price meant retention of greater parts of the harvest by the growers.⁹³ Before the war, a cultivator had to part with almost all his grains to pay rent and revenues, and to meet the needs of himself and his family. However, because of the wartime increase in the prices of foodgrains, he was now able to pay for everything by selling only a half or a third of his crop. Now he kept the rest at home as an 'insurance against the uncertainty of times'.⁹⁴ Thus, to some extent, the ease of paying rent and revenue had the chain-effect of contributing to stockpiling of crops by the primary producers, causing decline in supply for the non-agriculturist population.⁹⁵

In this situation, the Regional Food Commissioner of Eastern Region rushed to claim credit for the colonial government's benevolence, so to speak, in bringing in this ease for the farmers. He claimed that the lack of pressure from the central government for recovery of rent and debts helped the farmers to retain more food for themselves, thereby trammelling the release of food crops to the

⁹² Famine Inquiry Commission and Sir John Woodhead (Chairman), *The Famine Inquiry Commission: Final Report*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 379.

⁹³ Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, pp. 90-91.

⁹⁴ Braund, *Memorandum*, p. 8.

⁹⁵ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 14, p. 16.

markets.⁹⁶ His argument found resonance in the observation of another British civil servant of the Punjab cadre during the war. Malcolm Lyall Darling claimed about the Punjab peasants that ‘With the demands of the money-lender greatly reduced and those of Government satisfied by the sale of far less produce, the peasant had much more left for himself and his family, and though most of those we met declared they ate no more than before, some, perhaps the more candid, admitted the contrary.’⁹⁷ M. Azizul Huque, the second Food Member of the Governor-General’s Council, advanced a similar argument about the Bengali cultivators: ‘The Bengal cultivator grows chiefly for his own needs and only sells to meet his fixed liabilities and domestic needs. Rising prices enabled him to bring less of his produce to market and to eat more.’⁹⁸

However, subsequently, this theory of more consumption by the peasantry because of reduced pressure for land revenue and rising prices for their crop, was strongly challenged by an inquiry of the Doaba region conducted by the Punjab Government’s Board of Economic Inquiry. The Board’s report claimed that ‘the usual arguments trotted out by the various Government officials or interested parties about the increased rural consumption during war are just a self-created baseless myth, a mere cover for their own incompetence and failures. The war has not led to any decrease, if not to an increase, in the marketable surplus.’⁹⁹

However, the Food Commissioner of the Eastern Region went ahead to recommend ‘rigid enforcement of punctual payment of Government dues, rent, etc.’ as a ‘remedy’ for the alleged trend of retaining a larger part of the yield for the domestic consumption of the farmers themselves.¹⁰⁰ This recommendation

⁹⁶ See appendix ‘B’ (pp. 57-58) titled ‘Reasons for slow flow of grain into markets and possible remedies’ appended to Braund, *Memorandum*, p. 57.

⁹⁷ Malcolm Lyall Darling, *At Freedom’s Door*, Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, London, 1949, pp. 333-334.

⁹⁸ Food Member of the Governor-General’s Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 28.

⁹⁹ As quoted in *India’s Food Crisis, Analysis and Solution: Memorandum of the Communist Party of India to the Government of the Indian Union*, People’s Publishing House Ltd., Bombay, 1947, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ See appendix ‘B’ (pp. 57-58) titled ‘Reasons for slow flow of grain into markets and possible remedies’ appended to Braund, *Memorandum*, p. 58. See also Speech by the Food Member of the Governor-General’s Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 28.

demonstrates the Food Commissioner's insensitivity in appreciating the interlaced factors that jointly conditioned the mismatch between supply and demand in wartime India. It is possible that the eagerness to avoid stirring up peasant unrest during the war might have made the government less rigid in exacting land revenues. However, had this eagerness been not there, even then it was impossible to exact more land revenue than what the government actually collected. Though the producers often received higher price for their produce during the war, yet the extra income was drained by the overall inflation, such as the rise in prices of agricultural tools, clothes, medicines, and building materials. When the farmers witnessed the ruinous effects of the war on the food situation, such as the end of the rice import from Burma, unrestrained military procurement, and above all the frightening famine-sights in Bengal, it was only natural for them to try to retain as much crops as they could as an 'insurance against the uncertainty of times'.¹⁰¹ A harsher policy to exact more land revenue would have only aggravated the crisis, and condemned a much larger number of people to starvation.

Finally, it needs to be remembered that as British society, unlike India's, underwent a full mobilisation for war purposes, the Ministry of Food in Britain made allowances for possible breakdowns of transportation due to war related causes. Consequently, it made 'Emergency Food Distribution' plans in addition to the operation of general rationing. As per these plans, large stocks of food were held in reserve in each region of the country to meet demands in the case of emergencies.¹⁰² Such precautionary arrangements were absent in India. Throughout the war, food rationing in India functioned on ad hoc procurement. Government ration retailers never had enough stock for even next few days, let alone having stocks for future emergencies.

¹⁰¹ Braund, *Memorandum*, p. 8.

¹⁰² Richardson, 'Consumer Rationing', p. 80.

III. The Advance of Colonial Rationing

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in the first two years of the war, rationing was considered overall unwarranted in India. However, though there was no state intervention in food during those years, yet legal mechanisms that could be used to intervene in the country's food situation started taking shape immediately after the outbreak of the war. As mentioned in the first chapter, the central government passed the Defence of India Act in 1939 to protect India in the case of any future invasion by Japan. Under the act, Rule 81 was introduced, under which most of the future regulations regarding food supplies were framed in wartime India. Rule 81 provided for, among other things, regulating production, distribution, and consumption of 'articles or things of any description whatsoever', and controlling their prices.¹⁰³

Notably, the extensive legal scope of the Rule 81 armed the colonial central government with controlling powers at both ends of commodity control – at the end of production and distribution as well as at the end of controlling prices. By the end of March 1942, Burma had fallen into Japanese hands, making a Japanese invasion of India through Burma a strong possibility.¹⁰⁴ Against this background, after arming itself with the Rule 81, the central government proceeded to write to the provincial governments in October 1942 to ask them to study the practicability of introducing rationing, albeit only in respect of rice which was in short supply.¹⁰⁵ However, by the beginning of 1943, the general food situation worsened to such an extent that the central government had to write again to all the provincial governments 'advising them to prepare for the rationing of all the main foodgrains in important urban areas'.¹⁰⁶ At this grim historical moment, in the same year, Bengal witnessed the fatal convergence of three developments.

¹⁰³ As presented in Knight, *Food Administration*, p.11.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor C. Sherman, 'From 'Grow More Food' to 'Miss a Meal': Hunger, Development and the Limits of Post-Colonial Nationalism in India, 1947–1957', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2013, p. 575.

¹⁰⁵ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁶ *Idem.*

First, the fall of Burma into Japanese hands brought a sudden end to the import of Burmese rice to India. Second, 1943 was the year when Bengal was in the most desperate need of rice from external sources, as this was the peak year of the Great Bengal Famine. Third, as discussed in the first chapter, this was also the time when surplus provinces, such as Punjab, started protesting vehemently against the outward movement of grains from them to Bengal.

Against this background, interestingly, full government rationing was introduced not in Bengal, but in the Bombay city, in May 1943.¹⁰⁷ On 29 August 1943, the editorial in *The Statesman* newspaper pointed out: 'It is notable that comparatively healthy Bombay, unlike Bengal, has not been run during the war by an autonomous Ministry.'¹⁰⁸ Following the Congress Party's resignation from the government in 1939, the governance of Bombay had been taken over by the British governor of the province, as per section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. Thus, unlike Bengal, where the elected provincial government continued to exist, Bombay had been under direct rule of the British governor since 1939. Therefore, the governor's administration was able to make some unilateral progress with regard to preparations for introducing rationing in the Bombay city. Thus, the introduction of rationing in Bombay was a decision of the provincial governor and his bureaucracy, rather than an outcome of any national policy of the central government. As we shall see in the next chapter, administrative disagreements between the Bengal and central government were to delay the introduction of rationing in Bengal. For the time being, let us note that the delay in Calcutta in comparison to Bombay drew contemporary criticisms. The same editorial in *The Statesman* wrote that 'Bombay began food rationing months ago, whereas Calcutta (lying in the war-zone, and obviously much more exposed to ill consequences from loss of Burma's rice exports) has

¹⁰⁷ Idem. See also Government of Bombay, *Food Advisory Council, 1942-1944*, p. 8, in Henry Knight Papers, box – 1, CSAS. For a brief description of rationing in Bombay, see *ibid*, pp. 1-16.

¹⁰⁸ 'Text of an editorial *An All-India Disgrace* published in *The Statesman* on August 29, 1943', appendix IX, Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 262.

not yet got it, and shameful little announcements have lately been published of journeys by officials from the 'Second City' to learn Bombay's methods.'¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, when everything was working against Bengal, the report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee laid down the lines on which India's food policy from July 1943 onwards was founded.¹¹⁰ In its lengthy report, the most important pronouncement was an unequivocal assertion that whatever the situation, the only way to prevent the continuance and further geographical expansion of the Bengal famine was to ensure an equitable distribution of whatever was available and obtainable. As part of this emphasis on equitable distribution, the Foodgrains Policy Committee recommended state-managed rationing of foodstuffs in urban areas -

The general case for urban rationing is overwhelming and it is the view of the Committee (which has already been communicated to Government) that rationing should be introduced forthwith in the larger cities of India, both in draft (sic) and surplus areas, both in Provincial and State areas, in the first instance in those with populations of one lakh and over and should be progressively extended.¹¹¹

The *raison d'être* for recommending the introduction of rationing in surplus areas was that city people, even in surplus areas, were dependent on supplies from the countryside, and the countryside was often scoured of grain by commercial hoarders offering very high prices. However, the committee noted that the success of the rationing system would depend on the central and provincial governments' performance in other related fields of food-policy, such as an increase in available supplies, improved procurement machinery, general extension of the principle of statutory price control, and an overhaul of the existing food administration. In addition to these economic and administrative conditions, the committee's report also highlighted the need for politico-legal

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 261. Calcutta was often referred to as the 'Second City' of the British Empire.

¹¹⁰ FPC, *Report*, 1946.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

reforms in the relationship between the central colonial government run from Delhi and the provincial governments and princely states, as well as in the inter-provincial relationship.¹¹² As we shall see, the regional difference in the performance of rationing was often determined by the nature of the relationship that the central colonial state had with the local government of that region.

Though the committee's recommendation for introducing rationing was accepted by the central government without further ado, yet, there were considerable difficulties in implementation. Firstly, the immense difference in the dietary habits of various classes and castes of Indians, in addition to the regional differences, made any uniform India-wide list of rationed foodstuffs impossible. Secondly, as mentioned in chapter 1, during the war, recruiting the necessary number of staff to implement procurement, transport, distribution, and overseeing of foodstuffs for rationing purposes was a difficult task, given competition from the army and war-related administrative and industrial sectors for manpower.

However, even after taking these difficulties into consideration, the Foodgrains Policy Committee was convinced that rationing had become 'the only method of killing the queue'.¹¹³ The committee believed that rationing was the only way to prevent panic and unrest in front of private grain-shops, and to maintain what it called 'food morale'.¹¹⁴ Additionally, against the backdrop of severe food scarcity in many parts of the country, rationing was expected to help to attract food donations from abroad. It was argued that in order to get food imports from overseas, India must first convince the donating countries that any food so sent would be equitably and economically distributed through rationing.¹¹⁵

By August 1943, full rationing was in force in thirteen cities and areas, whereas partial rationing was functioning in four areas. By this time, the fully rationed

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 23-27.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹⁴ Idem.

¹¹⁵ Idem.

areas were Bombay city and suburbs, Poona and Kirkee, Cochin State, Travancore, Bangalore city, Civil and Military Station Bangalore, Cutch, Indore city, Dewas Senior, Morar and Lashkar in Gwalior State, Quetta Pishin, Jafarabad, and Vithalgadh in Kathiawar Agency. The partially rationed areas were Bhopal city, Junagadh, Thanadeoli and Manavadar in Kathiawar Agency.¹¹⁶ Once started, rationing was extended very rapidly to other areas. Within the next six months, by February 1944, 103 cities and towns were rationed in India. By February 1945, the number increased to 516 towns and municipal areas.¹¹⁷ In terms of the number of consumers under the rationing system, by the beginning of 1944, 24 million people were receiving food rations.¹¹⁸ By November 1944, approximately 42 million people were covered by rationing.¹¹⁹ Within the next three months, by February 1945, the coverage expanded further to bring 50 million people under its fold.¹²⁰

This extremely rapid growth of rationing within such a short period reflected a further important development. As we will see in the next chapter, despite initial resistance, gradually rationing came to be seen as an indispensable form of state mediation in food distribution in a country of growing economic inequality, where entitlement losses vis-à-vis food put the physical survival of millions in danger. As will be argued, the rapid expansion of food rationing in late colonial India represented the beginning of what was to become a central plank of post-colonial India's social welfare strategy, namely, state-subsidised food distribution for the poorest in society. As a form of state intervention in daily life, the attraction of rationing to the hungry poor was unique and immense. As the popular demand for rationing grew briskly, so did rationing.

Recruiting the massive number of ration dealers needed to implement rationing in the large number of rationed areas scattered over a country as vast as

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

¹¹⁷ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 189.

¹¹⁸ Gopalakrishnan, *India's Food Problem*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 189.

¹²⁰ Idem.

undivided India, was a formidable task. The required number of retail dealers was so large that the Food Department of the central government chose the easiest method. It converted many of the existing private grain traders into government ration dealers, instead of incurring the prodigious burden of making fresh recruitments to all the posts of ration retailers.¹²¹ In addition to these ration shops now run by erstwhile private dealers, a small number of government retail shops were opened.

As mentioned earlier, initially, in 1943-44, rationing was already facing strong opposition from provincial governments and established grain traders, who held strong vested interests in the continuation of free markets. The central government did not therefore want to add to the opposition by insisting on uniformity in terms of the list of rationed items all over India. Unlike in Britain, the high degree of regional variation in agricultural production and food habits actually made such uniformity impossible in India. However, the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee adopted at least one uniform policy regarding the foodgrains to be distributed. According to it wherever rationing was introduced, all the staple foodgrains of that area (unlike in Britain) should be included in the rationing. The committee expressed the view that 'It is desirable that, as far as possible, the tastes and habits of the various communities should be respected.'¹²² Thus, the committee set up a uniform principle of accommodating the diversity in the food habits of different parts of the country in the rationing system.

The recommendations of the committee were not binding on the provincial governments. When, however, the introduction of rationing seemed irreversible, most of the provincial governments submitted a list of food items describing the consumption habits of their local populations. Accordingly, for instance, in 1944, rice, wheat, and millets were sold by the ration stores in Bombay, Sind, Central Provinces and Hyderabad, whereas in Punjab only whole wheat and *atta* (flour)

¹²¹ FPC, *Report*, p. 72.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

were given in ration. In Madras, which was predominantly a rice-eating province, only rice was given in ration, though in Mysore even *ragi* or millet (in addition to rice and a small amount of wheat) was among the rationed items.¹²³

In Madras city, in February 1945, to popularize the consumption of wheat, demonstrations in cooking wheat were organized by the government, and 'model restaurants' serving wheat items were opened in Malabar district.¹²⁴ As rice was particularly scarce in wartime India, in other rice eating areas, such as Bombay, Cochin, and Calcutta, the authorities had to make similar special efforts to encourage people to buy alternative grains such as wheat to reduce the pressure on rice supply. Accordingly, the central government published pamphlets trumpeting the nutritional benefits of alternative grains such as wheat and millet, and offering recipes of how to prepare these alternative grains. In fact, from the start, the Foodgrains Policy Committee had been aware that having adequate government publicity measures were indispensable in making rationing acceptable to the common Indian consumers. The committee's recommendations attached due emphasis to 'large-scale publicity' in order to 'prepare' the common consumers about the benefits of rationing, and thereby to secure public opinion in its favour.¹²⁵ For this purpose, the committee recommended for the appointment of a publicity officer in the Food Department.¹²⁶ From the administrative standpoint, state publicity was essential in countering the political attacks on the food administration and overall food situation that were often aimed at stirring up popular panic, and agitation against the colonial state. Accordingly, the Secretary of State for India encouraged 'skilful publicity' to advertise the arrival of food imports of even small amounts to maintain confidence in the colonial government's handling of food scarcity.¹²⁷

¹²³ See Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 191.

¹²⁴ 'All-India Monthly Report on Food Position for the month of February, 1945', file no. 1 (14)-IB/45, 1945, on the subject 'Monthly reports on food situation in India and Indian States', p. 3, Political Department, Intelligence Bureau Branch, NAI.

¹²⁵ FPC, *Report*, pp. 70-71, p. 79.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹²⁷ Draft telegram from the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, undated, H 291/12, in Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

With regard to the quantity of rationed items, the Foodgrains Policy Committee suggested a standard of one pound of grains per adult per day, and half of that adult ration for children between the age of two and twelve years.¹²⁸ However, in the surplus provinces, a strong demand to allow a more generous quantity of grains in ration followed. To justify this demand, provincial administrations came up with different arguments that were noted in the *Report on the Progress of the Recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee*.¹²⁹ For instance, the report describes how the government of the North West Frontier Province resorted to the martial race theory to justify their demand for higher quantity of grains under rationing system. They cited the heavily built bodies of their people to claim that they belonged to warrior races, and therefore needed more food than people in, for instance, south India.

These arguments were passed on to the Central Food Advisory Council, an advisory body that had been set up by the central government. A year after the first introduction of rationing, the Council in its meeting in July 1944 rejected the demand for a greater amount of grains in ration for any part of India, arguing that the people of all rationed areas should equally share the burden of grain deficiency. Accordingly, the Council pressed the Government of India to adhere to the settled quantity of ration at 1 pound per adult daily throughout all the rationed areas in India.¹³⁰ The central government duly conveyed the decision of the Council to the provincial governments. Thus, the Indian civilians were expected to live on roughly 1,000 calories a day, whereas civilians in Britain were getting approximately 3000 calories a day.¹³¹ After the war, this disparity in quantity was sharply criticised in retrospect by Sir S. V. Ramamurthy, a member

¹²⁸ FPC, *Report*, p. 78-79.

¹²⁹ DOF, *Report on the Progress of the Recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee*, GOI, 1944.

¹³⁰ *Idem*. Also cited in the letter no. R. 1008/39, dated the 2nd September 1944, from R. H. Hutchings, Secretary to the Government of India, DOF, to all Provincial Governments / Administrations / Residents, on the subject 'Rationing', NAI, New Delhi.

¹³¹ See the news report, 'India starves because she joined Britain's war', *Free Press Journal*, 9 April 1946, as compiled in Sumit Sarkar (ed.), *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1946*, part I, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 865.

of the Indian Food Delegation to the Combined Food Board in Washington in April 1946: 'The train of humanity cannot run as one with first class tickets for 3000 calories and more and third class tickets hardly for 1000 calories.'¹³² However, as mentioned earlier, the central government in India made an exception to the standardized quantity of rationed grains by creating a special category in the rationing system, the category of 'heavy manual workers' who were to receive additional quantities of grains over the standard quantity. The reasons behind this preferential treatment of the 'heavy manual workers', and its significance in war efforts, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Invariably, the retail price of grains was lower at the ration shops in comparison to the prevailing price in open markets, and of course much lower than in the black markets. Ration shops sold foodstuffs either at no-loss-no-profit basis, or at a price subsidized by the government. However, the lower price at the ration shops caused an unprecedented influx of desperate buyers from neighbouring non-rationed areas to the rationed area.¹³³ Both central and provincial governments were usually unprepared to prevent surges of this kind. As a consequence, areas under statutory rationing saw a much more rapid exhaustion of stocks at the ration shops than had been anticipated. In some areas, therefore, to end the torrent of unwelcome external purchasers, the price of grains at the ration shops had to be raised to the 'economic' level, that is, to the level of prices prevailing in the open markets.¹³⁴ To mitigate the adverse effect that this rise in price had on the buying capacity of the target customers within the rationed area, government sometimes provided employment to unemployed and destitute men who were physically fit to do manual work. Accordingly, able-bodied men were sometimes employed in government projects such as in soil conservation works.¹³⁵

¹³² As reported *ibid.*

¹³³ Knight, *Food Administration*, 115.

¹³⁴ *Idem.*

¹³⁵ *Idem.*

IV. Conclusion

In general, in Britain state intervention in everyday food earned loyalty and support for the state as it 'saved' the citizens from popularly feared wartime starvation. The success of Britain in rationing was publicly admired by the food authorities in India who were not that successful. For instance, Sir Azizul Huque, the second Food Member of the Governor General's Council said that from his personal experience he could attest that the Ministry of Food in Britain 'has most successfully tackled the food problem in extremely difficult circumstances.'¹³⁶

Unlike in Britain, in India, rationing could not earn the colonial state much popular loyalty, gratitude, or support. Instead, often it proved to be the Achilles heel for the colonial rule and colonial hegemony. The empirical reason for this was twofold. Firstly, the diversity of India in terms of political units reduced the chances of success of civil rationing. During the war, the existence of provinces with elected indigenous parties in government, and technically sovereign princely states, in addition to the central colonial government and centrally governed Section 93 provinces, subjected rationing in India to tremendous political opposition as well as administrative feuds and confusion. Therefore, compared to Britain, rationing was considerably less uniform in success in the areas where it was introduced in India.

Secondly, by the time rationing was introduced in India in 1943, general food situation in the country had gone too bad to be instantly repaired by the introduction of rationing. When the abrupt decision to introduce rationing was taken in 1943, there was no time to do the necessary homework before launching rationing immediately. Therefore, the rationing system in India was in the nature of a hastily formulated system devised in the middle of the emergency situation that it was supposed to tackle.

¹³⁶ Speech by the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 18.

In addition to the above mentioned empirical reasons, three subjective factors prevented the colonial state from garnering much political profit from rationing in India. Firstly, India became independent in August 1947, within only four years after rationing was introduced in 1943. Thus, rationing was introduced in India towards the tail end of the British colonial rule. By that time, nationalist anticolonial mind-set had taken deep roots among vast sections of the Indian population who received food rations from the same state that they held responsible for their starvation by dragging India into a war that was not her war at all. In this situation, the failure of the colonial state to ensure smooth and effective running of food rationing actually strengthened the nationalist portrayal of the late colonial state as a weak and incompetent state, and thereby contributed towards the erosion of the hegemony of the British rule. Thus, on a broad level, rationing in metropolitan Britain and rationing in colonial India engendered completely different outcomes – in the former, it strengthened the authority of the state, whereas in the latter it weakened the sway of the state.

Secondly, there was a major problem with the projection of rationing in India. In Britain, rationing was publicized as a measure made unavoidable by the demands of the war. Thus, the link between the war and the need to have rationing was publicly known in Britain. However, in India, for political reasons, the colonial state could not afford to make the same link explicit in public. As the war was simply not the Indians' war, therefore common Indians could not be expected to willingly tolerate the restrictions with regard to food consumption suddenly imposed by a hitherto unfamiliar system called rationing. Therefore, on the part of the colonial state in India, it was desirable to conceal rationing's connection with war-calculations, and to project it as a welfare measure. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the urgency of feeding the army and the 'essential' workers in war industries on a priority basis ensured the failure of the colonial state in disguising the fact that it was primarily the calculations of the war, and not the suffering of the people, that prompted the state to intervene in everyday food matters.

Thirdly, there was nothing similar between the British and Indian rationing in terms of either their ideological roots or motives. In Britain, the main driving force behind rationing was to protect British citizens from food scarcity. Consequently, at home, Britain adopted 'a form of war socialism,' whereby an attempt was made to disperse scarcity across all classes. In India, on the other hand, rationing was introduced only in 1943, halfway through the war, when famine and malnutrition on a massive scale threatened to disrupt the war efforts, and thus forced the colonial state to introduce rationing. In Britain rationing was a preventive measure against shortage, whereas in India it was a much belated remedial measure against widespread starvation.

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Chapter 4

The Mixed Bag of State-Feeding

I. Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the areas that were outside the map of full (or statutory) rationing in India were all rural areas. Thus, unlike in wartime Britain where the length and breadth of the country was brought under rationing system, rural India was excluded from full rationing. This exclusion of rural areas, and the prioritization of towns and cities, were the results of several misplaced but stubbornly held beliefs. Government authorities were convinced that as rural areas produced food crops, their local populations would somehow manage to find food. The Secretary of State for India Leopold Amery's memorandum on 'The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains' reflected this belief: 'a large majority of the population of the Indian countryside consumes food grown by themselves and their neighbours which never come on any market.'¹ This misconception proved to be particularly fatal for Bengal. The Bengal countryside was never self-sufficient in rice and was heavily dependent on rice imports from Burma, which suddenly ended with the fall of Burma into Japanese hands in 1942. The countryside suffered crop failures and crop destruction by extreme weather events, particularly the Midnapore cyclone in October 1942. It also suffered from the 'scorched earth' policy of the government, as the army and

¹ *Memorandum by Mr Amery, 'The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains'*, undated but deduced to have been written on 8 January 1943, L/E/8/3297: ff 225-6, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7* (hereafter *Transfer*), vol. III, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1971, document number 330, p. 474.

police burnt grain stocks and standing crops as a preventive measure to deprive the Japanese soldiers of any readily available food in case of a Japanese invasion of India. For the same purpose, the government also removed grains from local warehouses to the government depots in Calcutta. In addition, the countryside was subsequently denuded of remaining grains by the buying spree by the urban stockists as well as by government agents buying for the army and for the ration shops in cities.²

The central government's Food Department noted that 'In Bengal the problem is accentuated by the presence of Calcutta itself, with its population of nearly four million and over half the war industries of India.'³ Later M. Afzal Husain, one of the five members of the official Famine Inquiry Commission, recorded in his minute to the commission that in earlier times 'imports of Burma rice were roughly equal to the rice requirements of Calcutta.'⁴ Therefore, with the end of rice imports from Burma, 'Calcutta was *on* the Bengal market.'⁵

The Bengal famine of 1943 was primarily a rural one; those who died in the city of Calcutta were actually villagers who had thronged in the city in search of food.⁶ Against this background rationing was introduced in Calcutta. As it was primarily the Bengal famine that led to the introduction of food rationing in colonial India, rationing in Calcutta was certainly the litmus test for the colonial state. Though the causes of the Bengal famine have been studied in

² As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, for literature on the food situation in Bengal see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981; Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982; Madhusree Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*, Basic Books, New York, 2010; Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*, Hurst & Company, London, 2015.

³ *Memorandum by Government of India, Food Department*, on 'The Bengal Food Situation', MSS. EUR. F. 125/138, undated, prepared for consideration by the Viceroy's Council on 1 September 1943, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, 1973, document No. 93, pp. 196-197.

⁴ Minute by Mr. M. Afzal Husain, in Famine Inquiry Commission (hereafter FIC), *Report on Bengal*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 190.

⁵ *Idem*. Emphasis in original.

⁶ Iftekhar Iqbal, 'Return of the Bhadrak: Ecology and Agrarian Relations in Eastern Bengal, c. 1905-1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, Nov. 2009, p. 1346.

great detail in the existing literature, yet, how the initial reluctance of the provincial government to introduce rationing, and the consequent delay in implementation, aggravated the crisis in Calcutta has received no attention in the existing scholarship. This chapter fills in that gap in the literature. The second section of this chapter discusses the fatal delay in implementing rationing in Calcutta. The third section explores the prioritized feeding arrangements for the colliery labour, the police, and the employees of the central government. The discussion of the 'special ration' privileges of these employees, who were classified as 'essential' for the war effort, provides an understanding of how the central government's food policies were influenced by the need to have a smooth running of the war efforts. The fourth section discusses food provisioning of the army. The fifth section demonstrates how the task of feeding the army in India led to serious contentions between the colonial government in India and the imperial government in Britain.

II. Rationing: 'A New Thing'

In India, even in the urban areas that were fortunate to come under the rationing scheme, the introduction of rationing was never smooth, and was often fatefully delayed. Calcutta provides the most illuminating case study. Tusharkanti Ghosh, the editor of the popular Congress-leaning newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, wrote in late 1943 that:

The Government announced long ago that Calcutta would be rationed. There is no knowing when rationing will begin. Hours lengthen into days and days into weeks and there is apparent disposition in authoritative quarters to seek for continuous postponement. To feed people constantly on promises and not to redeem them in time is a procedure which shakes faith and undermines *morale*.⁷

The start of rationing in Calcutta had to clear numerous policy and bureaucratic hurdles. Consequently, it was not until 31 January 1944 that full

⁷ Tusharkanti Ghosh, *The Bengal Tragedy*, Hero Publications, Lahore, 1944, p. 76. Emphasis in original.

rationing came into force in the city.⁸ A memorandum of the Food Department of the central government on 'The Bengal Food Situation' argued that "There is tendency on the part of the Bengal Government to look on the distribution centres for the relief of a comparatively few of the destitute and poorer classes of the population, opened in Calcutta and the districts, as the limit of all possible distribution and rationing measures."⁹ At the First Food Conference in December 1942 (discussed in the first chapter), in connection to a proposal to fix maximum price of rice, the 'Bengal representative' had said that "We have regarded the whole matter as so academic that we have not attempted to make any calculations."¹⁰ During the peak of the Bengal famine, on 9 August 1943, Sir Azizul Huque, the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council still favoured non-interventionism with regard to food affairs in the provinces. In his speech in the Central Legislative Assembly, Huque argued that adoption of measures relating to food 'must be left to the judgement and discretion of the provinces who have to face problems and responsibilities of their own and we cannot judge their acts and their omissions without full knowledge of their difficulties.'¹¹ This non-interventionism that Huque had been pursuing, was to a considerable extent responsible for the delay in the introduction of rationing. However, later in the month, Sir J. P. Srivastava succeeded Huque in the Governor-General's Council as the new Food Member, and pushed for rationing in Bengal. Srivastava had to replace Huque's non-interventionism with bold central intervention to get rationing started in Bengal, as we shall see soon.

When pressed by Srivastava, the Civil Supplies Department of the Bengal Government started insisting on training government officials to implement rationing, without employing readily available private shopkeepers, as will be discussed soon. The insistence on excluding private traders further delayed

⁸ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 65.

⁹ *Memorandum by Government of India, Food Department*, MSS. EUR. F. 125/138, undated, compiled in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 93, p. 198.

¹⁰ As quoted in Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943): Speech by the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council and Other Papers*, presented by the Secretary of State for India to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, October 1943, His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1943, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the introduction of rationing in Bengal. However, in September 1943, the Governor of Bengal Sir John Herbert opined that private grain-traders 'behaved so badly' in the Bombay rationing system that there was 'perhaps some justification' for the attitude of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Civil Supplies Minister in the Bengal government.¹² Nonetheless, in December 1943, the new Viceroy Lord Wavell accepted that 'Disputes about the selection of people to run the Government shops delayed their establishment.'¹³ Meanwhile, while evaluating the Bengal government's food policy, a letter dated 3rd October 1943 circulated by the Bengal Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of India alleged that the central government did not supply Bengal with adequate food, and tolerated the refusal of other Indian provinces to export grains to Bengal.¹⁴

The discussion between Srivastava and the official Famine Inquiry Commission after the famine reveals how the introduction and implementation of rationing were considerably delayed because of the differences between the central and the provincial government. Srivastava, in his capacity as the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, faced questions about the delay at the initial stage of implementing rationing in Calcutta when he met the Famine Enquiry Commission in New Delhi on 15th February 1945. When Sir Manilal Nanavati, one of the Indian members of the Commission, enquired about the cause of the delay, Srivastava started by pointing out that Suhrawardy, the Civil Supplies Minister of Bengal, was sceptical about rationing, since it was a relatively unfamiliar system of state intervention. 'Well, at first I believe, before I became member in August, when I saw Mr. Suhrawardy in August, many people did not believe in rationing; Mr. Suhrawardy did not believe in it. It was a new thing, and he did not believe in

¹² Telegram from the Governor of Bengal, repeated by the Viceroy Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, 20 September 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 125, p. 285.

¹³ Letter marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET' from the Viceroy Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery, 16 December 1943, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 267, p. 546.

¹⁴ 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (2)', Provincial Letter, 3rd October 1943, Calcutta, Bengal Provincial Committee, Communist Party of India, compiled in Suranjan Das and Premansu Kumar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959: Documenting a Turning Point in the History of West Bengal*, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Kolkata, 2004, p. 7. Original in Bengali, translation mine.

it.¹⁵ That rationing seemed too alien a concept to the Civil Supplies Minister, even amid the crisis of famine, is a reminder of how deep-seated contemporary beliefs were that the state had no proper role in the distribution of food to the civilian population.

As the Muslim League led provincial government was an ally of the central government in the war effort, the British chairman of the Famine Inquiry Commission, Sir John Woodhead, tried his best to defend the Bengal government. Woodhead's opinions differed considerably from those of Sir Manilal Nanavati. Woodhead argued that the delay was simply inevitable, because the provincial government was unable for a considerable period to secure control over food supplies.¹⁶

However, Srivastava stood his ground and maintained that speedy implementation of rationing would have actually ensured the best use of whatever small or big supplies were available.¹⁷ In his opinion, the problem was not actually one of supply, but rather the reluctance to undertake the administrative task of implementing rationing that made the provincial government averse to it. '... we guaranteed the supplies; and they had, in any case, some supplies in their hands. But they were not convinced; and I believe they did not feel equal to the administrative task involved. After all, Calcutta is a big city; there are four million people in Greater Calcutta; and rationing an area like that was a tremendous job.'¹⁸

Disputes between the central and provincial government over the actual shape of the rationing machinery were also laid before the Famine Commission as another reason for the delay. As mentioned earlier, Suhrawardy was in favour of waiting until the central and provincial

¹⁵ *Proceedings of the Famine Inquiry Commission* (hereafter *PFIC*), Thursday, the 15th February 1945, the Commission's informal discussion with the Hon'ble Sir J. P. Srivastava, K. B. E., Food Member, in Manilal. B. Nanavati papers, Private Papers Section, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi, p. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

government could build a body of trained government staff to take charge of all the government shops, so that private traders could be excluded from the rationing system altogether.¹⁹ It seems that he did not want to work with an interim rationing machinery involving private traders, as that was sure to mar rationing with widespread corruption, and in turn to incur criticism from the League's political opponents. As we shall see in the next chapter, Suhrawardy was already attracting political attacks from the Hindu Mahasabha for having recruited a private Muslim trading company Messrs. Ispahani and Co. as the sole grain buying agent on behalf of the government. This made Suhrawardy particularly reluctant to engage private agencies in the rationing system.

Finally, in December 1943, the central government concluded that there was no time to wait as there was already severe food scarcity in Calcutta. The Food Member of the Viceroy's Council informed the Famine Enquiry Commission about the Bengal government that:

When we found that their promises to start rationing by certain dates did not materialize, then in December, when I went there, after pleading with them for several days not to insist on this question of having only Government shops – (which had by the way caused considerable agitation in Calcutta – I believe that it would have led to the failure of rationing if they had insisted on it, and this was the opinion of everybody including Mr. Kirby and Mr. Braund²⁰) – I, with the full concurrence of the Government of India – I mean the Executive Council – gave them a direction in the third week of December that they must have a certain number of private shops and that they must have rationing going by a certain date – the direction covered both the requirements, viz. that private shops should be utilized and that rationing must be introduced by a specified date. Then of course at that time I was told that they were not going to accept it, that they were going to fight over it, resign or something of that kind; but better counsels prevailed; they accepted it; and rationing was started on the date fixed by me in the direction.²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁰ The Food Member was referring to Mr Kirby, the Rationing Advisor to the Government of India from the Ministry of Food in Britain, and to Justice H. B. L. Braund, who was the Regional Food Commissioner for Eastern India.

²¹ *PFIC*, p. 18.

Thus, in order to end the impasse over the issue of engaging private shops in the rationing system, Srivastava had to put pressure on the provincial government by setting a deadline for the introduction of rationing. As pointed out by the Famine Inquiry Commission's *Report on Bengal*, 'The Government of Bengal were also directed that there shall be set up and operating not later than the 31st January 1944 at least 1,000 retail centres for the distribution of rationed foodstuffs in addition to shops operated by industrial concerns for their employees.'²² Actually, to ensure the inclusion of private shops in the rationing system, the central government had to set a limit on the number of government shops: 'On the 21st December 1943, the Government of India directed the Bengal Government, under Section 126-A of the Government of India Act, that the number of retail shops under the direct control and management of the Provincial Government should not be more than 450, and that the remainder should be licensed retail shops, owned and managed by selected private traders.'²³ The adoption of such a firm stand on the issue by Srivastava finally forced the provincial government to give in.

Subsequently, full rationing came into force in Calcutta with effect from 31 January 1944. After going through the depositions and documents submitted to the Famine Inquiry Commission, Sir Nanavati concluded with some very adverse comments about Suhrawardy as the Minister of Civil Supplies in the Bengal government: 'I find four different excuses given by the Food Minister there for not enforcing rationing.'²⁴ According to Sir Nanavati, Suhrawardy had first argued that the available staff for rationing were incompetent and disobedient. He then blamed the tumultuous political situation in the province for the delay in implementing rationing, next he complained that adequate food supplies were not available for rationing, and finally he started raising objections about private shops.²⁵ Consequently, Sir Nanavati pointed out: 'I find in the space of two months, four different versions given by the same man

²² FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 65.

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *PFIC*, p. 19.

²⁵ *Idem.*

for not introducing rationing.²⁶ All these prove the reluctance of the provincial government to undertake the task of running rationing system.

Srivastava expressed his conviction before the Famine Inquiry Commission that 'If rationing had been started in Calcutta earlier, I still believe that a good deal of the distress in the mofussil might have been avoided. Rationing should have been started six months earlier.'²⁷ The Commission's *Report on Bengal* accepted his conclusion. In chapter VIII on the 'Supply and Distribution in Bengal', the *Report* concluded that 'If effective preparations had been made in 1943 for the introduction of rationing in Calcutta, the crisis would not have begun as early as it did, nor would it then have developed as quickly as it did.'²⁸

As we have seen by now, reluctance and resistance on the part of the provincial government delayed the introduction of rationing. The failure of the provincial government to prevent the famine in Bengal, and its subsequent bungling with regard to rationing, provided colonialists an opportunity to argue that the poor performance of the provincial government proves that Indians were still not ready for self-rule. Thus, a link was drawn between the provincial government's failure to deal with the food crisis effectively, and India's demand for national independence. An editorial in *The Statesman* newspaper makes us aware of this political aspect of the food crisis in Bengal. The editorial reported that 'some' people, evidently colonialists, jumped in to use the crisis of Bengal under a provincial government as a proof of India's unsuitability for independence. However, notably, despite being a British-owned newspaper, *The Statesman* did not encourage such an argument. In fact, it found the claim nonsensical: 'It is nonsense to suggest, as some do, that development of famine under an autonomous provincial Ministry proves India's unfitness for self-rule.'²⁹

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 64.

²⁹ 'Text of an editorial *Reflections on Disaster* published in *The Statesman* on September 23, 1943', appendix X, Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Earnest Benn, London, 1966, p. 267.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Women queuing up for rice, Lake Market, Calcutta, Bengal famine, 1943'

Photographer: Sunil Janah (1918 - 2012)

Source: Sunil Janah, *Photographing India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013, p. 145.

Remarkably, delays in implementing rationing persisted at late as the beginning of 1945 in some parts of India. For instance, in February 1945, when rationing had become a somewhat established form of state intervention in food, the unnamed representative of the United Provinces stated at the Fifth All-India Food Conference that:

We feel that we are dealing with a temporary emergency which we hope will be gone, say, three years hence. If that is so we are going to get through it by improvisations . . . If it is a matter of improvisation, I do not think it is necessary to go to total rationing for the sake of the theory of total rationing, if you see that under all other circumstances you had better hold off for a few months more or a year more.³⁰

At the same conference, the representative of Punjab declared that the Punjab government too thought it unnecessary for a surplus province like Punjab to introduce rationing.³¹ However, this opposition to rationing died out over the subsequent year. 1946 again saw extensive grain shortages in India, particularly in Punjab, Bombay, and entire south India.³² This convinced most of the opponents of rationing about its inevitability in a poor country like India where procuring enough for two meals a day was a quotidian struggle for the majority. Henry Knight pointed out "That the danger could only be met by the extension of government procurement, price control, and rationing of foodgrains seems only to have been effectively acknowledged when the year 1946 brought food shortages to the Punjab itself."³³

III. Prioritized Hunger

We turn now to examine rationing arrangements for colliery labour, police, and central government employees. The Government of India showed special concern for food supplies to these sections of the civil population, demonstrating the close link between food policies and the imperial war

³⁰ As quoted in Sir Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India: 1939-47*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1954, pp. 189-190.

³¹ As quoted *ibid.*, p. 190.

³² For a description of the crop failures in 1946 see *ibid.*, pp. 249-252. See also B. R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge, digital print 2003, p. 162.

³³ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 160.

effort. It was crucial to keep the labour in collieries adequately fed to keep the production in war industries going. Protection against food scarcity for the staff in the departments of the central government, such as in the postal and railway department, was essential for smooth execution of the war. Keeping the police adequately fed was necessary to maintain law and order in the time of war, and to quell any opposition to the colonial state's war efforts. Notably, some of the colonial officials, such as the Governor of Bengal Sir John Herbert, was well aware that preferential feeding arrangement for particular personnel or organizations, such as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, was sure to draw harsh criticisms. While acquainting the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow with food supplies in Bengal in his letter dated 8 June 1943, Governor Herbert wrote: 'when there is not enough to go around, continued supplies to the Bengal Chamber are cried down as racial and class preference.'³⁴ However, such consideration did not prevent Viceroy Linlithgow from pressing for preferential treatment of the police and colliery workers, as is evident from his telegram to the Governor of Bihar on 13 June 1943: 'you should I think regard as first essential the security of food position for forces of law and order, essential services and administration. Next in priority I hope you will do everything possible to secure food position for essential industries particularly mines at Jamshedpur and Mica.'³⁵

The coal mines in eastern India, particularly in Bihar which was the largest coal producing province, were extremely crucial for the war industries.³⁶ According to a post-war calculation by the Food Department, by 7 February 1946, there were in total 2,22,631 colliery workers in Bihar, with 39,606 adult dependents and 70,111 minor dependents.³⁷ By 1943, due to the overall food shortage in eastern India, the collieries in Bihar were getting seriously

³⁴ Extract from the letter by the Governor of Bengal Sir J. Herbert to Viceroy Linlithgow, MSS. EUR. F. 125/43, dated 8 June 1943, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 766, p. 1050.

³⁵ Telegram from Viceroy Linlithgow to the Governor of Bihar, 13 June 1943, Department of Food, Rationing branch [hereafter DOF(R)], Government of India (hereafter GOI), file RP-1011/24, NAI, 1943, p. 44.

³⁶ *Annual report of the Chief Inspector of Mines in India, 1943*, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1946.

³⁷ 'Introduction of revised Rationing scheme for labour working in Collieries', DOF (R), file. RP-11011(13), vol. III, GOI, NAI, p.8.

worried about their ability to continue feeding their workforce. Against this background, on 18th March 1943, the Assistant Secretary of the Indian Mining Association sent to the Secretary of Commerce Department a copy of his telegram (despatched earlier to the Labour Department on the previous day) reminding him about the serious food situation in coal-fields in both Bengal and Bihar. He warned that the 'Coal Industry cannot give any guarantee that production will continue.'³⁸

The need to retain a healthy workforce in the collieries ensured special attention from the colonial state to the food situation in collieries. At the beginning of 1944, the Labour Department requested the Food department to put a preferential system in place for the colliery labour. The Food Department soon obliged by introducing a separate scheme of rationing for the colliery labour in Bihar and Bengal.³⁹ The scheme that was circulated to the colliery authorities and the provincial governments by the Food Department stipulated that the procurement of the rationed items would be either by the provincial or central government, or by the mining federation, but never by the colliery owners themselves. In cases where procurement was to be executed by the provincial or the central government, the distribution was always to be the responsibility of the provincial government.⁴⁰ However, if the procurement was to be done by the colliery federation, then the onward distribution to individual collieries too was to be done by the federation.⁴¹ Individual collieries were to be responsible for the bulk storage of the stocks, and for distribution to individual workers through ration shops at the collieries set up by the colliery authorities. The scheme chalked out procedures in detail aiming for smooth and corruption-free

³⁸ See the correspondence of the Assistant Secretary of the Indian Mining Association to the Secretary to the Government of India, Commerce Department, dated 18th March 1943, No. 457- R, DOF (R), GOI, file RP-1011/13, 1943, NAI.

³⁹ Letter on the subject 'Extension of rationing scheme in collieries other than Bengal and Bihar, from V. Hoon, Under Secretary, DOF, to the Department of Industries and Supplies, GOI, 26.9.46, file 1011/13, NAI.

⁴⁰ See 'Scheme for the Rationing of Consumer Goods to Colliery Labour' in DOF (R), file R-1011/13, 1943, GOI, NAI, p. 1 of the 6 pages of the scheme (N. B. the document contains no pagination. Page numbers have been added by me counting from the first page as page 1).

⁴¹ *Idem*.

distribution, such as how to maintain separate registers such as the ration-book register, the daily sales register, and stock register. The scheme also introduced indent forms that the recipients needed to fill-in and hand over parts of them to the distributing staff. Because of the general unfamiliarity with these new rationing procedures, the scheme took pains to train the distributing staff by explaining the functions of these indent forms, and to lay down the procedures to check their validity, and even to impart instructions regarding how to fill in, use, and maintain them.⁴² However, it must be remembered that due to the dominance of illiteracy and ignorance among the colliery workers, these formalities were clearly vulnerable to flouting and corruption by the rationing staff in the collieries.

There were problems with preferential rationing arrangements. Such arrangements for 'essential' civil workers such as colliery workers, who were directly connected with the execution of the war, had attracted unskilled labourers from other sectors, who hoped to gain access to the guaranteed feeding arrangements. This had led to a sudden inter sectorial flow of labour toward the colliery sector. Therefore, to prevent workers from other sectors from joining collieries for food, steps were taken to harness false enumeration for the issue of ration books. It was stipulated in the scheme that the central government would make a minimum period of attendance at the colliery mandatory to be eligible for the rationed items. Further, to ensure that workers were not merely registered on paper to draw their food rations without actually contributing to production, a rule was inserted in the scheme that if a worker was found to have been absent at work for a given period, his ration book would be cancelled automatically or held in abeyance.⁴³

The edible and drinkable items that were to be distributed through the rationing system to colliery labour were high-calorie foods suitable for the diet of a heavy manual labourer. They included *dal*, or dried pulses, mustard

⁴² Ibid., p. 1, pp. 3-4.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

oil, gram flour, *gur* (jaggery), and tea.⁴⁴ All these items were to be rationed on an individual basis, rather than on family basis.⁴⁵ Children of colliery workers aged between 2 and 12 years were to receive half of the food amount laid down for adults.⁴⁶

However, not all provincial administrations followed the strict logic of additional rationing to be directed at heavy manual labour. Some seem to have used the provision of extra rations as a means to enhance their popularity among other groups of manual workers. On 2 September 1944, in his circular letter on rationing sent to 'All Provincial Governments / Administrations / Residents', R. H. Hutchings, Secretary of the Central Government's Department of Food, raised the issue of misuse of the provision of supplementary ration to the heavy manual workers.⁴⁷ In the attachment to his letter, Hutchings compiled a long list of non-eligible workers illegitimately receiving extra rations, who were by no means engaged in heavy manual work. These workers included *chaukidars* or watchmen, cobblers, cleaners of motors and other machines, domestic servants and servants of various establishments, motorcar drivers, hospital attendants, hawkers, peons, painters, record lifters, metal workers, *tongawalas* or drivers of horse carts, camel cart drivers, mat makers, *charpaiwalas* or makers of woven beds, donkey drivers, electricians, milkmen, potters, gatemen, office boys, store men and others.⁴⁸

As is evident from this long list, much wider groups of workers were included under the category of 'heavy manual workers', in order to make them eligible for supplementary rations. To restrain this populist tendency of many provincial administrations, in the same letter, Hutchings requested all provincial governments and Residents in the princely states to exclude the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁷ From R. H. Hutchings, Secretary to the Government of India, DOF, to all Provincial Governments / Administrations / Residents, on the subject 'Rationing', letter no. R. 1008/39, 2nd September 1944, DOF(R), NAI.

⁴⁸ Ibid., enclosure I.

non-heavy workers who had been wrongfully included in the list of eligible workers for supplementary rations: 'The Government of India deprecate the inclusion in the list of workers entitled to supplementary rations of persons who cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be called heavy manual workers and request that provincial governments and administrations will review their lists with a view to the exclusion of such persons.'⁴⁹ However, as discussed in the first chapter, the central government did not have any clear constitutional authority under the Government of India Act, 1935, to force the provincial governments to enforce a curtailment of the list of eligible workers for supplementary rations. My sources are silent about whether the central Food Department' request bore any fruit at all.

In different provinces, special rationing arrangements were also made for the police. For instance, in Bihar, the police personnel were to draw supplies at a higher quantity than allowed to the common civil customers.⁵⁰ Their dependents, up to a maximum of two adults or four minors per policeman, were to receive supplies at the same rate as other government employees.⁵¹ For the colonial state, the need to concentrate on war efforts without distractions necessitated more control over domestic dissidents, suppression of nationalist movements such as the Quit India movement in 1942, and rigorous maintenance of everyday law and order. As David Arnold's study of armed police has pointed out, 'To understand the full extent of the colonial government's coercive powers it is necessary to look beyond the army barracks. In British colonies the army was usually relegated to the background and the task of suppressing disturbances and enforcing imperial authority was primarily the responsibility of police forces.'⁵² Consequently,

⁴⁹ Letter no. R. 1008/39, 2nd September 1944, from R. H. Hutchings to all Provincial Governments / Administrations / Residents.

⁵⁰ See the letter from R. N. Lines, Esq., I.C.S., Deputy Controller of Supplies, Bihar, to all District Magistrates and Heads of Departments including the Register, High Court, 3rd July 1943, GOI, NAI. See also paragraph 3 in the copy of the letter No. COW-28/42, 31st May 1943 from the Postmaster-General, Bihar & Orissa Circle, Patna, to the Director-General, Post & Telegram, New Delhi, in DOF(R), file RP-1011/24, 1943, GOI, NAI.

⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵² David Arnold, 'The Armed Police and Colonial Rule in South India, 1914- 1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1977, p. 101.

during the war, there was a far greater need for securing the loyalty of the police. Granting the police the privilege of 'special' rationing was a tool to achieve this loyalty. Therefore, policemen were receiving extra ration of 12 *chattaks*⁵³ over and above the average quantity of civil ration of 1 lb per adult per day.

These food privileges extended to the Indian police had an enduring effect. After the end of the war, in March 1946, the supplementary police ration was reduced from 12 *chattaks* to 7 or 8 *chattaks* per person. This produced widespread resistance. There were many cases of discontent, particularly among the lower ranks of the police, about the reduction in police rationing in post-war period. For instance, in March 1946, in Bihar, police constables resorted to strike in Muzaffarpur, and it soon spread to many other districts of the province. However, in the face of threats of prosecution for indiscipline, the strike was over by early April in most of the districts without being able to increase the quantity of police ration.⁵⁴ In the same month, in the United Provinces too, reduction in ration led to hunger-strikes in six districts by the armed police, which were accompanied by posters in Benaras and Lucknow appealing to the religious sensitivity of the policemen by declaring that 'men who ate the reduced ration would be deemed, in Hindus, to have eaten beef and, if Muslim, to have eaten pork'.⁵⁵ The Home Department found that 'subversive' leaflets had been printed for distribution among the striking policemen.⁵⁶

Within few months of India's independence, towards the end of 1947, spokesmen for the Indian police demanded a cereal ration at par with the

⁵³ A unit of measurement for mass, equals to approximately 58.32 grams, or approximately 2.057 ounces.

⁵⁴ *Extracts from Fortnightly Report for Bihar for the second half of March 1946*, file no. 18/3/46, Home (Political) Department, 1946, GOI, NAI, compiled in Sumit Sarkar (ed.), *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1946*, part I, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 436.

⁵⁵ *Extracts from Fortnightly Report for the United Provinces for the second half of March 1946*, file no. 18/3/46, Home (Political) Department, 1946, GOI, NAI, in *Towards Freedom, 1946*, part I, p. 438.

⁵⁶ *Idem.*

army scale of ration. The Deputy Inspector General of Police, Delhi, asked for an increase in supplementary police ration from 7 *chattacks* to 10.5 *chattacks* per head per day, that is, the army scale of ration.⁵⁷

This demand was now directed at the Food and Civil Supplies Department, which was set up by the independent Indian government in continuation of the Department of Food established during the war. The demand of the police was met sympathetically within the department on the ground that the work of the police indeed included daily physical exercises, in addition to the usual work of policing. K. Ram, Secretary of the Civil Supplies Department, argued in his letter to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi:

. . . the present ration of cereal rations for the Delhi Police force is barely sufficient to sustain a person, who, in addition to his normal daily work as a police officer, has to perform drill and do other physical exercises three times a day. . . the cereal ration allowed to the members of the Defence Services is 10 ½ *Chattaks* per man per day and the duties of the police are just as arduous as those of the army. As the scale of 7 *Chattaks* per head per day appears to be inadequate I am to request that the police force may be treated on the same level as the army in the matter of ration.⁵⁸

Interestingly, despite such sympathetic opinion in favour of increasing police ration, the overall shortage prevented actual increase in the ration scale for the police.⁵⁹ Thus, with the end of the wartime need to have greater policing over the civil society in colonial India, in the early independent India the overall bargaining power of the police with regard to rationing decreased to some extent.

In addition to police agitations regarding quantity of ration, there were also agitations regarding quality. For instance, in Delhi, more than two thousand policemen refused to eat their food on 21 March 1946 as a protest against

⁵⁷ See the letter Sd. K.K. Subramanian on the subject "Increase in the ration of Delhi Police Force", 23.12.47, in DOF(R), file RP-1011/24, 1943, GOI, NAI.

⁵⁸ K. Ram to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi, 11 December 1947, DOF(R), file RP-1013/21, 1944, GOI, NAI, p.160.

⁵⁹ DOF(R), file RP-1013/21, GOI, NAI, pp.160.

their low salaries and, notably, poor quality of food provided to them from the Police Lines Kitchen. One of the strikers complained: ““The food supplied to us from the Police Lines Kitchen is not fit for human consumption. Even cattle would not eat the *chappatis* and *dal* which we have to eat.””⁶⁰ The protest grew so serious that British troops were posted at the Police Lines, and put in charge of the armoury in place of the Indian policemen.⁶¹ To end the police protest, 12 policemen had to be dismissed,⁶² and the British troops had to use tear gas and arrest 93 Indian policemen.⁶³

In addition to the police, the central government also paid special attention to the food requirements of other central government employees, such as the employees of the railway and postal departments. The proceedings of a departmental conference of the Food Department held in March 1943 are most illustrative in this. The proceedings tell us that the Food Department came up with a system of selling heavily subsidized food grains from departmental shops exclusively aimed at the employees of the central government departments who drew a salary of less than three hundred rupees per month.⁶⁴ The Food Department provided preferential treatment to the central government employees as their services were indispensable for smooth execution of the war.

During the war, there was often competition between the central government and the provincial governments in the priority given to their respective staff in terms of feeding arrangements. In the aforementioned conference, Somerset Butler, representative of the central Food Department, lamented

⁶⁰ News report, ‘*Delhi police strike*’, *Hindustan Times*, 22 March 1946, in *Towards Freedom, 1946*, part I, p. 433.

⁶¹ *Idem*.

⁶² A Press Communique issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi Police, undated, in *Towards Freedom, 1946*, part I, p. 434.

⁶³ *Extracts from a news report, ‘Tear gas attack on Delhi policemen’*, *Statesman*, 23 March 1946, in *Towards Freedom, 1946*, part I, pp. 434-435.

⁶⁴ Proceedings of the departmental conference of the Food Department, where officials of the Posts and Air Department, Labour Department, Department of Education, Health & Lands (hereafter DEHL), Railway Board, Central Public Works Department (hereafter CPWD), and War Transport Department were also present, held on 24 March 1943 in New Delhi, in DOF(R), file R-1011/13, 1943, GOI, NAI.

that the priority of the provincial governments was always to feed their own staff first; feeding central government employees was always a matter of secondary concern for them.⁶⁵ To solve this, Sir Gurunath Bewoor, the Secretary, Posts and Air Department, called for the appointment of a central government officer who would bargain with the respective provincial Director of Supplies to ensure that central government employees received an adequate share of what the provincial government procured.⁶⁶

Against this kind of demands, as mentioned in the first chapter, Regional Food Commissioners were appointed in March 1943 to ensure liaison between the central Food Department and the food administrations of their respective regional jurisdiction, and to oversee the overall food situation there. The newly appointed Regional Food Commissioners were asked to ensure favourable distribution of available stocks for the central government employees, and to consider making it a condition for the provincial governments that if they wished to receive emergency food supplies in times of severe scarcity, they must undertake to feed central government employees in their respective provinces in normal times.⁶⁷ For Bengal, W. H. Shoobert, the Director General of Posts and Air Department, suggested that if the Bengal government did not 'behave', central government should send the requisite foodstuffs directly to the central employees posted in the province. However, Somerset Butler pointed out the dangers of taking such an action – it would give the provincial government the impression that it was no longer responsible for feeding central government employees from foodstuffs procured within the province, and thus make central government departments dependent solely on food sent by the centre.⁶⁸

When such deliberations were taking place in official chambers, outside the food situation of the central government workers was deteriorating rapidly.

⁶⁵ Ibid., see Somerset Butler's comment, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., see Sir Gurunath Bewoor's remarks, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid. See the comment of Mr. N. V. H. Symons, Indian Civil Servant from the Civil Defence Department, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., see Butler's comment, p. 3.

For instance, in the same conference, J. J. Bryan, who was representing the office of the Chief Engineer of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), expressed fears that the labourers employed in airfield construction (for whom the Bengal government refused to provide grains from its stock) might start strikes, and eventually food-riots might break out in airfields.⁶⁹ In view of these developments, Bryan suggested that instead of a centralized food supply for the central government departments, individual departments should be given permits to buy food on their own for their own staff. He claimed that if given permit to import on their own, the CPWD alone could import 70,000 maunds into Bengal.⁷⁰ However, the proceedings of the conference do not mention whether Bryan was talking of importing 70,000 maunds of rice or wheat or any other food.

Nonetheless, the demand for buying-permits for individual departments was rejected by Somerset Butler of the Food Department on the ground that it would result in competition in buying among the purchase agents of each department, and that in turn would raise the prices. However, he also admitted that in any case the central government had failed to prevent such competitive buying from taking place unofficially without permits, which resulted in a situation where some of the big employers' agents hoarded six months' grain reserve, causing disappearance of grains in the open market by this time (March 1943).⁷¹

This inter-departmental competition in buying foodstuffs from the market resulted in considerable tension. A major dispute broke out in the conference between W. H. Shoobert, the Director General of the Posts and Air Department, and the unnamed representative of the Railways Department. Shoobert complained that Railways Department was the favourite of the Food Department as it always received government's attention first in times of food scarcity, and the Food department often ignored competitive buying by its

⁶⁹ Ibid., see the words of Mr. J. J. Bryan, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., See words of J. J. Bryan, pp. 3-4.

⁷¹ Ibid., see Butler's words, p. 4.

agents.⁷² Whereas, Shoobert claimed, the staff of the Posts and Air Department nearly starved in Calcutta, and consequently were about to launch a strike in March 1943.⁷³

IV. Provisioning the Army

. . . finding the civilians spending more on themselves than necessary, the soldiers have decided in England to reduce their own sugar, meat and tea rations for enabling the former to continue their orgy. Is that not a matter of regret for us, that we should snatch necessary nutrition from the mouths of those who are prepared to sacrifice even their lives for us? Wars do cost us something. Every one of us must share the reduction of luxuries to the vanishing point and of necessities to the minimum. Is it fair that while soldiers are prepared to reduce their necessities to a limit below the minimum, we should consider it unpatriotic to limit our luxuries even?⁷⁴

This strong advocacy for sacrificing civil food needs for the feeding of the army was published in a magazine titled *Sahyog*, literally meaning co-operation, published in March 1941 from the princely state of Bharatpur in Rajasthan. Fascinatingly, it demonstrates how sacrificing food for the army was projected as an act of patriotism on the part of civilians. As already discussed in chapter 2 and 3, army's voracious hunger was considerably responsible for the drain on civil supplies. However, the quoted excerpt from the *Sahyog* magazine reveals how some civilian Indians thought it patriotic, and almost a pious duty, to sacrifice food for the army. However, in this connection, it needs to be remembered that pro-empire sentiment was generally stronger in the princely states than in the provinces of British India, largely because of their relative seclusion from nationalist movement in British India. Therefore, it was perhaps not altogether surprising that such a

⁷² Ibid., see Shoobert's words, p. 3.

⁷³ Idem.

⁷⁴ *Sahyog*, Holi number, vol. I, no. VIII, 15th March 1941, Co-operative Department, Bharatpur State, p. 199, in file no. 39/3/41-Poll (I), 1941, on the subject 'Propaganda and Publicity: Suggestion in the "Sahyog", a magazine issued from Bharatpur, regarding the use of dried vegetables by the Indian Troops', Home department, Political (I) section, GOI, NAI.

demand for civil food sacrifice for the army came from Bharatpur, one of such princely states.

In the particular case of the *Sahyog* magazine, to inject a feeling of guilt into the civilian eaters, it claimed that soldiers in Britain were sacrificing their sugar, meat, and tea rations so that the civilians could continue their lavish feasts. However, as discussed in chapter 3, there is no evidence that the soldiers in Britain made any such sacrifice for the civilians. In fact, throughout the war, the army remained the blue-eyed boy of the Ministry of Food in Britain, and received greater rations than what the British civilians received. The fable of British soldiers sacrificing their food for the civilians in the metropolis was trumpeted in the princely state of Bharatpur clearly to discourage the hungry civilians in the state from complaining about their starvation, and to make them accept starvation as an unavoidable cost of the war, as well as a patriotic sacrifice in favour of the military stomachs. Tolerating starvation was thus projected as a way of conveying gratitude to the army for 'saving' India from the onslaught of the AIX powers.

Securing adequate food supply was so essential for the war effort in India that the Foodgrains Policy Committee, while concluding its policy recommendations, declared that 'It is incorrect to say that "next" to the War, the food-problem is the most serious issue which faces this country. This is wrong: the food-problem is a part of the War-effort. Its settlement is as urgent as any that confronts the country in military terms.'⁷⁵ The National War Front in India published an advertisement in 1943, notably under the title 'Food for War: Flowers for Victory', propagating that 'Until victory is won, vegetables and quick-growing fruits *must* replace flowers in private gardens . . . Let flowers bloom in your garden again on Victory-day, but now while the world

⁷⁵ Foodgrains Policy Committee (hereafter FPC), *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee 1943*, Sir Theodore Gregory, Chairman, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1946, p. 128.

is torn by war, plant FOOD. Plant FOOD on every inch of your garden, large or small.’⁷⁶

As mentioned in previous chapters, there was a substantial increase in the number of soldiers in India during the World War II. More than two million fresh recruitments were made in the army, navy, and air force during the war.⁷⁷ According to Gajendra Singh’s research, on 1 September 1939 the total number of combatants and non-combatants in the Indian army was 210,656, and by 1 April 1945, the number rose to 2,285,936.⁷⁸ In addition to this vastly expanded regular British Indian Army, there were Allied troops from many parts of the world stationed in India. Thus, it became a much bigger task to feed the enormous number of military men in India. In January 1944, in reply to the Secretary of State for India’s queries about the grounds for demanding food imports to India, the Food Department telegraphed him that:

1944 requirement in foodgrains and pulses of non-Indian troops, including U. S. A., Chinese, West Africans, East Africans and British additional to pre-war strength is 181,480 tons. Also assuming that consumption on military ration is 50 per cent. higher than that of civil life, additional demand on resources of the country, represented by very large increase in the Indian Army, would be approximately 180,000 tons per annum. Similar increase on account of labour employed on Defence Works might amount to 50,000 tons.⁷⁹

Many of the new Indian recruits came from poor families, and so found themselves eating much more food at the army canteens than they could afford to eat at home before enlistment. In January 1944, while arguing his

⁷⁶ See the advertisement issued by the National War Front, file no. 4-30/43-P, 1943, on the subject “‘Grow More Food & Vegetables” campaign – production in town gardens – propaganda through films and lantern slides”, DEHL, Food Production Branch, GOI, NAI. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁷ See the telegram marked ‘PRIVATE’ from Viceroy Wavell to Mr Amery, 12 January 1944, L/E/8/3322: f 35, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 321, p. 633. See also Indivar Kamtekar, ‘A Different War Dance: State and Class in India (1939-1945)’, *Past and Present*, vol. 176, no. 1, Aug. 2002, p. 190.

⁷⁸ ‘Class Composition of the Army in India’, Asia and Africa Collections, British Library, L/WS/1/456, and ‘Indian Army Morale and Possible Reduction, 1943-1945’, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, L/WS/1/707, as presented in ‘Appendix II: Recruitment into the Indian Army during World War II’, in Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 256.

⁷⁹ Telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE’ and ‘SECRET’ from Governor-General (Food Department) to Secretary of State, 11 January 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 316, p. 625.

case for increased import of foodgrains to India, the Viceroy Wavell reported to the Secretary of State that though 'Indians included in total are not new mouths to feed, but their army rations are far more liberal than what they would consume in their homes.'⁸⁰

While discussing the greatly increased army demand for food during the war, we need to factor in that in addition to providing extra amounts of food ration to the actually serving army men, their families too had to be provided for with food under preferential treatment within the military rationing scheme. Indivar Kamtekar's research shows that during the war only a minority of the Indian soldiers were owners of land; majority of them were from the labourer and artisan classes.⁸¹ My research finds that even the majority of those fortunate ones who owned land, owned small lands. For instance, in 1947, the Communist Party of India in its memorandum to the central government on the issue of India's food crisis cited a prior enquiry report of the Punjab Government's Board of Economic Inquiry which calculated that only 12.1 per cent of the landowners in Punjab owned holdings of more than 15 acres.⁸² As the vast majority of the landowners owned less than 15 acres, naturally the majority of the land-owning soldiers belonged to such petty land-owning families. Naturally, their families could not depend solely on their own agricultural land for food in times of scarcity or complete disappearance of food in the open markets. Therefore, to procure food, their families were considerably dependent on the money remitted by them to home.

Dismal tales of starvation back home reached the soldiers through letters by family members. On 31 July 1943, Leopold Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, informed the War Cabinet through his memorandum on the Indian situation that "subversive activities among the troops in the Indian army, which are already causing anxiety, are most likely to be successful if

⁸⁰ Telegram marked 'PRIVATE' from Viceroy Wavell to Mr Amery, 12 January 1944, L/E/8/3322: f 35, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 321, p. 633.

⁸¹ Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance', pp. 191-192.

⁸² *India's Food Crisis, Analysis and Solution: Memorandum of the Communist Party of India to the Government of the Indian Union*, People's Publishing House Ltd., Bombay, 1947, p. 33.

accompanied by reports from home that their families are starving.”⁸³ Weekly intelligence summary from the General Headquarters, India, dated 20th August 1943, noted that ‘Many Indian soldiers serving in East India have seen the famine conditions prevailing there for themselves, and Indian soldiers in general are already apprehensive of the effects of food shortages upon their families.’⁸⁴

The fear of starvation was spoiling the familial bonding. While discussing wartime inflation in his recent study of ‘India’s war’, Srinath Raghavan has cited a very interesting letter from a soldier’s wife in Hyderabad state to her husband wherein she wrote how the fear of starvation prevented her from spending money on taking photographs of their children: ‘You are always asking me to send a photo of mine and children; but it would cost me at least five rupees nowadays and where will I get so much . . . Please increase my allotment, otherwise we are really going to starve.’⁸⁵ Though Raghavan has quoted this letter to prove his point about wartime inflation, yet the letter can be further interpreted as conveying how wartime inflation in food prices, and the resultant need for greater remittance to the soldiers’ families, were upsetting the emotional bonding between the soldiers and their families. In October 1944, when the question of feeding the defeated Italians arose before the War Cabinet, a letter from the India Office informed the Paymaster General Frederick Lindemann that ‘it is only necessary to imagine the feelings of the Indian soldiers, who fought the Italians for several bitter years in the desert, when it is announced that their own country is to run the risk of local famine so that the Italians can have their larders filled.’⁸⁶

⁸³ As cited in John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, foreword by the late Lord Stockton, Hutchinson, London, 1988, p. 911.

⁸⁴ ‘Extract from G.H.Q., India, Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 94, Dated 20th August, 1943 – Part III, Security Intelligence’, marked ‘INTERNAL’, annexed to document no. 119, *War Cabinet Paper W. P. (43) 407*, 17 September 1943, R/30/1/4: ff 123-5, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 119, p. 273.

⁸⁵ Fortnightly Censor Summary, 21 April to 5 May 1943, L/P&J/12/655, Asian and African Collections, British Library, London, as cited in Srinath Raghavan, *India’s War: The Making of Modern South Asia, 1939-1945*, Allen Lane, London, 2016, p. 351.

⁸⁶ Letter from the War Cabinet to the Paymaster General, 23rd October 1944, H293/3 - H293/4, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, Nuffield College Library (hereafter NCL), Oxford.

As news of starvation by their loved ones distracted and demoralized the soldiers, therefore, to prevent such demoralization, the army authorities eventually had to introduce family-rations for them. Thus, in addition to the substantially increased task of feeding the serving army men, authorities had to undertake the additional responsibility of feeding their families too. According to P. K. Basu, Regional Food Commissioner of Calcutta, by October 1944, families of all soldiers, except those who were themselves stockists of rice and paddy, were brought under the army rationing system irrespective of their income.⁸⁷ Notably, to make food rations available to the families of army men in distant and disconnected pockets, special arrangement had to be made subsequently. For instance, in the Madras presidency, 'a novel experiment in the form of a mobile military welfare ration depot' was started at Mailpatti in the North Arcot district under the supervision of the local Soldiers' Board. The purpose of this mobile ration depot was to supply food rations to the families of the soldiers in distant pockets of the district at the weekly bazaars.⁸⁸

The favourable arrangements made for army rations had potential to cause civil resentment with possible political consequences. Food officials realized this danger. For instance, the Regional Food Commissioner of Madras, C. P. Karunakara Menon, noted that 'while it is necessary to meet all reasonable requirements of the military personnel it is criminal to allow rations which admit of wastage when the civil population is suffering. Such large disparity in rations is bound to cause discontent among the civil population'.⁸⁹ Sir Azizul Huque, the Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, admitted in October 1943 that while the army was enjoying high quantities of ration, for civilians in many areas, for instance in Cochin, shortage of supplies had forced the rationing authority to lower the grain ration to 'nutritionally insufficient' quantity.⁹⁰ Under pressure from the Food Department, in

⁸⁷ P. K. Basu, Regional Food Commissioner of Calcutta to GOI, 10 July 1944, DOF(R), file R-1013/2, GOI, NAI, p. 62.

⁸⁸ See the extract from the Fortnightly Report for the first half of September 1946, from the Government of Madras to the Home Department, GOI, DOF(R), R-1013/2, NAI, p. 61.

⁸⁹ DOF(R), file R-1013/2, GOI, NAI, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Food Member of the Governor-General's Council, *India (Food Situation 1943)*, p. 32.

December 1943 the General Army Headquarters instructed all army headquarters and army commands that for the families and servants of the military personnel, as well as for the civilians employed by the defence services, 'In areas where 'civil rationing' has been or may be introduced, purchases of 'rationed' commodities from Army sources will be restricted . . . to the limits laid down for the civil population of that area.'⁹¹

Notably, within the Food Department, particularly among the Indian food officials, there was a general sense of displeasure, and even guilt, over the much higher quantity of army ration compared to the survival level rations allowed to the common civilian customers. For instance, the officers of the Sugar and Salt Branch of the Food Department were disgruntled with the provision of very high sugar ration allowed to the army men, when, as discussed in the second chapter, there were severe restrictions on sugar consumption by the civilians. The Sugar and Salt Branch cited the example of Simla where there was a huge disparity between sugar ration for the army men and civilians.⁹² Eventually, according to the Sugar Controller of India, in view of the adverse mood of the Food Department, the War Department issued orders in February 1945 to limit the sugar ration for military personnel in sedentary postings, and for their families living in areas under standard civil rationing, to the level of standard civil rations.⁹³ However, a memorandum of the Army Branch of the War Department reveals that the reduction was made simply because there was already enough sugar stock with the army. Consequently, though the aggregate army demand for sugar was reduced, yet, no reduction was made in the sugar rations to individual soldiers and their families.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Circular communication from the General Headquarters to Head quarters, and all armies/ commands, 27 December 1947, DOF(R), R-1013/2, GOI, NAI, p.23.

⁹² For a detailed description of the sugar ration allowed to army personnel stationed at Shimla and their families, see the document of the Office of the Sugar Controller for India, Shimla, 3.3.1945, in DOF(R), file RP- 1011/24, 1943, GOI, NAI.

⁹³ *Idem.*

⁹⁴ See the memorandum of the War Department (Army Branch), 22 February 1945, on the subject 'Sugar for Defence Services during 1944-45,' signed by A. C. Beynon, Joint Secretary to the DOF, in DOF(R), GOI, file RP-1011/24, 1943, NAI.

In addition to staple grains, the army required meat and vegetables. The procurement of these items had far-reaching consequences. The foreign Allied troops stationed in India, consisting of mainly American and British soldiers, were accustomed to eating meat, eggs, fish, and vegetables on a scale far more lavish than was usual amongst most of the Indian civilian population. Among all these supplementary items, the procurement of meat proved particularly difficult. Henry Knight's account provides important insights into the problems that increased army demand caused. According to Knight (and according to the *Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, 1943*) in peacetime, and even in the early years of the war, army authorities purchased meat (as well as other supplementary foods like fish and eggs) through a system of local contracts made with local suppliers.⁹⁵ As the demand was small then, the primary producers and suppliers did not find it difficult to supply them on a regular and reliable basis.⁹⁶

However, since 1942, when the Japanese threat intensified, and when the scale of both domestic enlistment and stationing of foreign troops rose steeply, the army demand for meat began to expand at a rapid rate. As a consequence, military authorities entered into bigger contracts with local private suppliers. These suppliers were keen to obtain the contracts, but quickly realized that there was a stark mismatch between rapidly growing demand and what was a relatively static supply of animals.⁹⁷ Further, many animals died while in transport to far away military bases in railway wagons, often because of unpredictable delays on the way.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 231. See also FPC, *Report*, p. 35. See further letter from the Quarter Master General in India, to the Headquarters of the North Western Army, Southern Army, Central Command and Eastern Command, 7 April 1944, no. 67053/Q-4, file no. 49-W, 1944, on 'Coordination of Purchase of food stuffs for the Defence Services', War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

⁹⁶ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 231.

⁹⁷ *Idem*.

⁹⁸ Appendix 'A', titled 'Statement by the B. R. I. A. S. C. Central Command Relative to the Difficulties Encountered in the Procurement of Local Produce', to the final agenda of the second meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-ordination Committee, 23-24 January 1945, in file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

In this situation, to fulfil their contracts, the private suppliers started offering exorbitantly high prices in an effort to persuade cattle farmers to sell their livestock. The high price succeeded in tempting farmers to sell young stock and even working cattle to the butcheries.⁹⁹ In addition to the temptation of higher prices, the wartime escalation in the price of cattle food and fodder made it more attractive to sell cattle for meat. As discussed in the second chapter, the increased slaughter of working cattle for meat was cited by a section of the Indian press and some political parties as the most important cause leading to the eventual depletion of India's 'cattle wealth', so badly needed for ploughing land.¹⁰⁰

Gradually, by early 1944, the army authorities and the Food Department of the central government realized the need to restrain popular civil discontent over the army's voracious demand for food. However, at the same time, in the early months of 1944, failure to keep the army content about food would have had grave implication for the ongoing Imphal - Kohima battle in North-East India against the Indian National Army led by Subhas Chandra Bose.¹⁰¹ Now, to strike a balance between the civil and army interests, the Army Branch of the War Department of the central government asked all provincial governments to form a Purchase Coordination Committee 'in each military command, under the chairmanship of the Major-General in charge of Administration, consisting of representatives of the Command, the Food Department and the Provincial Government, with sub-Committees constituted on similar lines at each military station or convenient group of stations in the Command.'¹⁰² The purpose of the Purchase Coordination Committees was 'to obviate the competition that now results from the Food

⁹⁹ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁰ *The Hindu*, Wednesday, April 7, 1943, collected by the Bureau of Public Information, GOI, in file no. 10-5/43-P, 1943, on the subject 'Restriction on slaughter of cattle – Ceylon Army authorities' tenders for import of cattle – Food Deptt's general instructions regarding issue of licences (sic) – Press Note', DEHL, Food Production Branch, NAI.

¹⁰¹ Barnes and Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay*, pp. 914-915.

¹⁰² Letter from Government of India, War Department (Army Branch) to all provincial governments and Chief Commissioners, on the subject 'Co-ordination of purchases of foodstuffs for the Defence Services', 15 February 1944, Regr. No. 1559-Q/ W.7., in file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

Department, General Headquarters and local military authorities separately purchasing supplies without co-ordination in regard to prices and quantities.¹⁰³ Thus, this new system was expected to prevent 'indiscriminate procurement from civil resources in competition with local contractors, Food Department Contractors and others', and thereby to bring down high prices.¹⁰⁴

In the second chapter, I have discussed how the Food Department issued orders to prohibit slaughter of young stock, cattle in milk, and cattle fit for being used for ploughing. In addition, in an effort to control indiscriminate slaughter of cattle, now the military authorities sent out circulars banning slaughter of cattle belonging to a wider range of different categories. These included: cattle under three years of age, cows which were pregnant, cattle between three and ten years of age which were being used or likely to be used for agricultural and transport purposes, and cows between the same age bracket which were in milk.¹⁰⁵ In fact, one of the stipulated objectives of the Purchase Coordination Committees was to regulate 'consumption of supplies in such manner as to protect animal breeding stocks, cows in milk and working bullocks used for agricultural and transport purposes.'¹⁰⁶ Many of the animals tendered by the military contractors for sale for slaughter were rejected by the army's veterinary inspectors as they were found to be pregnant.¹⁰⁷ To prevent the useless transportation of pregnant animals and wastage of time in the whole unnecessary process, the Central Command of the army once even suggested that 'legislation is required making it an

¹⁰³ *Idem*.

¹⁰⁴ letter from the Quarter Master General in India, to the Headquarters of the North Western Army, Southern Army, Central Command and Eastern Command, 7 April 1944, no. 67053/Q-4, file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

¹⁰⁵ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 232.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Government of India, War Department (Army Branch) to all provincial governments and Chief Commissioners, on the subject 'Co-ordination of purchases of foodstuffs for the Defence Services', 15 February 1944, Regr. No. 1559-Q/ W.7., in file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

¹⁰⁷ Appendix 'A', titled 'Statement by the B. R. I. A. S. C. Central Command Relative to the Difficulties Encountered in the Procurement of Local Produce', to the final agenda of the second meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-ordination Committee, 23-24 January 1945, in file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

offence to tender for sale for slaughter any animal known at the time to be pregnant.’¹⁰⁸

However, the measures to preserve India’s ‘cattle wealth’ came a little late. Though these measures helped to check indiscriminate slaughter, yet they could not make up for the loss of cattle that had already taken place, nor could they fully eliminate illegal butchering. Therefore, Henry Knight lamented that ‘It would have been well if these measures had been adopted earlier, for by 1945 there was “an acute shortage of bullocks for agricultural purposes practically all over the country”’.¹⁰⁹

In an interesting observation, Knight argued that in addition to valid concerns about military purchase far in excess of the army’s reasonable needs, there were exaggerated ‘rumours’ about military purchase.¹¹⁰ According to him, the army’s refusal to disclose its purchases and stock-position for ‘security’ reasons proved to be a fillip for the rumours.¹¹¹ Even the Foodgrains Policy Committee’s report refused to state the size of the army’s food reserve ‘for security reasons’.¹¹² In this situation, to prevent proliferation of rumours and to mitigate the overall popular discontent on the issue of excessive military procurement, the Food Department took further steps to moderate the drain on civil supplies caused by the army. Accordingly, it encouraged the military cantonments to start their own vegetable farms.¹¹³ Starting army’s own vegetable farms was also necessary as there was acute shortage of the ‘English varieties’ of vegetables for foreign soldiers.¹¹⁴ Knight cites the example of the the Eastern Command of the army which included Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and parts of Assam. Here, troop numbers were highest because

¹⁰⁸ Idem.

¹⁰⁹ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 232.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 228.

¹¹¹ Idem.

¹¹² FPC, *Report*, p. 36.

¹¹³ Idem. See also Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 232-233.

¹¹⁴ Appendix ‘A’, titled ‘Statement by the B. R. I. A. S. C. Central Command Relative to the Difficulties Encountered in the Procurement of Local Produce’, to the final agenda of the second meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-ordination Committee, 23-24 January 1945, in file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

of the region's proximity to the war front with Japan. To meet the needs of the vast number of Indian, British, American, Chinese, and other Allied Forces stationed there, vegetable gardens were opened in February 1944.¹¹⁵ Some of the vegetable farms were run solely by the army, and others jointly by the respective provincial government and the army.¹¹⁶ Growing vegetables was a considerably large undertaking. D. R. Sethi, the Director of Agricultural Production (Food), pointed out in January 1944 that for the production of 1585 tons of vegetables and 850 tons of potatoes per month for the army, it was essential to cultivate 3725 acres of land.¹¹⁷ However, finding land was not a problem as the army already had 8,260 acres of agricultural land.¹¹⁸

In addition to starting vegetable farms, existing army dairies were expanded, and many new dairies were established. Army piggeries were set up to produce pork for the foreign soldiers.¹¹⁹ Some of the piggeries, for instance, the military piggery in Calcutta, received pigs of imported breeds.¹²⁰ In May 1944, the first duck farm was opened in Bengal.¹²¹ To meet the wartime need for increased food production for the army, technical help from overseas experts were sought occasionally, as when an expert in mass incubation of duck eggs was brought from China to the duck farm in Bengal.¹²² At the military poultry farm in Nagpur, electric incubators as well as oil incubators were imported from Britain.¹²³ By the third quarter of 1944, the army was

¹¹⁵ Knight, *Food Administration* p. 233.

¹¹⁶ Idem.

¹¹⁷ Note by D. R. Sethi, the Director of Agricultural Production (Food), to the Secretary, DEHL, 19.1.1944, file no. 710-35/44 P II, 1944, on the subject 'Vegetables and Live Stock Breeding Schemes for increasing supplies to the Army – Advice of the D.A.P. (Food)', DEHL, Food Production Branch, NAI.

¹¹⁸ See the note by J. D. Tyson, Secretary, DEHL, 20.1.1944, file no. 710-35/44 P II, 1944, DEHL, Food Production Branch, NAI.

¹¹⁹ 'Statement by Col. J. R. Brown to be made at C. P. Government Production Meeting, Nagpur, 19th Dec. '44', appendix 'A' to 'Record of Sub-Committee Meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-Ordination Committee held at Nagpur on 19th December 1944', file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI. See also Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 233.

¹²⁰ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 233.

¹²¹ Idem.

¹²² Idem.

¹²³ 'Statement by Col. J. R. Brown to be made at C. P. Government Production Meeting, Nagpur, 19th Dec.'44', appendix 'A' to 'Record of Sub-Committee Meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-Ordination Committee held at Nagpur on 19th December 1944', file no. 49-W, 1944, War department, Army Branch, NAI.

also supervising four hundred goat-breeding herds.¹²⁴ Rabbit farming was a new thing introduced by the army. J. R. Brown, a Colonel of the Central Command told in December 1944: 'we feel we are laying the foundation of a new industry in India in starting this Rabbit Farming.'¹²⁵

The presence of a vast number of foreign soldiers in India also augmented the demand for processed foods, which had never before been a part of the Indian daily diet. Consequently, at first, the Purchase Coordination Committees adopted the shortcut of importing processed foods like tinned fish, frozen meat, dehydrated meat and potatoes to meet the demands of the foreign soldiers stationed in India. However, due to the shipping crisis, and lack of appropriate storage facilities like cold storage, the Food Department felt the need to reduce the dependence on imports of processed foods.¹²⁶ Consequently, to supplement these imports, the department tried to produce processed foods within India. Dehydration of food was important for the army as it made perishable foods last much longer, and also reduced the volume of food cargos and thereby made military transportation easier and more economical.

Accordingly, by February 1945, six newly constructed meat dehydration factories were producing processed meat at Nowshera, Poona, Patna, Madras, Delhi, and Agra, producing four tons of processed meat per day.¹²⁷ On an average, a dehydration factory for goat meat needed approximately 450 goats per day.¹²⁸ By October 1945, there were three more government meat

¹²⁴ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 233.

¹²⁵ 'Statement by Col. J. R. Brown to be made at C. P. Government Production Meeting, Nagpur, 19th Dec. '44', appendix 'A' to 'Record of Sub-Committee Meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-Ordination Committee held at Nagpur on 19th December 1944', file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

¹²⁶ For how the lack of cold storage was hampering the use of frozen meat, see 'Record of Sub-Committee Meeting of the Central Command Economic Co-Ordination Committee held at Nagpur on 19th December 1944', part two, file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

¹²⁷ Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 233-234.

¹²⁸ Copy of the letter from E. J. Boughton, Joint Secretary, DOF (Division III) to the Headquarters, Central Command, Agra, 27 June 1944, no. A-III/56 (6), file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

dehydration factories functioning at Anantapur, Ranipet, and Amritsar.¹²⁹ As discussed in the second chapter, and as shown in the following table 2 taken from the Food Department's circular letter to the provincial governments, to take care of the religious sensibilities of various communities, the meat dehydration factories run by the Food Department had to be divided into two categories – one producing dehydrated *halal* meat and the other dehydrated *jhatka* or conventionally slaughtered meat. In addition to processed meat factories, there were government factories producing dehydrated potatoes and onions in cans for the army.¹³⁰

In 1945, in addition to the factories directly run by the Food Department itself, there were 257 private food producing installations approved by the department that were producing for the defence forces (see the appendix 1).¹³¹ Some of the items produced by these factories were dehydrated potatoes, dehydrated onions, biscuits, ground coffee, condiment powders, syrups, oil salad (pickle), lemon and lime juice and cordials, and canned vegetables.¹³²

¹²⁹ Appendix I titled 'List of Government Factories run by Food Department', appended to the circular letter on the subject 'Post-war development of Food Industries' from J. M. Lobo Prabhu, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, to 'All Provincial Governments and local Administrations', 5 October 1945, No. A. –III/240 (3), DOF (Division III), in file. no. 356, 1945, on 'Post-war development of food industries', Mysore Residency, Bangalore, NAI.

¹³⁰ Knight, *Food Administration*, pp. 233-234.

¹³¹ 'List of Food Producing Installations approved for production for the Defence Services during 1945', appendix II appended to the circular letter from J. M. Lobo Prabhu, 5 October 1945, in file no. 356, 1945, Mysore Residency, Bangalore, NAI. The list is reproduced in full in the appendix 1 to this thesis.

¹³² *Idem*.

TABLE 2

List of Government Factories run by Food Department.

I. Bihar—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Halal), *Patna.*
2. Ghee Centre, *Muzaffarpur.*

II. Bombay—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Jhatka), *Poona.*

III. C.P.—

1. Ghee Centre, *Kamptee.*

IV. Delhi—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Jhatka), *Delhi Cantonment.*

V. Madras—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Jhatka), *Madras.*
2. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Halal), *Anantapur.*
3. Government Dehydration Factory (Jhatka), *Ranipet.*
4. Ghee Centre, *Bangalore.*

VI. N.-W.F.P.—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Halal), *Nowshera.*
2. Fruit Processing Factory, *Peshawar.*
3. Fruit Canning Factory, *Nasarpur, Peshawar.*

VII. Punjab—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Jhatka), *Amritsar.*
2. Ghee Centre, *Ambala Cantonment.*

VIII. Sind—

1. Ghee Centre, *Karachi.*

IX. U.P.—

1. Government Meat Dehydration Factory (Halal), *Agra.*
2. Government Dehydration Factory, *Farrukhabad.*
3. Government Dehydration Factory, *Lucknow.*
4. Government Dehydration Factory, *Fatehgarh.*
5. Ghee Centre, *Agra.*

'List of Government Factories Run by Food Department'

Source: Appendix I titled 'List of Government Factories run by Food Department', appended to the circular letter on the subject 'Post-war development of Food Industries' from J. M. Lobo Prabhu, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, to 'All Provincial Governments and local Administrations', 5th October 1945, No. A. -III/240 (3), Department of Food (Division III), in file no. 356, 1945, on the subject 'Post-war development of food industries', Mysore Residency, Bangalore, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Henry Knight pointed out that as the dehydration technique of food was a novel technique in India, it required the setting up of research and training centres, and training of workers by experts from foreign countries that were advanced in this technique. Consequently, the Food Department established a laboratory headquarter for this purpose, and created the post of 'technical advisors' who were sent to Britain and the United States of America to be trained in the techniques of dehydration of foodstuffs.¹³³ Further, a 'Mission of Experts' on dehydration from the Ministry of Food in Britain visited India during the winter of 1943.¹³⁴

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the unprecedented high number of foreign soldiers present in India, there was a huge increase in the number of Indian soldiers too during the war. Similar to the introduction of processed foods to India due to the stationing of non-Indian soldiers, the dietary habits of the army's Indian recruits led to the introduction of new food items. As discussed in the first chapter, north India, especially Punjab, was the main recruiting field for the British Indian army. As *ghee* or clarified butter was an indispensable part of the traditional north Indian diet, it was naturally one of the main items in army rations. However, due to the insufficiency of milk output during the war, adulterated *ghee* flooded the market, which often contained harmful ingredients. For instance, in February 1941, the Home Secretary of the North Western Frontier Province informed the Under Secretary of the central government's Department of Education, Health & Lands, which was looking after food affairs before the formation of the Food Department in December 1942, that 'The majority of ghee sold in this province is mixed'.¹³⁵ He further informed that much of this adulterated ghee was actually imported from the Punjab, Bajour and Swat.¹³⁶ As we have seen

¹³³ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 234.

¹³⁴ DOF's statement "B" on the subject 'Requirement of fish and fresh vegetables for dehydration', file no. 49-W, 1944, War Department, Army Branch, NAI.

¹³⁵ Letter from Abdur Rahim Khan, Home Secretary to the Government, N. W. F. P., to the Under Secretary to the GOI, DEHL, 10 February 1941, letter no. 422/19/66-HM, DEHL, file no. 29-9/40-11, NAI.

¹³⁶ *Idem.*

in table 2, to protect the soldiers' health from the harms of consuming adulterated *ghee*, the Food Department opened *ghee*-heating factories that were producing exclusively for the defence forces. However, because of the scarcity of milk on the one hand, and the enormous increase in the number of Indian soldiers on the other, the output of such *ghee* factories proved utterly inadequate.

Against this background, the Food Department had to think of alternatives that would taste like *ghee*, but would require no milk for production. Accordingly, the army food laboratories came up with *vanaspati*, or 'vegetable *ghee*', an edible hydrogenated oil-compound produced from groundnuts. *Vanaspati* was well received as a satisfying alternative to pure dairy *ghee*. Henry Knight tells us that by the end of 1945, there were seventeen *vanaspati* factories in India with the annual output of 117,245 tons.¹³⁷ These factories received government funding to import plants and machineries from abroad.¹³⁸

However, with the end of the war and consequent demobilization in India, the army demand for processed foods shrank rapidly. Accordingly, a press note was issued in April 1945 by the Food Department notifying that 'no assistance would be given to any party who might start erecting a *vanaspati* factory, without the prior sanction of the Food Department.'¹³⁹ J. M. Lobo Prabhu, the Deputy Secretary of the Food Department, wrote to 'All Provincial Governments and local Administrations' that 'they may increase their interest in food industries in proportion as our own interest decreases with the reduction in the Army demand.'¹⁴⁰ Thus, in the absence of adequate army demand, the centre's Food Department was trying to shift the responsibility

¹³⁷ Knight, *Food Administration*, p. 235.

¹³⁸ *Idem*.

¹³⁹ *All India Monthly Report on Food Position for the month of April, 1945*, file no. 1 (14)- IB/45, 1945, on the subject 'Monthly reports on food situation in India and Indian States', p. 3, Political Department, Intelligence Bureau Branch, GOI, NAI.

¹⁴⁰ See paragraph 8 in the circular letter on the subject 'Post-war development of Food Industries' from J. M. Lobo Prabhu, 5 October 1945, in file no. 356, 1945, Mysore Residency, Bangalore, NAI.

of supporting the processed food factories to the shoulders of the provincial governments and princely states.

There were two types of food industries developed by the Food Department. First, those that were directly run by the department. Second, private factories that depended on the Food Department for absorbing their production for the army.¹⁴¹ As the army demand contracted after the war, private factories were advised by the central government to develop a share in the civil food market. However, the civil demand for processed foods was not big enough to sustain the industry. In his already mentioned letter, J .M. Lobo Prabhu, the Deputy Secretary of the Food Department, admitted that 'In respect of industries owned privately, the problems now arising are, firstly, in respect of creating a public demand to absorb supplies so far taken by the Army. . . Food industries are distinguished from other industries in that they have no arrears of civilian demand accumulated for satisfaction as soon as the Army demand is withdrawn.'¹⁴² Further, he pointed out that 'Many food industries have so far depended on the Food Department for priority assistance in respect of raw-material, equipment, and transport. This assistance has been confined in proportion to the production for the army.'¹⁴³ When the 'priority assistance' by the Food Department stopped with the end of the war, the private factories were left in the lurch with regard to raw materials, machineries, and transportation. Most of the private factories had therefore to shut down.

As K. T Achaya's study of food industries has shown, during the war, the production of a wide range of processed foods had also given birth to new types of subsidiary industries, such as canning factories producing cans for processed foods.¹⁴⁴ When the central government scaled down production of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., paragraph 2. For a complete list of the food producing installations approved for production for the defence services during 1945, see *ibid.*, appendix II. The list is also reproduced in full in the appendix 1 to this thesis.

¹⁴² Ibid., paragraph 3.

¹⁴³ Ibid., paragraph 6.

¹⁴⁴ K. T. Achaya, *The Food Industries of British India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 255-258.

processed foods after the war, the need for packing materials dropped too, eventually leading to the closure of many such factories.

This whole episode of processed food reveals the industrial implications of the military's demand for food. It demonstrates how completely novel types of industries emerged in India depending solely on the short-lived wartime demand from the army, and how they eventually disappeared because of their dependence solely on military demand.

In the post-war period, the Regional Food Commissioners began to reassert their old demand for a reduction in the size of the military ration. In May 1946, the Regional Food Commissioner of Madras C. P. Karunakara Menon, who had earlier condemned the very high quantity of army rations, called for a reduction in the army ration:

. . . When the civil population (non-producers) are now on a 12 oz ration and may have to go down to a still smaller ration in the coming months, it would appear difficult to justify a ration of 21 oz to the army men who are now in peace conditions, or any rate higher than what is now allowed to the heavy manual labourers viz 1 lb. If their ration of food grains is reduced to 1 lb a day the saving would be nearly 50,000 tons a year which would feed at 12 oz four lakhs of civilians a year.¹⁴⁵

Interestingly, this question of the post-war army ration had an outcome directly the reverse of the post-war police ration. As we have seen, some food officials recommended continuance of the higher ration in the case of the police, but the Food Department eventually decided to reduce the quantity. In the case of the military ration, food officials like Menon called for cuts in the quantity, but the Food Department overrode the arguments in favour of a reduction in the quantity, and resolved to continue the wartime high level of army ration. R. H. Hutchings, Secretary of the Department of Food, advised Menon that 'it is no use...pursuing the matter further with the War

¹⁴⁵ Menon's letter to the DOF, 30 May 1946, DOF(R), file RP-1013/21, 1944, GOI, NAI, pp. 36-37.

Department. No further reduction in the Army scale of rations can be obtained . . . you will of course, realise that the present is not a good time to risk discontent in the Army by a reduction in rations'.¹⁴⁶ The Food Department's overall reluctance to diminish the quantity of army ration was strengthened by the position taken by the army doctors. In February 1945, a memorandum of the War Department's Army Branch on the subject of sugar ration for the army made it clear that the army doctors were against any reduction in the army ration, even for military personnel engaged in sedentary work.¹⁴⁷ The army doctors' opposition to cuts in military ration is explained by the fact, as pointed out by Indivar Kamtekar's research, that the majority of the army's wartime recruits were anaemic and underweight at the time of enlisting, who, according to the medical surveys done by the army doctors, later gained weight on army rations.¹⁴⁸

Why the fate of the army was different from that of the police with regard to food ration after the end of the war? The answer lies in the difference in their bargaining power against the colonial state, arising out of the difference in the value of their loyalty to the colonial state. As decolonization of India was becoming an unavoidable reality in the eyes of the colonial state since the end of the war, British interest in maintaining everyday domestic law and order in India was declining. The colonial state stopped to care much about everyday law and order in a colony that it was going to lose soon. Consequently, from the British point of view, the political need to keep the police fed, and thereby secure their loyalty, decreased. Further, the loyalty of the police could be taken more for granted than that of the army in the post-war period, given the record of police loyalty during the war. David Arnold's study of police has pointed out that 'Cases of disaffection among the police were remarkably few in view of the low esteem in which their loyalty was held by European civil servants.'¹⁴⁹ However, as we have seen in the previous

¹⁴⁶ Hutchings to Menon, 4 June 1946, DOF(R), file RP-1013/21, 1944, GOI, NAI, p. 37.

¹⁴⁷ The memorandum of the War department (Army Branch), GOI, 22 February 1945, on the subject 'Sugar for Defence Services during 1944-45', signed by A.C. Beynon, Joint Secretary to the Department of Food, in DOF(R), file RP-1011/24, 1943, NAI, New Delhi.

¹⁴⁸ Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance', pp. 190-191.

¹⁴⁹ Arnold, 'The Armed Police', p. 125.

section, the consequent reduction in police ration led to protests by the police, which had to be suppressed, notably, by the troops.

After the end of the war, victorious Britain's position as a decisive global power was further entrenched. Retaining that global position, and decimating the possibility of any other foreign powers whatsoever gaining foothold in Asia taking advantage of Britain's ongoing retreat from India, necessitated the continuance of a formidable British Indian army until the final departure of the British from India. Further, as David Arnold has pointed out, "There was fear, too, that in an emergency the armed police might not prove reliable."¹⁵⁰ In many parts of India 'the troops' superior weaponry and firepower' was needed to 'overcome rioters and rebels armed with captured police weapons.'¹⁵¹ Therefore, in the immediate post-war period, the colonial state could not afford to take the risk of incensing the army by reducing the quantity of their food ration. The revolt by the Royal Air Force in January 1946, and by the Royal Indian Navy in February 1946, further demonstrated the dangers of angering the British as well as Indian defence personnel in South Asia, particularly when poor quality of military food was one of the causes of these revolts.¹⁵² Hence, the army continued to enjoy higher quantities of food ration even after the war. Thus again, the food policies of the colonial state were inseparably knotted with the arithmetic of political utility of the target beneficiaries of such policies.

V. Contention between London and Delhi

As mentioned in the first chapter, throughout the war, the central government in India continued to be run by the authority of the British Parliament through a chain of control from the British War Cabinet, via the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁵¹ Idem.

¹⁵² For a concise discussion of the British and Indian mutinies in 1945-46, see Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire*, Allen Lane, London, 2007, pp. 217-223.

Secretary of State for India based at the India Office in London, to the Viceroy based in Delhi. The Viceroy was the Crown Representative in India, and the highest civilian colonial authority in India. Naturally, the Food Department and the Food Minister under the central government were ultimately answerable to him. Below him, there was a British governor in each of the 11 Indian provinces, irrespective of the fact whether the province was being run by an elected indigenous government or it was a 'Section 93' province under the governor's rule. The Commander-in-Chief in India was the supreme commander of the British Indian Army, who commanded the army in liaison with the holder of the civilian office of the Viceroy, the Secretary of State for India, and above all with the War Cabinet. As the *Transfer of Power* compilation of documents shows, all these authorities routinely communicated with each other in writing on all affairs several times a week, sometimes several times on a single day, via letters and telegrams.¹⁵³ These communications were always clearly marked into different categories such as 'PERSONAL', 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 'IMMEDIATE', 'MOST SECRET' and 'TOP SECRET'.¹⁵⁴

In this section, through an extensive study of a large number of communications between Delhi and London between late 1942 and mid 1944, that is, during the period when India's food crisis was most severe, I will demonstrate how the issue of food imports to India coloured metropolitan Britain's relationship with the Government of India. On 14 November 1942, Leopold Amery, the London-based Secretary of State for India, took up the issue of military provisioning with the Government of India. Amery clearly feared that the hike in food prices, poor harvests, and the Midnapore cyclone of 1942 might convince the Indian government to curtail food supplies to the troops. He therefore asked Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, to adopt 'more Central intervention than could normally be

¹⁵³ Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, 12 vols., 1970-83.

¹⁵⁴ For a discussion of the different types and categories of communications between the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy, see appendix 'A' titled 'Reconsideration of the Channels of Communication between the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy, August-November 1943', appended to *Transfer*, vol. IV, pp. 1236-1241.

contemplated' to obtain requisite amount of food. Amery explained how he was under pressure to procure food in India to provision the army, and to export rice to defence forces in Ceylon – 'I have been much exercised over your food problems, both as regards wheat for the Army and rice for Ceylon, about which as you know I have been very much pressed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies.'¹⁵⁵ In his desperation to increase food procurement in the Indian colony, Amery even suggested to Linlithgow that the Government of India should make part of its revenue demand not in cash, but in kind, as a means to secure more supplies – 'you might even consider the possible desirability of some portion of the land revenue being collected in kind.'¹⁵⁶

Within a fortnight, Viceroy Linlithgow began to assert strongly that exports of food from India was difficult. On 30 November 1942, he wrote to Amery from New Delhi: 'I am becoming very seriously disturbed about the food situation here. . . we shall just have to look after India first, whatever the political reactions outside India. I think it well that the Cabinet should realise how potentially serious the situation is here.'¹⁵⁷ Within three days since then, the Viceroy's reluctance to export food from India to other war bases acquired a sharper tone in his telegram to Amery which deserves to be quoted in length. On 3 December 1942, he telegraphed Amery saying:

I think it probable that until our own position becomes clearer we shall have to stop all exports of foodgrains from India and also ask for additional imports of wheat at least sufficient to ensure half the Army's total annual requirements of 500,000 tons. I realise that this will mean serious difficulty in Ceylon and Arabia and an unwelcome call on shipping but export of foodgrains from India has already excited considerable public criticism. If it continues despite a threatening internal shortage it may become a political issue of considerable gravity and until our own position is clearer and we see whether the new measures now in contemplation improve the situation continuance of exports is likely to do serious harm. On the other hand the announcement that in future there will be no exports of food-stuffs and that large shipments of wheat

¹⁵⁵ Mr Amery to Linlithgow, telegram, L/E/8/3297: ff 321-4, 14 November 1942, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document No. 181, P. 259.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

¹⁵⁷ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery (Extract)*, marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL', MSS. EUR. F. 125/11, 30 November 1942, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 233, p. 326.

have been arranged is likely to have a stimulating effect in India and may go far to induce a freer flow of grains into the market.¹⁵⁸

Thus, in addition to resisting the demand from London for food exports from India, the Viceroy now started making counter-demands for food imports to India. Notably, in support of his opposition to the demand for exports, he was now citing growing 'public criticism' of food exports, and the potential for politicization of the issue of export.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the Government of India set up the Department of Food on 2 December 1942. Securing food for the army and for the workers employed in the war industries was such a priority for the department that within a week of its establishment, on 9 December 1942, it wrote a long telegram directly to the Secretary of State. This telegram is extremely important in conveying the priority that military needs for food had in the thoughts of the department over the civil demands for food. The telegram said that 'A number of army mills have closed down for lack of wheat. Reports are coming in from all sides of inability to purchase wheat in the Punjab at controlled rates. There is grave shortage in Calcutta Bombay and Delhi and serious difficulties are being experienced in finding food for employees on essential war works.'¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the Food Department wrote that 'In above circumstances we are compelled to approach again with the request for an additional 600,000 tons of wheat.'¹⁶⁰ However, the department was keen to avoid rousing public anger within India against the priority given to military hunger. Therefore, it advised against making allocation for the army explicit, with a promise that it would anyhow give preference to military needs: 'To produce the desired psychological effect this should be consigned to Food department with no allocation for military and civil. Food Department, who are now responsible for military as well as civil supplies, will see that military needs are given preference.'¹⁶¹ Further, the department argued that even

¹⁵⁸ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 3 December 1942, MSS. EUR. F. 125/23, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 242, pp. 333-334.

¹⁵⁹ *Government of India, Food Department to Secretary of State*, marked 'IMPORTANT', 9 December 1942, telegram, L/E/8/3297: f 297, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 265, p. 358.

¹⁶⁰ *Idem*.

¹⁶¹ *Idem*.

assistance for 'civil supplies' was no longer a mere civil matter, instead, it was now definitely 'a war requirement':

It is realised that this demand involves a most serious call on shipping and that its satisfaction must seriously interfere with transport of other war requirements. The food situation is, however, so acute that immediate substantial assistance is essential if war work in India is not to be seriously disorganised and law and order gravely menaced. Assistance for civil supplies has become definitely a war requirement justifying allotment of increased shipping space.¹⁶²

However, such forceful arguments from the Food Department failed to move the Secretary of State. In his reply telegram from the India Office to the Food Department on 15 December 1942, Amery claimed that 'meeting of your demand would mean cut in volume of imports into U. K. of materials, etc. for war production by some 10, repeat 10 per cent. over period of 6 months.'¹⁶³ He further claimed that 'if American assistance falls short of best', 'cutting down of U. K. food ration would almost certainly be involved' in sending food to India.¹⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Viceroy Linlithgow persisted in his attempts to secure imports to India. On 22 December 1942, he again wrote to Amery: 'though I fully appreciate the difficulties about making shipping available which you set out in your official telegram, we may be driven to ask that those difficulties should be faced – indeed as I write I see little alternative to our doing so.'¹⁶⁵

Amery now told Linlithgow that his demands for imports were muddling with the plan to supply 150,000 tons of wheat to Turkey to which the British Government had 'definitely committed themselves when your telegrams

¹⁶² *Idem.* The Commander-in-Chief at that time was Sir Archibald Wavell.

¹⁶³ *Secretary of State to Government of India, Food Department*, telegram marked 'IMPORTANT', 15 December 1942, L/E/8/3297: ff 283-5, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 275, p. 373.

¹⁶⁴ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁵ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery (Extract)*, marked 'PRIVATE AND PERSONAL', 22 December 1942, MSS. EUR. F. 125/11, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 291, p. 411.

began to come in.’¹⁶⁶ Thus, despite the grave food shortage prevailing in India, supplies to Turkey were given priority and accordingly Linlithgow’s demands for imports into India were turned down. Linlithgow raised the issue of this neglect of India in his telegram to Amery on 26 December 1942: ‘the opinion as already been voiced by certain commercial associations and in the newspapers that the United Kingdom and U. S. A. which are sending food to North Africa, Iran and other places are under a greater obligation to come to the assistance of India.’¹⁶⁷

The tenacity of the Viceroy in demanding food imports to India forced the Secretary of State to come up with a memorandum on ‘The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains’, sent to Lord Leathers, the Minister of War Transport, with copy to ‘other ministers concerned’. The memorandum urged the ministers ‘that consideration should be given as a matter of urgency to what steps can be taken to provide shipping for the satisfaction of this most urgent need’, that is, India’s need for food imports.¹⁶⁸ However, the memorandum made it clear in unequivocal words that in any case the contribution towards India’s food needs ‘would not be very significant.’¹⁶⁹

Against this background, the Food Department of the Government of India again sent a long telegram to the Secretary of State on 10 January 1943, highlighting the serious troubles that the food crisis was causing to the war efforts:

The wheat reserves of Q. M. G.¹⁷⁰ in India are completely exhausted. All that remains forward with troops is approximately 30 days’ supply. The Army needs 30,000 tons a month to meet its day-to-day requirements without any provision for rebuilding exhausted reserves. Supplies for the civil population are also extremely short

¹⁶⁶ *Mr Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow*, marked ‘PRIVATE’, 23 December 1942, MSS. EUR. F. 125/1, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 294, p. 413.

¹⁶⁷ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE’, 26 December 1942, MSS. EUR. F. 125/23, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 297, p. 422.

¹⁶⁸ *Memorandum by Mr Amery*, ‘The Indian Demand for Imported Food Grains’, undated but deduced to have been written on 8 January 1943, L/E/8/3297: ff 225-6, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 330, p. 478.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

¹⁷⁰ Quarter Master General.

and we are seriously concerned about workers in essential services. Imminence of strikes among cranemen and port workers in Bombay is feared and food shortage at collieries is affecting supply of labour and coal raisings. In Calcutta flight of port and other essential labour is in part due to scarcity of supplies. The normal consumption of the civil population outside major wheat producing areas even when reached (sic) by 33½ per cent amounts to 38,000 tons a month and unless this quantity can be provided there is no doubt we shall have not only strikes and labour shortages in essential services and war industries but also food riots amongst general population of the cities.¹⁷¹

Therefore, the Food Department pleaded that in addition to improving the civil food situation, wheat imports were also needed to 'restore army's reserves amounting to 60,000 tons', and to 'assist in meeting army's requirements in 1943-44 which cannot be met on their present scale from Indian crops, without trenching severely on supplies for civil population.'¹⁷² After exchanges of further communications on food, finally His Majesty's Government (H. M. G.) agreed to provide shipment for 'a total of 125/130,000 tons' (in addition to 30,000 tons for military requirements) to carry food to India.¹⁷³ While communicating the government's decision to the Viceroy, the Secretary of State added that 'H. M. G. regret that they find it impossible at this stage in view of the heavy sacrifices already assumed on behalf of India and of the present pressure from all sides on our shipping, to consider your further request.'¹⁷⁴

Though Viceroy Linlithgow put pressure on the British Government for imports into India, yet, in view of the pressure from the army to export rice to the war base in Ceylon, he was compelled to further squeeze already exhausted India for more rice for export. He informed the Secretary of State in January 1943: 'Mindful of our difficulties about food I told him [Fazlul Huq, the Premier of Bengal] that he simply *must* produce some more rice out of

¹⁷¹ *Government of India, Food Department to Secretary of State*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 10 January 1943, L/E/8/3297: f 222, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 332, pp. 479-480.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 481.

¹⁷³ *Mr Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 16 January 1943, L/E/8/3305: ff 236-42, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 350, p. 515.

¹⁷⁴ *Idem.*

Bengal for Ceylon even if Bengal itself went short! He was by no means unsympathetic, and it is possible that I may in the result screw a little out of them. The Chief continues to press me most strongly about both rice and labour for Ceylon.’¹⁷⁵

After a gap of six months, when the situation in Bengal worsened to the level of a widespread famine, communication between Delhi and London regarding food increased again. In July 1943, the Food Department again directly telegraphed the Secretary of State informing him that severe food scarcity ‘will almost certainly produce internal disorder and strain which will involve calling on defence services for assistance in connection with internal security and thereby distracting them from their main object’, and ‘There are already indications that shortage of food and necessity for operatives to spend lengthy periods in food queues etc. is having a bad effect on munitions production.’¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the department demanded ‘a programme of 500,000 tons to be spread over 6 months imports to start [from] September’.¹⁷⁷

The War Cabinet’s meeting on 4 August 1943 took this demand for imports to India very lightly and concluded that ‘the shortage of grain in India was not the result of physical deficiency but of hoarding, due to inflationary conditions.’¹⁷⁸ The Minister of War Transport was so unconcerned and complacent that he claimed that the demand for imports would eventually disappear: ‘in January 1941 [sic¹⁷⁹] a demand had been made for an additional 600,000 tons of wheat, but in the result it had not been necessary

¹⁷⁵ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, marked ‘PRIVATE AND PERSONAL’, 26 January 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, in *Transfer*, vol. III, document no. 362, p. 544. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁶ Government of India, Food Department to Secretary of State, telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE’, 15 July 1943, L/E/8/3322: ff 310-11, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, 1973, document no. 38, p.77.

¹⁷⁷ *Idem*.

¹⁷⁸ *War Cabinet W. M. (43) 111th Conclusions, Minute 1*, meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 4 August 1943, L/E/7/687: ff 265-7; R/30/1/4: ff 127-9, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 71, p. 156.

¹⁷⁹ As mentioned earlier in this section, such a demand was actually made on 9 December 1942, and not in January 1941, as the Minister of War Transport wrongly mentioned. See *Government of India, Food Department to Secretary of State*, marked ‘IMPORTANT’, 9 December 1942, telegram, L/E/8/3297: f 297, in *Transfer*, vol. III, 1971, document number 265, p. 358.

to ship anything approaching this quantity.’¹⁸⁰ He was confident that ‘much the same would happen on this occasion.’¹⁸¹ However, finally the War Cabinet gave approval to move ‘not more than 50,000 tons’ of wheat ‘as a token shipment’ to Colombo to await there possible forwarding to India, and to make available to India, if feasible, up to 100,000 tons of barley from Iraq.¹⁸² Thus, the War Cabinet approved, at least in theory, less than one-third of the Indian demand. Angered by this meagre and inconsequential ‘help’, Linlithgow telegraphed Amery:

A firm promise of 100,000 tons of barley and the possibility of small additional quantity of wheat will go nowhere in meeting our essential demands, and after consultation and in full agreement with Commander-in-Chief, Finance Member and Food Member, I am bound in terms to warn the Cabinet that the Government of India and I cannot be responsible for the continuing stability of India now, or for her capacity to serve as a base against Japan next year unless we have appropriate help in prospect.¹⁸³

Being under the pressure of such strong words from the Viceroy, Amery forwarded his ‘anxious telegram’ to the Prime Minister Winston Churchill.¹⁸⁴ Linlithgow’s demand received strong support from the military quarter. On 8 September 1943, the Commander-in-Chief Claude Auchinleck telegraphed General Sir A. Brooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that ‘In view of grave future food situation in Bengal and also of shortage in other parts of India I must ask that you will use your influence with H. M. G. to do all they can to help Govt. of India in this matter specially by permitting import of food grains into India.’¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ *War Cabinet W. M. (43) 111th Conclusions, Minute 1*, 4 August 1943, L/F/7/687: ff 265-7; R/30/1/4: ff 127-9, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 71, p. 156.

¹⁸¹ *Idem*.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁸³ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE and PERSONAL’, 13 August 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 78, p. 169.

¹⁸⁴ As Amery informed Linlithgow in *Mr Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow (Extract)*, marked ‘PRIVATE and SECRET’, 17 August 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 85, p. 177.

¹⁸⁵ *General Auchinleck to General Sir A. Brooke*, telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE’ and ‘MOST SECRET’, 8 September 1943, L/E/8/3322: f 230, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 102, p. 217.

However, the War Cabinet at that time was calculating what gains they could extract from India in exchange for helping her with food. Accordingly, a letter dated 24 September 1943 from an unnamed officer at the Offices of the War Cabinet to the Paymaster General Lord Cherwell argued that:

. . . it would be deplorable statesmanship to promise anything without obtaining promises of better behaviour in the future from the Government of India. At the moment that Government is in a state of desperation. It would be folly to refuse to deal with them at all, and equal folly to make them an unconditional gift of wheat. We must exploit our position. I would suggest that we promise to ship 250,000 tons in the next 3 months providing that the Government of India promises 1) to raise taxation especially income-tax; 2) to take practical measures against hoarders whether private individuals or provincial Governments.¹⁸⁶

Thus, even during the period of the Bengal famine, there was talk of making shipping of grains to India conditional upon increasing the tax burden within India. Against these calculations, the War Cabinet, at its meeting on the same day, finally increased the amount of possible import into India by merely 50,000 tons.¹⁸⁷

In view of this minor increase in the possible allotment of imports, and the overall reluctance of the British Government to allow adequate imports into India, Linlithgow communicated his Executive Council's reluctance to Amery to bear criticisms for the British Government's non-cooperation in easing the food crisis: 'my Council are also getting very restive on the subject. . . they think it unreasonable that they . . . should not be free to say that His Majesty's Government have refused to help. Mudaliar¹⁸⁸ in fact at the last meeting

¹⁸⁶ Letter dated 24th September 1943 from Offices of the War Cabinet to the Paymaster-General, H 290/5-H290/6, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

¹⁸⁷ *War Cabinet W. M. (43) 131st Conclusions, Minute 1*, meeting held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, 24 September 1943, L/E/8/3322: ff 188-9, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 139, p. 319.

¹⁸⁸ Sir Arcot Ramasamy Mudaliar, who was the member in the Viceroy's Executive Council in charge of the supply department. He remained in London as one of India's representatives at the War Cabinet until 27 July 1943. See 'Principal Holders of Office', in *Transfer*, vol. IV, p. xxiv.

suggested that a formal protest should be addressed by Council to the Cabinet.’¹⁸⁹

Next month, on 20 October 1943, Field Marshall Archibald Wavell replaced Linlithgow as the Viceroy of India.¹⁹⁰ Being the former Commander-in-Chief from July 1941 until June 1943, Wavell had first-hand military experience at the top level, and therefore had a clear idea of the negative impact that food shortage could have on war efforts. Just like his predecessor, Viceroy Wavell too made repeated demands for food imports into India. Annoyed by the suspicion in London about the figures of India’s food requirement and lengthy discussions over the statistics, finally on 4 January 1944, Wavell telegraphed Amery: ‘I feel that on this matter it is of no use going on arguing from month to month on figures and details’, and that ‘Cabinet must trust man on the spot’.¹⁹¹ He further added: ‘We cannot carry through our policy with uncertain doles from month to month.’¹⁹² Wavell now increased the demand for imports to one million tons: ‘unless we can be assured now of receiving one million (repeat one million) tons of food grains during 1944 we are heading for disaster both as regards famine and inflation.’¹⁹³

Following the Viceroy’s lead, the Food Department mounted further pressure on Amery. On 11 January 1944, the department telegraphed Amery bluntly asking ‘whether risk of famine and unrest in main base of operations against Japan advances consummation of United Nation’s effort towards ending the war’.¹⁹⁴ The department further clarified that ‘if it is implied that we should now be ready to reduce consumption all over India we would reply that at least one-third of the population is already undernourished: that we have

¹⁸⁹ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery*, telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE’ and ‘PRIVATE AND PERSONAL’, 26 September 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 144, pp. 323-324.

¹⁹⁰ See ‘Principal Holders of Office’, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, p. xxiv.

¹⁹¹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked ‘PRIVATE’, 4 January 1944, L/E/8/3322: f 62, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 295, p. 590.

¹⁹² *Idem.*

¹⁹³ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁴ *Governor-General (Food Department) to Secretary of State*, telegram marked ‘IMMEDIATE’ and ‘SECRET’, 11 January 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 316, p. 623.

been struggling to provide Bengal with foodgrains and have consequently squeezed the rest of India.¹⁹⁵ However, notably, the Food Department made an interesting revelation: 'If we get firm promise that one-and-a-half (1½) million tons will be available if required we may not need to take it all – announcement itself accompanied by substantial arrivals just before harvest would have great psychological effect.'¹⁹⁶

Next month angry Wavell telegraphed a stern warning to Amery: 'I warn His Majesty's Government with all seriousness that if they refuse our demands they are risking a catastrophe of far greater dimensions than Bengal famine that will have irretrievable effect on their position both at home and abroad. They must either trust the opinion of the man they have appointed to advise them on Indian affairs or replace him.'¹⁹⁷ As communications with Amery had not been very helpful, desperate Wavell now mentioned this warning telegram directly to Prime Minister Churchill beseeching 'Please help me all you can'.¹⁹⁸ Churchill replied to Wavell: 'Cabinet will consider matter again officially on Monday. I will certainly help you all I can but you must not ask the impossible.'¹⁹⁹ Thus Churchill made it clear that in his opinion Wavell was asking for 'the impossible'. In this way, Wavell's hope for securing adequate food imports into India was now essentially shattered by the highest authority in the British Government. Finally, on 15 February 1944, Churchill made the refusal of Wavell's demand clear: 'we simply cannot find the shipping. Everything is involved in the Operation and our own import[s] cut to the barest minimum.'²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 624.

¹⁹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁷ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE' and 'PRIVATE', 9 February 1944, R/30/1/4: ff 92-3, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 364, p. 707.

¹⁹⁸ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Churchill (via India Office)*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE', 9 February 1944, R/30/1/4: ff 91, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 365, p. 707.

¹⁹⁹ *Mr Churchill to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell (via India Office)*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 12 February 1944, Wavell Papers, Private Correspondence: Secretary of State, 1943-6, p. 13, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 375, p. 723.

²⁰⁰ *Mr Churchill to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell (via India Office)*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'PRIVATE', 15 February 1944, R/30/1/4: f 85, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 379, p. 729.

Seeing no hope of getting necessary shipping from Britain, Wavell now started putting pressure on the British Government to seek shipping from the United States of America: 'If therefore His Majesty's Government is unable to supply necessary tonnage I trust they will make immediate and insistent approach to Americans or will allow India to appeal to U. N. R. A.'²⁰¹ Every day's further delay is dangerous.'²⁰² Simultaneously, he telegraphed Churchill for reconsideration: 'I feel so strongly that cessation of imports will cause first-class disaster in India that I have had to ask for reconsideration.'²⁰³

Wavell's demand received backing from Admiral Louis Mountbatten, who was then the Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command. Admiral Mountbatten telegraphed all the Chiefs of Staff that Wavell's suggestion 'of approaching the Americans for help should be considered without delay.'²⁰⁴ Commander-in-Chief Auchinleck too provided emphatic support in his telegram to the Chiefs of Staff: 'I am absolutely convinced that it is an urgent military necessity for food to be imported into this country as asked by the Viceroy.'²⁰⁵

However, the British Government remained unmoved. Amery informed Wavell that the 'Minister of War Transport. . . has advised that approach to United States for shipments of substantial size would be a completely hopeless enterprise unless it were founded on a situation in which demonstrable shortage can be shown to exist'²⁰⁶, and that approaching the U. N. R. A. would be futile as the organization was 'not in a position to provide any shipping'.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

²⁰² *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE', 16 February 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 382, p. 735.

²⁰³ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Churchill (via India Office)*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE' and 'PRIVATE', 16 February 1944, Wavell Papers, Private Correspondence: Secretary of State, 1943-6, p. 14, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 383, p. 736.

²⁰⁴ *Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten to Chiefs of Staff (via Air Ministry)*, telegram, 17 February 1944, L/E/8/3323: f 368, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 384, p. 737.

²⁰⁵ *General Sir C. Auchinleck to Chiefs of Staff (via Air Ministry)*, telegram, 17 February 1944, L/E/8/3323: f 369, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 386, pp. 737-738.

²⁰⁶ *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'SECRET', 23 February 1944, L/E/8/3323: ff 352-3, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 397, pp. 753-754.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 754.

Infuriated by the War Cabinet's refusal to arrange for shipping to carry grains to India, Wavell went to the extent of alleging that 'The fact is that the P. M. has calculated his war plans without any consideration at all of India's needs; I am afraid that he may be courting a first-class disaster to the Empire, unless we are very lucky.'²⁰⁸ He further telegraphed Amery that 'His Majesty's Government. . . has chosen deliberately to disregard advice given by those responsible in India.'²⁰⁹ He added: 'I confess I am unable to understand why U. S. A. cannot be approached in the matter of food until there is "demonstrable shortage", which must mean in effect when people are dying of starvation.'²¹⁰ In early March 1944, he further wrote to Amery: 'The P.M. is probably most annoyed, but that cannot be helped. He will have less trouble in the end if he gives me imports now to prevent a famine.'²¹¹

Even in this situation, shockingly, instead of providing unconditional wheat imports into India, Britain's Minister of Food Jay Llewellyn was talking of exporting rice from India. On 6 March 1944, Llewellyn wrote to Amery. 'In view of India's magnificent rice crop', he suggested that 100,000 tons of rice be exported to Ceylon because 'economy of shipping is, of course, a material consideration and there is no doubt that it would be far easier for Leathers [Minister of War Transport] to supply Ceylon's rice needs from India than from Brazil, which is the only other possible source'.²¹² He further wrote that Amery should try to procure from India 'a further 120,000 tons to look after the needs of Saudi-Arabia, the Arab Sheikdoms, East Africa, Mauritius, and the Seychelles.'²¹³ In the same letter, he described his plan to import 50,000 tons of rice from Brazil to Britain, instead of sending it to Ceylon or other needy

²⁰⁸ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 25 February 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 401, p. 758.

²⁰⁹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'SECRET', 26 February 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 402, p. 762.

²¹⁰ *Idem*.

²¹¹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 7 March 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 414, pp. 784-785.

²¹² Letter dated 6th March 1944 from Jay Llewellyn, Minister of Food in the British Government, to the Secretary of State L. S. Amery, H 291/16 (2nd page) in Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²¹³ *Idem*.

countries.²¹⁴ Further, as a counter to India's demand for food imports from abroad, he now cited the need to satisfy the food requirements of the areas liberated from the enemy forces.²¹⁵ He proposed rice exports from India as a condition for wheat imports. According to his final proposal, 180,000 tons of wheat from Australia would 'go to India in exchange for Indian rice, while a further 120,000 tons of rice, which Ceylon was to get from Brazil and other sources, is to be supplied by India in return for wheat, which the Ministry of War Transport will arrange to find.'²¹⁶

Thus, even when India was going through severe grain shortage, the British Government was pressing for exports of rice from India in exchange for wheat imports. A later message in April 1945 from an unnamed official at the India office to the Paymaster General Frederick Lindemann pointed out the negligence of India's food requirements:

India is in a much more dangerous position than most of the European countries which are now receiving so much attention. For example S. H. A. E. F.²¹⁷ want to send 600,000 tons of wheat to Germany and over 1 million tons of food to the liberated Areas in June, July and August of this year. We have never guarded against shortages in India on anything like this scale . . . indeed many of our own officials, are so pre-occupied with Europe that they tend to forget altogether about the needs of the Empire.²¹⁸

However, Wavell instantly rejected Llewellyn's proposal in his telegram to Amery: 'export of rice from India is quite impossible. We are in fact publicly pledged not to export.'²¹⁹ Against this background, at the War Cabinet's meeting on 20 March 1944, when India's foodgrain requirement came up in the agenda, Amery warned that 'The War Cabinet would incur a grave

²¹⁴ *Idem.*

²¹⁵ *Idem.*

²¹⁶ As communicated by Amery to Wavell, in *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 9 March 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 419, p. 797.

²¹⁷ Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (S. H. A. E. F.) was the headquarters of the commander of Allied forces in north-west Europe, from late 1943 until the end of the war.

²¹⁸ Letter from the India Office on the subject 'The Wheat Situation in India' to the Paymaster General, I. F. R. (45) 3, 3rd April, 1945, H296/2, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²¹⁹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE' and 'SECRET', 12 March 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 426, p. 805.

responsibility' if food shortage interfered with military operations in South and South East Asia, especially 'in face of the reiterated warnings of the Viceroy.'²²⁰ Finally, the Cabinet instructed the Minister of War Transport to load 200,000 tons of wheat to ship to India in the second and third quarters of 1944.²²¹

Wavell still pointed out that import of this size was 'one-sixth of India's real requirements and one-half of minimum which I postulated as essential for next six months.'²²² He again demanded that the Americans be requested to provide necessary shipping.²²³ Angry Wavell further wrote a strongly worded telegram to Amery: 'When I accepted this most thankless and arduous post I expected confidence and support from prime Minister and War Cabinet. I do not feel I am receiving it in this matter which I consider is vital to India. . . I hope that War Cabinet do not consider that I am exaggerating or falsifying the situation which would obviously be an impossible position for both parties.'²²⁴

He continued to express his inability to supply adequate food to the army. In a subsequent later, he told Amery: 'I am informing Supreme Commander and Commander-in-Chief of inability of India to meet Service requirements.'²²⁵ Interestingly, Amery now felt that Wavell's blunt refusal to feed the army 'may bring the seriousness of the position home to the Cabinet.'²²⁶

As the food provisioning of the army was in grave danger now, Admiral Louis Mountbatten telegraphed the Chiefs of Staff that he would be prepared to

²²⁰ *War Cabinet W. M. (44) 36th Conclusions, Minute 4*, meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 20 March 1944, R/30/1/4: ff 63-6, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 434, p. 823.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 824.

²²² *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'SECRET', 25 March 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 440, p. 836.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 837.

²²⁴ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'PRIVATE' and 'SECRET', 25 March 1944, L/PO/10/32: f 29, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 441, pp. 837-838.

²²⁵ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'SECRET', 19 April 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 466, p. 900.

²²⁶ *Idem. Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 20 April 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 468, p. 904.

release shipping space for wheat by cutting down military cargo.²²⁷ In addition, he now sought permission to advise Joseph Stilwell, the Commanding General of the United States Army in the China-Burma-India theatre of the war,²²⁸ to similarly reduce American military cargo in order to release space for grains on American ships.²²⁹ The Chiefs of Staff telegraphed Mountbatten immediately on the next day preventing him from contacting the United States army: 'you should say nothing to Stilwell'.²³⁰

However, J. J. Llewellyn, the Minister of Food, pointed out in a letter to the Paymaster General Frederick Lindemann on 29 March 1944 that 'if another famine should occur it would be a good thing on political grounds to be able to say that we had asked the United States for help and that they had been obliged to turn down our request. This would at least give us a reply to the vociferous critics of our Indian policy in America.'²³¹ Therefore, the pressure mounted by Wavell, Auchinleck, and Mountbatten on the War Cabinet over months, finally had some impact as Churchill wrote a personal telegram in April 1944 to Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States, asking for shipping to carry wheat to India: 'a satisfactory situation in India is of such vital importance to the success of our joint plans against the Japanese that I am impelled to ask you to consider a special allocation of ships to carry wheat to India from Australia without reducing assistance you are now providing for us . . . We have wheat (in Australia) but we lack the ships.'²³²

However, after a wait of more than a month, finally on 2 June 1944 Amery informed Wavell that President Roosevelt had expressed his inability to help

²²⁷ *Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten to Chiefs of Staff (via Air Ministry)*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 27 April 1944, L/WS/1/654: f 202, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 480, p. 929.

²²⁸ See 'Index of Persons with Bibliographical Notes for the Period 15 June 1943 – 31 August 1944', in *Transfer*, vol. IV, p. 1277.

²²⁹ *Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten to Chiefs of Staff (via Air Ministry)*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 27 April 1944, L/WS/1/654: f 202, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 480, p. 929.

²³⁰ *Chiefs of Staff to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten (via Air Ministry)*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 28 April 1944, L/WS/1/654: f 83, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 484, p. 936.

²³¹ Letter from 'J. W.' to the Paymaster-General, 29th March 1944, H291/30, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²³² Text of Churchill's personal telegram to President Roosevelt, as reproduced by Amery in *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, telegram marked 'PRIVATE' and 'TOP SECRET', 29 April 1944, L/E/8/3323: f 165, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 486, p. 939.

with shipping as 'his military advisers tell him that the shipping cannot possibly be spared from operations.'²³³ A disappointed and angry Wavell wrote back to Amery: 'What do War Cabinet suggest I should tell Mountbatten? I cannot feed his troops unless I get imports asked for.'²³⁴

As is clear from the foregoing communications between Delhi and London, during the most critical period of food shortage India actually received no substantial help in the form of grain imports, despite frequent communications from London in the matter. Infuriated by the objections and delay in the matter, Wavell wrote to Amery that 'It is scandalous that we are making no progress about food imports after about six months' discussion.'²³⁵ In his desperation to secure imports, Wavell again telegraphed Churchill: 'I am unwilling to add to your burden, but conditions here are such that I must approach you personally for help over food imports.'²³⁶ Later in the same telegram Wavell stood up to Churchill and bravely asserted that his government's attitude towards India's contributions was 'short-sighted and callous':

His Majesty's Government's attitude if maintained can, and will, be represented with reason as both short-sighted and callous. India has made great efforts in the Allied cause during the war, and the poorer classes have borne uncomplainingly much hardship and suffering. Without India's help the Allies would not now be in a position to invade the Continent of Europe or to threaten Japan. It would be a poor reward to condemn many hundreds of thousands of Indians to starvation.²³⁷

In the face of such strongly worded communications from Wavell, Amery telegraphed him informing that Churchill's government has finally decided

²³³ *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 2 June 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 523, p. 997.

²³⁴ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE' and 'PRIVATE', 4 June 1944, L/WS/1/654: f 194, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 525, p. 1000.

²³⁵ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 20 June 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 541, p. 1033.

²³⁶ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Churchill (via India Office)*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE' and 'TOP SECRET', 24 June 1944, L/PO/10/25, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 547, p. 1044.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1044-1045.

to ship 'additional 200,000 tons of wheat from Australia to India during third quarter of 1944', subject to review of the situation in August and again in November 1944.²³⁸ However, as the quantity of 200,000 tons was significantly less than the demands made by Wavell, he was unimpressed by this decision about wheat imports. On 5 July 1944, he telegraphed to warn Amery: 'I must warn you that His Majesty's Government's decision has been too little and too late. It has had a very bad Press and has increased rather than allayed public anxiety.'²³⁹ Therefore, once again he forcefully demanded that 'If His Majesty's Government wish to prevent famine in India they will most certainly have to send us imports in addition to those already announced.'²⁴⁰

After this, communications between Delhi and London regarding food imports became less frequent. No concrete decision on Wavell's demand was reached. Consequently, Wavell seemed to have given up the hope of getting the necessary grain imports. After a long gap of almost two months, on 28 August 1944 he again bemoaned to Amery: 'I am sorry there is no decision yet about food imports.'²⁴¹ He lamented that Australia had a million tons of surplus wheat five or six months ago, 'but His Majesty's Government has dallied for so long that perhaps it has been dissipated.'²⁴² Instead of trying to provide any concrete help, Amery now left the matter to mere hope: 'All this must, I know, be very embarrassing for you. . . I can only hope that the actual situation in India is now better than you feared two or three months ago.'²⁴³

Thus, during the years of most severe food crisis in India, the country did not receive any substantial food imports arranged by the government in Britain.

²³⁸ *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE' and 'TOP SECRET', 24 June 1944, L/E /8/3323: ff 95-6, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 548, p. 1046.

²³⁹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'IMMEDIATE', 5 July 1944, L/E/8/3323: f 51, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 566, p. 1069.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1070.

²⁴¹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery (Extract)*, telegram marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 28 August 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 674, p. 1229.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 1230.

²⁴³ *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, marked 'PRIVATE AND TOP SECRET', 31 August 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 676, p. 1233.

Notably, from the correspondence between Delhi and London it becomes amply clear that even the Government of India's professed desire to end the civil food crisis was actually a by-product of the need to have a smooth running of the war efforts. However, differences of opinions between the governments in Britain and India regarding the extent of the food crisis in the Indian colony, the imperial government's mistrust of the statistics of shortages in India, and its prioritization of war efforts in other parts of the world, led to bitter contentions between the two governments.

Amery's failure to arrange for help as desired by the successive Viceroys, proved costly for his own political career in Britain. When he was contesting in the general election to be held in July 1945 from the constituency of Birmingham Sparkbrook as a Conservative Party candidate, Rajani Palme Dutt (1896 – 1974), a half-Indian and half-Swedish leading figure in the Communist Party of Great Britain,²⁴⁴ made the Bengal famine a big political issue in the campaign against him. In June 1945, the Earl of Scarbrough, one of the Parliamentary Under Secretaries at the India Office in London, while informing Wavell about the election situation told him that:

As far as I can make out, India does not figure as a political issue at this Election. The exception is the Secretary of State's election contest in Sparkbrook where Palme Dutt, the Communist, is dragging in India as one of the main issues. For example, he suggests that the Secretary of State is responsible for all the famine deaths in Bengal and he purports to receive many telegrams of good wishes from bodies such as the Bengal Kishan Sabha which, I have no doubt, are concocted by his Communist friends in India. On the other hand Srivastava's²⁴⁵ letter on the subject, a most generous gesture, has been published in the Birmingham Press and should exercise a steady influence.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ R. Palme Dutt Archive, in Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dutt/>, accessed on 19 November 2016. For Dutt's understanding of the causes and nature of the famine, see R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, People's Publishing House Ltd., Bombay, 2nd rev. edn., 1949, pp. 244-247.

²⁴⁵ Sir J. P. Srivastava, the Food Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council.

²⁴⁶ *The Earl of Scarbrough to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 27 June 1945, L/PO/10/22, in *Transfer*, vol. V, 1974, document no. 543, p. 1168.

Two weeks later worried Amery himself wrote to Wavell in one of his regular letters that ‘an able but thoroughly unscrupulous Indian Communist called Palme Dutt had for nearly two years been organising, with apparently unlimited funds, a campaign of vilification against me as “the gaoler of India”. The murderer who was directly responsible for a million-and-a-half deaths in Bengal, etc. etc.’²⁴⁷ The political attack by Dutt, among other factors, led Amery to warn Wavell that: ‘you may have to be prepared for the possibility of another Secretary of State.’ His fear was legitimate; he was defeated in the election by the Labour Party candidate Percy Shurmer.

Finally, a brief note is necessary on Frederick Alexander Lindemann (1886-1957), popularly known as Lord Cherwell, as he considerably shaped Churchill’s overall averseness to allow food imports into India. Lindemann was a professor of physics at the University of Oxford whom Churchill appointed as the Paymaster General (1942-45), and his wartime scientific adviser. In addition to being a colleague of Churchill, he was a close friend and confidante of him.²⁴⁸ The extent of influence that he exerted over Churchill was made clear by Amery when, in August 1943, he informed Linlithgow, in connection with the Cabinet’s discussion about inflation in India, that Churchill regarded Lindemann ‘as an authority on everything and especially on India!’²⁴⁹ In view of Lindemann’s persistent lack of sympathy for the problems of the Government of India regarding inflation and food crisis, angry Amery confided in Linlithgow that ‘he may still go on dinning into Winston’s receptive ears the kind of nonsense he has been talking to us.’²⁵⁰ The next Viceroy Lord Wavell too had a very bitter opinion about the influence of Professor Lindemann against his demands for food imports. He wrote to Amery in February 1944: ‘I see from your letter that that old menace and fraud the Professor was called in to advise against me.’²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ *Mr Amery to Field Marshall Viscount Wavell*, marked ‘PRIVATE AND SECRET’, 11 July 1945, L/PO/10/22, in *Transfer*, vol. V, 1974, document no. 592, p. 1230.

²⁴⁸ Adrian Fort, *Prof: The Life of Frederick Lindemann*, Pimlico, London, 2004, pp. 1-2.

²⁴⁹ *Mr Amery to the Marquess of Linlithgow (Extract)*, marked ‘PRIVATE AND SECRET’, 17 August 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 85, p. 177.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

²⁵¹ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, marked ‘PRIVATE AND SECRET’, 25 February 1944, L/PO/10/21, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 401, p. 758.

In his letter to Churchill in September 1943, Lindemann accused the Indian Government of being 'soft and flabby in their administration and their financial arrangements' in combating inflation.²⁵² Therefore, he suggested to Churchill that any food imports into India must be made conditional upon the 'Government of India's adopting the necessary steps to make the Provincial Governments disgorge their surplus and also to extract hoarded grain from the peasants.'²⁵³ In the same letter, he told Churchill that 'we must remember that starvation costs many hundreds of Allied lives every day the war in Europe is prolonged.'²⁵⁴ Thus, he clearly prioritized the 'Allied lives' over the famine victims in the Indian colony.

In November 1943, while advising Churchill on shipment of grains to India, Lindemann held India's 'high birth-rate' as the main cause of food scarcity in the country:

This shortage of food is likely to be endemic in a country where the population is always increased until only bare subsistence is possible. In such circumstances small local shortages or crop failures must cause acute distress. After the war India can spend her huge hoards of sterling on buying food and thus increase the population still more, but so long as the war lasts her high birth-rate may impose a heavy strain on this country which does not view with Asiatic detachment the pressure of a growing population on limited supplies of food.²⁵⁵

Lindemann, like many other British officials, was Malthusian in his approach to the relationship between food and population in India.²⁵⁶ He was also fixated on the crude causal relationship between the export of foodgrains to

²⁵² Letter from Lindemann to the Prime Minister, 23rd September 1943, H290/3-H290/4, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁵³ Ibid., H290/3.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., H290/4.

²⁵⁵ Letter dated 9th November 1943 with the heading 'Shipment of Foodgrains to India' from Lindemann to the Prime Minister, H 290/10, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁵⁶ For a brief discussion on the role of the 'Malthusian mentality' of Lindemann, Churchill, and Amery in the Indian food crisis, see Robert J. Mayhew, *Malthus: The Life and Legacies of an Untimely Prophet*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 2014, pp. 176-177.

India and the reduction in British imports. In February 1944, while again advising Churchill on 'Indian Grain Requirements', he wrote to Churchill: 'To give the Indians 1½ million tons of grain would cost us 2 or more million tons of imports; obviously we can not face this.'²⁵⁷ The premise on which his thoughts about wartime global food situation was based becomes clear from one of his post-war letters to Churchill in June 1946 wherein he said 'Of course, there has never been enough food in the world to bring India and China up to the European level [of consumption]', clearly revealing his conviction that the non-Westerners were destined to eat less than the Europeans.²⁵⁸

In March 1944, Lindemann went to the extent of suggesting to Churchill that India's food deficit was 'a paper deficit', that is, a result of erroneous statistics of production and demand. In connection with the Government of India's demand for grain imports, he wrote to Churchill: 'What we have to decide is not how much is required to meet a paper deficit but how much is needed to produce the required psychological results.'²⁵⁹ He further told Churchill that India now had a surplus of rice, yet the Viceroy was demanding grain imports 'because of the difficulties of procuring rice from the growers and because the breaking of the pledge not to export cereals from India will have a bad effect on the Continent.'²⁶⁰ In April 1944 he even asked Churchill 'Should Wavell be ordered to feed the Army even at the risk of civilian shortage?'²⁶¹ Such a question exemplifies the disregard that he had for starving civilians in India.

In his letter to Amery in the same month, Lindemann held the weakness, and consequent 'failure', of the Government of India in 'inducing the hoarders to disgorge by strong action against the small clique who appear to specialise in

²⁵⁷ Letter dated 14th February 1944 with the heading 'Indian Grain Requirements' from Lindemann to the Prime Minister, H 291/6, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁵⁸ Letter from Lindemann to Winston S. Churchill, 11th June 1946, J62/12, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁵⁹ Letter from Lindemann to the Prime Minister, 20th March 1944, H291/29, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁶⁰ *Idem*.

²⁶¹ Letter from Lindemann to the Prime Minister, 24th April 1944, H292/10, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

profiteering', responsible for the Indian food crisis.²⁶² Amery replied that there had been 'considerable tightening up' recently with regard to punishing the hoarders, and that Lindemann was actually exaggerating 'the extent to which there is hoarding by large dealers for profiteering purposes.'²⁶³ To his reply-letter Amery enclosed a note prepared by Mr Kirby, the Rationing Advisor to the Government of India, which argued that 'It is the producers, not the dealers, who hold back the grains' as a 'precautionary reserve' against possible starvation.²⁶⁴

As for the small imports allowed into India, in a draft letter to Churchill, Lindemann thought of advising the Prime Minister that 'We must advertise as much as possible any shipments we finally decide to make, but since really large imports are out of the question, it is most essential that their size should be kept secret'.²⁶⁵ In November 1944, in another letter to Amery, he attributed the food crisis in India to the lack of 'fair distribution': 'There is enough food in the country to prevent any starvation if it were evenly distributed.'²⁶⁶ Therefore, he added, 'I do not see why we should take all the blame'.²⁶⁷

Having a man with such harsh stance towards India's wartime food requirements as the Paymaster General and Churchill's Scientific Adviser certainly made food imports into India difficult. The role that Lindemann played in obstructing food imports into India clearly demonstrates how India's food situation was intimately connected with the war calculations in London, as well as with the personal prejudices of key authorities in the corridors of imperial power. Above all, it shows how little India's food problem was understood in London.

²⁶² *Lord Cherwell to Mr Amery*, 21 April 1944, L/E/8/3323: f 174, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 471, p. 910.

²⁶³ *Mr Amery to Lord Cherwell*, 22 April 1944, L/E/8/3323: ff 168-9, in *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 474, p. 914.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, see the note by Mr Kirby enclosed to it, pp. 914-915.

²⁶⁵ Draft of a letter from Lindemann to the Prime Minister, undated, H297/13, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁶⁶ Letter from Lindemann to Amery, 15.11. 44, H293/12, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

²⁶⁷ *Idem.*

VI. Conclusion

As no preparation before the war had been made in India with regard to introducing rationing, the sudden introduction of it in the middle of the war struck the Indian politicians and administrators as 'a new thing'. Consequently, administrative bungling followed. The resultant delay in the execution of rationing proved fatal for millions of the starving Bengalis.

The need to have a smooth running of imperial war efforts forced the colonial government in India to prioritize the hunger of the colliery labour, central government employees, and the police, as their services were much more important for the war efforts than the support of the common civilians. Therefore, even when the civil population was faced with the danger of starvation-death, the 'essential' employees continued to enjoy greater quantities of guaranteed ration.

The communications between the Viceroys of India and the War Cabinet in Britain make it amply clear that the government's interest in food in the Indian colony was always intertwined with military calculations. Additional recruitment to the British Indian Army, and the stationing of foreign Allied troops in India, considerably increased the military demand for food. When the Government of India was tasked with provisioning the vastly expanded Indian army and the foreign soldiers stationed in India, it felt that it was tasked with a job disproportionate to the produce in the Indian colony. Consequently, relation between London and Delhi was strained over the responsibility of feeding the army in India.

However, though the relationship between the colonial and metropolitan government was strained over provisioning the army, yet, neither side denied the primacy of military hunger over civilian stomachs. Nonetheless, each party sought to pass on the responsibility for feeding the army to the other. The Government of India pleaded with the British Government for food

imports into India to feed the army as well as the civilians. As for food for the civilians, the Government of India sometimes adopted the strategy of projecting the civil food requirement as itself a military requirement, in the hope that military needs would receive more sympathetic and prompt consideration from London than civil needs. As a result of its persistent demands for food imports into India, the Government of India received occasional imports, though invariably in much less quantities than it had asked for. The British Government insisted that the colonial government in India must increase domestic production, and carry out efficient procurement within the colony.

Notably, the higher quantity of army ration as compared to the survival-level rations allowed to the common civilians, caused displeasure, and even guilt, among the food officials in India, particularly when the civilians were starving in Bengal. Further, uncoordinated and unrestrained purchase of food by the army disturbed local economic structures in some areas, as in the case of the dearth of bullocks for ploughing caused by the indiscriminate slaughter of cattle for beef for the army.

The distinct food habits of foreign soldiers stationed in India generated wartime demands for new food items. This demand from the army had significant industrial implications. It gave birth to new food industries such as the processed food industry. However, many of these new industries eventually disappeared with the end of the war as they were dependent solely on the wartime military demand.

* * *

Chapter 5

Fed by Famine: Hindu Communal Politics

I. Introduction

Syama Prasad Mookerjee: If Bengal is famished, if Bengal is ruined, can the war be won? . . . Whose fault is it that Burma fell? Whose fault is it that Singapore fell? It was not the fault of Bengal. Why then should the people of Bengal suffer?

Member of the European Group: Why don't you go to Tojo, who is your pal?¹

Syama Prasad Mookerjee: That is the way in which we are to expect a reply from the European Group. Does my friend seriously suggest that we should look to Tojo for supply of rice and food and not to British Government? Will he advise Mr. Amery² to say so publicly in the House of Commons? There could be no more ignoble end of British rule in India than such an abject admission of failure. He says that Tojo is our pal. It has yet to be decided by the verdict of history as to who are our pals. If after 170 years of British association with India, Bengal is going to be starved and famished like this, you are not certainly our pal. That much I can say.³

¹ The European member was referring to Hideki Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan during much of the Second World War, from 17 October 1941 to 22 July 1944. As prime minister, Tojo was responsible for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in the morning of December 7, 1941, which caused the United States' entry to the war.

² Leopold Amery (1873-1955), the Secretary of State for India and Burma between 13 May 1940 and 26 July 1945.

³ *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, published by Prof. H. C. Ghosh, Calcutta, undated, pp. 21-22, Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, 'Speeches / Writings By Him', S. No. 20, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), New Delhi.

These exchanges between Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901–1953), the president of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, and an unnamed member of the European Group in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, took place on 14 July 1943, as the Great Bengal Famine reached its deepest point of crisis. Mookerjee's position illustrates something of the significant new political opportunities that the famine presented to the Mahasabha. In this chapter, I focus on the politicization of the famine within Bengal's complex communal politics, and on the role of the Hindu Mahasabha in particular in seizing the opportunity to expand its claims to the political leadership of Bengal's Hindu community.

The Viceroy Lord Linlithgow reported to the Secretary of State Mr Amery in September 1943 that 'both in the organisation of relief and in the working up of a campaign of protest against the alleged failure of everyone to help Bengal an active political campaign is being waged by the opposite [opposition] sides. Syama Prasad Mookerjee has everything to gain and nothing to lose from making the picture as black as possible . . . The Centre is of course Whipping Boy.'⁴ The Mahasabha dwelt on the famine to such an extent that in his telegram to Linlithgow, the Governor of Bengal even argued that the concern for the tragedy in Bengal in foreign countries was increasing because of Mookerjee's activities – 'The Constant attacks on Ministry by Syama Prasad Mukerji and his followers and publicity given to these attacks help to increase the panicky feelings that are abroad'.⁵

A famine as colossal as the Bengal Famine at the mature age of the British empire in India, was to prove profoundly important, both for the immediate management of its local consequences, and for shaping the politics of Bengal's

⁴ *The Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery (Extract)*, marked 'PRIVATE', and 'SECRET', 6 September 1943, MSS. EUR. F. 125/12, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7* (hereafter *Transfer*), vol. IV, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1973, document No. 100, p. 212.

⁵ Telegram from the Governor of Bengal, repeated by the Viceroy Marquess of Linlithgow to Mr Amery, MSS. EUR. F. 125/25, 20 September 1943, in Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 125, p. 285.

partition in 1947. Even at the national level, the issue of famine acquired a highly politicized status, and such politicization made irreparable dent into the hegemonic claims of benevolence propagated by the British Raj. In February 1944, the next Viceroy Lord Wavell admitted in one of his telegrams to the Secretary of State Amery that 'Bengal famine was one of the greatest disasters that has befallen any people under British rule and damage to our reputation here both amongst Indians and foreigners in India — you are better able to judge the effect at home and abroad — is incalculable.'⁶ Therefore, the issue of the famine had tremendous political potential. However, there were considerable attempts to prevent political discussions about the famine. A debate in November 1943 in the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi on the food situation is an illustrative example of such attempts:

Lala Sham Lal: . . .It is not expected that the government will come to your aid or do anything which may bring about common understanding . . . It is that popular and national Government alone that can solve all your difficulties, including the food crisis in the country today. . .

Mr President (Sir Abdur Rahim): All that is outside the scope of the motion before the House. The motion before the House is that the food situation of the country be considered. You cannot bring in all sorts of political constitutional matters.

Lala Sham Lal: Sir, the food situation is intimately connected with . . .

Mr President (Sir Abdur Rahim): There may be a remote connection.

Lala Sham Lal: All right; I bow to your ruling.⁷

⁶ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, telegram marked 'MOST IMMEDIATE' and 'PRIVATE', 9 February 1944, R/30/1/4: ff 92-3, in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer*, vol. IV, document no. 364, p. 706.

⁷ See the words by Lala Sham Lal in 'Motion regarding the food situation – Debate in the Central Legislative Assembly – November 1943', *Central Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. IV, 1943, compiled in Partha Sarathi Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1943-1944*, part 2, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p.1909.

Thus, in Delhi politicians were now keen to elevate the food crisis to the political stage as an 'issue', and to connect food scarcity with the political demand for a national Indian government. However, they also had to face those who wanted to prevent the politicization of food, and to keep viewing the food crisis as merely an agricultural and economic issue in isolation from politics. In the same debate, Pandit Shambhudayal Misra, member from the Central Provinces Hindu Division, tried to move an amendment to the food motion to indict the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, the Secretary of State Amery, and the Governor of Bengal Sir John Herbert for the food crisis. Again, he was not allowed to move the amendment as President Rahim found it to be against the rules and standing orders of the House.⁸ Mr E. L. C. Gwilt, a European member from Bombay, intervened to prevent politicization of the crisis: 'I would appeal to every Member of this House, to every section of the population to strive to avoid permitting the state of Bengal degenerating into a political issue, to which there has been a tendency.'⁹ However, Mr Gwilt's desperate attempt to stop the politicization of the food crisis was to no avail. Another member, Jamnadas M. Mehta from Bombay Central Division (Non-Muhammadan Rural), stated about the Food Members of the Governor-General's Council and other concerned British members of the Central Legislative Assembly that 'if they were in a free country, all those Honourable Members will be driven into an exile from which they will not return until their next birth'.¹⁰

Away from Delhi, the politicization of food was most blatant in Bengal, as on the one hand the province had a government led by the Muslim League, and on the other Hindu Mahasabha, the Hindu Right-wing party, was strong in the province. Food gradually became a site where these two parties took on one another. This chapter studies the politicization of the issue of food and famine. It particularly looks at how the famine fuelled high politics within the

⁸ See the words by Mr President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim) in 'Motion regarding the food situation', in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, part 2, p. 1911.

⁹ See the speech by Mr E. L. C. Gwilt in 'Motion regarding the food situation', in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, part 2, p. 1940.

¹⁰ See the speech by Mr Jamnadas M. Mehta in 'Motion regarding the food situation', in Gupta (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, part 2, p. 1920.

Bengal Legislative Assembly, the highest site of provincial high politics. How the famine, and famine-relief, were used in popular realpolitik outside the walls of the legislative assembly, will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second section of this chapter discusses the overall political setting in which Syama Prasad Mookerjee, on behalf of the Mahasabha, launching his political attacks on both the provincial and the central government. The third section looks at the way in which Mookerjee used the forum of the Bengal Legislative Assembly to assert the Mahasabha as the most effective critic of the central government's disastrous management of the famine in Bengal, suggesting that the Muslim League was a collaborator in its management, rather than providing alternative leadership. The fourth section explores the Mahasabha's attacks on the alleged partiality of the League's Muslim food officials. In the fifth section, I examine the way in which the Mahasabha used the issue of irregularities in the grain-trade to argue against the Muslim League and its ineffective policing of Muslim grain traders. Finally, the sixth section examines the political implications of the famine for the politics of partition in Bengal.

This chapter frequently uses quotations from primary sources as they are often found to be more useful than any commentary in conveying the directness and severity of political arguments around food. The quotations also help us to understand the language of wartime politics in Bengal, particularly the rhetorical tools that were employed to politicize hunger and food.

II. Mookerjee, the Mahasabha, and the Political Setting in Bengal

Before discussing how Syama Prasad Mookerjee used the Bengal famine, popularly known in Bengali as the *Panchaser Manvantar* (the famine of the year 1350 in the Bengali calendar), in the politics of the Hindu Mahasabha, it is imperative to know the overall political setting in which he was politicizing

the famine. This section provides a necessary understanding of the political background to the Mahasabha's famine politics.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee's public life began in June 1924. His father Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924) was vice-chancellor of the Calcutta University between 1906-1914, and again between 1921-1923. When Asutosh Mookerjee passed away in May 1924, his admirers appointed Syama Prasad Mookerjee a member of the syndicate of the Calcutta University to fill in the vacancy caused by his father's demise.¹¹ Subsequently, in 1929, Mookerjee was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council as a Congress candidate from the Calcutta University constituency.¹² When Congress decided to boycott the Council in 1930, Mookerjee toed the party's line and resigned from his seat.¹³ However, in the same year, he sought re-election as an independent candidate and succeeded in getting re-elected.¹⁴

The British Government announced the 'Communal Award' in August 1932, granting separate electorates in India to the 'Forward Caste' Hindus, 'Depressed Classes', Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Europeans in India, Indian Christians, and Anglo-Indians for the election of members to the provincial legislatures as well as in the proposed federal legislature. Mookerjee, as an independent member of the Bengal Legislative Council, vehemently opposed the fracturing of the electorate as he feared reduced political representation of, and diminished political power for the Hindu upper caste *bhadraloks*.¹⁵ Through his opposition to the 'Communal Award' he got noticed as a leader of the Hindu *bhadraloks*.¹⁶

¹¹ Rita Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee and an Alternative Politics in Bengal*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2002, p. 16.

¹² *Idem*.

¹³ *Idem*.

¹⁴ *Idem*.

¹⁵ *Bhadralok* loosely means educated Bengali gentlemen belonging to high castes. For the debates on the definitions, composition, and characteristics of the *bhadralok*, see Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 3-17. For a discussion of the overall politics in Bengal on the issue of 'Communal Award', see *ibid.*, pp. 18-54.

¹⁶ Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad*, pp. 22-23.

Following the Government of India Act, 1935, when provincial election was held in Bengal in 1937 as per the 'Communal Award', Mookerjee was again elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Calcutta University constituency as an independent candidate.¹⁷ He continued to voice Hindu *bhadralok* interests. However, soon he felt the need to have the organized support of a political party.¹⁸ In 1939, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha was visiting Bengal.¹⁹ In Calcutta, Mookerjee met Savarkar.²⁰ Joya Chatterji's study of Hindu Communalism in Bengal tells us that 'The issues which the Mahasabha took up were precisely those that worried the *bhadralok*.'²¹ Therefore, Mookerjee joined the Mahasabha,²² Savarkar made him the president of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha. Next year, due to his illness, he appointed Mookerjee the acting national president of the Mahasabha.²³

In his recent study of the origin and evolution of the Hindu Mahasabha, Prabhu Bapu has showed that by August 1924 provincial Hindu Mahasabhas had been established in nine provinces including in Bengal.²⁴ However, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha remained mostly inactive until it was re-launched in 1939 by Savarkar.²⁵ John Zavos's study of the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India shows that 'Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Mahasabha remained a relatively unstructured organization with little local-level organization.'²⁶ However, when Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883 – 1966), the firebrand *Hindutva* ideologue from Maharashtra, became the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23. See also *Return Showing the Results of Elections in India, 1937, Presented by the Secretary of State for India to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, November, 1937*, His Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1937, p. 52.

¹⁸ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 135-136.

¹⁹ Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad*, p. 30.

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 136.

²² Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad*, p. 30.

²³ Idem. See also Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, Berg, Oxford, 2001, p. 108.

²⁴ Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History*, Routledge, Oxford, 2013, p. 24.

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, Oxford University Press, compiled in *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics, An Omnibus*, with an introduction by Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 177. For a detailed discussion of the Hindu Mahasabha's social base and leadership, see Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha*, pp. 26- 43.

president of the Mahasabha in 1937,²⁷ he gradually transformed the Mahasabha into a 'fully fledged political party' in the hope of making it a 'credible political challenger' to the Indian National Congress, the largest nationalist party in India.²⁸

In the same year, the provincial election in Bengal 'delivered a fractured mandate', with no party having clear majority in the Legislative Assembly.²⁹ The Muslim League won 39 seats and emerged as the largest Muslim party. Its rival Muslim party Krishak Praja Party bagged 36 seats. The Congress emerged as the largest party having won 54 seats.³⁰ However, in order to keep Congress away from power, the Governor of Bengal bypassed Congress and invited A. K. Fazlul Huq, the leader of the Krishak Praja Party, better known by its abbreviation KPP, to form the government.³¹ Huq, interestingly, first turned to Congress instead of its Muslim rival the League for support to reach the required number of members to prove majority in the Assembly.³² However, Congress declined to be a part of the government. Huq then had to seek support from the League who obliged, and a KPP-League coalition government was formed in 1937 with Fazlul Huq as the Premier, that is, Chief Minister.³³ In order to obtain Muslim League's backing to form the ministry, Huq had to allot four out of six Muslim ministry posts to the League.³⁴

²⁷ William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 162.

²⁸ Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha*, p. 41. For a detailed discussion of the contents of 'Savarkarism' see Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, pp. 77- 111. For discussion of Savarkar's articulation of *Hindutva*, see John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism*, pp. 177-183. Savarkar himself articulated his ideas about Hindutva, Hindu culture, and most importantly Hindu rashtra (nation) in an ideological pamphlet originally published in 1923 under the original name 'Essentials of Hindutva'. Later the title of the pamphlet was changed to *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* See V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, Hindi Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi, 5th edn. 1966, reprint 2003.

²⁹ Bikramjit Dé, *British Policy in Bengal, 1939-1945*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2002, p. 3.

³⁰ See *Return Showing the Results of Elections in India, 1937*, pp. 40-52.

³¹ Dé, *British Policy*, p. 3.

³² *Idem.*

³³ *Idem.*

³⁴ Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937 -47*, Oxford University press, Karachi, 1988, p. 64.

Against this political backdrop, the Hindu Mahasabha was launched in Bengal two years later. Sensing an opportunity to politically grow in the province, Savarkar visited Calcutta in 1939, where he met Mookerjee and made him the president of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha.³⁵ In December of the same year, the Hindu Mahasabha formally called for the 'overthrow' of the Bengal ministry run by the Muslim parties.³⁶

Meanwhile, the *zamindar* (landlord) ministers of the League forced Huq to abandon the KPP's pre-election promise of radical agrarian reform, including abolition of *zamindari* system. Consequently, many of the KPP members, who had fiercely campaigned against the *zamindars*, deserted Huq.³⁷ On his part, Huq expelled 17 rebels from among the KPP's Assembly members.³⁸ This left him with a 'very precarious majority' in the Bengal Assembly.³⁹ Further, differences were also growing between Huq and the League. Finally, the coalition government fell in July 1941.

Huq now turned to the non-Congress and non-Muslim politicians for support. He returned to power in December 1941 at the head of a Progressive Coalition consisting of KPP, Forward Bloc, Bengal Legislative Scheduled Caste Party, and notably the Hindu Mahasabha. Huq inducted Syama Prasad Mookerji in his cabinet as the Finance Minister.⁴⁰ However, as Ian Talbot puts it, 'Huq's Machiavellian alliance with Shyma Prasad Mookerji, although it was shortlived, further cost him support amongst Muslim Prajas.'⁴¹ Mohammad H. R. Talukdar, the editor of the unfinished memoir of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, a major Muslim League leader, too points out that 'The inclusion

³⁵ Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad*, p. 30.

³⁶ Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, p. 211.

³⁷ Talbot, *Provincial Politics*, p. 63-64.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁹ *Idem.*

⁴⁰ Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad*, p. 46.

⁴¹ Talbot, *Provincial Politics*, p. 66.

of this man [Mookerjee] in the ministry antagonized the Muslims. Suhrawardy seized upon this godsent opportunity'.⁴²

Nevertheless, soon on 20 November 1942, Mookerjee resigned from the cabinet protesting against the 'duplicity' and interference of the British governor of Bengal and the British bureaucrats in the works of the government, and against their alleged 'neglect' of the relief works for the cyclone and flood victims in the Midnapore district in October 1942. He argued that the flood victims of Midnapore were being punished for their active participation in the Quit India Movement in August 1942 against the British government.⁴³

The governor John Herbert and the British bureaucrats on their part found Huq defiant of their control.⁴⁴ The governor was further worried that the conflict between Huq and the League was hindering the war efforts. The political estrangement between Huq and the governor reached its climax when Huq, defying the governor, promised in the Legislative Assembly to order an 'impartial' enquiry into the police tortures against the participants in the Quit India Movement in the Midnapore district.⁴⁵ Consequently, the governor forced Huq to resign, though he still had majority in the Assembly.⁴⁶

Thus, elected government in Bengal was replaced by the governor's rule. However, after a month, on 24 April 1943, Muslim League, with the support of the European Group and the Bengal Legislative Scheduled Caste Party, formed the government.⁴⁷ The Bengal Provincial Muslim League was divided into two factions, respectively led by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (1892-

⁴² Mohammad H. R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy with a Brief Account of His Life and Work*, 2nd edn., foreword by Kamal Hossain, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2009 (first published in 1987), p. 18.

⁴³ Dé, *British Policy*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Dé, *British Policy*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Das, *Communal Riots*, pp. 163-164.

⁴⁶ Dé, *British Policy*, p. 4. For a detailed discussion about Fazlul Huq's politics and his premiership in Bengal between 1940 and 1943, see Sana Aiyar, 'Fazlul Huq, Region and Religion in Bengal: The Forgotten Alternative of 1940-43', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 6, Nov., 2008.

⁴⁷ Dé, *British Policy*, p. 4.

1963) and Sir Khwaja Nazimuddin (1894-1964).⁴⁸ The latter succeeded in becoming the Premier, that is, Chief Minister. Suhrawardy was a native and stalwart local leader of Midnapore, a district severely hit by the famine.⁴⁹ Therefore, to use Suhrawardy's personal influence to mitigate the anger of the starving people, Nazimuddin appointed him to the critical post of the Civil Supplies Minister. Suhrawardy looked after food affairs throughout the famine.⁵⁰

In May 1943, the Civil Supplies Department appointed M. M. Ispahani Ltd, a private trading firm, to the lucrative post of the sole grain buying agent of the Bengal government.⁵¹ From 20 May until 31 December 1943, M. M. Ispahani Ltd was the sole purchasing agent of the government.⁵² Hassan Ispahani had inherited his family business, and was one of the richest Muslim merchants in the province.⁵³ He, and another Calcutta business-magnate Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, were the principal organizers of the Bengal Muslim League in 1936. Ian Talbot's study of the League has argued that the Bengal Muslim League 'owed' its organization to these two big Calcutta businessmen.⁵⁴ In Bengal, the League had been inert in the early 1930s.⁵⁵ In July 1936, to counter Fazlul Huq's growing influence among the rural Muslims, Ispahani had invited Jinnah to Bengal. Subsequently, Jinnah's visit in August 1936 resulted in the merging of Bengal's United Muslim Party (of which Ispahani was the secretary) with the Muslim League. Thus, Ispahani had played a key role in the 'rebirth' of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.⁵⁶ He was a close

⁴⁸ Joya Chatterji, 'The Making of a Borderline: The Radcliffe Award for Bengal', in Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh (eds.), *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1999, p. 180.

⁴⁹ Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

⁵¹ Famine Inquiry Commission, 'Statement Summarising Evidence Related to Messrs. Ispahani Ltd.', in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi, p. 3. See also Famine Inquiry Commission's draft letter marked 'SECRET' to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Food, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, NAI, p. 1.

⁵² Famine Inquiry Commission's draft letter marked 'SECRET' to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Food, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, NAI, p. 2.

⁵³ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 80.

⁵⁴ Talbot, *Provincial Politics*, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 82-83.

confidante of Jinnah.⁵⁷ Further, Joya Chatterji's study tells us that the League in Bengal was 'heavily dependent on the financial support of Hassan Ispahani'.⁵⁸ As we will see later in this chapter, the appointment of such a prominent League member as the *sole* purchasing agent of the government drew scathing attacks from Mookerjee.

In the first week of June 1943 Civil Supplies Minister Suhrawardy launched a province-wide 'Food Drive'.⁵⁹ The purpose of the Drive was "'To ascertain the actual statistical position, to locate hoards, to stimulate the flow of grain from agriculturists to the markets, and to organise distribution of local surpluses as loans or by sales to those who were in need of foodgrains.'"⁶⁰ Notably, the Food Drive scheme excluded Calcutta and the municipalities of Howrah and Bally from the scope of its application.⁶¹ This exclusion drew attacks from Mookerjee as we will see later in this chapter. However, the Civil Supplies Ministry argued that the Bengal government did not have adequate administrative strength to undertake simultaneous operations in the districts as well as in Calcutta, Howrah, and Bally.⁶²

To execute the scheme, all the rural and urban areas were divided into units and sub-units. In rural areas a unit consisted of two unions,⁶³ and each sub-unit consisted of a village or a group of villages. In urban areas, a unit consisted of a municipal ward or block comprising between 3,500 and 4,000 houses, and each sub-unit consisted of approximately 100 houses.⁶⁴ 'Each unit was put in charge of a squad consisting of one officer, 4 official

⁵⁷ Talbot, *Provincial Politics*, p. 68.

⁵⁸ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 255.

⁵⁹ Famine Inquiry Commission (hereafter FIC), *Report on Bengal*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1945, p. 91.

⁶⁰ As quoted *idem*.

⁶¹ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 57.

⁶² *Idem*, p. 57.

⁶³ Unions were geographical jurisdiction of the Union Boards, that is, local administrative units representing a group of five to twenty contiguous villages. The unions were formed following the enactment of the Bengal Village Self-Government Act in 1919, and were replaced in independent India by the *Gram Panchyats* (village assemblies) following the enactment of the West Bengal Panchayat Act in 1957. See C. Ashokvardhan and Ashish Vachhani (eds.), *Socio-Economic Profile of Rural India*, series-II, vol. four (Eastern India), Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2011, p. 306.

⁶⁴ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 56.

subordinates, and 4 non-officials.⁶⁵ Each sub-unit was to have a 'sub-unit committee' consisting of 12 members 'who were elected, as far as possible, by the residents in the sub-unit concerned.'⁶⁶ Thus, the Food Drive scheme tried to involve local public in the government's food activities. 'It was hoped that this contact would enable the administration to secure the help of village leaders in matters relating to food.'⁶⁷ The sub-unit committees were to make house-to-house enquiry into stocks of rice and paddy, and persuade persons holding surplus stocks to lend or sell them to those who did not have enough food. Thus the sub-unit committees were a part of the Bengal government's famine-relief mechanism. Stocks of un-licenced traders were to be requisitioned, and 25 per cent of stocks over 300 maunds kept by any individual, whether a licenced trader or a farmer, was also to be requisitioned. Further, District Civil Supplies Officers were empowered to requisition stocks, under certain conditions, from the agriculturalists.⁶⁸

Against this overall political and administrative background, Mookerjee led the politics of the Mahasabha on the issue of famine. Initially the Mahasabha, under the presidency of Savarkar, had provided whole-hearted political support to the British war efforts until 1942 in pursuance of a policy of unalloyed opposition to secular Congress.⁶⁹ However, a schism between the colonial government and the Mahasabha started growing since 1942 under the leadership of Syama Prasad Mookerjee in Bengal. Unlike Savarkar, who believed in 'revolutionary' Hindu nationalism, Mookerjee started trying to transform the Mahasabha into a mass-based party.⁷⁰ This produced a rift between the colonial government and the Mahasabha, which was widened by the colonial government's growing sympathy for the League's demand for Muslim political autonomy. It was within this political setting that Mookerjee

⁶⁵ *Idem.*

⁶⁶ *Idem.*

⁶⁷ *Idem.*

⁶⁸ *Idem.*

⁶⁹ For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the Hindu Mahasabha and the British colonial state in India during the Second World War, see Nandini Gondhalekar and Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'The All India Hindu Mahasabha and the End of British Rule in India, 1939-1947', *Social Scientist*, vol. 27, nos. 7- 8, Jul. – Aug. 1999.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51, p. 57, p. 61.

launched his political attack simultaneously on the League government in Bengal, as well as on the central government, for causing the Bengal Famine. As starving Bengalis of all religious persuasions lost the battle for food in the open market, they turned increasingly to state agencies for support. The state's failure to deliver help provided the Mahasabha a political weapon against the government.

In Bengal, the Mahasabha was heavily dependent on the personal charisma of Mookerjee, he was the biggest crowd-puller of the Mahasabha. He revived the moribund Mahasabha in Bengal after joining it in 1939. The Mahasabha in Bengal was so dependent on his personal charisma that Savarkar made him the provincial president of the party from the moment of his joining it. Being a well-known educationist and former Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, and being a Brahmin by caste, he commanded the respect and loyalty of a large section of the 'high' caste *bhadraloks*, who were the target audience of the Mahasabha's politics.⁷¹ He almost single-handedly provided leadership to the Mahasabha in its politics on the issue of famine, and its relief activities. Therefore, this chapter explores the role that he played as the undisputed leader of the Mahasabha during the famine.

III. 'His Master's Voice': Mookerjee and the Collusion of Empire

A key source for the politics of the Mahasabha vis-à-vis the famine lies in a lengthy speech in the Bengal Legislative Assembly that Syama Prasad Mookerjee made on 14 July 1943, during a debate on the food situation in Bengal. He alluded to the attempts of Suhrawardy, the Minister of Civil Supplies, to defend his record in the management of the food crisis by recruiting greater numbers of Indian officials to his department, who were expected to work more energetically in the interests of the Bengali civilian population. However, Mookerjee reminded his audience that the British

⁷¹ Mookerjee was the vice-chancellor of the Calcutta University between 1934 and 1938. He was also a barrister-at-law.

governor of Bengal had vetoed all previous attempts to expand Indian recruitment:

To-day as my friend Mr. Suhrawardy has pointed out, the Department of Civil Supplies can boast of Indian officers of repute, although that very same attempt made by the past Ministry was vetoed by the Governor who was not prepared to hand over key positions in this department, acting in his individual judgement, except to European members of the Indian Civil Service or non-official Europeans.⁷²

Mookerjee went on quietly with devastating criticism of the British officials' handling of the famine:

I have nothing to say against them personally, but the fact remains that the policy which they tried to introduce and give effect to failed. The officers are still there; some of them have been promoted; some of them are suffering from nervous breakdown, but no one is here taking into account the horrid state to which they had reduced the province. A judge of the High Court was hurriedly brought from the Bench to preside over the department of Civil Supplies and he did not know how quickly to go back to his old place again.⁷³

In Britain, in direct contrast to Mookerjee's argument, Frederick A. Lindemann, the Paymaster General (1942-45) and the Scientific Advisor to the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, hinted to Churchill in September 1943 that 'the sheer inefficiency and corruption due to Indianising the Civil Service' was one of the causes of the famine in Bengal.⁷⁴ Lindemann's suggestion tells us how the Indianization of the civil service became a contested issue in assigning the official responsibility for the famine.

However, in his speech in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Mookerjee went ahead to draw more explicit link between Bengal's Muslim League government and the failures of the British officials. He drew attention to

⁷² *Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 1. Mookerjee was referring to Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the minister of civil supplies in the Bengal government.

⁷³ *Idem.*

⁷⁴ Letter from F. A. Lindemann to the Prime Minister, 23rd September 1943, H290/3, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, Viscount Cherwell, Nuffield College Library (hereafter NCL), Oxford.

Bengal government's recent statement claiming that there was no real shortage of food in Bengal, and it was actually hoarding and misdistribution that lay behind the famine. He suggested that in its pronouncements, Bengal government was actually the mouthpiece for the British Government, that 'His Master's voice' was being echoed simultaneously in the corridors of political power in Bengal as well as in Britain:

Now it is curious that simultaneously with this announcement made by the new Ministry of Bengal, which had the special blessing of the Governor of this province and a section of permanent officials, His Master's voice spoke out in the House of Commons. There Mr. Amery declared – Yes, there is some trouble in India and in Bengal but there is no shortage of foodstuffs in the country; there is only hoarding and maldistribution and Government is looking after this aspect of the problem.⁷⁵

Though Mookerjee projected Mr. Amery, the Secretary of State for India, as an awfully uninformed British statesman hostile to India's need for food, yet, the writings of Amery, in both his official and personal capacity, prove that he was rather sympathetic to India's food demands.⁷⁶ As his official writings demonstrate, in the meetings of the War Cabinet he strongly supported India's demands for food imports put forward by the successive Viceroys of India. However, most of the time his words were ignored by the Prime Minister Churchill and other members of the Cabinet. Amery wrote in his personal diary on 24 September 1943: 'Cabinet, at which I fought my battle for Indian food as hard as I could.'⁷⁷ However, notably, in the same diary entry, he also mentioned that 'Winston may be right in saying that the starvation of anyhow under-fed Bengalis is less serious than sturdy Greeks,

⁷⁵ Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's *Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ See the personal diary of Amery between 1 August 1943 and 20 September 1944, compiled in John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, foreword by the Late Lord Stockton, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1988, pp. 932-1002. See also the exchange of letters between Amery and the Viceroys of India, respectively Marquess of Linlithgow and Field Marshall Viscount Wavell, during 1943-44, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7*, vol. III and vol. IV, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, respectively 1971 and 1973.

⁷⁷ See the entry by Leo Amery in his personal diary on 24 September 1943, in Barnes and Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay*, p. 943.

at any rate from the war point of view, but he makes no sufficient allowance for the sense of Empire responsibility in this country.'⁷⁸ Thus, even Amery concurred with Churchill in accepting the primacy of satisfying military hunger, as opposed to civil hunger. His diary actually corroborates to the allegation by Mookerjee that the colonial state in India was consciously neglecting its responsibility to save its civilian subjects from starvation. It is striking that even when millions were dying of starvation in Bengal, Lindemann still felt that the Government of India was trying to 'mulct' Britain by demanding grain imports: 'it it (sic.) a little hard that the U.K., which has already suffered a much greater drop in consumption than India, should be mulcted because the Government of India cannot arrange its affairs in an orderly manner.'⁷⁹

In this political situation, Mookerjee presented himself as the defender not only of Bengal's Hindus, but of all Bengalis, who stood accused by the British as well as the Bengal government as responsible for their own misfortunes. He alleged that:

The false picture painted by a so-called responsible Ministry just enabled the representative of His Majesty's Government to get up in the House of Commons and to announce to the world that the serious situation that threatened Bengal, which was near the eastern war frontier, was not due to the pursuit of any wrong policy by Government either in Delhi or in Calcutta but due to the selfish and obstructive attitude taken up by the people themselves.⁸⁰

However, in this connection, it is important to note that in addition to politically attacking the governments in Calcutta, Delhi, and London, Mookerjee also took care to emphasise a more constructive approach. He proposed that the British must be made to understand that starvation in Bengal, very close to the war front with Japan, was actually detrimental to British war interests. A famine would divert state machinery, including the

⁷⁸ *Idem.*

⁷⁹ Letter from F. A. Lindemann to the Prime Minister, 3rd August 1943, H290/2, Papers of F. A. Lindemann, NCL.

⁸⁰ *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 4.

police and the army, from war efforts to famine-relief, hinder procurement of provisions and recruitment for the army, and greatly damage the reputation of Britain and its allies. Therefore, he argued, adequate food-supply must be publicly pronounced as a 'war measure'. He proposed that 'A message should be sent to the Prime Minister of England that in view of the serious position that threatens Bengal it is disastrous to the interests of the Allied Powers themselves not to supply necessary foodstuffs to Bengal: it should be regarded as a *war measure* and there should be no more tinkering with it.'⁸¹

IV. The 'Muslim Saboteur', and Censorship

In addition to what Mookerjee portrayed as the collusion between the British and the Bengal government, a second ground on which he and his colleagues in the Mahasabha attacked the Muslim League government lay in the alleged role of Muslim officers in the Bengal government's food administration. Direct public allegations in the Assembly or in print were difficult to make, since, as we shall see, both the Government of India, and the new Muslim League government, were active in controlling news on the food situation. However, there is an undated and unsigned note in Mookerjee's personal papers that suggests that informal discussion of these themes was common in the Mahasabha circles during the closing years of the war and immediately afterwards. The note, probably recorded by Mookerjee himself or one from his close political circle, was clearly written on the eve of independence and partition. It accused Muslim officers and traders of 'sabotaging' rationing arrangements and undermining Hindu traders. It alleged that:

The Rationing Department has been created for the last few years stifling long-standing trade channels. The Hindu trade and Hindu staffs have practically been groaning under the League Ministry for the last few years. There is hardly any point why the Muslim personnel should be retained under C. R. [Civil Rationing] after the 15th August '47 after the virtual transference of their allegiance and services to East Bengal. It is highly inexpedient that these personnel

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 22. Emphasis mine.

should be kept on only to sabotage the scheme of rationing in West Bengal for the next six months.⁸²

The note made further observations about the conduct of Muslim staff in the Food Department:

It is already in the air that the Muslim staff has practically suspended work in view of the impending partition of the province and it is being talked about freely that since they have no allegiance to West Bengal after the 15th of August they would be quite at liberty to enjoy the earned leave already accumulated to them during the period of the next 6 months they would be in West Bengal. It would be idle to ignore the psychological aspect of the Muslim staff to stop work for the next few months when they will be busy setting about to secure jobs in East Bengal and to carry on a nefarious propaganda of hatred and sabotage.⁸³

The author of the note had further interesting suggestions for the future of the Government Stores which housed supplies of grains and other foods for distribution through official ration system. It suggested that in the future West Bengal Government Stores could safely be abolished, but some government stores, in addition to ration shops run by authorized private dealers, should be retained within what the author termed 'Muslim pocket areas', which should be manned jointly by Hindu and Muslim staff:

It may be argued that if all the Muslim Staff are allowed to go to East Bengal according to their choice and if all the G. S. [Government Stores] are all of a sudden abolished how to feed the Muslim pocket areas during fresh communal disturbances as the A. R. S.⁸⁴ are likely to be looted and Hindu staff assaulted. The answer to this question is to man these Moslem pocket areas only by maintaining the minimum required number of G. S. which again are to be manned by jointly by Hindu and Muslim staff. For this only a few G. S. have to be maintained without any big expenditure.⁸⁵

⁸² Undated and unsigned note titled 'Some Comments on the So-Called Stand Still Arrangement Said to Agreed upon by the 2 Ministries', in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installment VIII and IX, sub. file no. 4, NMML, pp. 92-93.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 93.

⁸⁴ A. R. S. stands for Authorized Ration Shop.

⁸⁵ Undated and unsigned note titled 'Some Comments on the So-Called Stand Still Arrangement', p. 95.

In South Asia, it was not unusual for the Hindus and Muslims to cluster and 'predominate' in particular neighbourhoods.⁸⁶ As the *paras*, or neighbourhoods, in Calcutta tended to coincide with the demographic concentration of the Hindu or Muslim community, a ration shop run by an authorized dealer in a *para* in all probability served the food requirements of a particular community, and was staffed by people from that dominant community. The Famine Inquiry Commission's *Report on Bengal* actually mentioned that the delay in the recruitment of rationing staff by the League government 'was accentuated at one stage by an endeavour to maintain communal proportions.'⁸⁷ Thus the ration shops were likely to have been part of the communal landscape of a Hindu or Muslim *para*. Therefore, it is very likely that during communal riots attacks against the *para* of the 'other' included looting of the ration shops as well as physical violence against their staff. In the communally segregated Calcutta, an empty ration shop and the consequent prospect of starvation by the 'other', surely had the potential of being used as a weapon against the 'other' community.

However, the Mahasabha's apprehension that Hindu staff in the ration shops in Muslim neighbourhoods would be attacked by the Muslim mobs seems to have been unfounded, and merely aimed at stirring Hindu sentiments against the Muslims, as it was unlikely to find any Hindu rationing staff in Muslim neighbourhoods to attack. In this context, the use of the term 'Moslem pocket' is suggestive. It served as a reminder that Muslims lacked demographic strength in Calcutta, which was located in the overwhelmingly Hindu western part of undivided Bengal. At the same time, the recommendation that Government Stores be kept open in Muslim neighbourhoods underlined the Mahasabha's wish to present itself as a politically responsible organisation, concerned for Muslims as much as Hindus.

⁸⁶ See Yasmin Khan, *The Great partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2007, p. 73, p. 76.

⁸⁷ FIC, *Report on Bengal*, p. 96.

There were also major political advantages to be derived from shutting down ration shops in Hindu localities. As we shall see in the next chapter, it would put relief and rationing in the hands of the Mahasabha's fast growing famine relief wing, then developing as a means of political mobilisation. But the delicate and risky task of providing rations in the Muslim neighbourhoods was envisaged very much as a task for the new League government of Bengal.

In connection with the communal projection of the food situation by the Mahasabha, a brief note on wartime political censorship in Bengal is necessary. Taking full political advantage of the famine and simultaneous failure of the government food administration would have required much greater freedom for the Mahasabha's public communications than it was able to attain in reality. But, as we have seen in the previous chapters, control over news about food situation became a key concern for the wartime colonial state in India. The central government imposed strict controls on what could be revealed about the extent of the famine. Sometimes 'Military censorship' was used to erase the very word 'famine' from news reports.⁸⁸ Ian Stephens, the British editor of *The Statesman* newspaper published from Calcutta and Delhi, stated in his memoir that 'Cables from India were watched for references to conditions in Bengal and all such meaningful words as famine, corpse, starvation methodically struck out.'⁸⁹ Interestingly, it was *The Statesman*, a British-owned English newspaper, that covered the famine most extensively, including publication of series of ghastly photographs of the famine victims. Of course, there were speculations in the press circles about how could *The Statesman* get past the Bengal censors with such photographs. In his memoir, Stephens cited an opinion published in *Dawn* newspaper suggesting that *The Statesman* got away with the photographs because of its "privileged position" of being a British-owned newspaper with a British editor.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Barnes and Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay*, p. 910.

⁸⁹ Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Earnest Benn, London, 1966, pp. 187-188.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

However, Stephens had said in December 1943 that 'being British-owned, it is open to taunts from nationalist rivals that it constitutes a limb of Government.'⁹¹ In his memoir, he claimed that the central government's Chief Press Advisor and the Information Bureau tried their best to prevent *The Statesman* from publishing the disturbing photographs.⁹² However, exploiting the technical lacunae in the wartime censorship rules, *The Statesman* dodged the government censors.⁹³ Also, when other foreign correspondents present in India, mainly British and Americans, found out that their despatches were being 'emasculated' by the censors, they too rallied behind *The Statesman's* 'guerrilla campaign'⁹⁴ against the suppression of the press, providing strength of support to its resistance.⁹⁵ Editor Stephens harshly attacked the censorship attempts: 'The continuous appearance of effort on the part of persons within India's Governmental machine, perhaps out here, perhaps in Whitehall, to suppress, distort, or muffle the truth about Bengal is dragging the fair name of the British Raj needlessly low.'⁹⁶ Immediately after the publication of the first instalment of the appalling photographs of the famine victims on Sunday 22 August 1943, Stephens became almost a hero in the eyes of the Indian nationalists.⁹⁷ The nationalist support from the beginning for *The Statesman's* famine coverage made it difficult for the government, both central and provincial, to clamp down on its subsequent publications.

When the press was facing tremendous censorship, the potential for the Mahasabha as a political party to exploit the food crisis publicly was limited. The position drew scathing attack from Mookerjee, as part of his Assembly speech:

⁹¹ 'Memorandum by Mr. Stephens about Seac, December 11, 1943', appendix XIII, *ibid.*, p. 279.

⁹² Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, pp. 185-197. See also 'Letter to Mr. H. Tufnell-Barrett, Provincial Press Advisor, Bengal, dated April 15, 1944, from Mr. Stephens', appendix XII, *ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

⁹³ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 185, p. 197 (footnote 26). See also 'Letter to Mr. H. Tufnell-Barrett, Provincial Press Advisor, Bengal, dated April 15, 1944, from Mr. Stephens', appendix XII, *ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

⁹⁴ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 187.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

An order was issued under the Defence of India Rules that no newspaper would be allowed to comment on the food drive unless the editorials were placed before the Home Department for previous scrutiny. That was a taste of the new regime of the liberator of freedom, to quote Mr Siddiqi. If people wanted to criticise and point out what was fundamentally wrong with the Scheme – they were to be gagged and no article was to be published without pre-censoring by the Home Department.⁹⁸

The attempt both of provincial and central government to veil the failure of the food administration did much to exacerbate the food crisis in Bengal. Often, relief could not reach the most severely affected areas as the existence of scarcity there was suppressed from the press, political parties, and general public. Even some contemporary League politicians later admitted that the Bengal government led by the League suppressed the real situation from the general public. Abul Mansur Ahmad, the noted Bengali littérateur, journalist, and Muslim League politician, later described in his Bengali memoir how the League government had sought to divert attention away from the food crisis: ‘they suppressed the real situation from the public. Food scarcity was inevitable and imminent, yet they said there was no scarcity. People started dying of starvation, yet they said no one died of starvation. Those who died, did not die of starvation. They died of stomach disease caused by overeating.’⁹⁹ Though Mookerjee’s attack on censorship was very much part of his search for political advantage, yet it does give us an idea of the severity of censorship in Bengal during the famine.

V. Political Exploitation of the Trade Issue

On 4 June 1943 the Bengal government passed the Bengal Foodgrains Inquiries and Control Order providing that “an authorized officer may, together with such persons as he may consider necessary, enter upon any

⁹⁸ Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s *Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachhar (Fifty Years of Politics as I Saw It)*, Khoshroz Kitab Mahal, Dacca, 6th edn. 1995, re-print 2013, p. 183. Translation mine.

premises where he has reason to believe that foodgrains have been stocked".¹⁰⁰ Following the order, on 7 June 1943, the Bengal government launched its Food Drive Scheme, aimed at checking, and if necessary confiscating, hoarded food stocks.¹⁰¹ As we have seen in section II above, the scheme was peculiar in its construction. It initially excluded the two most important cities of western Bengal, namely Calcutta and Howrah, from the scope of its application. This was puzzling to many observers, since these two cities contained the bulk of the warehouses into which grain merchants seeking profits had stockpiled their wares in expectation of rising prices. To escape confiscation in the districts, the hoarders shifted their rice-hoards from the districts to Calcutta and Howrah.¹⁰²

Mookerjee was quick to incorporate the exclusion of the two cities from the Food Drive into his public critique of the Muslim League government and its minister of civil supplies, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawady. He asked his opponents in the Legislative Assembly: 'Why were Calcutta and Howrah excluded? If you were really sincere and genuine, if you wanted that there should be a full stock-taking, you should have started with Calcutta and Howrah.'¹⁰³ He drew a link between this exclusion and the League's political supporters amongst Muslim grain traders. The League, he alleged, was acting in the interest of the Messrs. Ispahani and Co., the trading company owned by League politician Hassan Ispahani. Mookerjee pressed his point: 'Why did you not take the stocks of those wealthy profiteers like Messrs. Ispahani and Co. who, according to the Minister himself, can today forego a profit of 40 lakhs,

¹⁰⁰ See Kali Charan Ghosh, 'Indian Famine Relief Measures: Old and New', *Modern Review*, Nov. 1943, reproduced in K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-Hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943, p. 122.

¹⁰¹ Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, p. 122.

¹⁰² 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (2)', Provincial Letter, 3rd October 1943, Calcutta, Bengal Provincial Committee (hereafter BPC), Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI), compiled in Suranjan Das and Premansu Kumar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959: Documenting a Turning Point in the History of West Bengal*, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Kolkata, 2004, p. 6. Original in Bengali, translation mine.

¹⁰³ Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943, p. 8.

for the benefit of the poor people of this province?’¹⁰⁴ He himself provided the answer:

The reason was that there were certain firms which cannot be easily touched; the reason was that there were certain quarters near which the mighty Mr. Suhrawardy dared not go, because they were the people on whom the Ministry had to depend for its existence. So they had to be left out, and this so-called drive had to be undertaken against poor consumers and agriculturists.¹⁰⁵

Mookerjee thus sought to project the Mahasabha as the protector of petty producers and small stockists in the countryside from indiscriminate confiscation by the Bengal government. However, the real situation may have been more complex than this. Direct evidence is difficult to obtain, but intelligence reports of the period suggest that the real aim of the Mahasabha was to stir up opposition to the League government among the wider community of grain dealers, and to lobby for an unrestricted free trade in grains. A letter marked ‘SECRET’ from D. A. Brayden of the Central Intelligence Office, Calcutta, to G. C. Ryan, Assistant Director of the Intelligence Bureau in New Delhi, noted on 11 January 1944 that:

The price of rice has been going up in the last few weeks and there is considerable lack of confidence in the ability of the Government to control the situation. This is made still more acute by the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha and the other Opposition groups which are determined to discredit and if possible overthrow the present Muslim League Ministry. Moreover these Opposition groups can influence the ordinary rice dealers and in fact it will have been plain that the Rice Mills Association and other trade organizations are being warmly supported by the Mahasabha in their demands that the purchase and distribution of rice in the province should be left to “the normal channels of trade”.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Idem.

¹⁰⁵ Idem.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from D.A. Brayden of Central Intelligence Office, Calcutta, to G.C. Ryan, Asstt. Director (R), Intelligence Bureau, New Delhi, 11th January 1944, in the Confidential File, 1943-44, Governor’s Secretariat, Bengal, on ‘H.E.’S “PROGRESS REPORTS” TO H.E. THE VICEROY ON FOOD SITUATION? 11th SEPT. – 8th NOV. 1943’, Ref. No. R-3-2-49, India Office Records, British Library, London.

This interpretation of the Mahasabha's activities by the intelligence official may not have been too far from the truth. Mookerjee made it clear to his Assembly audience that he also objected to the League's policies because, under the garb of 'controlled' trade, the government was selectively hindering the trade of Hindu grain dealers, and misusing state powers in trade to 'create' a new body of Muslim grain dealers at the cost of well-established old Hindu dealers.¹⁰⁷ In government shops Mookerjee saw a 'way of distributing patronage on communal and political considerations'.¹⁰⁸

With regard to distribution, why should a proposal be made that all ordinary channels of trade are to be dispensed with and Government shops are to be opened? What are these shops? To whom will they be offered? At what price? . . . Now, Sir, the last Ministry decided that unless a man was in trade for at least three years, he would not be entitled to a controlled shop. That was a salutary check. Why has that order been ignored? Is it a hindrance in the way of distributing patronage on communal and political considerations?¹⁰⁹

What is noteworthy here is the parallel strategy pursued by Mookerjee. He appealed both to Hindu consumers and to Hindu grain merchants, portraying both as the victims of the League's preference for Muslim grain traders. Usually, the interests of grain consumers and grain traders are mutually opposed. But Mookerjee attempted the delicate task of combining, and subsequently channelling, these two interests against what he presented as their common enemy, the Muslim League government of Bengal. Religion was to be the glue that held together these mutually opposed economic interests. Thus, on the site of food, Mookerjee sought to make Hindu consumers and Hindu traders feel a common sense of discrimination by the Muslim League ministry.

¹⁰⁷ Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine: Bengal 1939 – 45*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, p. 143.

¹⁰⁸ Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's *Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Idem.

In this connection, the Communist Party of India alleged that by taking refuge behind the Mahasabha's political attacks on the League government on the issue of controlling trade, the Hindu traders actually continued to stockpile and profiteer.¹¹⁰ The Communists further made an explosive allegation, that the Hindu grain traders were not hoarding paddy and rice merely for profiteering, but such hoarding became a political weapon of the Hindu traders against the Muslim League as the food scarcity was sure to discredit the League government.¹¹¹ However, the Communist Party did not provide any example or evidence to substantiate this allegation.

As pointed out in section II, the League government appointed the firm of Messrs. Ispahani and Co. as the sole grain buying agent for the government. This arrangement drew Mookerjee's particular wrath. In addition to making usual charges of corruption and nexus between a political party and a private business concern, Mookerjee particularly harped on the fact that Mr Ispahani himself was an important member of the League.

It was nothing short of a scandal that the Ministry should have appointed a particular firm as the sole agent, and what is more, advanced about two crores of rupees to that firm without a single scrap of document. . .

. . . Up till now has been no written agreement between the Government of Bengal and Ispahanis. No tenders were invited. The terms have not been offered to others. Ispahanis have refused to pay any security as demanded by the Government of Bengal. Will Government dare say 'no'? Is it not a scandal of the first magnitude that at this perilous time two crores of rupees or more of public money are to be handed over to a firm (sic), a partner of which is a pillar of the party to which Mr. Suhrawardy belongs?¹¹²

¹¹⁰ 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (2)', Provincial Letter, 3rd October 1943, Calcutta, BPC, CPI, in Das and Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959*, p. 12. Original in Bengali, translation mine.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹² *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 11-12. In another opinion the Bengal Government gave 30 million of rupees, that is 3 crores, in advance to the Messrs. Ispahani and Co. Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and The Ravaging of India during World War II*, Basic Books, New York, 2010, p. 138.

Messrs. Ispahani and Co. started acting as the government's sole buying agent with effect from 20 May 1943. However, there was indeed no written agreement between the Bengal government and the firm until September. On 9 September 1943, an agreement was formally executed between the two, which was put into effect retroactively from 20 May 1943.¹¹³ Stressing the fact that Ispahani was not only involved in corruption, but also himself an important member of the League, served a twin purpose. It helped Mookerjee to convey the impression that the League bore a heavy responsibility for the famine. It also portrayed the League as a conscious beneficiary of the inflation in food, as it received considerable funding from Ispahani, who allegedly earned fortunes through corruption in his dealings as the government's *sole* buying agent. However, Mookerjee, the political tactician, took pains at the same time to portray the matter as one above the narrow lines of party politics, requesting support from even the members of the ruling party.

What is the policy of the present Government of Bengal in giving protection to favoured profiteers and allow them to prosper and thrive on the miseries of the people of the province? I would appeal to the Muslim members who are sitting on the other side to consider the situation dispassionately and not treat this as a party question. It is not a question of Muslim League or Congress or this party or that.¹¹⁴

Mookerjee demanded nonetheless that Ispahani, as a government contractor, should cease to be a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Again, he took care to portray the demand as one based on technical ground, rather than one coming from mere political hostility. In support of his demand, he cited the British constitutional theorist Thomas Erskine May, whose treatise on parliamentary procedure stipulated that in the British parliamentary

¹¹³ FIC, 'Statement Summarising Evidence Related to Messrs. Ispahani Ltd.', in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, NAI, p. 4. See also FIC's draft letter marked 'SECRET' to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Food, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, NAI, pp. 1-2.

¹¹⁴ *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, p. 13.

system if a member of the House of Commons is found to be a government contractor, he would have to cease to be a member of the House.¹¹⁵

Ispahani continued nonetheless to remain a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Given his substantial political and financial support for the Muslim League, it was very difficult to compel his resignation and ejection from the Assembly. This must have been very clear to Mookerjee and his colleagues in the Mahasabha. Thus, the whole outcry around Ispahani's resignation was aimed at achieving a single political goal – trumpeting the close nexus that linked the League government with Muslim business interests, a nexus that could easily be portrayed as deliberately operating against the Hindu population of the province.

VI. Famine and the Demand for Pakistan

Communalization of the food issue became most overt and dangerous when Mookerjee drew explicit connection between Bengal's food scarcity and the ongoing drive of the wider Muslim League to position itself as spokesperson for all of India's Muslims in their search for political autonomy. He never missed a chance to denounce the Muslim League over the issue of food scarcity. In a speech at the Calcutta Town Hall on 6 June 1943, about 5 weeks prior to his speech at the Legislative Assembly, he had presented the failure of the League government to prevent famine as the proof of the financial flaws in the proposal for a separate state of Pakistan:

A ministry pledged to Mr. Jinnah and Pakistan which has already started its Pakistan conference in different parts of Bengal in spite of the grave situation due to food and war has now to run from one province to another, all outside the fancy dreamland of Pakistan. One wonders whether the Moslem League ministry will now realise the economic futility of Pakistan and stop its baneful activities that lead to disunity and disharmony at this grave hour of peril.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 14-15.

¹¹⁶ Dr. S. P. Mookerjee's speech at the Town Hall meeting on 6th June 1943, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installment II - IV, sub-file no. 119, NMML, p.1.

Nor was Mookerjee's speech on this occasion limited to criticisms in general terms. He raised a much more particular and immediate political spectre. As noted earlier in section II, an important feature of the Bengal government's famine relief strategy was the establishment of Food Committees at the level of unions and villages. Mookerjee suggested to his Town Hall audience that the recent formation of Muslim League branches at the level of the unions in Bengal would result in the Food Committees being filled with Muslim members, who would use their positions to exclude Hindus from food distribution.¹¹⁷ Expectedly, Fazlul Huq, the leader of the League's rival KPP, was also attacking the local Food Committees for their partisanship.

However, the Communist Party of India in Bengal maintained distance from Mookerjee's and Huq's political attacks on the Food Committees. The Communist Party claimed that it was the first to demand formation of popular Food Committees to unearth illegal stocks, and subsequently forced the bureaucracy, which was skeptical about the idea, to accept their party-policy. Therefore, the party saw the formation of Food Committees as its political victory over the bureaucracy.¹¹⁸ Bhowani Sen (1909 – 1972), noted leader of the Communist Party, alleged that neither Huq nor Mookerjee was actually interested in solving the food problem; instead, they were running their 'exposure campaign' to magnify the minor problems associated with the Food Committees, with the sole intention of ousting the current League government. Particularly Mookerjee, it was argued, adopted the policy of sowing the seeds of disunity in the Food Committees.¹¹⁹ Sen further argued that their 'exposure campaign', purportedly aimed at exposing the corruption and partisanship of the Food Committees, would not solve any problem,

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹⁸ 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (1)' by Bhowani Sen, Provincial Letter 15/43, 2nd July 1943, Calcutta, BPC, CPI, in Das and Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959*, p. 1. Original in Bengali, translation mine.

¹¹⁹ 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (2)', Provincial Letter, 3rd October 1943, Calcutta, BPC, CPI, in Das and Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959*, p. 12. Original in Bengali, translation mine.

instead it would demoralize the hungry people, break popular unity, give rise to chaos, and incite people to loot food.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, five weeks later in his speech in the Assembly, Mookerjee again attacked Suhrawardy linking his food policies to the Pakistan issue. He accused Suhrawardy of subordinating Bengal's food needs to the wider political calculation of their potential impact on the demand for Pakistan. He alleged that Suhrawardy, as a protagonist of the Pakistan demand, had initially hesitated to seek grain supplies in neighbouring Orissa and Bihar, as the two provinces were outside the proposed Pakistan scheme. Unlike Bengal, which was a Muslim majority province, in both Bihar and Orissa Hindus were in overwhelming majority. In the provincial election in 1937, Congress had won overwhelming majority in both the provinces, and the League had won no seat.¹²¹ Buying grains in these two provinces that were to remain parts of India after proposed partition, was sure to raise serious doubts about the self-sufficiency of Bengal in foodgrains, and in turn about the food sustainability of Pakistan, of which Bengal was going to be a part.

You let loose wealthy traders and individuals who wanted to profit by easy purchase in different parts of Orissa and Bihar. The Government of Orissa revolted; the Government of Bihar revolted. Then Mr. Suhrawardy tried to negotiate with them. I say, Sir, it was the clear duty of the Bengal Ministry to do it at the very first stage and that is the charge which I bring forward against it. Why did Mr. Suhrawardy hesitate first to go to Orissa and Bihar? Was it because he, a protagonist of the Pakistan Scheme, did not care to ask favours from Orissa and Bihar as they formed part of the future Hindustan?¹²²

In his address to the Assembly, Mookerjee seized every chance to portray the famine in League-ruled Bengal as a proof of the League's incompetence to rule, and the economic un-viability of Pakistan. 'Alas', he declared. "The

¹²⁰ 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (1)' by Bhowani Sen, Provincial Letter 15/43, 2nd July 1943, CPI, in Das and Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959*, pp. 1-3. See also 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (2)', Provincial Letter, 3rd October 1943, CPI, in Das and Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959*, pp. 7-8.

¹²¹ For election results in Bihar, see *Return Showing the Results of Elections in India, 1937*, pp. 82-91. For election results in Orissa, see *ibid.*, pp. 110-113.

¹²² *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, pp. 10-11.

economic structure of Pakistan is collapsing and Bengal, the future home of Pakistan, has to be provided for through the generosity of adjoining Hindu provinces.¹²³

Inevitably, there were counter allegations by the Muslim League. Abul Mansur Ahmad, prominent in the Muslim League, alleged that when the League government attempted to buy rice from Bihar, the 'Hindu-leaders' of Bengal and other provinces raised hindrances in the hope that starvation would compel the Bengali Muslims to surrender their demand for Pakistan.¹²⁴ According to Ahmed, some of them openly wanted to teach the Bengal government a lesson for demanding Pakistan.¹²⁵ More than four decades after the famine, in 1987, Mohammad H. R. Talukdar, the editor of Suhrawardy's unfinished memoir, alleged that Bihar 'forcibly unloaded on the platform foodgrain purchased by Bengal government agents. Its refusal was greatly dictated by the fact that it had a Congress government, which did not wish to assist the Muslim League government of Bengal in spite of the deteriorating conditions and deaths due to starvation in that province.'¹²⁶ The unfinished memoir itself is silent on the issue, as it starts with Suhrawardy's political career in post-partition Pakistan in the 1950s. It is indeed difficult to find clear-cut evidence for these accusations and counter-accusations, or for the political motives supposedly underlying them. What they do demonstrate, though, is the degree to which communal politics had come to focus on the issue of food. In this setting, communal antagonism could no longer be viewed as something occurring at a distance in public squares and markets. Focussed so firmly on food, it now became an inseparable part of everyday domestic existence.

Mookerjee's political attacks on the Bengal government finally culminated in the demand for its outright dismissal. In a press conference in Delhi on 10th July 1944, he formally called for an end to the government. Dismissal of the

¹²³ Ibid., p. 11.

¹²⁴ Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachhar*, p. 183. Translation mine.

¹²⁵ Idem.

¹²⁶ Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p. 20.

League government, he argued, was necessary for the efficient handling of the food situation: 'Both the Viceroy and Mr Casey,¹²⁷ if they want the food situation to be properly tackled with the willing co-operation of the people, must either get rid of the Ministry themselves or summon the Assembly immediately and allow the people's representatives to proceed constitutionally against it.'¹²⁸

Mookerjee must have realised that neither the Viceroy nor the British governor of Bengal could be realistically expected to dismiss the League government at this stage of the war. The Mahasabha itself also lacked the numerical strength in the Legislative Assembly that would have enabled it to mount a direct challenge. In this situation, Mookerjee was compelled to seek wider political allies, whose political position on issues other than food was quite contrary to that of his own. At the press conference noted above, he claimed publicly that in addition to the entire block of the upper caste Hindu members of the Legislative Assembly, even the majority of the Scheduled Caste members were against the League ministry.¹²⁹ He even claimed that nearly fifty Muslim members, one Indian Christian member, and 'several labour members' belonged to the opposition.¹³⁰

Outside the walls of the Assembly too, Mookerjee and his colleagues sought out other political allies. In the Mahasabha's own pamphlet lauding its leading role in famine relief, it sought to associate a number of illustrious contemporaries with the ranks of the League's opponents. The pamphlet quoted the eminent Congress leader Mrs. Vijaylaxmi Pandit, whereby she asserted that "'The half-hearted attempts of the Provincial Government to deal with the [food] situation have made the public distrustful of all Government promises."¹³¹ The same pamphlet adduced the eminent

¹²⁷ Richard Casey (1890 – 1976) was the Governor of Bengal from 14 January 1944 until 19 February 1946.

¹²⁸ Dr. S. P. Mookerjee's speech at the press conference in Delhi on 10. 7. 44, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installment II-IV, sub-file no. 119, NMML.

¹²⁹ *Idem.*

¹³⁰ *Idem.*

¹³¹ Mrs. Vijaylaxmi Pandit's statement in October 1943, quoted under the heading "Some Thoughts on Bengal Famine", in Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (hereafter BPHM), *How Hindu*

educationist and founding member of the National Liberal Federation, Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, to the Mahasabha's cause. It quoted from one of his speeches made in Calcutta in October 1943: "Could there be a greater tragedy for Bengal than the attitude of the Ministry (Muslim League) which even in this tragic situation..... is appealing only to a section of the people and are rousing feelings detrimental to the best interests of the population of Bengal?"¹³²

In these ways, Mookerjee and his colleagues followed a strategy of cherry-picking from the medley of political utterances against the League government, and used them to bolster their own case against the government. However, in view of its claim that the League government was facing sweeping opposition both inside and outside the Assembly, Mahasabha had to face the obvious expected question: how was the government able to remain in power? Mookerjee had his reply ready. 'The Ministry will not remain in office for a minute but for the solid support of 25 Europeans members ...'¹³³ Thus, the old issue of British favouritism towards the League government was brought back and made to serve the Mahasabha's war against the League government. The story of an unpopular Muslim party kept in power only by the support of the foreign rulers fitted the template of the Mahasabha's Hindu nationalism perfectly. To the Mahasabha's target Hindu audience, the narrative of an implied 'Islamic rule' in the province existing in collaboration with the foreign British rule over Bengal as well as over the larger land of India seemed to explain the starvation of the Hindus. This understanding was precisely what the Mahasabha had been working hard to construct during the 'Bengal vortex'.¹³⁴

Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine, p. 38, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installments V and VII, Printed Material category, S. No. 12, NMML.

¹³² Pt. Kunzru's speech in Calcutta in October 1943 quoted under the heading "Some Thoughts on Bengal Famine", in BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 38.

¹³³ Dr. S. P. Mookerjee's speech at the press conference in Delhi on 10. 7. 44, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installments II - IV, sub-file no. 119, NMML.

¹³⁴ The phrase 'Bengal vortex' was used by Major General E Wood, the Additional Secretary of the central government's Food Department, in his letter to L. G. Pinnell, the Director of Civil Supplies in Bengal, on 23rd April 1943, that is, at the peak of the Bengal famine. The term 'vortex' encapsulates the perception of this colonial official that Bengal had come to constitute a great out of control vacuum into which food was vanishing, generating tremendous political and

VII. Conclusion

Recently Yasmin Khan has argued that 'Politicians, either in prison, or reluctant to become involved by association, stayed strangely mute about the famine.'¹³⁵ It is certainly true that the Indian National Congress itself did not seek to use the case of famine against either the colonial state or the Muslim League. Four factors may have shaped this stance. First, the Congress party in Bengal had been irreparably weakened when its charismatic Bengali leader Subhas Chandra Bose left Congress and formed a new party named Forward Bloc in 1939.¹³⁶ Second, by the time the famine broke out in 1943, most prominent Congress leaders were already behind bars, following the launch of the Quit India Movement in August 1942. Congress was banned in connection to the Quit India movement. Third, the political foothold of the Congress in Bengal had never been strong, given the particular social and ethnic makeup of the province. No Congress government ever established itself in colonial Bengal, and its comparative lack of organization in the province prevented it from taking full political advantage of the famine.¹³⁷ Fourth, the Congress was preoccupied during the 1940s with much questions of strategy at the all-India level, given the pressures of Jinnah's League, the prospect of independence with partition, the accession of the princely states within India, and the preparations for drafting independent India's future constitution. Against this preoccupation with macro politics, food and famine were relegated to secondary concerns for the Congress.

administrative turbulence. See the copy of the confidential letter no. D.O. 400/Addl. S, (CONFIDENTIAL), dated New Delhi the 23rd April, from Major General E. Wood, the Addl. Secy. to the Govt. of India, Department of Food, New Delhi, to L. G. Pinnell, Director of Civil Supplies, Bengal, Calcutta, annexed as Appendix H, pp. 69-70, to H. B. L. Braund, *Memorandum of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund on Events from March 1943 to the end of 1943 in relation to the Food Situation in Bengal*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1944, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, NAI.

¹³⁵ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War*, The Bodley Head, London, 2015, p. 208.

¹³⁶ Dé, *British Policy*, pp. 4-5.

¹³⁷ John Gallagher, 'Congress in Decline: Bengal, 1930 to 1939', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1973, p. 643.

It is also true, as Yasmin Khan has pointed out, that ‘The experience of the famine victims could not be easily hitched to national narratives’.¹³⁸ The famine did not fit in the grand narrative of a steadily progressing Indian nationalism. However, it did fit in the narrative of the failures of the British Raj, and of the ‘crimes’ of the Raj. The Hindu Mahasabha certainly built its reputation for opposing the empire from its stance during the famine. At the same time, it made maximum political capital from the famine in its opposition to the government of the League. Thus, the potential of the issue of starvation in high politics was fully realized by the Hindu Right.

Wartime politics in Bengal was characterised by the antagonistic binary between Muslim League’s focus on some form of Muslim statehood, and the Hindu Mahasabha’s self-appointed role as the defender and champion of Bengal’s Hindus. As the party in government, the League was naturally keen to avoid too much focus on the issue of the famine, and so it came as a sudden and unprecedented political weapon into the hands of the Mahasabha. In this situation, the Mahasabha was greatly aided by the unique and grim convergence of three factors at that particular historical moment – the colossal scale of famine mortality, the continuance of the fear of a possible Japanese attack even after the destruction of boats in eastern Bengal, and the presence of Muslim food officials while the country was seemingly advancing toward partition on the basis of religious difference. In such a period of heightened fear and anxiety in general, the issue of food caught political fire swiftly once the Mahasabha decided to put a political match to the issue. In view of the separation of duties between the provincial government led by the Muslim League, and the central colonial government run from Delhi, Mookerjee sought to make starvation into a political sword that would cut both ways. On the one hand, it was used against the foreign rule, and on the other against the League’s drive for Muslim political autonomy and the proposed partition of India.

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¹³⁸ Khan, *The Raj at War*, p. 208.

Chapter 6

Political Harvest of Famine-Relief

I. Introduction

The last chapter discussed the politicization of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 by the Hindu Mahasabha at the level of high politics. However, the issue of food scarcity obviously had tremendous political potential for mobilizing Bengal's many thousands of starving citizens beyond the sphere of high politics. Naturally, political struggles over the issue were not confined to the political theatre of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. The most important arena within which the Mahasabha sought to project its identity and recruit followers lay in its programmes of famine relief. Through its relief activities, the Mahasabha's religious nationalist politics disseminated to the level of neighbourhood and quotidian politics. In fact, it was during the period of the Second World War that food scarcity, long a familiar preoccupation for Bengal's urban and rural poor, for the first time started to emerge as a focus of real concern for the province's *bhadralok* communities in Calcutta and its environs. The Bengali middle class' sense of vulnerability to food scarcity in 1943-44 helped the Mahasabha to emerge as their saviour by providing food relief to them.

In the absence of large scale relief activities by the Congress in Bengal, the famine presented an opportunity to the Mahasabha to improve its political mass base.¹ Even the Communist Party of India noted during the famine that

¹ Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: from Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 115.

Congress' inaction with regard to the food situation pushed even the Congress-minded Hindu middle class into the open arms of the Mahasabha.² By the time Congress realized this, the Mahasabha's already increased popularity through relief made Congress politically fearful of opposing its activities.³ As for the Bengali communists themselves, the provincial committee of the Communist Party of India admitted that even though the party successfully organized relief in certain pockets in Rangpur, Faridpur, and Chittagong district and in the Krishnanagar city, yet, its overall failure to become more active regarding the famine gave away to Syama Prasad Mookerjee the control over private relief.⁴

The Communist Party categorically mentioned in its policy-document that it was unwilling to use the issue of food scarcity to discredit either the League government or the colonial government and launch any political movement against either of them during the war. Though the party accepted that ultimately it was the policies of the British imperialism that were responsible for the crisis in Bengal,⁵ yet, it warned against the Fifth Column, arguing that those using the tragedy of Bengal to launch *satyagraha* or any political movement, were not fighting for India's independence, rather they were exhausting the remaining strength of the freedom movement.⁶ Instead of opposing the League government, the communists urged the League to replace its one-party ministry with an all-party ministry, including members of the Communist Party, to unitedly combat the food crisis.⁷ The communists saw the solution to the food problem not in any political movement, but in the united efforts of the people against the hoarders and the Fifth Column.⁸ Notably, the communists' stand found resonance in the pages of the *The*

² 'Our Duty during the Food Crisis (2)', Provincial Letter, 3rd October 1943, Calcutta, Bengal Provincial Committee (hereafter BPC), Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI), compiled in Suranjan Das and Premansu Kumar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Food Movement of 1959: Documenting a Turning Point in the History of West Bengal*, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Kolkata, 2004, pp. 12-13. Original in Bengali, translation mine.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Statesman, the British-owned newspaper published from Calcutta and Delhi. *The Statesman* called for 'a truce to local politics and communal backbiting', and formation of a 'broad-based Ministry 'of all the talents' whose members trusted one another and functioned as a team'.⁹

As for relief by individuals, earlier, during periods of minor food availability decline, the customary *Rājā-prajā-sambandha*, that is, the patron-client ties between the landlords and their dependents such as the sharecroppers and agricultural wage-labourers, used to provide some relief to the dependants in the form of food and grain-loans. Paul Greenough's study has demonstrated that such patron-client ties collapsed in 1943 because of the severity, wide geographical spread, and long duration of the famine.¹⁰ Now the subsistence of the landlords themselves was seriously threatened. Consequently, they abandoned their clients. The landowning patrons were now hiding their grain stocks from the sight of their sharecroppers and labourers for the fears of looting.¹¹

Against this background, the Mahasabha dominated the sphere of private relief. In its communications about relief, the Mahasabha's rhetoric of philanthropy took on distinctly political and communal overtones, thus contributing to the intensification of communal tension in the province. The unparalleled scale of the famine, the inept handling of the situation by the Muslim League ministry, and the disorganisation of the Congress during this period left the way open for the Mahasabha to maximise its political capital and to demonstrate its nationalist and philanthropic credentials.

The Mahasabha's use of famine-relief as a political instrument is the focus of this chapter, which aims to bring a new dimension to the discussion of

⁹ 'Text of an editorial *Reflections on Disaster* published in *The Statesman* on September 23, 1943', appendix X, Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, Earnest Benn, London, 1966, p. 269.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion on the collapse of the *Rājā-prajā-sambandha*, or the patron-client ties, see Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, pp. 207-215.

¹¹ Bikramjit Dé, *British Policy in Bengal, 1939-1945*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2002, pp. 196-197.

communal politics in wartime Bengal. The Mahasabha documented its relief activities in considerable and orderly detail. The principal source for this chapter is the Mahasabha's own narrative. The Mahasabha not only provided relief to the starving, it also took great care to publicize that philanthropic work during the famine. As part of its relief-publicity, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha published two reports describing its relief operations. First, it published an interim report in 1943, and then a final report in 1944. Simultaneous publicity alongside its ongoing relief works was necessary for the Mahasabha's political growth. Accordingly, the Mahasabha sought publicity during the peak of the famine in 1943, when public mind was preoccupied with starvation. Therefore, instead of waiting to publish the finalized report a year later, it hurried to publish an interim report in 1943. Both reports had almost identical titles – the interim report was titled *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, and the final one was titled *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*.¹² These straightforward titles seem to have been chosen to instantly catch the attention of the audience.

The interim report was written jointly by Professor Haricharan Ghosh and Mr Manoranjan Choudhury, joint secretaries of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha. In addition to containing a narrative of the Mahasabha's relief activities, the report included a comprehensive list of different types of relief centres run by the Mahasabha and the number of people served by them (reproduced in the appendix 2 to this thesis), and a list of local relief organizations that received 'help' from the Mahasabha. The final report too was co-authored by Haricharan Ghosh and Manoranjan Choudhury. To put more weight into this final report, a foreword by Syama Prasad Mookerjee was added to it. Similar to the interim report, the final report too provided a narrative of the Mahasabha's relief activities, and 8 appendices giving details of different types of its relief centres and the number of people served by

¹² Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (hereafter BPHM), *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, BPHM, Calcutta, 1943, in Papers of Syamaprasad Mookerjee, Printed Material, S. No. 9, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), New Delhi. BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine: Report of Relief Work by Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha*, with a foreword by Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, BPHM, Calcutta, 1944, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, installment V and VII, Printed Material category, S. No. 12, NMML.

them. In addition, it contained receipts and disbursement account of foodgrains, receipts and payments of money, and some brief quotations from various persons and reports condemning the central and provincial governments for the famine. However, unlike Mookerjee's speeches analysed in the previous chapter, these reports themselves do not contain any political attack on the provincial or central government. They are primarily concerned with publicizing the philanthropic works done by the Mahasabha.

Notably, though destitutes, illiterate or little educated in the vernacular, formed a large section of the recipients of relief from the Mahasabha, yet, the Mahasabha's Bengal provincial committee decided to publish reports of its relief activities in English, instead of in Bengali. This proves that the target audience of these publications was not the destitute relief-receivers, but the English educated Bengali *bhadraloks* and government officials. Also, many of the the Muslim elite who were running the Bengal government, did not know Bengali.¹³ Therefore, English was more useful than Bengali in reaching the ears of the government.

The two important reports have remained hugely underexplored in the existing literature on the Bengal famine for mainly two reasons. First, in the existing literature, famine-relief has received considerably less attention than famine victimization. Second, existing literature on Hindu communalism in wartime Bengal tends to focus on the Mahasabha's role in the communal riots of 1946, and its political stance regarding the partition of India. Therefore, the Mahasabha's reports on its relief activities have suffered from a lack of interest in them.

In addition to the Mahasabha's own narrative, this chapter has made use of contemporary survey, political letter, accounts of the tours of famine-stricken

¹³ Ian Stephens, the editor of the newspaper *The Statesman*, wrote in his memoir about the Premier (Chief Minister) of Bengal Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin, and Civil Supplies Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy that 'Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin and Mr. Suhrawardy both Muslims, weren't of Bengali origin, their forbears [sic.] I think all came East with the Moghuls, and at least one of them couldn't speak Bengali.' See Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 147.

districts, contemporary articles as well as memoirs of newspaper editors, newspaper editorials, personal accounts, memorandum of the Regional Food Commissioner of Eastern India, diary of the Secretary of State for India, letter intercepted by the censor authorities, public appeal issued by the Bengal Relief Committee, and Syama Prasad Mookerjee's speech.

II. Relief on the Ground: Hindu Mahasabha versus Government

The report titled *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine* gives us an idea of the nature of the donations that the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee received. Before establishing a relief committee explicitly under its name, the Mahasabha had opened a relief committee named Bengal Relief Committee in collaboration with a few other minor private relief organizations. But, while donating to this committee, many of the donors had explicitly 'expressed their desire that their money was to be spent through the Hindu Mahasabha.'¹⁴ Consequently, a separate relief-fund named Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha Relief Fund was opened, and it was put under the sole control of the newly formed Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee.¹⁵

The Mahasabha's report does not reveal the identity of the donors. This may have been a consequence of the donors' reluctance to advertise their wealth and their political sympathies. However, from their insistence on spending their donation only through the Mahasabha, we can safely assume that all the donors were Hindu by religion. As is well known, Hinduism has a long-standing theory on earning good *karma* (cumulative consequences of deeds) and *punya* (virtue) by providing relief to the needy. Notably, a survey conducted in 1943 by the teachers and students of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Calcutta (belatedly published in 1949)

¹⁴ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 8.

¹⁵ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 2.

revealed that often the famine victims attributed their misery to their bad *karma*.¹⁶ Thus, sufferers suffered because of their bad *karma*, whereas those who helped them earned good *karma*. The survey pointed out that ‘The doctrine of *Karma* pervades the whole life of the Hindus. They firmly believe that every individual is destined to fare in the next world, according to his activities here. The present life, in the same way, is conditioned by the past one. . . This popular belief very intimately influences the life and activities of the Hindus.’¹⁷ Accordingly, devout Hindu donors did not want to miss their share of good *karma* and *punya* that they felt entitled to by donating to the relief-fund for the famine victims. However, to obtain the full amount of good *karma* and *punya*, their donations needed to be spent through the pious hands of the Hindus only. Therefore, donations to the Hindu Mahasabha made the Hindu donors feel assured that their due share of good *karma* and *punya* would flow back to them.

With the passage of time the Mahasabha’s relief activities overshadowed other voluntary relief organizations, of which there were thousands. According to Mr J. R. Symonds, officer-in-charge, Friends’ Ambulance Unit (an international volunteer organization of the Quaker Christians active in famine-relief in Bengal), there were ‘many types of relief work undertaken by hundreds – even thousands – of relief committees in Bengal’.¹⁸ Some of the notable organizations engaged in relief work were Marwari Relief Society, the Gujarat Seva Samiti, the Arya Samaj, the Poona Relief Committee, the Seva Samiti, Ramkrishna Mission, the Friends’ Ambulance Unit, and the All India Women’s Conference.¹⁹

However, the large monetary donations that Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Bengal Relief Committee, and the Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee

¹⁶ Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta*, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1949, p. 10.

¹⁷ See footnote 11, *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸ See the contribution from Mr J. R. Symonds to K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-Hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943, p. 179.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 56.

received together from outside Bengal are a testimony that they received the recognition even from non-religious organizations of being the largest non-government relief organization in Bengal. According to a list compiled by the newspaper *Hindustan Times*, they received 21,012 Rupees from the 'Hindustan Times and Hindustan Relief Fund' in New Delhi, 50,000 Rupees from the 'Janmabhoomi Fund' in Bombay, 1,00,000 Rupees (remitted to Syama Prasad Mookerjee) and 50,000 Rupees (remitted to the Bengal Relief Committee) both from the 'Indian Express Fund' in Madras, 99,296 Rupees from the 'Leader Fund' in Allahabad, 30,000 Rupees from the 'Indian Nation Fund' in Patna, 20,000 Rupees from the 'Tej Fund' in Delhi, 10,000 Rupees (remitted to Mookerjee) and 10,000 (remitted to the Bengal Relief Committee) both from the 'Aj Fund' in Benaras.²⁰ According to the Mahasabha's final report on its relief activities, till 30th June 1944, Mookerjee received Rs. 8,54,582-1-6 p. in cash from different sources for the Hindu Mahasabha Relief Fund. He also gathered 35,676 maunds of food grains and pulses either from donors or by purchase.²¹

Mahasabha's interim report spells out the structure of its relief mechanisms. In addition to providing relief through its own branches, it also provided help both in kind and cash to local organizations that were also active in providing relief to the famine victims.²² The Mahasabha did not limit itself to providing help only, it actually cared to develop a system of supervision too. The interim report asserted that 'The latter organisations are being properly supervised by the inspectors sent from the Head Office in Calcutta.'²³

This raises the question as to why the Mahasabha provided monetary and material help to these private local relief organizations. In part, it may have been the consequence of the Mahasabha's lack of own manpower and its limited organizational presence in the province. There may also have been a

²⁰ See the tables of monetary donations given by various relief funds, Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, pp. 183-186.

²¹ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 10.

²² BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

²³ *Idem*.

further political calculation. Help to local organizations assisted in developing a symbiotic relationship between the Mahasabha and such organizations, which in turn helped the Mahasabha's ideology and politics to penetrate Bengal neighbourhoods. In the early 1940s, Hindu volunteer groups had already proliferated in Calcutta and in the mofussil (outlying) towns. Joya Chatterji's *Bengal Divided*, one of the most influential works on Hindu communalism in Bengal in the 1930s and 1940s, tells us that most of these groups devoted the bulk of their energy to 'encouraging physical fitness and pseudo-military training among bhadrakalok youths.'²⁴ These volunteer groups provided a ready-made source of political labour, into which the Mahasabha was able to tap. Some of them, such as the Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Hindu Sakti Sangha gradually became volunteer wings of the Mahasabha.²⁵ This spared Mahasabha the time-taking and tedious task of building its own relief network from scratch, and also the local tension that was bound to develop had the Mahasabha tried to replace already existing local volunteer groups with its own army of volunteers.

Of course, in addition to non-governmental relief, the Bengal government too provided free relief. In fact, the scale of the famine can be measured by the huge number of recipients of relief. For the overall food situation in eastern India, we have a very detailed official memorandum from the key year of 1943, written by Justice H. B. L. Braund, the Regional Food Commissioner of the Eastern Region.²⁶ Notably, in the existing literature on the Bengal famine, Braund's memorandum has been used only in passing. Nonetheless, according to Justice Braund, by the end of December 1943, there were six thousand six hundred and twenty-five gruel kitchens throughout Bengal, out of which four thousand four hundred and sixty-nine were run by, and one thousand six hundred and fifty-one were subsidized by, the Bengal

²⁴ Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932 – 1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 233.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-236.

²⁶ H. B. L. Braund, *Memorandum of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund on Events from March 1943 to the end of 1943 in relation to the Food Situation in Bengal*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1944, in the Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi.

government. The number of totally private kitchens was five hundred and fifty-one.²⁷ Together all these government, semi-government, and private relief centres were feeding over 2.5 million people every day.²⁸ In addition to this, about thirty thousand people were receiving cash doles and grain doles.²⁹ The amount of money spent on relief by the government by the middle of September was four hundred and twenty-six lakhs of rupees.³⁰

What is particularly interesting here is the effectiveness of the Mahasabha's relief strategy compared to that of the Bengal government. Although there were many more government centres for famine relief, the Mahasabha's centres seem to have been far more successful in reaching famine victims than those of the state. T. G. Narayan, a reporter of *The Hindu* newspaper who toured the famine-stricken Tippera district in Bengal in 1943, pointed out that 'Government free kitchens, unlike non-official kitchens, were not free to buy grain from the black market to relieve the immediate needs of the hungry. So, between June and the end of November, out of the 13 lakhs of rupees that had been sanctioned towards free kitchens, not more than a tenth of the sum could be spent on them.'³¹ Further, the characteristic rigidity of state administration, and obsession with maintaining official procedures, made government relief incapable of making flexible improvisations and adjustments demanded by the diversity in local food situations. On the other hand, precisely because of its independence from bureaucratic procedural rigidity, private relief was faster and more 'personal' while dealing with relief to individuals. J. R. Symonds, the Officer-in-Charge of the Friends Ambulance Unit, effectively summed up why voluntary organizations in general were more effective in providing relief than the government:

Firstly, the good voluntary organization is almost invariably ahead of Government, both in theory and execution. It has no precedents to consult, no files to lose, no public holidays to observe and no

²⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ T. G. Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, with a foreword by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, The Book Company Ltd., Calcutta, 1944, p. 193.

finance department with which to conduct a dignified controversy. Its arguments are drawn from the suffering it has seen at first hand on the field and its immediate policy shaped by the amount of money it can immediately lay hands on. Secondly, the voluntary organization works on a restricted scale, and can therefore afford to be humane, giving the vital extra attention to the individual which is not feasible or economical in a large scheme.³²

The example of the government gruel kitchens is illustrative. The government opened gruel kitchens in both Calcutta and in the districts, though mostly in Calcutta.³³ However, both in Calcutta and in the districts, there were emaciated people who were so feeble from prolonged starvation that they could not physically move from their homes to the free kitchens. Arangamohan Das was the president of a local private relief committee, the Mahendra Relief Committee, based in Tamluk town in the Tamluk subdivision. He prepared a report for the press titled 'A report from Nandigram, Tamluk (October 1943)' describing his tour of rural Nandigram *thana* (police district).³⁴ Das' report described how in rural Nandigram those suffering from the most acute starvation were unable to get to the free kitchens opened by the Muslim League ministry because they were too weak to leave their homes. Consequently, Das feared that if relief was not sent to door to door, man to man, the starving population at whom the relief works were aimed, would soon perish. And this was not the picture in only one *thana* (police-district), but in the whole region.³⁵ For instance, in union number 3 also, Das found four free kitchens, set up directly by the government, which were again out of reach of the majority of the starving destitute who could not travel to the kitchens because of extreme physical weakness caused by prolonged starvation.³⁶

³² See the contribution from Mr J. R. Symonds, officer-in-charge, Friends' Ambulance Unit, to Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, p. 182.

³³ Braund, *Memorandum*, p. 36.

³⁴ See 'A report from Nandigram, Tamluk (October 1943)' by Arangamohan Das, president of the Mahendra Relief Committee based in Tamluk town, reproduced in Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 152.

³⁵ *Idem*.

³⁶ See the account by Arangamohan Das, which was prepared for press by himself, reproduced in Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 152.

As state relief operations had to function primarily from state owned premises, it was clearly difficult for such operations to step out of the government relief centres to reach out to immobile famine victims. In addition, as government relief centres were manned by staff usually recruited from among outsiders, they also lacked local knowledge, particularly knowledge about local demography. The local volunteer groups, patronized by the Mahasabha, had a clear advantage over the state relief machinery in this matter. As local insiders, they had information about the financial situation of local households, and the crucial information as to the degree of their starvation. Private relief was thus able to reach the needy in a more effective and comprehensive way.

An important source for this chapter is the rare account of a tour of the famine-stricken Midnapur district in November 1943 by Chittaprosad (1915-1978), a noted Bengali painter and a member of the Communist Party of India.³⁷ Chittaprosad's account titled *Hungry Bengal* was banned by the Bengal government soon after it was published. Existing copies, of which there were several thousands, were burnt. Until 2011, only two copies were known to have survived, one is with Chittaprosad's family, and the other somehow found its way to the British Library in London. In 2011, the Delhi Art Gallery published a reprint of the account, presumably from the copy retained by Chittaprosad's family.³⁸

While touring the famine-stricken Midnapur district, Chittaprosad pointed out that in distant small villages, where the intake of relief was calculated to be low because of reduced population, the government did not provide any

³⁷ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District*, by Chittaprosad, in November 1943, New Age, Bombay, 1944.

³⁸ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District*, by Chittaprosad, in November 1943, reprint, Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2011. The Delhi Art Gallery published the reprint of *Hungry Bengal* in conjunction with their exhibition titled 'Chittaprosad: A Retrospective 1915-1978', organized in 2011. A two-volume catalogue was also published in conjunction with the exhibition. In this catalogue, the family copy has been referred to as possibly the only surviving copy. Most likely the Delhi Art Gallery and Chittaprosad's family were unaware of the copy kept at the British Library in London, where I have consulted the original publication.

relief because it was 'opposed to waste of relief'.³⁹ Further, he found that the government was not providing relief to peasants who were 'supposed to be able-bodied'.⁴⁰ Thus, government relief excluded adults in relatively good health, even though they were troubled by the lack of access to food. Private relief made no such distinction between emaciated and relatively healthy people.

Popular perception of government relief was also coloured by the apparent indifference of the Government of India functioning from Delhi. W. R. Aykroyd, a member of the Famine Inquiry Commission, later said that 'The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, was more interested in political issues than in famine'.⁴¹ Lord Linlithgow failed to visit Bengal to gather first-hand information about the famine at its height. This failure was publicized in the press as the proof of the central government's callousness and even ruthlessness towards the fate of the civilian subjects of the Raj. An editorial in *The Statesman* newspaper wrote that Linlithgow's failure to visit Bengal particularly struck people as his main subject of study throughout life was agriculture, he had led the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture in 1926-28, and was well-versed in economics.⁴² Publicity of the central government's alleged callousness must have helped non-state relief actors such as the Mahasabha to appear in popular imagination as the real friend of Bengal's starving. By the time Lord Linlithgow's successor, Field Marshal Lord Wavell, finally visited Bengal, the irreparable harm to the benevolent image of the central colonial state had already been done. Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar (1876-1945), eminent Bengali lawyer and an illustrious patron of the Mahasabha, had conveyed the Mahasabha's stance on this issue directly to Linlithgow on 15 September 1943:

My dear Lord Linlithgow, I have to thank you for replying to my letter of 24 Aug 1943, about famine in Bengal. I confess that the bold

³⁹ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal*, 1944, p. 12 (N. B. the book contains no pagination. Page numbers have been added by me counting from the first page as page 1).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴¹ W. R. Aykroyd, *The Conquest of Famine*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1974, p. 79.

⁴² 'Text of an editorial *Two Men* published in *The Statesman* on October 19, 1943', appendix XI, Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, pp. 271-272.

statements that your Ex is in close touch with the Bengal situation and that the matter is really for the Provincial Govt have given me very great shock. If it were not your Excellency I would have said that the attitude is one of callous disregard of duty, and that constitutional quibbles are out of place where the problem is one of saving lives of thousands.⁴³

Linlithgow was so widely criticized that even his son Lord Glendevon told about the decision of not visiting Bengal that 'here it is easy to feel that his judgement was at fault.'⁴⁴ *The Statesman's* editor Ian Stephens later wrote in his memoir about Linlithgow that 'He'd held office throughout development of a food-crisis which eventually killed about two million people . . . But he stayed away from Bengal. It was astounding. And it naturally evoked bitter comment, culminating when his successor Lord Wavell, within a week of taking over flew straight to the afflicted province and during a three-days' stay got a great many needed things done.'⁴⁵

Getting relief from government centres itself was an agonizing task. The Mahasabha's interim report vividly describes the distressing scene common at the doorstep of controlled shops that sold foodstuffs at a cheap rate fixed by the government:

During all the summer months it was a pathetic sight to find people, many of them old and decrepit and many more children, waiting in the scorching sun hour after hour in long and almost never-ending queues before the controlled shops. No less pitiable was the spectacle provided by these people sleeping in long rows by the side of a street during the night with the hope of being in time in the next morning for a seer of rice in the neighbouring controlled shop.⁴⁶

⁴³ See copy of Sir N. N. Sircar's letter to Lord Linlithgow, Sep 15, 1943, file no. 4, on 'Correspondence by Sri N. N. Sircar with Lord Linlithgow in connection with Famine situation in Bengal and his reply throwing responsibility for the administration of famine on the Provincial Government – an extraordinary statement for a responsible head of an administration' in Papers of Sir Manilal B. Nanavati, Private Papers Section, NAI.

⁴⁴ John Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay: Lord Linlithgow in India, 1936-1943*, Collins, London, 1971, p. 274, as quoted in John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.) *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, foreword by the late Lord Stockton, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1988, pp. 912-913.

⁴⁵ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, pp. 193-194.

⁴⁶ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 1.

T. G. Narayan, the reporter of *The Hindu* newspaper, too wrote about the queues in front of the controlled shops:

Those at the tail-end didn't have an earthly chance of getting their *seer* of rice which was all a shop would sell a person at a time. Each shop got 320 *seers* of rice a day, and after the shopkeeper had served 320 people he closed up for the day. I am not sure that all this quantity was sold. Some of it must have found its way into the black market. There must have been underweighing too.⁴⁷

A related general problem with queues outside government grain shops was pointed out by Henry Knight while discussing similar shops in Bombay: 'Sometimes the buyer's place in the queue had been "jumped" by some "Goonda," buying for a black-marketeer, pushing his way into the queue ahead of orderly customers and housewives.'⁴⁸

A letter by a Chinese citizen staying in Calcutta, intercepted by the censor authorities, articulated the ground reality of state rationing in Calcutta, describing the problems and fatal delays in the everyday rationing system caused by its labyrinthine bureaucratic procedures. The letter written by T. T. Koo (the Chinese editor of the *Chinese Journal of India*) from Calcutta dated 18.4.44, which was originally addressed to M. T. Chen of a newspaper named *Shin Min Daily News* in China, read:

The most difficult problem is that the ration shops can only register a limited number of ration cards. When this number has been reached, latecomers although possessing ration cards are unable to register and buy controlled goods. For four weeks I have been wandering all over the town with my ration card endeavouring to purchase rationed commodities (rice, sugar, flour etc.), but all in vain. I have also written to the office of the Food Controller but ten days have passed and still no reply. If I had not obtained the help of someone inside, then my family and I would have died of starvation. We can see poor people who have no food to eat, lying about all over the place. Some of them are starved and unable to move, and I am sorry for them so give them money.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, p. 137.

⁴⁸ Sir Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India: 1939-47*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1954, p. 200.

⁴⁹ See extract of T.T. Koo's letter in the secret communication dated 28.4.44 of the Chinese Intelligence Wing, under the letterhead *Indian Censorship (Secret)* in F. No. 42(38)-W/44 (Secret), 1944, on the subject "Censorship Interceptions. Letter from T. T. Koo, Calcutta to M. T. Chen, Chungking regarding food rationing in Calcutta, as seen by a Chinese", External Affairs Department, War Branch, Government of India (hereafter GOI), NAI.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Starving women waiting for the government controlled Grain Shop to open'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 – A Photographic History', part – 4, accessed on 10 January 2017. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2011/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-4.html>

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'India Citizens Waiting in Line for Soup Kitchen'

Date Photograph Taken: 17 December 1943. **Photographer:** Unknown.

Source: Website of gettyimages, Bettmann collection.
<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/photos/bengal-famine?begindate=1939-01-01&enddate=1948-01-01&editorialproducts=archival&family=editorial&phrase=bengal%20famine&excludenudity=true&sort=mostpopular#license>. Accessed on 10 January 2017.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Starving Hindus waiting for the government controlled Grain Shop to open'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 – A Photographic History', part – 1. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2009/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-1.html>. Accessed on 26 November 2016.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Starving people lining up for government handouts in Calcutta'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 – A Photographic History', part – 1. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2009/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-1.html>. Accessed on 26 November 2016.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

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Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Starving People lining up for food'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 – A Photographic History', part – 4. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2011/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-4.html>. Accessed on 26 November 2016.

The fact that the censor board intercepted Koo's letter, proves the discomfort of the state authorities with news about their failure to handle the food situation well, and their consequent eagerness to prevent such news from spreading. Within official circles, every attempt was made to paint Koo's observation about the rationing in Calcutta as untrue, or at best exaggeration. Accordingly, the Under Secretary of the External Affairs Department declared that 'The intercept has been rightly stopped. It is extremely doubtful if there is any truth in the contention, but we are making enquiries.'⁵⁰ The External Affairs Department even took the pains to write to Sir Edmund Gibson, the China Relations Officer in Calcutta, to suggest that 'Perhaps you would consider mentioning to Mr. Koo the undesirability of sending out misleading reports.'⁵¹ The China Relations Officer obliged, but in his reply memo to the External Affairs Department, he cleverly blended a validation for Koo's observation vis-à-vis rationing in Calcutta citing his personal suffering from the same rationing system.

I have pointed out to Mr. Koo the undesirability of sending out misleading reports, though having myself suffered from the Calcutta rationing system I have a fellow-feeling.

I understand from Dr. Pao that the Chungking authorities have themselves brought to his notice that some articles or articles written by Mr. Koo contain comments which a guest in a foreign country should not have made. However on the whole I think Mr. Koo means well.⁵²

The lengthy procedural prerequisites that one had to go through before obtaining rationed food items, and the overcrowding and consequent chaos and suffering at the controlled shops, all underscored the inadequacy of government arrangements. Against this background, private relief proved to be a vital supplement to the government arrangements. As we shall see in the next section, the key importance of private relief helped to protect the Mahasabha against what might otherwise have been harsher official curbs on its relief activities.

⁵⁰ See the Under Secretary's note, *ibid.*

⁵¹ See External Affairs Department's confidential communication (D.O. No. D.4864-W/44) dated 30th June 1944, signed by S. I. Hasan, to Sir Gibson in F. No. 42(38)-W/44 (Secret), 1944, on the subject "Censorship Interceptions. Letter from T. T. Koo, Calcutta to M. T. Chen, Chungking regarding food rationing in Calcutta, as seen by a Chinese", External Affairs Department, War Branch, GOI, NAI.

⁵² See Sir Gibson's D.O. No. 1099/41 dated 24th July 1944 to S. I. Hasan, Esq., External Affairs Department, New Delhi in F. No. 42(38)-W/44 (Secret), 1944 on the subject "Censorship Interceptions", External Affairs Department, War Branch, GOI, NAI.

III. Beneficiaries of the Mahasabha's Relief

To understand the way in which the Mahasabha was able to blend political appeals to practical philanthropy, we need to understand the actual forms of relief provided by the Mahasabha, and the target recipients of its outreach work. To start with, unlike government relief, Mahasabha accepted that one size does not fit all, and consequently provided different types of relief to different types of sufferers. For those who were too destitute to pay anything at all for food, the Mahasabha set up Free Kitchens and Free Ration Stores.⁵³ For those who still had some resources left but not enough to depend on them to procure food, it started cheap canteens serving *khichuri*⁵⁴ or *parota*⁵⁵ at a cheap price. For people of this category, the Mahasabha also opened cheap grain shops whereby uncooked rice, *atta*,⁵⁶ and few other items were sold at a cheap rate.⁵⁷ For such uncooked items, the quota of grains was fixed at 4 seers of rice and 4 seers of wheat for each person per month.⁵⁸ For those whose monthly per capita income was 10 rupees or below, the price was fixed at 10 rupees per maund for both rice and *atta*. For those whose monthly per capita income was between 11 and 20 rupees, the price was 15 rupees for rice and rupees 16-8-0 for *atta*.⁵⁹ Two things stand out from this pricing. First, even from the relief centre, for a maund, or 40 kilograms, of grains, a person had to spend the whole of his monthly income, leaving nothing for other necessities of life like clothes and medicines. Second, the price of *atta*, which was earlier cheaper than rice, was now the same as rice or even higher than rice.

By 30 June 1944, in total the Hindu Mahasabha spent rupees 7,07,186-5-4p., and distributed 35,676 maunds of food grains. The Mahasabha directly maintained 227 relief centres in the 24 districts of Bengal, and on an average served 1,07,727 persons daily. Every day it served cooked food to 5,897 persons from free kitchens, to 6,450 persons from cheap canteens, distributed free ration to 3,66,12 persons, and cheap ration to 5,05,69 persons.⁶⁰

⁵³ 'Appeal Issued by the Bengal Relief Committee', 1st August 1943, Calcutta, in S. P. Mookerjee Papers, II-IV installments, sub file no. 114, Printed Material category, NMML, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Rice and lentils cooked together.

⁵⁵ Flat unleavened bread sautéed in oil or *vanaspati* or butter or *ghee* (clarified butter).

⁵⁶ Milled wheat.

⁵⁷ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁸ 'Appeal Issued by the Bengal Relief Committee', 1st August 1943, p. 5.

⁵⁹ *Idem*.

⁶⁰ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, pp. 10-11.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'A young Hindu girl serving food to the starving citizens suffering from the famine'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 – A Photographic History', part – 1. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2009/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-1.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2017.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Famine affected people being fed in a relief camp'

Date photograph taken: December 1943. **Photographer:** William Vandivert.

Source: 'Calcutta and Bengal Famine', *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, <http://images.google.com/hosted/life/9c9458f03165eabf.html>. Accessed on 26 November 2016.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Mass Feeding at Relief Centres'

Source: K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-Hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943, p. 93.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Mass Feeding at Relief Centres'

Source: K. Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress: A First-Hand Description and an Objective Study of the Indian Famine of 1943*, Hindustan Times Press, New Delhi, 1943, p. 93.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Feeding in a free-kitchen'

Source: *The Statesman*, as reproduced in Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of The Destitutes in Calcutta*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1949, plate IV, facing p. 18.

An interesting aspect of the relief provided by the Mahasabha was the 35 'Milk Canteens' whereby it supplied free milk to destitute children and old people. The Mahasabha's interim report pointed out that many mothers were extremely emaciated from starvation, and therefore 'could be of little use to the babies at breast.'⁶¹ D. C. Majumdar, a local attorney in Manikganj town and a member of the Manikganj Relief Committee, reported to the Bengal Relief Committee in September 1943 that 'there are hundreds of little children, both orphans and those deserted by parents. They cannot take gruel and are only fit for using mother's breast. They are rolling on the street. Some of them are dying . . . They require milk, barley, water, etc.'⁶² The Mahasabha's interim report pointed out that even the fortunate children who somehow managed to survive beyond the tender age of breast-feeding, 'could not again stand the food precariously and haphazardly procured by their parents.'⁶³ They needed dairy milk.

Thus, the need for dairy milk was immense during the famine. Unfortunately, just at the time when the need for dairy milk was rising, its supply was falling, since many livestock farmers and milk providers were themselves victims of the famine. The Bengal government took no initiative to increase the supply of milk. While discussing the 'failure' of government relief, Tusharkanti Ghosh, the editor of the popular Congress-leaning daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, wrote: 'What has the Ministry done in the matter? Milk is selling at Calcutta at two seers or even less for the rupee. Has the Ministry lifted its little finger to get supplies of milk from outside?'⁶⁴

⁶¹ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 3.

⁶² As quoted in Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 282-283.

⁶³ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Tusharkanti Ghosh, *The Bengal Tragedy*, Hero Publications, Lahore, 1944, p. 49.

For the scarcity of fresh milk, the reason most vigorously cited by the Mahasabha was the unrestrained slaughter of cows by the defence forces to procure beef for the increased number of Muslim soldiers and non-Indian soldiers stationed in India, and export of cattle to war-bases abroad for meat. Further, lack of milk was held responsible for the low vitality of people that rendered them vulnerable to diseases, and thereby increased famine mortality. An appeal to the public issued in August 1943 by the Bengal Relief Committee under the auspices of the Mahasabha, seeking donations and public co-operation with relief activities, touched upon the issue of 'supply of meat to the military':

Apart from the food position, there has been a severe loss of cattle due to death and disease. What is more distressing and alarming is that cattle are being purchased in large numbers for supply of meat to the military. Government should immediately stop this, as this not only reduces the already limited supply of milk but will vitally affect cultivation. Further, the low vitality of the people may lead to large scale mortality as soon as diseases, like malaria and cholera break out in the province during and after the monsoon.⁶⁵

As already discussed in the second chapter, in the face of acute shortage of milk, the Hindu taboo on cow-slaughter got considerably reinforced, which in turn fanned the age-old communal tension surrounding beef. Therefore, the Mahasabha publicized the slaughter of cattle as the root cause of the scarcity of dairy milk.

Against this background the Mahasabha opened its 'Milk Canteens'. According to the Mahasabha's final report, from these Milk Canteens 5475 infants and 'invalids' 'regularly' received a free supply of milk.⁶⁶ However, the Mahasabha managed to distribute only condensed milk that was made available to them by the Indian Red Cross.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ 'Appeal Issued by the Bengal Relief Committee', 1st August 1943, p. 4.

⁶⁶ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 11, and Appendix III, p. 26.

⁶⁷ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Gods Change Hands: When the land is gone, cattle could not be spared, and the helpless kisan takes his only bit of property to the 'hat' for sale.'

Source: Sketch by Chittaprosad, the noted Bengali painter and member of the Communist Party of India, during his tour of the famine-stricken Midnapur district in Bengal in November 1943. Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District*, by Chittaprosad, in November 1943, New Age, Bombay, 1944, plate 8 (N. B. the book contains no pagination, plates have been numbered by me counting from the first plate as plate 1).

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'A moving free-kitchen. Women and children far outnumbered the adult males.'

Source: *The Statesman*, as reproduced in Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of The Destitutes in Calcutta*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1949, plate VI, facing p. 40.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'A Milk Distributing Centre'

Source: Government of Bombay, *Food Advisory Council: 1942 - 1944*, with a foreword by Sir Henry Knight, Government of Bombay Press, Bombay, not dated, in Henry Knight papers, box - 1, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Distribution of milk between children in a relief camp'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 - A Photographic History', part - 3. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2011/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-3.html>. Accessed on 26 November 2016.

The Mahasabha's final report pointed out that the famine had a grave effect on childbirth. Starvation deprived pregnant women and unborn babies in their wombs of necessary nourishment, increasing the rate of miscarriage and child death at birth.⁶⁸ Arangamohan Das, the already mentioned president of the Mahendra Relief Committee in Tamluk town, described in October 1943 how in union number 13 of the Tamluk Subdivision in the Midnapore district not a single childbirth was registered during the preceding four months, that is, between July and October 1943.⁶⁹ Against this dismal background of reduced birth rate and increased child mortality, the Mahasabha's interim report tried to convince its readers about the multi-generational impact of the famine: "The famine in other words is not only doing away with a large body of people of the present generation but it is threatening to play a greater havoc upon the next."⁷⁰

Interestingly, attention to the fate of the children during the famine had been a striking and interesting feature in the thoughts of the Mahasabha. Earlier too, in his speech at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July 1943 on the food situation, Syama Prasad Mookerjee made scathing criticism of the government's decision to exclude the rice-need of children below the age of four years from the official calculation to determine the figure of rice needed:

While calculating the surplus stock Mr Suhrawardy directed that children below four years of age of poor families were not expected to take any rice and be excluded. Well, he did not even know that they could not live on other food like Horlicks Milk and other delicious children's food ordinarily available for richer people. Mr. Ishaque, the Director of Rural Reconstruction, had the goodness of including even children who were aged below four. But Mr. Suhrawardy came and the great reform he made was practically to suggest that children might be starved! (Mr. Kiran Sankar Roy: Because he has no children). I do not know that, but this omission showed up his mentality and methods.⁷¹

⁶⁸ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 9.

⁶⁹ See the account by Arangamohan Das, reproduced in Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 152.

⁷⁰ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

⁷¹ *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Speech during the Debate on the Food Situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July, 1943*, published by Prof. H. C. Ghosh, Calcutta, Syama Prasad Mookerjee papers, "Speeches/ Writings By Him", S. No. 20, NMML, p. 6.

Mookerjee's criticism touched on the larger issue of class in child nourishment. His assertion that for children of poor Bengali parents, rice was infinitely more important as a food item than for the children of richer parents, surely had some weight. As malnourished mothers did not produce adequate amount of breast-milk, and as poor parents could not afford to feed their children dairy milk or supplementary commercial baby-foods, the lives of their children were dependent on cheap rice to the exclusion of almost all other food items. Therefore, the Bengal government's alleged assumption, as claimed by Mookerjee in the above quotation, that Bengali children in poor families below the age of four years were not dependent on rice much, and therefore they could be excluded from the calculation to determine Bengal's total rice-need, betrayed the classist thinking by the provincial government. However, as mentioned in the third chapter, no independent source could be found to examine the veracity of the Mahasabha's allegation against the League government in this matter.

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that saving the children during the famine became an important and sensitive issue. Providing milk in relief to the children was an effective way of reaching out to the Bengali parents. Therefore, the 'Milk Canteens' run by the Mahasabha had tremendous potential to earn the Mahasabha the gratitude of the Bengali parents.

Joya Chatterji's study of Hindu communalism in Bengal has demonstrated that winning the political loyalty of the Hindu middle class remained central to the Mahasabha's political mobilization, as the middle class was the biggest target audience of the particular brand of Hindu nationalism that the Mahasabha was offering.⁷² As we shall see, the Mahasabha was successful in its efforts to reach out with food to the hungry and needy among Bengal's middle classes. To understand how this came about, we need a clearer sense of the cultural reasons that drew Bengal's middle and upper classes to the

⁷² Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 135-136.

Mahasabha's relief programmes, in preference to official relief efforts. A contemporary 'first hand description' of the famine left behind by K. Santhanam (1895 -1980), an English educated member of the middle class and a Congress leader and joint editor of the *Hindustan Times* newspaper, asserted that:

It is nevertheless a fact that many respecting Bengalis prefer to starve in their homes than go to the gruel kitchens. This fact was adduced by a District Magistrate as a merit of the gruel kitchens. "Some indignity is necessary to keep down the relief to the minimum," he said. Administrative convenience was of more importance to this official than the loss of self-respect of a whole people. Anyone who has seen the sickening scramble and clamour at these gruel kitchens will agree that it is hardly possible for the poorest to go to these kitchens and not feel ashamed.⁷³

Reputation, honour, and concepts of purity and pollution were of great importance amongst Bengal's *bhadralok*; *bhadralok* families were often unwilling to let others know that they were starving at home. Lance Brennan, who has studied government relief during the Bengal famine, points out that even the Bengal government's instructions on the organization of famine-relief noted that 'among the middle classes were people "who would starve rather than come to state openly that they are in need of gratuitous relief."' ⁷⁴ Most of these families were dependent on either small fixed salaries or small incomes from professions.⁷⁵ Their spending on food increased steeply because of wartime inflation. In 1947, a statistical study by S. Bhattacharyya of the Statistical Laboratory, Calcutta, of the impact of the war on the consumption pattern of the middle class in Calcutta revealed that the average monthly per capita expenditure on food almost doubled between 1939 and 1945, it rose steeply from 8.5 rupees in 1939 to 16.4 rupees in 1945.⁷⁶ As per

⁷³ Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, pp. 40 - 41.

⁷⁴ Government of Bengal, *Instructions for the Organisation and Distribution of Relief*, 1943, Pinnell Papers, MSS Eur. D911/4, India Office Records, British Library, pp. 4-5, as quoted in Lance Brennan, 'Government Famine Relief in Bengal, 1943', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3, August 1988, p. 560.

⁷⁵ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ S. Bhattacharyya, 'World War II and the Consumption Pattern of the Calcutta Middleclass',

the study, in 1945, compared to 1939, 'Protective food like milk, fish, meat and eggs has become much thinner and for the lower levels, i.e. up to total expenditure Rs. 100, these are as good as non-existent.'⁷⁷

In order to save themselves from starvation, many of the middle class families had to part with whatever few gold ornaments they had.⁷⁸ Handwritten letters in vernacular received by Syama Prasad Mookerjee during the famine, often from little-educated middle class Hindu housewives, vividly inform us about the predicaments faced by Bengali middle class households, and their expectation from Mookerjee and his party. One of such letters, dated 19/8/43, written in Bengali by Aparna Sengupta, a housewife personally unknown to Mookerjee, is very illuminating in this, and therefore deserves to be quoted in length:

I am completely unknown to you. If I tell my identity, you would definitely understand who I am. But I feel really ashamed of disclosing my identity. I am the wife of a teacher, and the daughter of a teacher in Patna . . . It is almost one and a half year now that my husband has been getting half salary. I cannot express how our 9 children, I and my husband, widow sister-in-law – these twelve people are surviving on this meagre income and providing for education of the children and medical expenses. It was very difficult even when my husband was getting full salary. I cannot write in words what situation we have come to; it is not possible too. I am just letting you know that for the last two months, we have been half-fed; sometimes we cannot eat even one meal a day stomach-full. Whatever is being brought to home by my husband and 18 years old son by their hard work is proving insufficient. . .⁷⁹

Unlike the government relief, which had a blanket relief policy for all classes, the Mahasabha formulated special forms of relief for these middle class families already embarrassed by the mismatch between their *bhadralok* identity and diminished material status, which avoided further eroding their sense of self-respect. The Mahasabha came up with cheap grain stores for

Sankhyā: The Indian Journal of Statistics, vol. 8, no. 2, Mar. 1947, pp. 199-200.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁷⁸ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Aparna Sengupta to Mookerjee, S. P. Mookerjee Papers, installments II - IV, Sub. File No. 111, NMML, pp. 75-76. Translation mine.

them: 'Special schemes have been formulated and worked by us to provide relief to these families. Cheap grain stores have been particularly helpful to them.'⁸⁰ These cheap grain stores did not give grains in alms free of cost, but rather sold them at a very cheap rate, thus avoiding the implication that customers were the recipients of charity.⁸¹ Though the middle class paid absolutely minimal prices for the rice they received, it still gave the feeling that they 'bought' and did not beg. Thus, relief provided by the Mahasabha was able to reconcile two apparently irreconcilable states in middle class households, that is, on the one hand their pride in their social honour, and on the other their increasing need to receive help from outsiders to procure food.

The Mahasabha was particularly concerned with providing relief to some notable sections of the middle class. To start with, it spent a total sum of rupees 35,712/10/- for the relief of the distressed middle class families of the 'security prisoners' in Bengal at the rate of rupees fifty per such family.⁸² As one or more of the earning male members of these families was/were in jail, they found themselves in great economic hardship during the famine. In an express telegram despatched on 21.9.1943 to the editor of the *Indian Express* newspaper in Madras, which, as mentioned earlier, was one of the biggest donors to the Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee, Mookerjee wrote:

THANKS REPLY x IN CONSULTATION PRABHUDAYAL DECIDED SPEND 25000 HELPING 500 DESTITUTE MIDDLECLASS FAMILIES WHOSE MALE MEMBERS DETAINED WITHOUT TRIAL x SEVEN HUNDRED SUCH GETTING NO ALLOWANCE FROM GOVERNMENT AND FAMILIES STARVING x IN ORDER AVOID POLITICAL MOTIVES THIS AMOUNT SEPARATED FROM OTHER FUNDS BOTH ACCOUNT AUDIT⁸³

To further its attraction among sections of the 'upper' caste Hindus, the Mahasabha took special care to provide food-relief to the Brahman *pandits* of

⁸⁰ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

⁸¹ *Idem.*

⁸² BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 11.

⁸³ S. P. Mookerjee Papers, installment II - IV, Sub. File No. 111, NMML, p. 94.

Bengal's *tols* (rural informal schools with Sanskritik curriculum).⁸⁴ While describing the spending of funds, the Mahasabha's interim report highlighted that it spent six thousand rupees to provide relief to the Brahman *pandits*.⁸⁵ In his study of the Bengal famine, Paul Greenough has pointed out that 'As Brahman teachers are regarded with veneration by Hindus, it was not surprising that a special effort would be mounted to spare them famine distress.'⁸⁶ As Brahman teachers had considerable social influence over their respective villages, winning their support and loyalty through 'special relief' was an indirect but very effective way of gaining socio-political influence over the villages.

In addition to 'upper' caste elites, the Mahasabha also took special care to provide what it called 'special relief' to white-collar professional elites, who were usually members of the upper castes within the *bhadralok* community.⁸⁷ The Mahasabha provided 'special relief' to urban schoolteachers in some districts in east Bengal and to one hundred families of lawyers, pleaders, and Muktears (law clerks) in the Faridpur district. Teachers of 35 schools in the Munshiganj Sub-Division in Dacca, teachers of high schools under District Teachers' Association in the Noakhali district, teachers of all high schools of the Pabna district, and teachers of all high schools of the Chandpur Sub-Division in the Tippera district received such 'special relief' from the Mahasabha.⁸⁸

Naturally, in addition to the teachers, many poor students too received food from the Mahasabha's relief centres, thus allowing the Mahasabha to grow its presence and influence in the education sector on the whole. T. G. Narayan, the reporter of *The Hindu* newspaper, pointed out an interesting conspiracy theory in circulation among some of the starving students in Dacca: 'In Dacca

⁸⁴ The *pandits* were Brahman priests-cum-teachers in the *tols* (also called *Pāthasālā*). *Tols* were traditional informal schools of instruction in rural areas with traditional Sanskritik curriculum, usually in grammar, traditional law, logic, and religious philosophy.

⁸⁵ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 133.

⁸⁷ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 13.

⁸⁸ *Idem*.

I heard that students fainted in classrooms and their famished teachers were in no healthier state. Many of the students there got their food from the cheap canteens. The future leaders of the country were having a bad time indeed. In their anger, they said the famine had been engineered by the Government to crush the Hindu intelligentsia.⁸⁹ This kind of conspiracy theory regarding the Muslim League government's role in the famine, was no doubt helpful to the Mahasabha's relief politics aimed at discrediting the League government.

A major reason for the popularity of the Mahasabha's relief among the starving middle class was the government's explicit refusal to make any 'special' relief arrangements for them on the basis of their claimed superiority in terms of caste, culture, and comparatively better financial status. In its testimony to the Famine Inquiry Commission, the Bengal Provincial Mahasabha told that often the cooks at the government gruel kitchens were Muslims, making it 'impossible' for the Hindus to receive cooked food from there.⁹⁰ On the one hand this state refusal to treat the middle class as 'special', on the other hand the middle class' insistence on refusing equal treatment with the poorer classes, created a clear-cut fissure between the state and the Bengali middle class. The first-hand reportage by T. G. Narayan, the correspondent of the newspaper *The Hindu*, from his tour of the famine-stricken Tippera district in Bengal, is illuminating in conveying this fissure:

The middle class also suffered because no organized government relief touched it. Free kitchens, homes for destitutes and emergency relief hospitals were, in the main, meant for the working classes. Middle class people were free to go to them. But they wouldn't and couldn't because their notion of respectability stood in their way and it was also difficult to jostle with hundreds of unwashed men, women, and children for a meal of gruel. They would prefer to get dry grain doles . . . Many district Magistrates when approached for help were reported to have disowned responsibility for aiding the middle class and said that if they would not go to the free kitchens they should fend for themselves.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, p. 215.

⁹⁰ 'Testimony of the Bengal Provincial Mahasabha', in Manilal. B. Nanavati papers, Private Papers Section, NAI, p. 261.

⁹¹ Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, pp. 215-216.

A survey conducted by the teachers and students of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Calcutta in 1943 (belatedly published in 1949) revealed about government free kitchens that:

In the villages, on rare occasions, Hindus and Muhammadans had separate free-kitchens and concessions to caste prejudice was made on some occasions in the interest of higher caste people. But just as exceptions prove the rule, such cases were so few that they proved that the famine had practically done away with social rules regarding interdining, which are so strong in our country. In Calcutta these exceptions were very rare.⁹²

Thus, when government relief refused to make any 'special' arrangements for the middle class, it was then the Mahasabha came to the middle class with 'special relief' exclusively aimed at them. The Mahasabha's 'special relief' arranged for fast distribution of uncooked rice to the *bhadraloks* that allowed them to take rice to their homes and cook it in the privacy of their houses, away from the public messing by sundry castes at the free relief kitchens. Besides caste considerations, distribution of uncooked rice spared the *bhadralok* recipients from the tiring task of walking to the relief kitchens every day and waiting there in long queues to have meals. Thus, the Mahasabha's 'special relief' allowed the middle class *bhadraloks* to keep their 'notion of respectability' intact.

The anthropological survey by the teachers and students of the University of Calcutta revealed that even during the peak of the famine, 14.16% of the famine-affected people surveyed were still observing socio-religious restrictions regarding food.⁹³ 53.80% of the surveyed people admitted that they had temporarily given up observing the caste and religious restrictions on eating due to the pressure of starvation. However, they emphasized that they would retain the customary eating rules when food availability improves.⁹⁴ Notably, 32.04% of the surveyed people claimed to have permanently discarded all scruples about taking food from people belonging to other castes.⁹⁵ However, the survey warned that 'It is difficult to say

⁹² Das, *Bengal Famine*, p. 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁹⁵ *Idem.*

how far the claims of this 'no scruple' group would survive in normal times. It was not very difficult to put forward such a claim at a time when the whole social order was very rudely shaken by the famine.'⁹⁶

T. G. Narayan, the reporter of *The Hindu* newspaper, described the scene at relief kitchens when he was touring Sarisha in October 1943: 'I could see in the long queues a Caste Hindu lined up behind a Namasudra and himself followed by a Moslem.'⁹⁷ The Mahasabha's 'special relief' spared the middle class the 'polluting' task of physically jostling with 'hundreds of unwashed men, women, and children', mostly 'untouchables' by caste, for a cooked gruel-meal, and eating with them. Thus, the Mahasabha's 'special relief' perfectly suited the middle class' caste-based notions of respectability, bodily purity and pollution.

In addition to the immediate social factors, there were some wartime calculations, as well as some long-term material conditions, that pushed the middle class into the open arms of the Mahasabha. In the first place, war strategy necessitated a non-prioritization of the middle class in government relief (as opposed to government rationing) during the famine. The middle class was concentrated in the great city of Calcutta, and other cities and towns of the province, whereas the Bengal government was more concerned with providing relief (distinct from rationed food) to the countryside, as per its attempt to prevent the famished country people from marching towards the cities for food. As discussed in the third chapter, the Bengal government, as well as the colonial central government, apprehended that the arrival of large number of famine victims in the cities would incur scathing criticism from the urban educated, as well as the national and international press, which in turn would jeopardize war efforts. Additionally, it was feared that such hunger migrations would increase the pressure on city transport and accommodation badly needed by the army. A further concern focussed on the spread of disease by sick famine victims, who would transmit their infections to the urban population, military personnel, and 'priority' workers employed in war-industries. Ian Stephens, the editor of *The Statesman* newspaper feared that famished destitutes 'may be a seedbed for devastating epidemics of disease which spread to the troops.'⁹⁸ These fears meant that government relief remained focussed on the countryside, and thus Bengal's urban middle classes received very little in the form of official famine-relief.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

⁹⁷ Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, p. 152.

⁹⁸ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 180.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

'Famine affected people in a relief camp'

Photographer: William Vandivert.

Source: *LIFE* Archive hosted by Google, accessed on the website *Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian Subcontinent*, www.oldindianphotos.in, 'Bengal Famine of 1943 – A Photographic History', part – 4. <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/2011/12/bengal-famine-of-1943-part-4.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2017.

In addition to the wartime non-prioritization of the middle class, the ‘first-hand description’ by K. Santhanam touches on the longer-term relationship that the colonial state had with the Bengali *bhadraloks*, a relationship which in turn influenced the state’s attitude towards this class during the famine. In a chapter evocatively sub-titled ‘The Pitiable Plight of Middle Classes’,⁹⁹ Santhanam wrote about the perceived disdain and distrust in the treatment of the middle class by the state officials, referring back to the nineteenth century Anglicising policies of Lord Macaulay: ‘Every official whom we met asked with a slight suggestion of disdain whether we had come to help the *bhadralok*. From the days of Macaulay the middle classes of Bengal have been an object of disdain to the rulers and when later these classes showed that even the worm could turn, they became an object of distrust.’¹⁰⁰

To perceived disdain and distrust, was added financial hardship, and the state’s refusal to acknowledge that hardship of the middle class. Reflecting his own middle class origin, Santhanam asserted with some force that ‘The distress of those who are getting Rs 30 or 40 a month is no less than those of others attending the gruel kitchens. The lot of the peasants who own or cultivate a few *bighas* is clearly better.’¹⁰¹ While describing a relief centre in Dacca in the autumn of 1943, Michael Brown, the contemporary independent observer, wrote in his polemical study of the food crisis that ‘Artisans, clerks, teachers and less wealthy professional men existed on a meal a day supplied at the cost of one or two annas by the city relief committee’s canteens. Ordinary incomes were useless when rice cost seven to ten times its normal price or was not available at all.’¹⁰² In the villages, many Brahmans lost their

⁹⁹ Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42. Santhanam was referring to Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800 – 1859) who is known for writing the *Minute on Indian Education*, published in February 1835. In his *Minute*, Macaulay displayed great disdain for ‘native’ (particularly Hindu) culture and learning. He argued that Western learning was superior, but in India could only be taught through the medium of English. He urged the government of the East India Company in India to produce ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes and opinions, in morals and in intellect’. As quoted in Ram Nath Sharma and Rajendra Kumar Sharma, *History of Education in India*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2004, p. 85. For a general discussion on Macaulay’s views on Indian learning, see *ibid.*, pp. 79-87.

¹⁰¹ Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, p. 42.

¹⁰² Michael Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, with a forward by Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1944. p. 2.

customary income from acting as priests for the 'low' castes, as villages were depopulated by the famine.¹⁰³

However, in government circles, the middle class was perceived as a class commanding over comfortable amounts of incomes. This perception was further reinforced by the middle class' own unwillingness to reveal their economic hardship, as such a revelation would have surely compromised their status or respectability in the eyes of the neighbours and relatives. As an outcome of their assumed affluence, the *Famine Manual*, prepared by the Revenue Department of the Government of Bengal in 1941, had categorically abandoned the *bhadralok* families in the hands of private relief. As per the manual, 'indigent persons who are likely to need relief, but who are not eligible for the Government dole, e.g., able-bodied indigent *Bhadralog* (sic) who will under no circumstances work at test works', were to be provided for from private donations to non-official charitable funds.¹⁰⁴ Of course, between manual labour and dependency on private relief, the middle class chose the latter. But the fact that the government actually suggested that the reluctance of the *bhadraloks* to do manual work was a reason for leaving them in the hands of private relief, was in itself deeply disconcerting for the *bhadraloks*, as we have seen in the account of Santhanam quoted earlier. Against this background, Santhanam urged that 'public [that is, community] relief organizations need to devote some attention to them, particularly as the officials do not seem to be well disposed to consider their difficulties.'¹⁰⁵ The Hindu Mahasabha's relief did exactly what Santhanam asked for the middle class. The Mahasabha's 'special relief', exclusively aimed at them, provided an appropriately dignified setting for the receipt of famine assistance.

The already discussed letter in Bengali by Aparna Sengupta, a middle class Hindu housewife, to Syama Prasad Mookerjee, tells us how starvation revised

¹⁰³ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, *Famine Manual*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1941, pp. 56-57.

¹⁰⁵ Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, p. 42.

the notion of feminine decency. In her letter dated 19/8/43, Sengupta wrote to Mookerjee:

... sacrificing all shame [of begging for charity] I beg of you ... give us one maund of rice to eat. We have to spend for two maunds of rice per month because there is no hope of getting anything else in addition to rice. You please save the family of this poor sister by arranging by any means for 1 maund of rice for us per month. If we receive 1 maund of rice, then the babies can have some milk-barley and medicine for disease.¹⁰⁶

Sengupta's letter tells us how middle class women had to give up the age-old notions of *lajja* or feminine decency codes in their desperation to get help outside family to avoid starvation. In times prior to the outbreak of the wartime food scarcity, writing a letter like this openly begging rice from a male who was in no relation to her, had been a big social taboo for the middle class Hindu women. Doing something like that had been unthinkable for them, as the fear of being branded as *nirlajjo* or *behaya* (devoid of feminine sense of decency and coyness) had always stood in their way of begging food. Nevertheless, the sight of famine corpses all-around, and the prospect of actually dying of hunger, brought down the walls of cultural codes of conduct that the middle class Bengali society had scrupulously prescribed for its female members.

However, hunger could not render all codes of *lajja* redundant, and unshackle women from excessive expectations set by the demands of maintaining *lajja*. There were still residues of *lajja* as are clear from the last paragraph of Sengupta's letter - 'If I know that you would oblige my begging, then I will let my husband know. . . I am writing to you in severe trouble and after considerable struggle [against my *lajja* or shyness]'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Sengupta wrote to Mookerjee without the knowledge of her husband, as, most likely, she felt that her husband's sense of manly duty to feed his dependent wife and children would have been hurt by the fact that his wife had to beg rice from

¹⁰⁶ Sengupta to Mookerjee, S. P. Mookerjee Papers, installment II - IV, Sub. File No. 111, NMML, New Delhi, pp. 75-76. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁷ Idem.

unrelated males outside the protected border of home, and consequently he would have disapproved of her plan to write to Mookerjee. About the Bengali husbands' sense of failure in their manly duty of feeding their women, T. G. Narayan, the journalist of *The Hindu* newspaper, wrote: 'You couldn't meet your wife without the rice without feeling that you were a beaten man.'¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Sengupta thought it was safer to let her husband know only when the rice actually appears, as the sight of 1 maund of rice in front of her half-fed husband was most likely to be capable of melting his heart, and in turn of enabling him to ignore his wife's 'indecent' and 'unwomanly' act of begging rice.

Though relief to the *bhadraloks* remained the chief concern of the Mahasabha throughout this period, yet, at the same time, the Hindu poor in the province also received the Mahasabha's assistance. The Namasudra community formed the majority of Hindu peasantry and agrarian labourers in east Bengal.¹⁰⁹ Numerically, the Namasudras were the second largest Hindu caste group (after the Mahishyas) in Bengal, and the largest in the eastern part of Bengal. As per the 1901 census of India, 75.14 per cent of the total Namasudra population of 1,860,914 lived in the low-lying swamp areas of six districts in east Bengal – Bakarganj, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Jessore and Khulna.¹¹⁰ The Mahasabha's final report on its relief activities describes how the Mahasabha sent foodgrains to Mollarhat in the Khulna district for the relief of the Namasudras who were doubly hit by a 'riot' in addition to the famine.¹¹¹

It seems that the Mahasabha was keen to become the sole spokesperson of the Hindus as a whole; accordingly, it was reluctant to confine its following only among the 'high' caste Hindus. Consequently, by providing occasional

¹⁰⁸ Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion about the socio-economic profile of the Namasudras, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, 2nd edn. with a new postscript, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 11-29.

¹¹⁰ *Census of India*, 1901, vol. VI, part I: 395-396, 459; vol. VIA, part II, table XIII: 146, as presented *ibid.*, p. 11-12.

¹¹¹ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 14.

food-relief to the poor too, it tried to avoid being seen as overtly partial to the 'high' caste *bhadraloks*. For the same reason it claimed, at least on paper, that it never discriminated between castes while providing relief: 'the Mahasabha was always prepared to give special help to distressed Hindus, particularly in areas where they were economically and numerically weak, they never made any discrimination as between castes or creeds.'¹¹² Such a claim actually conveys the limitation of doing an exclusively 'high' caste politics in wartime Bengal, especially in view of the growing organization of the so called 'low' castes, such as the organization of the Namasudras under their famous community leaders such as Guruchand Thakur, P. R. Thakur, and Jogendranath Mandal (1904-1968).¹¹³ In 1940, Mandal became the president of the Calcutta Scheduled Caste League (formed in 1937).¹¹⁴ In protest against casteist oppression of the Namasudras within Hindu society, he made common cause with the Muslim League, and later after partition managed to become the first minister of law and labour in Pakistan. In view of such growing organization and politicization of the so called 'low' castes in wartime Bengal, their support for the politics of the Hindu Right could no longer be taken for granted, it now needed to be won by providing material relief.

The Mahasabha's relief to the poor 'low' castes is further explained by the politics of religious conversion, which is discussed in the next section. Meanwhile, the Mahasabha's final report on famine-relief claimed that starving Hindu destitutes were being converted to Islam by the Muslim volunteers by providing them food in exchange for their consent to convert. According to the report 'A large number of destitutes who were forced to forsake their religion were fishermen, moochis,¹¹⁵ and other sects of the depressed classes', who were at the bottom of the food-availability pyramid.¹¹⁶ It seems that such a development compelled the Mahasabha to

¹¹² Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹³ For a detailed discussion on the politics and the movement of the Namasudras in Bengal during the Second World War, see Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity*, pp. 173-237.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

¹¹⁵ Cobblers.

¹¹⁶ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, pp. 17-18.

turn its eyes to these deprived sections of the Hindu society and try to persuade them with food to stay within the fold of Hinduism.

IV. Relief and the 'Indian Character'

Let us turn now to another aspect of the Mahasabha's attempt to capitalise on the political potential of famine-relief in the public discussions that took place around the theme of the 'Indian character' in the context of famine. However, as we shall see soon, in the Mahasabha's framework 'Indian character' was essentially reduced to 'Hindu character'. Nonetheless, the Mahasabha found itself in something of a quandary. On the one hand, its politics was based on a claimed superiority of the Indian (read Hindu) civilization over that of the Muslims and the West. On the other, it found itself criticising the greed and inefficiency of some Indians, especially of the politicians and grain merchants, for the calamity of the Bengal famine. It was a challenge for the Mahasabha to reconcile these two positions in public life. Relief activities provided some help in reconciling these two apparently irreconcilable positions. Accordingly, even during the famine days filled with mass deaths, the Mahasabha publicized the virtues of the 'Indian character' in its campaigns of famine-relief. As the Mahasabha's own narrative put it: 'In the midst of such death and distress, suffering and agony, there was found the great spirit of service and sacrifice inherent in Indian character. In this historic trial of 1943, the whole of India responded readily with men and money to this call of suffering humanity.'¹¹⁷

However, contemporary observation challenged such a positive image of the 'Indian character' enthusiastically publicized by the Mahasabha during the 'trial' of the famine. For instance, during the peak of the famine, *The Statesman* newspaper was openly cynical about the city *bhadraloks'* attitude towards the famine victims. When famine corpses were piling on the streets of Calcutta, *The Statesman* wrote on 13 August 1943 that 'Those who carry away the dead

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

found in the streets do noble work. But it may be that a large part of the gratitude felt towards them is for taking away sights that offend the eye or nose.’¹¹⁸ In a country with widespread poverty, the Indian cities had always attracted the rural poor, as it was only in the cities where they could at least hope to get scraps of food and change coins thrown at them by the *babus* [bhadraloks]. Consequently, the well-to-do in the Indian cities had always been accustomed to seeing destitutes, often in a moribund state, at their doorsteps. Ian Stephens, the editor of *The Statesman*, wrote in his memoir about his personal experience of observing famine deaths in Calcutta:

Even if you’ve been half-expecting it there’s still no drama; nothing to hear, almost nothing characteristic at first to see, anyway in a city like Calcutta, notorious for its swarms of pitiable poor living in squalor near the margin of subsistence, its disgraceful organized trade in crippled beggars. You’ll find the squatting tattered figures everywhere, always; the enigmatic prostrate forms; on waste ground, grassy plots, the paved sidewalks even of the wealthier areas...¹¹⁹

The monotony of seeing terribly suffering dehumanized human beings at close quarter caused insensitivity. Thus, contemporary press observations challenge the Mahasabha’s positive portrayal of the ‘Indian character’. The Mahasabha’s glorification of the ‘Indian character’ seems to have been politically motivated whereby it tried to project the Indian (read Hindu) character as morally superior to the Muslim or British character.

Unlike the lower echelons of the middle class, to which women like Aparna Sengupta belonged, the upper middle class and upper class felt neither moved nor panicked by the hunger deaths all-around them. Whereas, broadly speaking, the mainstream nationalist as well as the leftist politics of the time were being led, both ideologically and practically, by the very *bhadraloks* who were untouched by the famine. Possibly, this was a factor for why the Bengal famine could not become an epicentre of political agitation, which it should

¹¹⁸ *The Statesman*, 13 August 1943, as quoted in appendix “H” to Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal: 1770-1943*, Indian Associated Publishing Co. Ltd., Calcutta, 1944, pp. 185-186.

¹¹⁹ Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, p. 169.

have become given the shockingly large scale of it. As I have discussed throughout this and the previous chapter, the issue of the famine was picked up politically mainly by the Mahasabha, whose active political presence was confined to Bengal and a couple of other regions in north India. Naturally, for the *bhadraloks* in the Mahasabha, the immediate concern was to grow politically where they could realistically grow, and Bengal was one of such regions. Accordingly, they picked up the issue of famine and famine-relief as they realized the potential of the famine in helping them to grow politically.

Freda Bedi (1911-1977), a British woman who moved to India and participated in the Indian independence movement, toured famine-stricken Bengal in January 1944 on behalf of the newspaper *The Tribune*. In her account of the tour, we find a brief mention of the Muslim non-government organizations that were providing relief. Among them, of course there was a relief committee of the Muslim League party. Some of the other private Muslim organizations involved in relief work were the Moslem Majlis, the Ahrars, the Muslim Chamber of Commerce, and the Khaksars.¹²⁰ Though Bedi mentioned that there were other Muslim relief organizations too, yet she did not name them. As discussed already, the 'Indian character' idolized by the Mahasabha was actually less of an Indian, but more of a Hindu character. This so called 'Indian character' did not include the Muslim characters, as evident from the fact that the Mahasabha had no praise to utter for the works done by the Muslim non-government organizations during the famine. Instead, it condemned the leading organization among them – the Khaksars- for shifting the Hindu famine victims, often orphans, to shelters at distant places outside Bengal.

The Mahasabha was particularly worried about the Khaksar volunteers because for the Khaksars social service was not a one-off enterprise, instead, it was an indispensable part of their regular religious duties. The Khaksars were rigorously trained in performing 'social service' in rigid discipline, with

¹²⁰ Freda Bedi, *Bengal Lamenting*, The Lion Press, Lahore, c. 1944, p. 89.

the tacit aim of winning over an increasing number of people (including the non-Muslims) and gradually turning them into 'soldiers of Islam'. The Khaksar movement came into being around 1930, under the founder and supreme leader Allama Inayatullah Mashriqi (1888-1963). Shan Muhammad, a scholar of the Khaksar Movement, notes that '*prime facie*, the ostensible object of the Khaksar Movement was social service. Dressed in semi-military style with *Belchas*¹²¹ on their shoulders under the command of their *salars*¹²² in perfect rigid discipline, they marched through city streets on the occasion of religious festivals and rendered even menial services whenever required to do so.'¹²³ However, in addition to the emphasis on social service that formed a great part of the identity of being a Khaksar, there was also a strong element of Islamic militarism in the Khaksar movement. Muhammad Aslam Malik, a political biographer of Mashriqi tells us that 'Mashriqi's militaristic philosophy', and particularly his thesis of *Ibadat* (worship), was primarily aimed at making the Muslims 'Soldiers of Islam'.¹²⁴

Therefore, among all the Muslim volunteer organizations, the Khaksars posed a significant challenge to the relief politics of the Mahasabha. Consequently, to discredit the relief activities of the Khaksars, the Mahasabha tried to impose its own narrative on the Khaksar relief strategy. They projected the transfer of Hindu famine victims from Bengal by the Khaksars as a proof of the intrinsic evilness of the Muslim 'nature' as a whole, in comparison to the selflessness of the Hindu nature:

Famine and pestilence exhibit different sides of human nature . . . The other side of human nature is reflected in the activities of certain organisations including the Khaksars who held out to the starving people (*sic*) assurances to provide them with food, clothes and shelter and began to remove men, women and children to distant places in India without paying any regard to their religion or choice. We always agreed that Hindu orphans should remain in the custody of Hindu organisations and Moslem orphans with

¹²¹ Shovels.

¹²² Captain.

¹²³ Shan Muhammad, *Khaksar Movement in India*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1973, p. v.

¹²⁴ Muhammad Aslam Malik, *Allama Inayatullah Mashraqi: A Political Biography*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000, p. 41.

Muslim orphanages. While we scrupulously adhered to this principal, the Khaksars and some other organisations did not.¹²⁵

J. R. Symonds, the officer-in-charge of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, was dismayed 'at the communalism of organizations which set out to give relief to Mussalmans, Hindus or Christians only'.¹²⁶ Famine-relief as a tool of religious conversion was a novel phenomenon in 1943. In the historiography of famines in India, such a use of famine-relief is unrecorded for earlier famines. The Mahasabha vigorously raised the issue of religious conversion by the Muslim volunteers through providing food in relief; it alleged that starving Hindus were being forced to renounce Hinduism 'for a morsel of food'.¹²⁷ The Mahasabha complained: 'Another aspect of human nature could be seen when people pretending to do humanitarian service insisted on change of religion. Some of the unfortunate destitutes of Bengal who lost their all left their homestead for unknown destination, some again changed their religion for a morsel of food.'¹²⁸ Realising that the famine had created scope for religious conversion from Hinduism through distribution of food, the Mahasabha made haste to provide relief to the Hindu vulnerable to 'save' them from converting to another religion, and to ex-Hindus to 'restore' them to Hinduism.¹²⁹ The Mahasabha's final report on its relief operations claimed to have 'saved' and 'restored' a large number of families who abandoned Hindu faith in an attempt to avoid starvation.¹³⁰ Here the Mahasabha's invocation of the rhetoric of 'saving' implicitly involved the notion of 'fallen', suggesting that even if one's decision to convert to another religion was prompted by the desperation to be free from the clutches of starvation, yet, it would be essentially a 'fall' in the life of a Hindu, from which he needed to be saved.

Even long after the famine of 1943, the issue of dispatching Hindu destitutes outside Bengal during the famine, provided a recurrent reference-point in the

¹²⁵ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 16.

¹²⁶ See the contribution from Mr J. R. Symonds to Santhanam, *The Cry of Distress*, p. 182.

¹²⁷ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, pp. 17-18.

¹²⁸ *Idem.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³⁰ *Idem.*

politics of the Hindu Right for citing the alleged 'communal' character of the Muslim organizations during the famine. Balraj Madhok, an aide of Mookerjee and a professor of history at the Delhi University wrote as late as in 1969 that '... whereas Bengal Relief Committee under the leadership of Dr. Mookerji was giving relief to all, irrespective of caste and creed, the Khaksar and the Muslim League began to exploit the people's misery by sending the Hindu destitutes to their relief centres outside Bengal with a view to ultimately convert them to Islam.'¹³¹

The Mahasabha dragged religion into food by advocating relief work along communal lines. Its final report on relief suggested that 'Hindu orphans should remain in the custody of Hindu organisations and Moslem orphans with Muslim orphanages'.¹³² Such a suggestion tried to set limits on the humanitarian cross-religious relief on the site of hunger, and served to foreclose the possibility of reaching out to the communal 'other' in the time of a common humanitarian crisis. The report tells us that Mookerjee met the Khaksar leaders working in Calcutta, and requested them to return the Hindu destitutes who were taken away from Bengal by them, to the Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu relief organisations.¹³³ He also requested them to cease further despatch of destitutes from Bengal.¹³⁴

Realizing the sensitivity of the issue, and its potential to fuel communal tension, the Bengal government stepped in. Interestingly, as Srimanjari's study has described, local intelligence officials informed the government that Khaksar famine-relief was gaining popularity and sympathy from the Muslim public and thereby 'undermining the influence of the Muslim League'.¹³⁵ Already shamed for its failure to prevent the famine, and for its inadequate and chaotic relief arrangements, the League Ministry wished to avoid this

¹³¹ Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr: Biography of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerji*, Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1969, p. 48.

¹³² BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 16.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³⁴ *Idem.*

¹³⁵ Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine: Bengal 1939 – 45*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, p. 144.

apparent leakage of the remaining support, and to eliminate the threat of communal tension that the Khaksars' relief activities brought. Therefore, according to Srimanjari, the ministry ordered a halt to the dispatching of Hindu destitutes out of Bengal in a bid to hinder the relief activities of the Khaksars and thereby to stall their growing popularity amidst the hungry.¹³⁶ Accordingly, as pointed out by the Mahasabha's final report, the government issued circulars cancelling earlier orders that had allowed relocation of destitutes outside Bengal, and banning any further despatch of the Hindu destitutes from Bengal by the Khaksars.¹³⁷ The report claimed credit for the Mahasabha for the action; it attributed the halt to the 'strenuous efforts of the Mahasabha under the leadership of Dr. Mookerjee and several other humanitarian and relief organisations'.¹³⁸

Interestingly, the Mahasabha itself continued to send destitutes out of Bengal to Hindu relief centres elsewhere. The Mahasabha's final report lists six such Hindu organisations and individuals, namely, the Arya Pradeshik Pratinidhi Sabha in Lahore, International Arya Samaj in Delhi, the Bengal Famine Relief Committee in Ambala Cantonment, Lala Sriram in Lahore, Dr. Kedarnath in New Delhi, and Dr. Amarnath Suri in Hyderabad, Sind.¹³⁹ In total, these organizations and individuals received 207 lone boys and 89 families.¹⁴⁰ With regard to the return of these boys and families to Bengal, the report skirted around the issue, asserting that the children and families concerned were 'living happily under the care of different Hindu Organizations'.¹⁴¹ However, because of the pressure by the government on the Mahasabha on the issue, the report gave a vague assurance that the destitutes would be brought back to Bengal 'as soon as the conditions here are favourable for their rehabilitation or as soon as they express their desire to come back to

¹³⁶ *Idem.*

¹³⁷ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, p. 17.

¹³⁸ *Idem.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, appendix VIII, p. 31.

¹⁴⁰ *Idem.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Bengal.’¹⁴² My sources are completely silent on whether this assurance was ever actually realized or not.

V. Political Dividend of Relief

This chapter thus far has discussed the Mahasabha’s relief activities. Now it will engage with the question whether the Mahasabha’s relief activities earned it any concrete gain in electoral politics, as opposed to receiving mere gratitude for free food and a conventional Hindu sense of affiliation to a Hindu charity. Did the starving Bengalis who flocked to its relief kitchens care to get involved in its politics? To answer these questions, we first need to discuss why Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who was leading the Mahasabha in its relief activities, became widely popular during the famine. To begin with, why middle class Hindu women like Aparana Sengupta, as discussed earlier, were thinking of Mookerjee as their saviour to the exclusion of other political leaders and parties? Why, as Paul R. Greenough has pointed out, did ‘the threatened “middle class” find its leader in Syama Prasad Mookerji’?¹⁴³ On the part of Mookerjee, the fact that among the Hindu middle-class Bengalis he came to be seen as the sole crusader against hunger and the saviour of the hungry was no doubt a great achievement. His personal background played an instrumental role in making him acceptable and dear as a leader to the Hindu middle class. He was himself a member of the middle class. He also had the necessary amount of educational capital to be accepted as the representative of the educated *bhadraloks* to voice their grievances. He was a barrister-at-law, and the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University between 1934 and 1938.¹⁴⁴ In addition, he had a very respected lineage. His father Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924) was a famous educationist and was knighted in

¹⁴² Idem.

¹⁴³ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁴ Rita Basu, *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee and an Alternative Politics in Bengal*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2002, p. 16, p. 18.

1911 for his contributions to education, and was also the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University between 1906-1914, and again between 1921-1923. Though Sir Asutosh did not participate in formal politics, yet, because of his administrative courage in maintaining the autonomy of the university in the face of dictates from the high colonial officers, and because of his strong personality, he was conferred with the popular epithet *Banglar bagh*, meaning Bengal tiger.

Coming from such a lineage, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, from the outset of his political career, commanded popular respect and acceptability. He embodied what the Bengali middle class aspired to be. He served as a model Hindu Bengali – ‘enlightened’ by western education, yet at the same time rooted in Indian culture and Hindu religious tradition. This personal capital of Mookerjee proved to be his political capital too; it created an aura of cultural acceptability and political credibility around his personality and his politics. During the famine, when most of the established *bhadralok* leaders of the Congress were behind the bars in connection with the Quit India Movement launched in August 1942, Mookerjee emerged to be seen as the sole *bhadralok* leader possessing sincerity and concern for the distress of the starving Hindu middle class. Hence, requests for help with food were directed to this newly emerged saviour.

It seems that the Mahasabha as an organization took much care to make its leader known to common recipients of relief. For instance, T. G. Narayan, the reporter of *The Hindu* newspaper, described the scene at a relief hospital run by the Mahasabha in the Contai sub-division in the Midnapore district in November 1943: ‘Every room in the hospital had a picture of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. I do not know what therapeutic effect that had on the patients.’¹⁴⁵ Thus, while treating the famine victims

¹⁴⁵ Narayan, *Famine Over Bengal*, p. 172.

in the Bengal districts, the Mahasabha made sure that they become familiar with Mookerjee. In addition to giving publicity to its leader, the Mahasabha was also trying to make itself widely known as an organization to the people during the famine. For example, in famine-stricken Contai town, artist Chittaprosad visited an erstwhile Congress office which was now a Hindu Mahasabha centre.¹⁴⁶ There was a sign at the door about 'Mahasabha Nari Samiti or some such thing.'¹⁴⁷ Thus, the Mahasabha made sure that its name was displayed prominently while helping people during the famine. Freda Bedi, the already mentioned British woman who toured Bengal in January 1944 on behalf of the newspaper *The Tribune*, wrote in her account of the tour that 'bigger Relief Committees' were opening branches of their organizations, 'often communal ones'.¹⁴⁸ Though Bedi did not name any of those 'bigger Relief Committees', it is likely that branches of the Mahasabha, the biggest private relief provider, often accompanied its relief kitchens as during the famine years the number of its branches increased from 1004 in the year 1942 to 1217 by 1944, and its membership figure increased from a mere 15474 in 1942 to a handsome figure of 40887 by 1944.¹⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that the Mahasabha was re-launched in Bengal only five years ago in 1939. Despite being such a newcomer to Bengal politics, during the famine years its organization grew so rapidly. Thus, in all probability, relief centres served to disseminate the Mahasabha's political ideology and to recruit political activists for the party.

¹⁴⁶ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Idem. Nari Samiti means Women's Society.

¹⁴⁸ Bedi, *Bengal Lamenting*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁹ BPHM, *Annual Report for the Year 1943-44*, All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers, NMML, F. C-59, p. 137.

Photograph redacted for copyright reason.

Members of a Hindu Mahasabha Relief Centre in a village named Bamni in Bengal.

The Banner in the background reads in Bengali *Hindu Mahasabha Sahajjyo Kendra* (Hindu Mahasabha Relief Centre)

Photographer: Unknown.

Source: Google Images. Original source not mentioned on Google.
<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-rghMpjH8FOk/UWGb57T3W4I/AAAAAAAAAZw/6w88BduYAMM/s1600/Hindu+Mahasabha+Relief+Center.jpg>. Accessed on 10 January 2017.

Chittaprosad, the noted painter and a member of the Communist Party of India, accused Mookerjee of blatant political favouritism and partisanship in providing relief. According to Chittaprosad, wherever the Bengal Relief Committee under the Mahasabha had people from other political parties, Mookerjee did not send cheap rice to it. He sent rice to only those branches of the Committee where the Mahasabhaites were clearly in full control.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Chittaprosad asserted that Mookerjee was consciously using famine-relief for political purposes.

Mookerjee seems to have succeeded in his political plan. Through its relief activities, the Mahasabha succeeded in presenting itself to the Bengali Hindus in the countryside as an alternative to the Congress. There are instances of this development in Chittaprosad's account. For example, the already mentioned Mahasabha centre in Contai town visited by Chittaprosad was being run by a man who 'was a former Congressman, now turned Mahasabhaite'.¹⁵¹ Another local Congress leader named Satish Jana, despite being a Congressman, admitted to being connected to all relief organizations, 'particularly the Mahasabha.'¹⁵² Chittaprosad encountered a Hindu village doctor in Midnapore whose first question to him and his colleague was 'Congress or Mahasabha?'¹⁵³ Such a question in a remote village indicates that during the famine the Mahasabha had established itself as an alternative, or at least as a competitor, to the Congress in certain countryside. In popular rural thinking only the Mahasabha, to the exclusion of other political parties, succeeded in emerging as a rival to the Congress in terms of relief activism. A 'popular' local Congress leader in Gopalpur village told Chittaprosad and his colleague: 'Let us not discuss politics, please. Tell me, if you can, how to get relief, more relief.'¹⁵⁴ Thus, even for a Congress leader, the need to receive relief became more important than formal politics, and the Congress was

¹⁵⁰ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵² *Idem.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

failing to provide relief, whereas the Mahasabha was reaching out to people with relief.

Through its relief activities, the Mahasabha projected itself to the people as a friend in time of their hardship, and thereby raised its political profile. Even Tusharkanti Ghosh, the editor of the popular Congress-leaning daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, suggested that Suhrawardy, Bengal's civil supplies minister, should follow the relief plan of Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Thus, by endorsing the plan of Mookerjee, Ghosh indirectly accepted that the Congress had failed to come up with any considerable relief plan. While discussing the need for greater relief in the mofussil and countryside, Ghosh wrote about Mookerjee's relief activities that "The plan he has proposed for immediate relief seems to us to be the only feasible one. In fact, it is the only plan that has come either from the Government or from outside the Government. It is a major constructive suggestion for which Mr. Suhrawardy had cried, some time ago. Let him take this up, work it and take the *kudos*. We trust Dr. Mookerjee will not mind."¹⁵⁵ Thus the editor of a leading Congress-leaning daily certified Mookerjee's relief plan as the best available plan.

Chittaprosad's account makes us aware of the complex ways in which the Congress' rural support was further eroding in Midnapore district which was severely hit by the famine. Midnapore was the district where the Quit India Movement received its strongest support only fourteen months ago in August 1942. According to Chittaprosad's claim, in their zeal to oppose the Bengal government and hinder its procurement for the army, the Congress supporter *jotedars* (landowning rich peasantry) resolved "'Not a grain of paddy to Government,'" and accordingly burnt, or buried underground, or drowned in the rivers, thousands of maunds of paddy.¹⁵⁶ Some of them, 'to teach the bureaucracy a lesson', sold grains to the hoarders.¹⁵⁷ In the words of Communist Chittaprosad:

¹⁵⁵ Ghosh, *The Bengal Tragedy*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁶ Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal*, p. 7. 1 maund equals to 37.5 kilogram.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Inspired by only one feeling, hatred of foreign domination, the people of Midnapur of course did not realise then that in their anger they were not doing Government any harm, but merely preparing the way for their own starvation. To deprive Government of rice, they put it in the hands of the hoarders: to fight Government, they strengthened the hands of the enemy at home. Patriotism provided a convenient mask for the hoarders at that time to bring off their shady deals, but the self-same “patriots” did not hesitate later to set the police on hungry peasants when they cried for a morsel of food.¹⁵⁸

Along the lines of Chittaprosad, Michael Brown, the contemporary independent observer, too argued in his 1944 polemical study of food situation that during the Quit India Movement ‘the organizers hurt the public far more than the authorities and succeeded in holding up the movement of large quantities of food at a vital period.’¹⁵⁹ Brown argued that:

The 1942 disturbances thus had a two-fold effect. The direct one of destroying food and the means of moving and distributing it, and the indirect but no less effective result of giving the profiteer, hoarder and speculator a fairly free run by tying up the forces of supervision for about five months. Also, the gospel of defiance of authority took effect far beyond the political sphere and encouraged every petty shopkeeper in his anti-social ways.¹⁶⁰

According to Chittaprosad, when famine struck, villagers regretted rallying around the Congress in the previous year, and grew bitter with the congress. This bitterness with the Congress drove them into the open arms of the Mahasabha.

Interestingly, though the Mahasabha succeeded in emerging as a mainstream Hindu political party in some parts of Bengal, often at the cost of the Congress’ influence, yet, it failed to reap electoral success. After the famine, the first chance to test the Mahasabha’s strength among the Hindus in electoral politics came with the election to the provincial legislature in 1946. The Mahasabha failed miserably in the test. In total, the Mahasabha fielded

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Brown, *India Need Not Starve!*, p. 67.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

candidates only in 26 seats.¹⁶¹ The election result was disastrous for it. The Mahasabha won only one seat, that is, the safe seat of the Calcutta University constituency from where incumbent Mookerjee was re-elected unopposed.¹⁶² The Mahasabha received merely 1.2 per cent of the total votes in the unreserved 'General Urban' class of constituencies.¹⁶³ As per the 'Communal Award', only non-Scheduled Caste Hindu males were eligible to vote in these 'General Urban' constituencies.¹⁶⁴ In the unreserved 'General Rural' class of constituencies, the Mahasabha received merely 2.8 per cent of the total votes.¹⁶⁵ Again, only non-Scheduled Caste Hindu males were eligible to vote in these 'General Rural' constituencies. In contrast to the poor performance by the Mahasabha, the Congress received 96.8 per cent of the votes in the 'General Urban' constituencies, and 74.4 per cent of the votes in the 'General Rural' constituencies.¹⁶⁶ The Mahasabha candidates were defeated by huge margins. For instance, the Mahasabha candidate from the Calcutta East constituency Sarojendra Prasad Bagchi received only 27 votes against the 12,305 received by the winner Congress candidate Jyotish Chandra Ghosh.¹⁶⁷ The Mahasabha candidate Patit Paban Chatterjee from the Calcutta Central constituency received only 217 votes against 13,566 received by the winner Congress candidate Basantlal Murarka.¹⁶⁸

Does this electoral debacle mean that all the enthusiastic relief activities of the Mahasabha failed to earn loyalty to the politics of Hindu communalism? Most probably, it does not. Joya Chatterji's findings caution us against treating the election result as a proof of the lack of support for the politics of Hindu communalism. Instead, the Mahasabha's electoral defeat can be treated as a

¹⁶¹ See the 'Detailed Statement Showing the Result of Elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly', in *Return Showing the Results of Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Legislatures in 1945-46*, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1948, pp. 110-136.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁶³ See *ibid.*, the 'Number of Votes Polled by Various Political Parties in the Bengal Legislative Assembly', p. 71.

¹⁶⁴ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, the 'Detailed Statement Showing the Result of Elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly', p. 110.

¹⁶⁸ *Idem.*

proof of the adoption of Hindu communalism by the Congress. In the words of Chatterji 'Appearances notwithstanding, the very convincing defeat by the Congress Party of the Mahasabha was not a vote for secular nationalism against Hindu communalism. It reflected instead, the conviction of enfranchised Hindu Bengalis that the Bengal Congress was committed to protecting their 'interests', and was likely to do this more effectively than the Hindu Mahasabha.'¹⁶⁹ Chatterji accepts that 'In the early forties, the Mahasabha had been able to draw away a significant section of the Congress' traditional constituency.'¹⁷⁰ However, as I will discuss soon, 'when Congress policy turned towards a more businesslike defence of Hindu interests, many Hindus renewed their allegiance to the Congress and voted for it in the 1945-46 elections.'¹⁷¹

Chatterji asserts that by 1946, 'the Bengal Congress came to present an unequivocally Hindu profile'.¹⁷² Therefore, she argues, 'the political differences between it and the Mahasabha became difficult for the untutored eye to discern.'¹⁷³ Suranjan Das too, in his study of communal riots in Bengal, has pointed out that 'Inside the Bengal Congress, too, the influence of the Mahasabha had increased substantially during this period'.¹⁷⁴ Das argues that 'a section of Congressmen developed a strong sense of Hindu identity, especially in view of the perceived threat from the Pakistan movement.'¹⁷⁵ In this circumstance, similar to the Mahasabha, the Congress too started denouncing the Muslim League 'as a threat to the political and civil liberties of non-Muslim communities.'¹⁷⁶

My research supplements the findings of these secondary literature as I find that the overlapping of the Mahasabha's and the Congress' support-base was

¹⁶⁹ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 229.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁷³ *Idem.*

¹⁷⁴ Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991, p. 211.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁷⁶ *Idem.*

a serious impediment in the way of the Mahasabha's political expansion. For instance, in February 1945, Viceroy Lord Wavell, while discussing the reconstruction of his Executive Council, wrote to the Secretary of State for India Leopold Amery that there was no need to include any Mahasabha member in the council, because 'the Mahasabha overlaps the Congress', and by having members from the Congress, 'it should not be difficult to satisfy the general run of Mahasabha members that their interests have not been overlooked.'¹⁷⁷ Thus, even in the matter of securing a nominated seat in the Viceroy's Executive Council, its overlapping support-base with that of the Congress was proving to be an impediment for the Mahasabha. Later, on 1 July 1945, during the Simla Conference between Wavell and the Indian political leaders to discuss the proposed 'Wavell Plan' for Indian self-government, Wavell again wrote to Amery that 'The Mahasabha is a curious body; many of its rank and file seem to be Congress men, and on big political issues will follow Gandhi rather than Syama Prasad Mookerjee or Savarkar.'¹⁷⁸ In the election of 1946 in Bengal, a large number of the Mahasabha supporters seemed to have done precisely that.

Making the distinction between the Hindu communalism of the Congress and that of the Mahasabha was all the more difficult in Bengal, as, unlike in north India where an aggressive communal rhetoric distinguished the Mahasabha from the Congress, in Bengal their rhetoric was the same. Joya Chatterji has pointed out that 'The Mahasabha in Bengal generally avoided the cruder rhetoric and style that characterised their movement in other parts of India. This owed much to the sophisticated leadership of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and is as much a commentary on the extremism of the Bengal Congress as on the suave restraint of Mookerji.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 11 February 1945, L/PO/10/22, compiled in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, 1942-7*, vol. V, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1974, document no. 259, p. 541.

¹⁷⁸ *Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Mr Amery*, marked 'PRIVATE AND SECRET', 1 July 1945, L/PO/10/22, compiled in *Transfer*, vol. V, document no. 555, p. 1182.

¹⁷⁹ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 249-250.

Chatterji has demonstrated that following the Hinduisation of the Congress, the Mahasabha actually avoided confronting the Congress in the election, and preferred 'electoral understandings' in many constituencies.¹⁸⁰ The Congress reaped the benefits of these 'electoral understandings' more than the Mahasabha did, possibly because of its greater organizational presence in the province and its much higher national standing, and because of the popular understanding that it was politically 'better equipped' as a national party than the Mahasabha, and therefore was likely to protect the Hindu interests more effectively than the Mahasabha.¹⁸¹ For the same reasons probably, as Chatterji's study further tells us, the big Hindu businessmen and large landholders who had been the traditional patrons of the Mahasabha, changed sides in favour of the Congress, and figured prominently among the Congress' 'newfound supporters'.¹⁸²

Though the Mahasabha's performance in the 1946 election was a disaster, yet, below the surface of high electoral politics, the Mahasabha's relief works seem to have earned the party considerable support at the neighbourhood level, as indicated by the role played by the volunteer organizations backed by the Mahasabha in the riots later in the year. Suranjan Das' study of communal riots in Bengal points out that since its re-launching in Bengal in 1939, the Mahasabha had been active in mobilizing the Hindus along a communal line.¹⁸³ Das' study tells us that in the 1940s the Mahasabha leaders regularly toured districts in Bengal to set up Hindu *akharas* (gymnasiums) to train the Hindu youth in martial arts, and to raise Hindu volunteer corps.¹⁸⁴ As discussed in the second section, Hindu Mahasabha used the service of these volunteer corps in its relief activities. The volunteer bodies received money for relief works from the Mahasabha's relief fund. This strategy of building a synergic relationship with local volunteer groups during the famine seems to have worked out in the Mahasabha's favour. Joya Chatterji's

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 229-230.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁸³ Das, *Communal Riots*, p. 166-167, 169, 180.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 211.

study tells us that these volunteer groups mobilized vast sections of the Hindu *bhadralok* youth of Calcutta behind the Mahasabha.¹⁸⁵ Thus, by engaging them in its relief activities, the Mahasabha obtained a network of Hindu volunteers on the ground. Suranjan Das points out that later during the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946, Hindu *akharas*, or gymnasiums, became the “local organizers” of the riot.¹⁸⁶ Yasmin Khan’s study of the partition of India too tells us that the Hindu volunteer bands and neighbourhood clubs or gymnasiums took active part in the violence against the Muslims in the riots in August 1946.¹⁸⁷

Given the large role played by the Hindu volunteer corps in the Calcutta riots, it would not be nonsensical to hypothesize that by involving the volunteer corps earlier in the famine-relief activities, the Mahasabha had been successful in indoctrinating them in Hindu communalism. Later, during the riots, the Mahasabha seems to have reactivated the mobilization that it had already done during the famine, and built on the grassroots organization that it had established through its relief activities. However, admittedly, further extensive research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Notably, Rakesh Batabyal’s study of communalism in Bengal suggests that failure at the electoral politics was one of the factors that drove the Mahasabha to a phase of ‘extreme’ Hindu communalism.¹⁸⁸ According to Batabyal, after the debacle at the 1946 election, the communal riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, and Tippera later in the year provided a lifeline to the Mahasabha for political survival. These riots gave credence, so to speak, to the Mahasabha’s claim that the Hindus in Bengal were in danger of being attacked by the Muslims.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 237.

¹⁸⁶ Das, *Communal Riots*, pp. 185-186.

¹⁸⁷ See Yasmin Khan, *The Great partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2007, pp. 65-66.

¹⁸⁸ Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal*, p. 266.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-331.

As discussed in the third section of this chapter, the Mahasabha provided 'special relief' to urban schoolteachers and the families of lawyers, pleaders, and Muktears (law clerks) in some districts in east Bengal. In the list of areas where 'special relief' was distributed, the district that stands out is Noakhali, the site of a horrific Hindu-Muslim riot in October 1946. Since the 1920s, Noakhali had been a centre of radical peasant movements.¹⁹⁰ Here the Muslims were in the majority. The peasants were mostly Muslims, while Hindus dominated among the landed gentry and professional groups.¹⁹¹ In the district the Mahasabha had a powerful local organizer named Nalini Ranjan Mitra, who was a school teacher himself.¹⁹² The number of the Mahasabha's branches in Noakhali increased from 8 in 1943-44 to 143 in 1945-46.¹⁹³ The district had 146 unions.¹⁹⁴ That means the Mahasabha established a branch in almost every union. Batabyal argues that the famine, among other factors, contributed to this rapid rise in the Mahasabha's organization in the district.¹⁹⁵ In Noakhali, given the demographic division along a sharp religious line, and given the overlapping of the religious division with class division, as Batabyal points out, the 'People of even Congress persuasion showed an inclination towards the Hindu Mahasabha as a sense of insecurity gradually came to prevail in some areas.'¹⁹⁶ In view of the numerical strength of the Muslim 'other', among the Hindu teachers and lawyers in Noakhali, there had been a political space waiting to be captured by a vocal and active Hindu organization. The Mahasabha appears to have occupied this available space via the route of food-relief. That the Hindu lawyers in Noakhali came to be considered as one of the main targets by the Muslims, is supported by the finding of Sumit Sarkar that during the riots in October 1946 in

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 301-302.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁹³ 'List of Mahasabha Branches', All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers, NMML, file no. P-32, pp. 139-155, and file no. P-14, pp 138-139, as cited *ibid.*, p. 329.

¹⁹⁴ Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal*, p. 329.

¹⁹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

Noakhali and adjoining Tippera, in initial Hindu complaints attacks on lawyers figured prominently.¹⁹⁷

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the Hindu Mahasabha used food-relief as a political tool to garner the support of the starving Hindus. The inadequacy and ineffectiveness of government famine-relief made the Mahasabha's relief more attractive for vast sections of the Hindu Bengalis, particularly those belonging to the 'high' castes. In many areas, the Mahasabha succeeded in running an almost parallel relief mechanism to that of the government. In these areas, as a result of the virtual takeover of the task of relief by a private body like the Mahasabha, the indispensability of the government administration run by the Muslim League, came into question. Additionally, providing relief in the Hindu *paras* or neighbourhoods allowed the Mahasabha to develop a symbiotic relationship with local volunteer organizations consisting of mainly Hindu young men, which in turn helped in publicizing the Mahasabha's communal ideology at the neighbourhood level, and mobilizing the Hindus for its populist politics. Though the Mahasabha largely failed to convert the recipients of its relief into its voters in the 1946 provincial election, yet, the mobilization that it had done through famine-relief proved to be useful during the communal riots later in the year.

Though in some cases the Mahasabha consciously tried to reach out to the *chotoloks* ('low' caste poor people), yet, the target audience of its relief activities was primarily the middle class *bhadraloks*, as this was the class that had always been the core support-group of the Mahasabha's politics of Hindu nationalism. Therefore, the Mahasabha came up with forms of relief-distribution that were tailored to take care of the *bhadraloks'* sense of honour and pride in their high status in the caste and class hierarchy, even while receiving charity in the form of food-relief. On their part, the Bengali middle

¹⁹⁷ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 2002, p. 433.

class *bhadraloks*, being refused any special treatment by the government relief officials on the basis of their claimed social and cultural 'superiority', rallied behind the Mahasabha during the famine years.

During the famine, the personal charisma of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the president of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, played a major role in consolidating the support of the troubled middle class belonging to the 'upper' castes. Being an educated Brahmin and a middle class person, Mookerjee could inject a sense of identification into the Bengali middle class. Consequently, the starving middle class looked up to him as a saviour who, unlike the government relief officials, would understand their dilemma between the need to retain high position in the social hierarchy and the necessity to seek help in the form of food, and subsequently would devise relief-mechanisms that will strike a balance between the two. As demonstrated in this chapter, the Mahasabha under the leadership of Mookerjee did oblige.

Being an admittedly Hindu party, the Mahasabha portrayed its widespread relief activities as a proof of the 'intrinsic' munificence and humanism of the Hindus in general. Subsequently, this claimed intrinsic humanism of the Hindus was pitted against the alleged 'communal' nature of the Muslim relief providers like the Khaksars, thereby claiming an overall moral and cultural 'superiority' for the Hindus over the Muslims. The Mahasabha tried to project the relief activities by the Muslim Khaksar volunteers as mere exploitation of the misery of the Hindu destitutes to convert them to Islam in exchange for 'a morsel of food.'¹⁹⁸ Thus, in the Mahasabha's populist Hindu politics, food-relief was made to serve as a communal tool to mobilize the famished Hindus along religious line against the Muslim 'other'. In line with this strategy, the Mahasabha rushed to provide relief to the poorer Hindus to prevent them from converting to Islam for food.¹⁹⁹ The Mahasabha even advocated religiously segregated famine-relief by suggesting that Hindu and Muslim

¹⁹⁸ BPHM, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fought Bengal Famine*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

famine-orphans should be catered to respectively by Hindu and Muslim organisations only.²⁰⁰

In general, during the famine, at the level of everyday politics, the amount of private food-relief became proportional to the political dividend that a certain class or caste was projected to provide. Thus, when political loyalty started determining the thin line between life and death, the already acrimonious communal politics in Bengal became more caustic. Famine-relief emerged as a novel site for practicing overtly communal politics. Overall, politicization of an indispensable prerequisite for human existence called food rendered political bellicosity ingrained in everyday existence, which in turn widened the already existing chasm in the Bengali society along the line of religion.

* * *

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

Conclusion

The economic aspects of food production, procurement, and trade, and the role of food in accentuating everyday forms of ritual discrimination along the lines of caste and religion, have together given rise to a huge body of scholarly literature in the fields of economics and anthropology. As was argued in the introduction to this thesis, studies of the political impacts of food distribution, and of the role of the state, attract relatively less scholarly attention. Indian historiography, where studies of food have focussed mainly on the history of famines, is no exception to this trend. Even the most sophisticated studies of famines in colonial India do not explicitly draw the connection between food and politics. They dwell on the reasons for, responses to, and consequences of famines in great detail, yet they fall short of exploring the political implications of food.

This thesis has tried to fill in that gap in the existing literature. It has tried to do so by linking the role of everyday food to the nature of the late colonial British state in India during the testing years of the Second World War accompanied by widespread food scarcity. It shows that an understanding of state intervention in civil food measures gives us important new insights into the nature and functions of the late colonial state. Intervention in food in India during the war cannot be viewed as a mere extension of the state's duties, nor can it be viewed in isolation. Food and politics were dovetailed in wartime India. State intervention in food gave birth to new forms of political recruitment, most notably in the role of Hindu nationalist organisations in providing free food to famine-victims, as discussed in detail in the sixth chapter.

On a broader level, through the study of state intervention in food, this thesis brings the state back into the historiography of the late colonial India. As is

well known, Indian history writing during the first three decades after independence was viewed through the prism of the anti-colonial movement, and its political dealings with the colonial state. However, the emergence of post-modern, subaltern, and post-colonial perspectives since the early 1980s brought an abrupt change in the landscape of Indian historiography. The colonial state was now relegated to a secondary role in the historiography, and social historical questions concerning class, caste, gender, and religious identity gained dominance in the study of colonial India. Most influential here, of course, has been the Subaltern Studies school of historians, who have seen the role of the state to be minimal in the shaping of popular actions. According to the Subaltern School, popular politics originated and operated in a sovereign domain of agency independent of the state and of organised politics.¹ Though the original agenda contained an intention to apply this understanding only to the study of Indian nationalism, yet, in practice, this understanding and resultant methods and approaches have come to dominate all aspects of the field of colonial Indian history.

This thesis seeks to shift the emphasis back to the role of the state in shaping the concerns, behaviours, and actions of Indian colonial subjects in the area of food and its provisioning. Popular food related concerns did not arise in some independent sovereign domain of subaltern agency. Rather, they emerged in the process of engaging with the new roles of the state, and of ancillary political organisations in food provisioning. Many consumers and households were sceptical or downright hostile to the new official dietary norms and regulations that emerged with the progress of the war, and defied austerity laws and government orders regarding food consumption. Yet the option of withdrawing from the state as a form of defiance or resistance did not exist, as food was an inescapable requirement for physical survival. Consequently, opposition to the state on the site of food could take only one

¹ These arguments are set out most concisely in Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982.

form, that is, the form of active negation of, or resistance to, the state's authority to intervene in food.

State intervention in civil food was conceived in the womb of British military calculations at the start of the war. Of course, the greatly increased military need for a secure supply of adequate and nutritious food could not be met merely by restructuring the military machinery of food procurement. Adequate supplies for the army necessitated an overhaul of the whole civil food situation, drawing the state into the development of wider plans to re-shape civil food supply. Accordingly, this thesis tracks the development of mechanisms of state intervention in civil food. Before the start of the war, state intervention in food in India was confined to periodic ad hoc measures dealing with famines. It was only during the early years of the war that the colonial state began to develop mechanisms for overseeing and controlling food procurement, distribution, and consumption throughout the year as a matter of routine. This new role brought the state very firmly into the kitchens of its subjects, making it a reality in the everyday life of millions of common households across the subcontinent.

As chapter 1 demonstrates, colonial food administration was hamstrung by India's complex internal systems of governance during the war. This thesis has explored the constitutional, political, and administrative predicaments that weakened the wartime food administration. The Government of India Act of 1935 significantly reduced the power of the central colonial state to intervene in the food affairs in many provinces, and increased the leverage of Indian political parties in their negotiations with central government. Elected provincial legislatures and provincial executives made it difficult for the central government to intervene unilaterally in matters relating to food in the provinces. In provinces where there was still an elected party in government during the war, such as in Bengal and Punjab, central intervention had to come through lengthy and tortuous negotiations with the provincial governments, particularly in its hesitant and frustrated attempts to procure food during the peak of the wartime food scarcity in 1943-44. This inevitably

made the central government's food administration much slower and less decisive than it might have been in pre-1935 more unitary system of governance. Additionally, bitter and lengthy bargaining about food imports into India between the Government of India and the War Cabinet in Britain further hampered and delayed the efforts to tackle food crisis in the Indian colony. The delay often proved fatal, as in the case of Bengal where it cost roughly three million lives.

The political tug-of-war and attempts to apportion responsibility among various Indian political parties also contributed to making food administration more difficult. The parties tailored their appeals to different vote banks, which also led them to follow divergent policies vis-à-vis food. The case of the Unionist Party government in Punjab demonstrates this. As we have seen in this thesis, the Punjab government raised a range of protective trade barriers around Punjab to prevent the central government's attempts to export grain to famine-stricken Bengal. The Punjab ministry ostensibly claimed that a protectionist strategy was required to safeguard Punjab from possible future scarcity, whereas its priority in reality was to retain the Punjab peasantry's ability to stockpile and make profits by selling grains in open as well as black markets across India and abroad, markets that displayed an insatiable demand for grain given the wartime stifling of many supply channels. Highlighting these political calculations and compulsions, this thesis seeks to add to our understanding of the wider circumstances within which the Bengal famine developed.

The Quit India movement launched by the Indian National Congress in August 1942, right at the peak of the war, also contributed to the failures of India's food administration. The initial success of the movement in undermining the authority of the colonial state in vast parts of the country led the state to concentrate its efforts and administrative resources in the movement's suppression, distracting it from the focus on food for a brief but crucial period of time. The silence of the Congress on the Bengal Famine is a deafening one. It was partially the result of the internment of the Congress leadership after

the start of the Quit India movement, which put it out of touch with the tragedy in Bengal. Further, the urgent necessity to deal with the brazen communalization of politics in Bengal, and the complexities of political negotiations at the national level, preoccupied Congress during this period inhibiting its response to the Bengal Famine.

This study seeks an understanding of the strained and inadequate nature of the colonial state's attempts to play an active role in food provision during the war. The limitations of this new role of the state in India are most sharply appreciated when placed alongside that of the state in wartime Britain, which also hugely expanded its role in the provision of food. As discussed in the third chapter, the logic of wartime rationing in Britain was to mitigate the effects of scarcity to the greatest possible extent, and to distribute hardship with some degree of equity. These logics were absent in India. Instead, there were fears in India that intervention in food had the potential to stir up popular hostilities during the years of Britain's greatest weakness in the Indian colony. Further, the task of administering civilian food provision was initially perceived as a distraction from what were considered as much more important war needs, such as recruiting and training new soldiers. Yet the pressures to intervene in food, arising particularly out of the necessity to secure food supply to the military, were mounting. Consequently, colonial officials found themselves increasingly compelled to address civilian food needs in connection to attempts to securely provision the army.

This thesis offers insights into the social world of food consumption. While engaging with civil food consumption, food officials faced considerable complexities when they encountered the religious and cultural preferences of different Indian populations. As shown in the course of this thesis, the Hindu taboo on chicken consumption prompted the Food Department of the central government to set up poultries in Muslim majority areas, the aversion to wheat among the rice-eating populations in the eastern and southern provinces forced the department to undertake public awareness campaigns to persuade them to eat wheat, excessive feeding extravagance during

religious and social festivals compelled the department to legally impose moderation and restraint in hospitality during such occasions. Thus, even as pressure on food supplies increased, government food policies were not moulded by mere economic, nutritional, and logistical calculations, but additionally by a wide range of religious and socio-cultural considerations about Indian food preferences. By exploring these issues, this thesis has sought to contribute to the field of consumption studies in India, which has until recently been largely dominated by the studies of consumption of clothes, alcohol, liquors, and luxury objects like ornaments and perfumes by colonial India's emerging middle classes.

The role of the Hindu taboo on beef, and cow slaughter and beef consumption by the Muslims, in causing communal violence has been extensively studied in the scholarly literature on communalism in India. However, there is no thorough study of famine-relief as a tool to propagate communal ideology, and to mobilize the public along communal lines. Against this gap in the existing literature, the fifth and sixth chapters of this thesis have demonstrated in detail that the distribution of free food to the victims of the Bengal Famine had tremendous potential to become a tool for rapid political growth and mobilization, and this potential was fully realized by the Hindu Mahasabha. In doing so, these chapters offer new insights into the ground-level dissemination of populist Hindu communal politics.

For the Hindu Mahasabha, the famine was an important opportunity not only to expand its local support through providing relief, but also to highlight the inability of the Muslim League ministry to keep Bengal supplied with food, and to reduce its acceptability as a party to run future government in post-independence Bengal. These political calculations permeated down to local level, creating suspicion and hostility between Hindu and Muslim employees in the food administration in Bengal. This situation allowed the Hindu Mahasabha to pursue its political agenda by asserting that in the wake of a partition, Muslim personnel who remained in India would work to sabotage Bengal's food administration.

Given the wartime drain on its administrative resources, and the rapid decay in its political authority over India, the colonial state's food project in India was at once too timid, and too overambitious. Amidst the wider imperial crisis in Asia, the colonial Government of India lacked both the tools and the authority to control food procurement, distribution, and consumption across the subcontinent, particularly given its lack of any prior experience in everyday food administration. Its desperation to establish new food controls quickly resulted in policies and actions that failed to take local political situations into account, and often had the result of complicating the existing food situation, and alienating significant sections of Indian population. For middle-class Bengali housewives who looked through their windows to see dead and dying families on the footpaths of Calcutta during the famine, for peasants in Punjab who were forced by austerity laws to eat curries alone without bread to reduce wheat consumption despite having cash in their pockets, for middle class families in Bombay city who found only empty shelves in sweetshops due to restrictions on sugar consumption, for communities across India such as these, the British empire seemed to have failed in one of the elementary duties of government, that is, ensuring that its subjects were fed.

Food scarcity all over India was thus to help garner support for the nationalist demand for independence. Though this contribution of the food crisis to the erosion of colonial hegemony went mostly unrecognized by the Congress nationalists, yet, the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal, as shown in the fifth chapter, took advantage of the situation by launching a scathing attack on the colonial government's failure to prevent widespread scarcity. In the course of almost two centuries of British rule in India, the food project during the war was perhaps the largest project to intervene in the everyday domestic life of the Indians. Through its efforts to curtail wasteful consumption of food on social and religious occasions, and through efforts to move towards more equitable distribution and consumption of food through the introduction of rationing, the wartime state hoped to reap popular support at a moment

critical for its survival. However, the food project proved to be counterproductive. It actually posed vast sections of the Indian society against the state that introduced it.

Finally, this thesis tracks the origin of one of the most important and enduring concerns of the post-colonial Indian state, that is, food for the civilians. The food austerity measures introduced by the colonial state during the war, were continued by the post-colonial Indian state.² Just like the wartime colonial state, the post-colonial state too asked India's new citizens to accept substitute and subsidiary foods in place of rice and wheat to ease the pressure on them.³ It is a striking paradox that although the colonial state's attempts to intervene in the feeding of the civilian population met with little success, nonetheless, all successive federal governments in independent India have maintained extensive involvement in food production, procurement, and distribution. State management of food is one of the most publicized manifestations of the modern Indian state's investment in the welfare of its poorer subjects. Already by 1999, the central government was spending about 90,000 million rupees (approximately 1.4 billion pounds or 2.2 billion US dollars at that time) on food rationing, which was about 50 per cent of all government spending on anti-poverty programmes in India.⁴ As demonstrated by the appendix 2, just like the colonial state, in post-colonial India provincial governments like that of West Bengal has incurred considerable financial responsibility by arranging for supplementary quantities of rationed foods for poor people during religious festivals.⁵

² For a detailed exploration of how the post-colonial Indian state tried to use food austerity measures as part of a campaign to 'remake Indian diets', particularly in the late 1940s and 1950s, see Benjamin Siegel, 'Self-Help which Ennobles a Nation': Development, Citizenship, and the Obligations of Eating in India's Austerity Years', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2016.

³ Idem.

⁴ Jos Mooij, 'Dilemmas in Food Policy: About Institutional Contradictions and Vested Interests', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 52, Dec. 1999, p. A-114.

⁵ Government Order no. 397 (Sanc)/ FS/N/Sectt./BPI&F/6B-20/2011, from Joint Secretary, Food and Supplies Department, Government of West Bengal, to the Pay and Accounts Officer, Government of West Bengal, 26-08-2014, https://www.wbpds.gov.in/rptForUsers/rptNotificationOrderDtls_usr.aspx, accessed on 30 December 2016.

Ration shops selling food grains at heavily subsidised prices are ubiquitous in every big Indian village, city, and market town.⁶ Even after the dismantling of India's old 'Permit Raj'⁷, and the ushering in of a new age of neo-liberal governance since the early 1990s, it has been unthinkable that any Indian government would withdraw from such an extensive involvement in food in any foreseeable future.⁸ In fact, in the run-up to the national election of 2014, the last Congress-led federal government of the United Progressive Alliance introduced a historic extension of subsidised food to the corpus of law, with the National Food Security Act of 2013, which is possibly the biggest food-security programme in the world aiming 'to provide subsidised food grains to approximately two thirds of India's population' of roughly 1.3 billion.⁹

⁶ For literature on public distribution of food in independent India, see R. N. Chopra, *Evolution of Food Policy in India*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1981. R. N. Chopra, *Food Policy in India - A Survey*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988. K. R. Venugopal, *Deliverance from Hunger - The Public Distribution System in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1992. Jos E Mooij, *Food Policy and the Indian State: The Public Distribution System in South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999. T. N. Krishnan and N. Krishnaji (eds.) *Public Support for Food Security: The Public Distribution System in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi and London, 2000. Bhaskar Majumdar, *Political Economy of Public Distribution System in India*, Concept Publishing Co., New Delhi, 2009. Jagdish N. Bhagwati and Balbir S. Sihag, 'Dual Markets, Rationing, and Queues', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 95, no. 4, Dec. 1980. Jos Mooij, 'Food Policy and Politics: The Political Economy of the Public Distribution System in India', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1998. Jos Mooij, 'Food Policy in India: the Importance of Electoral Politics in Policy Implementation', *Journal of International Development*, vol. 11, no. 4, Jun. 1999. Jos Mooij, 'Real Targeting: The case of Food Distribution in India', *Food Policy*, vol. 24, no. 1, Feb. 1999. Jos Mooij, 'Dilemmas in Food Policy: About Institutional Contradictions and Vested Interests', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 52, Dec. 1999. Madhura Swaminathan, 'Structural Adjustment, Food Security and System of Public Distribution of Food', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, no. 26, Jun. 1996. Madhura Swaminathan, 'Understanding the Costs of the Food Corporation of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 52, Dec. 1999. B. Ramaswami and P. Balakrishnan, 'Food Prices and the Efficiency of Public Intervention: The Case of the Public Distribution System in India', *Food Policy*, vol. 27, nos. 5–6, Oct. – Dec. 2002. Reetika Khera, 'India's Public Distribution System: Utilisation and Impact', *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 47, no. 7, Mar. 2011. Deepankar Basu and Debarshi Das, 'Social Hierarchies and Public Distribution of Food in Rural India', *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 51, no. 12, Sep. 2015.

⁷ The 'Permit Raj', or 'Licence Raj' ('raj' means rule in Hindi), was the period between 1947 and 1990 when in India licences, or approvals, were required from numerous government agencies to set up and run industries and businesses. The procedure for obtaining all required licences or permits was a lengthy and complex one involving red tape. The Permit Raj was primarily a result of the successive Indian governments' decision to have a planned economy where all aspects of the economy were controlled by the state through regulations, and licences were given to a select few.

⁸ See Jos Mooij, 'Food Policy and Politics'.

⁹ Priyam Sengupta and Kakali Mukhopadhyay, 'Economic and Environmental Impact of National Food Security Act of India', *Agricultural and Food Economics*, vol. 4, no. 5, February 2016, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40100-016-0048-7>, accessed on 9 December 2016, p. 1.

It is remarkable that the origin of this very wide-ranging state-role in food lies only in the last nine years of British administration in India, between 1939 and 1947. Much of the legislation and the administrative machinery employed by successive post-colonial governments have been built on foundations laid during the Second World War. The development of food administration in colonial and post-colonial India must be therefore seen in a single frame in view of these powerful continuities. Wartime measures have far outlived the war, and have become permanent fixtures of the post-war and post-colonial structure of governance in India.

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For the full text of the National Food Security Act, 2013, see *The Gazette of India*, 'Extraordinary', part II, New Delhi, 10th September 2013, available at the website of India Code, Legislative Department, <http://indiacode.nic.in/acts-in-pdf/202013.pdf>, accessed on 9 December 2016. For the financial implications of the cost of food subsidy under the National Food Security Act, and other costs of implementing the act, see Prachi Mishra, 'Financial and Distributional Implications of the Food Security Law', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 39, 28 Sep, 2013, and Dipa Sinha, 'Cost of Implementing the National Food Security Act', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 39, 28 Sep, 2013.

Appendix 1

List of Food Producing Installations Approved for Production for the Defence Services during 1945

Source: Appendix II, appended to the circular letter on the subject 'Post-war development of Food Industries' from J. M. Lobo Prabhu, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, to 'All Provincial Governments and local Administrations', 5th October 1945, No. A. -III/240 (3), Department of Food (Division III), in file no. 356, 1945, on the subject 'Post-war development of food industries', Mysore Residency, Bangalore, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

| APPENDIX II. | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>List of Food Producing Installations approved for production for the Defence Services during 1945.</i> | | |
| COMMODITY. | NAME OF THE FIRM. | LOCATION. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| I. Bengal. | | |
| Biscuit Shakapara | Britania Biscuit Co., Ltd. | Calcutta (Dum Dum). |
| | Shama Biscuit Co., Ltd. | Calcutta. |
| | Lilly Biscuit Co. | Calcutta. |
| Cigarettes B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Calcutta. |
| Cigarettes I.T. | Godfrey Phillips India, Ltd. | Calcutta. |
| | National Tobacco Co. of India, Ltd. | Calcutta. |
| | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Kidderpore. |
| Curry Powder | Bengal Canning & Condiments Works | Calcutta. |
| Malt | Bengal Breweries, Ltd. | Dum Dum. |
| Oil Cooking Hydrogenated | Snow White Food Products Co., Ltd. | Howrah. |
| Powder Condiment | Hira Lal Devi Prashad | Calcutta. |
| | Resources of India, Ltd. | Calcutta. |
| Tea | Harrison & Crossfield, Ltd. | Calcutta. |
| Tobacco B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Kidderpore. |
| Vegetable Products | Snow White Food Products Co., Ltd. | Howrah. |
| II. Bihar. | | |
| Dehydrated Onions | Bhana Mal Gulzari Mal | Patna. |
| Dehydrated Potatoes | Bhana Mal Gulzari Mal | Patna. |
| Cigarettes B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Monghyr. |
| Powder Condiment | R.S.S. Arora & Co. | Patna City. |
| Cigarettes I.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Monghyr. |
| Rum | Cawnpore Sugar Works | Marhowa. |
| | Amritsar Sugar Co., Ltd. | Muzaffarpur. |
| Sugar | Harinagar Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Ramnagar (District Champaran). |
| | New Swadeshi Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Narkatiaganj (District Champaran). |
| | Saugauli Sugar Works, Ltd. | Saugauli. |
| | Gaya Sugar Mills, Ltd. | P. O. Gurdur Mills. |
| Tobacco B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Saharanpur. |
| | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Monghyr. |
| Vegetable Products | Rohtas Industries | Dalmianagar. |
| III. Bombay. | | |
| Biscuit Shakapara | Britania Biscuit Co., Ltd. | Bombay. |
| | Parley Products Manufacturing Co. | Bombay. |
| | Sathe Biscuit Co. | Poona. |
| Cigarettes B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| Cigarettes I.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| | Deccan Tobacco Works | Poona. |
| | Godfrey Phillips India, Ltd. | Andheri. |

| COMMODITY. 1 | NAME OF THE FIRM. 2 | LOCATION. 3 |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| III. Bombay—contd. | | |
| Coffee Ground | Himalaya Food Products | Mahim, Bombay. |
| | United Supplies | Bombay. |
| | Harsukh Das Jodh Raj | Bombay. |
| | Polsons, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| Curry Powder | Himalaya Food Products | Bombay. |
| Dehydrated Onions | The General Supplies | Nasik. |
| Golden Syrup | Rawalgaon Sugar Farm, Ltd. | Nasik. |
| Margarine | Hindustan Vanaspati Manufactur- ing Co. | Bombay. |
| Mustard Ground | S. M. Rajgar & Co. | Bombay. |
| Oil Cooking | Hindustan Vanaspati Manufactur- ing Co. | Mazagaon, Bombay. |
| | Vegetable Vitamin Food | Seon, Bombay. |
| | The Bharat Vanaspati Products | Pachora. |
| | Indian Vegetable Products | Bombay. |
| | Swastik Oil Mills, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| Oil Salad | Amrut Oil Mills, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| | Bharat Vanaspati Products | Pachora. |
| | Indian Vegetable Products | Bombay. |
| | Hindustan Vanaspati Manufactur- ing Co. | Bombay. |
| Pepper Ground | Himalaya Food Products | Bombay. |
| Powder Condiment | S. M. Rajgar & Co. | Bombay. |
| | Tricum Das & Co. | Bombay. |
| | Visanji Mohan Lal & Co. | Bombay. |
| | Himalaya Food Products | Bombay. |
| Sugar | Godavari Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Sakarwadi. |
| | The Belapur Co., Ltd. | Harigaon. |
| | Briham Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate, Ltd. | Baragaon (District Sholapur). |
| | Maharashtra Sugar Mills, Ltd. | P. O. Tilaknagar (Dist. Ahmednagar). |
| | The Saswad Mill Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Akluj (District Shola- pur). |
| | Sri Ghang Deo Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Pantemba. |
| | Walchand Nagar Industries, Ltd. | Walchandnagar. |
| Tobacco B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| Vegetable Products | Amrit Vanaspati, Ltd. | Bombay. |
| | The Amrut Oil Mills | Bombay. |
| | The Bharat Vanaspati Oil Mills | Pachora. |
| | Hindustan Vanaspati Manufactur- ing Co. | Mazagaon. |
| | Indian Vegetable Products | Cotton Green, Bombay. |
| Wheat Products | Swastik Oil Mills | Bombay. |
| | Vegetable Vitamin Food Products | Seon, Bombay. |
| | Wallace Flour Mills, "B" & "C" | Bombay. |

| COMMODITY. | NAME OF THE FIRM. | LOCATION. |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| IV. Delhi. | | |
| Biscuit Shakapara | Delhi Biscuit Co., Ltd. | Delhi. |
| Cigarettes B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | New Delhi. |
| Cigarettes I.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | New Delhi. |
| Curry Powder | Ram Prashad Mutton Lal | Delhi. |
| Oil Cooking Hyd. | Ganesh Flour Mills Co., Ltd. | Delhi. |
| Powder Condiment | Ram Prashad Mutton Lal | Delhi. |
| Vegetable Products | Ganesh Flour Mills | Delhi. |
| Wheat Products | Delhi Flour Mills | Delhi. |
| V. Madras. | | |
| Cigarettes B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Bangalore. |
| Coffee Ground | United Coffee Supplies Co. Sugesan & Co. Thomcos Produce, Ltd. Vasans, Ltd. India Coffee Syndicate | Coimbatore. Madras. Allepey. Madura. Madras. |
| Curry Powder | P. Venkatachellam Ramu & Co. Shaffee Mohd. & Co. Thomcos Produce, Ltd. United Coffee Supplies Co. Parry & Co. Parry & Co. A. L. A. Mathuveerapa Chettiar | Madras. Madras. Madras. Quilon. Coimbatore. Mettupalayam. Ranipet. Shiyali. |
| Dehydrated Potatoes | Parry & Co. Parry & Co. | Mettupalayam. Ranipet. |
| Lime/Lemon Juice and Cordials | India Fruits, Ltd. | Madras. |
| Mustard Ground | P. Venkatachellam | Madras. |
| Oil Cooking Hyd. | Mysore Vegetable Oil Products Mettur Chemical Industries | Madras. Mettur Dam. |
| Pepper Ground | Shafi Mohammed & Co. P. Venkatachellam | Madras. Madras. |
| Powder Condiment | Ramu & Co. Shafi Mohammed & Co. Thomcos Produce, Ltd. | Madras. Madras. Quilon. |
| Vegetable Products | Mettur Chemical Industries | Mettur Dam. |
| VI. N.-W.F.P. | | |
| Dehydrated Onions | Frontier Dehydrating Factory | Peshawar. |
| Dehydrated Potatoes | Frontier Dehydrating Factory | Peshawar. |

| COMMODITY. | NAME OF THE FIRM. | LOCATION. |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| VII. Punjab. | | |
| Atta | Diwan Kirpa Ram, Radha Kishan (Krishna Roller Flour Mills) | Ludhiana. |
| | Dhanpat Mal, Jwala Das (The Okara Flour & General Mills) | Okara. |
| | Seth Dhanpat Mal, Jwala Dass (Jwala Flour Mills) | Amritsar. |
| | Lakshmi Electric Flour Mills | Ludhiana. |
| | Shah Mohd. Ismail, H. Maula Bux (Colony Flour Mills) | Lyallpur. |
| | Seth Sukhdev Bux Flour Mills | Multan City. |
| Cigarettes I.T. | Union Tobacco Co., Ltd. | Jullundur City. |
| Curry Powder | Preservation Syndicate | Amritsar. |
| | Ahuja & Morrisons | Lahore. |
| | Industrial Syndicate | Amritsar. |
| | Standard Drugs Co., Ltd. | Amritsar. |
| Dehydrated Onions | Allied Industries & Potato Plant | Jullundur City. |
| | Kapur & Co. | Amritsar. |
| | Preservation Syndicate | Amritsar. |
| | Punjab Food Products | Ambala Cantonment. |
| Dehydrated Potatoes | Allied Industries & Potato Plant | Jullundur City. |
| | Kapur & Co. | Amritsar. |
| | Preservation Syndicate | Amritsar. |
| | Punjab Food Products | Ambala Cantonment. |
| Lime/Lemon Juice and Cordials. | Preservation Syndicate | Amritsar. |
| | R. L. Shafiqat & Co. | Amritsar. |
| | Standard Drugs Co. | Amritsar. |
| Malt | Indian Mildura Fruit Farms | Renala Khurd. |
| | Dyer Meakin Breweries | Kasauli. |
| | Murree Brewerie Co. | Rawalpindi. |
| Mustard Ground | Shadi Ram & Co. | Lahore. |
| | Industrial Syndicate | Ambala Cantonment. |
| | United Industrial Corporation | Ambala Cantonment. |
| Oil Cooking Hyd. | Ganesh Flour Mills | Lyallpur. |
| Pepper Ground | Industrial Syndicate | Ambala Cantonment. |
| | Shadi Ram & Co. | Lahore. |
| | United Industrial Corporation | Ambala Cantonment. |
| Powder Condiment | Devi Dayal, Om Prakash | Lahore. |
| | Ch. Khursheed Ahmed & Co. | Lahore. |
| | Ahuja & Morrison | Lahore. |
| | A. Karim & Co. | Amritsar. |
| | Amritsar Dehydrated Products | Amritsar. |
| | Industrial Syndicate | Ambala Cantonment. |
| | Kapoor & Co. | Amritsar. |
| | Preservation Syndicate | Amritsar. |
| | Punjab Food Products | Ambala Cantonment. |
| | Sir Sobha Singh & Co. | Amritsar. |
| | United Industrial Corporation | Ambala Cantonment. |
| Mohammed Latif Mohammed Rashid | Budhlada. | |

| COMMODITY. | NAME OF THE FIRM | LOCATION. |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Rum | Karnal Distillery Co., Ltd. | Karnal. |
| | Amritsar Distillery Co. | Khasa, Amritsar. |
| Salt Refined | Amritsar Chemical Food Products | Amritsar. |
| | Bharat Salt Refinery | Pind Dadan Khan. |
| | Khewra Salt Refinery | Pind Dadan Khan. |
| | National Salt Peter & Basic Industries | Lahore. |
| | Victory Salt Refinery | Lahore. |
| | T. S. Sethi & Co. | Lahore. |
| | Suri & Co. | Lahore. |
| | Northern India Salt Range Refinery | Choa Saidan Shah. |
| | R. L. Shafiqat | Amritsar. |
| | Upper India Chemical & Mineral Industries. | Amritsar. |
| Vegetable Products | Ganesh Flour Mills | Lyallpur. |
| Wheat Products | Ganesh Flour Mills | Lyallpur. |
| | Safuj Flour Mills | Ferozepur. |
| | Punjab Flour & General Mills | Shahdara. |
| VIII. Sind. | | |
| Biscuit Shakapara | J. B. Mandha Ram & Co. | Sukkur. |
| Salt Refined | Grax, Ltd. | Karachi. |
| Sugar | Pioneer Sind Sugar Mills Co., Ltd. | Mohattanagar. |
| IX. U.P. | | |
| Biscuit Shakapara | Modi Supplies Corporation, Ltd. | Modinagar. |
| Cigarettes B.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Saharanpur. |
| Cigarettes I.T. | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. | Saharanpur. |
| Curry Powder | Koka Mal & Sons, Ltd. | Agra. |
| | Govind Agricultural Farm | Meerut. |
| | Modi Food Products, Ltd. | Modinagar. |
| | Modi Foodstuffs, Ltd. | Hapur. |
| Dehydrated Onions | Dehydration & General Supplies | Meerut. |
| | Ganges Dehydration Works | Saharanpur. |
| | Modi Dehydration, Ltd. | Hapur. |
| | Modi Food Products, Ltd. | Begamabad. |
| | Caprihan Bros. | Agra. |
| Dehydrated Potatoes | Caprihan Bros. | Agra. |
| | Dehydration & General Supplies | Meerut. |
| | Ganges Dehydration Works | Saharanpur. |
| | Modi Dehydrators, Ltd. | Hapur. |
| | Modi Food Products, Ltd. | Begamabad. |
| Golden Syrup | Modi Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Meerut. |
| | Daurala Sugar Works | Meerut. |
| Lime/Lemon Juice and Cordials. | G. G. Fruit Preserving Factory | Agra. |
| Malt | Dyer Meakin Breweries | Ranikhet. |
| Mustard Ground | Modi Food Products, Ltd. | Modinagar. |
| Oil Cooking Hyd. | Modi Vanaspati Manufacturing Co., Ltd. | Meerut. |

| COMMODITY. | NAME OF THE FIRM. | LOCATION |
|-------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. | 2. | 3. |
| Oil Salad | Modi Vanaspati Manufacturing Co., Ltd. | Meerut. |
| | Northern India Oil Industries, Ltd. | Cawnpore. |
| Pepper Ground | Govind Agricultural Farms | Meerut. |
| Powder Condiment | Dehydrator Food & General Suppliers | Meerut. |
| | Govind Agricultural Farms | Meerut. |
| | Modi Foodstuffs, Ltd. | Hapur. |
| | Modi Food Products, Ltd. | Modinagar. |
| Rum | Carew & Co. | Rosa. |
| | Dyer Meakin Breweries | Lucknow. |
| Sugar | Deoria Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Gorakhpur. |
| | Kesur Sugar Works, Ltd. | Baheri. |
| | Modi Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Modinagar. |
| | Oudh Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Harigaon. |
| | Ajuddhia Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Raja Ka Sahaspur. |
| | Amritsar Sugar Co., Ltd. | Rohana Kalan (Muzaffarnagar). |
| | Basti Sugar Mills Co., Ltd. | Basti. |
| | Basti Sugar Mills Co., Ltd. | Walterganj. |
| | Burhwal Sugar Mills Co., Ltd. | Burhwal. |
| | Daurala Sugar Works | Daurala, Meerut. |
| | Diwan Sugar Mills | Sekoti, Sanda. |
| | Jaswant Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Meerut City. |
| | Hindustan Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Golagokarannath. |
| | H. R. Sugar Factory, Ltd. | Bareilly. |
| | Lakshmi Sugar Mills Co., Ltd. | Hardoi. |
| | Lakshmi Sugar & Oil Mills | Hardoi. |
| | L. H. Sugar Factory & Oil Mills | Pilibhit. |
| | L. H. Sugar Factory & Oil Mills, Ltd. | Kashipur. |
| | Noori Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Bhatni. |
| | Punjab Sugar Mills Co., Ltd. | Ghughli. |
| | Sarya Sugar Factory | Gorakhpur. |
| | Saksaria Sugar Factory | Bhobhnan. |
| | Seth Shiv Prashad Benarsi Das Sugar Mills. | Bijnor. |
| | Shankar Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Captainganj. |
| | Shambhaoli Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Buksar. |
| | Sri Sita Ram Co., Ltd. | Batalpur. |
| | Upper Doab Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Muzaffarnagar. |
| | Upper Ganges Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Seohara. |
| | Upper India Sugar Mills, Ltd. | Khatauli. |
| | Walterganj Sugar Factory | Walterganj. |
| Vegetable Products | Amrit Vanaspati Co., Ltd. | Ghaziabad. |
| | Ganesh Flour Mills | Cawnpore. |
| | Modi Vanaspati Manufacturing Co. | Modinagar. |
| Wheat Products | Shri Venkateshwar Flour Mills | Lucknow. |
| <i>X. Cochin State.</i> | | |
| Oil Cooking Hyd. | Tata Oil Mills | Tatapuram. |
| Vegetable Products | Tata Oil Mills | Tatapuram. |

| COMMODITY. | NAME OF THE FIRM. | LOCATION. |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| <i>XI. Gwalior State.</i> | | |
| Cigarettes I.T. ... | Central India Tobacco Co., Ltd. ... | Lashkar. |
| <i>XII. Kapurthala State.</i> | | |
| Powder Condiment ... | S. B. Chaudhari ... | Kapurthala. |
| Rum ... | Jagatjit Distilling Industries, Ltd. ... | Hamira. |
| <i>XIII. Mysore State.</i> | | |
| Cigarettes B.T. ... | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. ... | Bangalore. |
| Cigarettes I.T. ... | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. ... | Bangalore. |
| Coffee Ground ... | Sakamas Coffee Works ... | Bangalore City. |
| Oil Cooking Hyd. ... | Mysore Vegetable Product ... | Bangalore. |
| Rennet Tablets ... | Biochemical Products ... | Bangalore. |
| Sugar ... | Mysore Sugar Co., Ltd. ... | Mandya. |
| Tobacco B.T. ... | Woodward & Thomson, Ltd. ... | Bangalore. |
| Vegetable Products ... | Mysore Vegetable Products ... | Bangalore. |
| <i>XIV. Nabha State.</i> | | |
| Dehydrated Onions ... | Modi Food Supplies, Ltd. ... | Govindgarh. |
| Dehydrated Potatoes ... | Modi Food Supplies, Ltd. ... | Govindgarh. |
| <i>XV. Patiala State.</i> | | |
| Biscuit Shakapara ... | Patiala Biscuit Manufacturing Co., Ltd. | Rajpura. |
| Wheat Products ... | Bhupendra Flour Mills ... | Bhatinda. |

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Appendix 2

List of Relief Centres Run by the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee, and the Number of People Served

Source: Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, *How Hindu Mahasabha Fight Bengal Famine*, Calcutta, 1943, in Papers of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Printed Material, S. No. 9, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, pp. 6-11.

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>President</i> —DR. SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE. | | | |
| <i>Secretaries</i> —MR. MONORANJAN CHOUDHURY and PROF. HARICHARAN GHOSH. | | | |
| Total funds collected | ... | ... | Rs. 4,95,107-5-0 |
| Total Expenditure | ... | ... | Rs. 3,76,946-0-1 |
| In kind—(1) Food grains, approximately 20,000 maunds. (2) Cloth 32,000 pieces. (3) Goggles and shirts 32,000 pieces and blankets 10,000 pieces. Medicine worth Rs. 10,000/-. | | | |
| Calcutta Milk Canteens are getting milk from the Indian Red Cross Society. | | | |
| | No. of people served. | | No. of people served. |
| FREE KITCHEN :— | | FREE RATION :— | |
| <i>Calcutta</i> | | <i>Barisal</i> | |
| 1. Behala Thakurpukur ... | 750 | 1. Khayrabad ... | 67 |
| 2. Paikpara ... | 1,000 | 2. Chandrabar ... | 88 |
| <i>Murshidabad</i> | | 3. Gobindpur ... | 42 |
| 1. Jemokandi ... | 828 | 4. Rahamatpur ... | 76 |
| <i>Maldah</i> | | 5. Barisal Town ... | 388 |
| 1. Beraghoria ... | 185 | 6. Kalaskati ... | 122 |
| <i>Mymensingh</i> | | 7. Seemantakati ... | 50 |
| 1. Mymensingh Town ... | 200 | 8. Patuakhali ... | 44 |
| <i>Faridpur</i> | | 9. Doulatkhan ... | 56 |
| 1. Amgram ... | 500 | 10. Pecrojjpur ... | 250 |
| <i>Noakhali</i> | | 11. Raghuchar ... | 50 |
| 1. South Satara ... | 124 | 12. Banaripara ... | 50 |
| 2. Manipur ... | 100 | 13. Larua ... | 50 |
| | 224 | 14. Bhutsala ... | 50 |
| <i>Dinajpur</i> | | 15. Mahilara ... | 200 |
| 1. Parbatipur ... | 400 | 16. Baghda ... | 50 |
| <i>Khulna</i> | | 17. Khalisakota ... | 125 |
| 1. Beenerpota ... | 200 | 18. Lashkarpur ... | 50 |
| <i>24 Parganas</i> | | 19. Guthia ... | 50 |
| 1. Jhinkihat ... | 1,000 | 20. Patarhat ... | 50 |
| 2. Phulbani ... | 100 | 21. Dehergati ... | 50 |
| | 1,100 | 22. Jaguarupatali ... | 50 |
| <i>Burdwan</i> | | 23. Nalchira ... | 75 |
| 1. Ketugram ... | 60 | 24. Bhola ... | 262 |
| <i>Hoogly</i> | | | 2,343 |
| 1. Mayapur Rasulpur ... | 800 | <i>Mymensingh</i> | |
| | | 1. Charpara ... | 20 |
| | | 2. Tangail ... | 2,500 |
| | | 3. Bajitpur ... | 100 |
| | | 4. Naska ... | 100 |
| | | | 2,720 |

| | No. of people served. | | No. of people served. |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Dacca</i> | | <i>Tipperah</i> | |
| 1. Chawkmirpur | 22 | 1. Brahmanbaria | 500 |
| 2. Malikanda | 15 | 2. Gobindia | 225 |
| 3. Nali | 125 | 3. Bajapti | 225 |
| 4. Nayabari | 125 | 4. Boalia | 225 |
| 5. Manikganj | 125 | 5. Paikpara | 225 |
| 6. Tara | 125 | 6. Meher | 225 |
| 7. Sreebari | 125 | 7. Muradnagar | 75 |
| 8. Singjuri | 125 | 8. Jatrapur | 75 |
| 9. Aminpur | 1,004 | 9. Elliotgunge | 75 |
| 10. Hiramara | 80 | 10. Saripur | 75 |
| 11. Furshail | 50 | 11. Jethagram | 97 |
| 12. Narsingdi | 75 | 12. Chandpur | 625 |
| 13. Hasara | 500 | | 2,647 |
| | 2,496 | <i>Pabna</i> | |
| <i>Faridpur</i> | | 1. Badal | 280 |
| 1. Faridpur Town | 112 | 2. Pabna Town | 750 |
| 2. Mehendrasi | 105 | 3. Shahjadpur | 50 |
| 3. Madaripur | 1,400 | 4. Bera | 939 |
| 4. Birmohon | 100 | 5. Puranbharenga | 100 |
| 5. Shirkara | 250 | 6. Dembra | 177 |
| 6. Megna Union | 100 | 7. Dhopadaha | 64 |
| 7. Chappa | 100 | 8. Sthalnawhata | 250 |
| | 2,177 | 9. Brahmangram | 50 |
| | | | 2,610 |
| <i>Noakhali</i> | | <i>Rajshahi</i> | |
| 1. Feni | 238 | 1. Bishia | 62 |
| 2. Noakhali Municipality and Suberbs | 500 | <i>Dinajpur</i> | |
| 3. Sandwip | 500 | 1. Parbatipur | 270 |
| 4. Gardharbapur and Jamirtali | 250 | <i>Rangpur</i> | |
| 5. Chayani and Bhabani Jibanpur | 250 | 1. Kurigram | 100 |
| 6. Satgharia and Ranhati | 250 | 2. Rangpur Town | 50 |
| 7. Ramdi Cum Salaia | 300 | | 150 |
| 8. Hugli Cum Ramballaypur | 200 | <i>Bogra</i> | |
| 9. Panjala Cum Hotatia | 200 | 1. Bogra Town | 50 |
| 10. Jaynarayanpur | 250 | <i>Jessore</i> | |
| 11. Jirtali Cum Athalia | 250 | 1. Itna | 280 |
| 12. Ekharbpur | 100 | 2. North Narail | 50 |
| 13. Khandal (Feni) | 300 | 3. Ganganandapur | 50 |
| 14. Amirabad | 200 | 4. South Narail | 62 |
| 15. Raiyora | 200 | 5. Saralia | 50 |
| | 4,000 | 6. Amritabazar | 100 |
| | | | 542 |

| | No. of people served. | | No. of people served. |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| <i>Khulna</i> | | <i>Haverah</i> | |
| 1. Garibpur ... | 52 | 1. Nizhalia ... | 1,000 |
| 2. Haldiabunia ... | 95 | 2. Amardaha ... | 100 |
| 3. Mulghar ... | 100 | | 1,100 |
| 4. Gangachana ... | 160 | <i>Midnapore</i> | |
| 5. Magura ... | 256 | 1. Baloolati ... | 625 |
| 6. Bagerhat ... | 300 | 2. Nandigram ... | 625 |
| 7. Beladah ... | 50 | | 1,250 |
| 8. Dumuria ... | 250 | | |
| 9. Raruli ... | 25 | | |
| 10. Khulna Town ... | 750 | | |
| 11. Mitratentulia ... | 100 | | |
| | 2,088 | | |
| <i>Nadia</i> | | CHEAP CANTEEN :— | |
| 1. Chithalia ... | 86 | <i>Calcutta</i> | |
| 2. Chuadanga ... | 82 | 1. 8/A, Shibnarayan Das Lane ... | 500 |
| | 168 | 2. Justice Dwarka Nath Road ... | 500 |
| <i>24 Parganas</i> | | 3. 15, Jadu Bhattacharjee Lane (Kalighat) ... | 800 |
| 1. Karanjali ... | 1,600 | 4. 30, Banshtolla Golley ... | 500 |
| 2. Tspakhali ... | 1,400 | 5. 15, Sastitollah Road ... | 500 |
| 3. Raidighi ... | 500 | 6. Hindu Mahasabha Khadya Prathisthan, 152, Amherst Street, Calcutta ... | 500 |
| 4. Gokarni ... | 400 | 7. 27, Sastitolla Lane ... | 500 |
| 5. Bardrone ... | 900 | 8. 8/A, Marhatta Ditch Lane ... | 500 |
| 6. Jadavpur ... | 50 | | 4,300 |
| 7. Paikhati ... | 250 | | |
| 8. Basirhat ... | 25 | | |
| 9. Sivalaya ... | 500 | | |
| 10. Naihati ... | 375 | | |
| | 5,900 | | |
| <i>Burdwan</i> | | <i>Mymensingh</i> | |
| 1. Khangram ... | 540 | 1. Mymensingh Town ... | 400 |
| 2. Burdwan ... | 250 | | |
| 3. Kulti ... | 100 | <i>Dacca</i> | |
| | 890 | 1. Sunity Sangha ... | 500 |
| <i>Hoogly</i> | | <i>Khulna</i> | |
| 1. Banchia Baidyapur ... | 1,048 | 1. Beenerpota ... | 20 |
| 2. Jangipara ... | 373 | | |
| 3. Jirah ... | 98 | <i>24 Parganas</i> | |
| 4. Fulai ... | 100 | 1. Dhakuria ... | 500 |
| | 1,619 | | |
| | | <i>Hoogly</i> | |
| | | 1. Mayapur Rasulpur ... | 900 |

| CHEAP RATION :— | | No. of people served. | | No. of people served. |
|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | <i>Faridpur</i> | |
| <i>Barisal</i> | | | | |
| 1. Chandrahar ... | ... | 264 | 1. Faridpur Town ... | 330 |
| 2. Gobindpur ... | ... | 126 | 2. Amgram ... | 180 |
| 3. Rahamatpur ... | ... | 229 | 3. Madaripur ... | 3,600 |
| 4. Barisal Town ... | ... | 1,162 | 4. Shirkhara ... | 750 |
| 5. Kalaskati ... | ... | 365 | 5. Megna Union ... | 300 |
| 6. Srimantakati ... | ... | 150 | | 5,180 |
| 7. Patuakhali ... | ... | 133 | <i>Noakhali</i> | |
| 8. Daulatkhan ... | ... | 169 | 1. Noakhali Town ... | 1,875 |
| 9. Peerojpur ... | ... | 750 | <i>Tipperah</i> | |
| 10. Raghurchar ... | ... | 150 | 1. Brahmanbaria ... | 1,500 |
| 11. Banaripara ... | ... | 150 | 2. Gobindia ... | 375 |
| 12. Larua ... | ... | 150 | 3. Bajapti ... | 375 |
| 13. Bhatsala ... | ... | 150 | 4. Boalia ... | 375 |
| 14. Mahilara ... | ... | 600 | 5. Paikpara ... | 375 |
| 15. Baghdah ... | ... | 150 | 6. Meher ... | 375 |
| 16. Khalishakota ... | ... | 375 | 7. Muradnagar ... | 225 |
| 17. Laskarpur ... | ... | 150 | 8. Jatrapur ... | 225 |
| 18. Guthia ... | ... | 150 | 9. Elliotgunj ... | 225 |
| 19. Patarghat ... | ... | 150 | 10. Saripur ... | 225 |
| 20. Dehergati ... | ... | 150 | 11. Jethagram ... | 392 |
| 21. Jaguarapatali ... | ... | 150 | 12. Chandpur ... | 1,875 |
| 22. Nalchira ... | ... | 225 | | 6,542 |
| 23. Bhola ... | ... | 1,957 | <i>Pabna</i> | |
| | | 8,005 | 1. Pabna Town ... | 2,250 |
| <i>Murshidabad</i> | | | 2. Sahazadpur ... | 50 |
| 1. Jemokandi ... | ... | 114 | 3. Sthalnawhata ... | 750 |
| <i>Maldah</i> | | | 4. Brahmangram ... | 150 |
| 1. Maldah Town ... | ... | 500 | | 3,200 |
| <i>Mymensingh</i> | | | <i>Rajshahi</i> | |
| 1. Tangail ... | ... | 3,000 | 1. Bishia ... | 188 |
| <i>Dacca</i> | | | <i>Rangpur</i> | |
| 1. Nali ... | ... | 375 | 1. Rangpur Town ... | 150 |
| 2. Nayabari ... | ... | 375 | <i>Bogra</i> | |
| 3. Manikgunj ... | ... | 375 | 1. Bogra Town ... | 150 |
| 4. Tara ... | ... | 375 | <i>Jessore</i> | |
| 5. Sreehari ... | ... | 375 | 1. North Narail ... | 150 |
| 6. Singjuri ... | ... | 375 | 2. Ganganandapur ... | 150 |
| 7. Fursail ... | ... | 150 | 3. South Narail ... | 188 |
| 8. Narsingdi ... | ... | 225 | 4. Sarulia ... | 150 |
| 9. Hasara ... | ... | 1,500 | 5. Amritabazar ... | 300 |
| | | 4,125 | | 938 |

10

| | | No. of people served. | MILK CANTEENS:— | | No. of people served. |
|--------------------|-----|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| <i>Khulna</i> | | | <i>Calcutta</i> | | |
| 1. Mulghar | ... | 900 | 1. 8/B, Shibnarayan Das Lane | ... | 200 |
| 2. Magura | ... | 750 | 2. Behala Thakurpukur | ... | 200 |
| 3. Bagerhat | ... | 900 | 3. 15, Jadu Bhattacharjee Lane | ... | 800 |
| 4. Beledah | ... | 150 | 4. Raja Nabakissen Street | ... | 200 |
| 5. Dumuria | ... | 750 | 5. 162, Bowbazar Street | ... | 200 |
| 6. Raruli | ... | 75 | 6. 25, Puddapukur Road | ... | 200 |
| 7. Khulna Town | ... | 1,825 | | | |
| | | 4,650 | | | 1,800 |
| <i>Nadia</i> | | | <i>Barisal</i> | | |
| 1. Chithalia | ... | 193 | 1. Banaripara | ... | 200 |
| 2. Santipur | ... | 1,665 | <i>Maldah</i> | | |
| | | 1,858 | 1. Baragharia | ... | 50 |
| | | | <i>Mymensingh</i> | | |
| | | | 1. Mymensingh Town | ... | 100 |
| | | | 2. Jamalpur | ... | 200 |
| | | | | | 300 |
| <i>24 Parganas</i> | | | <i>Dacca</i> | | |
| 1. Dhakuria | ... | 500 | 1. Nalia | ... | 100 |
| 2. Jadavpur | ... | 150 | 2. Nayabari | ... | 50 |
| 3. Paikhati | ... | 750 | 3. Manikganj | ... | 50 |
| 4. Basirhat | ... | 75 | 4. Tara | ... | 50 |
| 5. Naihati | ... | 1,125 | 5. Sribari | ... | 50 |
| | | 2,600 | 6. Shingjuri | ... | 50 |
| | | | | | 350 |
| <i>Hoogly</i> | | | <i>Faridpur</i> | | |
| 1. Jirah | ... | 190 | 1. Faridpur Town | ... | 200 |
| 2. Fulai | ... | 300 | <i>Noakhali</i> | | |
| | | 490 | 1. Noakhali | ... | 500 |
| <i>Howrah</i> | | | <i>Rangpur</i> | | |
| 1. Nizbalia | ... | 3,000 | 1. Gaibandha | ... | 100 |
| 2. Amardah | ... | 300 | <i>Jessore</i> | | |
| | | 3,300 | 1. Itna | ... | 100 |
| <i>Midnapore</i> | | | <i>Khulna</i> | | |
| 1. Baluhati | ... | 1,825 | 1. Bagerhat | ... | 100 |
| 2. Nandigram | ... | 1,825 | <i>24 Parganas</i> | | |
| | | 3,650 | 1. Radhakhantapur | ... | 100 |
| | | | 2. Mathurapur | ... | 100 |
| | | | | | 200 |

| | No. of people served. | | No. of people served. |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Nadia</i> | | | |
| 1. Naladwip ... | 200 | ORPHANAGE:— | |
| <i>Bankura</i> | | | |
| 1. Bankura Town ... | 100 | <i>Pabna</i> | |
| <i>Burdwan</i> | | | |
| 1. Kalna ... | 100 | MEDICAL CENTRE:— | |
| 2. Asansol ... | 100 | <i>Maldah</i> | |
| | 200 | 1. Baragharia (Homæo Hospital) ... | |
| <i>Hoogly</i> | | | |
| 1. Jangipur ... | 175 | <i>Midnapore</i> | |
| 2. Tarakeswar ... | 100 | 1. Pichabani (Hospital) ... | |
| 3. Sreerampur ... | 100 | (Indoor) ... | |
| | 375 | 1. Pichabani (Hospital) ... | |
| <i>Howrah</i> | | | |
| 1. Shibpur ... | 100 | (Outdoor) ... | |
| <i>Midnapore</i> | | | |
| 1. Chaulkhola ... | 100 | 2. Bhuiyajibar (Hospital) ... | |
| 2. Debhog ... | 100 | (Indoor) ... | |
| 3. Anantapur ... | 100 | 2. Bhuiyajibar (Hospital) ... | |
| | 300 | (Outdoor) ... | |
| | | 3. Tomluk (Temporary Hospital) ... | |
| | | 4. Mahishadal ... | |
| | | 2,165 | |

HOME FOR DESTITUTES:—

| | | | |
|---|-----|--|--|
| <i>Calcutta</i> | | | |
| 1. S/A, Shibnarayan Das Lane ... | 150 | <i>Noakhali</i> | |
| 2. Kalighat Orphanage ... | 50 | 1. Cheoria ... | |
| 3. 25, Paddopukur Road ... | 75 | (Families of weavers) ... | |
| | 275 | <i>Pabna</i> | |
| <i>Barisal</i> | | | |
| 1. Sakti Samaj Asram (Perojpur) ... | 25 | 1. Bera ... | |
| 2. Matrimandir ... | 50 | (Families of fishermen) ... | |
| | 75 | <i>Paddy Husking Centres:—</i> | |
| <i>Khulna</i> | | | |
| 1. Senhati (Daulatpur) ... | 100 | <i>Pabna</i> | |
| <i>Hoogly</i> | | | |
| 1. Chandannagar ... | 50 | 1. Tantibonda ... | |
| <i>Midnapore</i> | | | |
| 1. Midnapore Town ... | 100 | (Families maintained by paddy husking) ... | |
| 2. Women's Home (Contai) ... | 39 | DEAD BODY DISPOSAL CENTRE:— | |
| 3. Shyamaprasad Vidyarthi Bhaban (Contai) ... | 20 | <i>Faridpur</i> | |
| 4. Tomluk ... | 50 | 1. Faridpur Town ... | |
| | 209 | <i>Midnapore</i> | |
| | | 1. Chaulkhola ... | |
| | | 2. Debhog ... | |
| | | 3. Anantapur ... | |

CAPITAL HELP CENTRES:—

| | | | |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Noakhali</i> | | | |
| 1. Cheoria ... | 25 | <i>Pabna</i> | |
| (Families of weavers) | | | |
| <i>Pabna</i> | | | |
| 1. Bera ... | 20 | <i>Paddy Husking Centres:—</i> | |
| (Families of fishermen) | | | |

PADDY HUSKING CENTRES:—

| | | | |
|--|----|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Pabna</i> | | | |
| 1. Tantibonda ... | 50 | DEAD BODY DISPOSAL CENTRE:— | |
| (Families maintained by paddy husking) | | | |

DEAD BODY DISPOSAL CENTRE:—

| | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Faridpur</i> | | | |
| 1. Faridpur Town ... | | | |
| <i>Midnapore</i> | | | |
| 1. Chaulkhola ... | | | |
| 2. Debhog ... | | | |
| 3. Anantapur ... | | | |

Appendix 3

West Bengal Government's expenditure on the distribution of additional maida, sugar, and edible oil to the poor under 'special package' for the festive season of Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Diwali, and Chhat Puja, 2014.

Source: Government Order no. 397 (Sanc)/ FS/N/Secc./BPI &F/6B-20/2011, from Joint Secretary, Food and Supplies Department, Government of West Bengal, to the Pay and Accounts Officer, Government of West Bengal, 26-08-2014, https://www.wbpd.gov.in/rptForUsers/rptNotificationOrderDtls_usr.aspx, accessed on 30 December 2016.

Government of West Bengal
Department of Food and Supplies
11/A, Mirza Galib Street, Kolkata-700087

No. 397 (Sanc)/FS/N/Secc./BPI&F/6B-20/2011 Dated: 26-08-2014

From: The Joint Secretary to the Govt. of West Bengal
Food & Supplies Department

To: The Pay and Accounts Officer;
Pay and Accounts Office-I
81/2/2, Phears Lane, Kolkata-700012

Sir,

I am directed by the order of the Governor to say that the Governor has been pleased to sanction and release a sum of Rs. 3,50,00,000/- (Rupees Three crore fifty lakh) only for meeting the expenditure towards subsidy for distribution of Maida, Sugar and Edible Oil to BPL & AAY beneficiaries including the special package beneficiaries in the PDS for the ensuing festive season of Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Diwali and Chhat Puja. The said items will be distributed for one fortnight during Durga Puja (starting from 15th September, 2014) and one fortnight during Kali Puja, Diwali and Chhat Puja (starting from 20th October, 14). Item wise Scale / quantity & time schedule of festive package is given in the Annexure.

2. The Governor is also pleased to authorize the Joint Director of Finance, office of the Director of Finance, Food & Supplies Department to draw the sum of Rs. 3,50,00,000/- (Rupees Three crore fifty lakh) only and disburse the same in favour of W.B.E.C.S.C. Ltd. for the above mentioned purpose by way of depositing it in **Current Account No.10959186808 of this department maintained in the State Bank of India, Park Street Branch**. As the current account is maintained in the name of Food & Supplies Department, Govt. of West Bengal, the cheque may be issued in favour of Food & Supplies Department, Govt. of West Bengal. The DDO will furnish necessary Utilization Certificate in due course.

3. The charge on account of expenditure of Rs. 3,50,00,000/- (Rupees Three crore fifty lakh) only, sanctioned hereinabove, is debitible to the Head of Account "2235-Social Security and Welfare-60-Other Social Security and Welfare Programmes-200-Other Programmes-NP-Non Plan-051-Differential Cost in the form of Subsidy for Non-procurement Related Activities by W.B.E.C.S.C. Ltd. under PDS[FS]-V-33-Subsidies-05-Other Subsidies" under Demand No. 21.
[Budget Code: 2235-60-200-NP-051-V-33-05]

4. Release as per Para 3 above will be made good by way of re-appropriation or otherwise of an amount of Rs. 18,50,000/- (Rupees Eighteen lakh fifty thousand) only to the aforesaid head of account from the Head of Account "2235-Social Security and Welfare-60-Other Social Security and Welfare Programmes-200-Other Programmes-NP-Non Plan-050-Differential Cost in the form of Subsidy for Procurement of Custom Milled Rice (CMR) by WBECSC Ltd. and Other Agencies under PDS [FS] -V-33-Subsidies-05-Other Subsidies" under Demand No. 21.
[Budget Code: 2235-60-200-NP-050-V-33-05]

5. Departmental Code of Food & Supplies Department is FS.

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17/9/14*

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6. This Order issues with the concurrence of Finance Department, Group N, vide their U.O. No. 0798 dated 22-08-2014 and Finance (Audit) Department vide their U.O. No. Group A-II /2014-2015/0035 dated 25-08-2014 and also with the approval of the Commissioner, Food and Principal Secretary, Food & Supplies Department.

7. The Principal Accountant General (A&E), West Bengal is being informed.

Yours faithfully,

Joint Secretary to the
Govt. of West Bengal

No. 397 (Sanc)/1(3)/FS/N/Sectt./BPI&F/6B-20/2011

Dated: 26-08-2014

Copy forwarded for information and taking necessary action to:

1. The Managing Director, W.B.E.C.S.C. Ltd.
2. The Director, DDP&S, Food & Supplies Department
3. The Director, Rationing, Food & Supplies Department

They are requested:-

- (a) *To ensure that lifting of the stock by the Distributors is completed by 8th September for the 1st phase & 13th October for the 2nd phase.*
- (b) *Also to ensure that the commodities are reached to FPS by 14th September for the 1st phase & 19th October for the 2nd phase.*
- (c) *To monitor the whole Operation of the distribution of this Festive Package.*
- (d) *To ensure smooth and uninterrupted supply of the said items in the PDS as per schedule.*
- (e) *To make wide publicity of this Festive Package by the WBECSC Ltd.*

Joint Secretary to the
Govt. of West Bengal

No. 397 (Sanc)/2(10)/FS/N/Sectt./BPI&F/6B-20/2011

Dated: 26-08-2014

Copy forwarded for information and taking necessary action to:

1. The Principal Accountant General (A&E), West Bengal, Treasury Building, Kolkata-700001
2. The Principal Accountant General (Audit), West Bengal, Treasury Building, Kolkata-700001
3. The Principal Secretary, Finance Department, Govt. of West Bengal
4. The Director of Finance, Food & Supplies Department
- He is requested to direct the Joint Director of Finance (D.D.O.) under his control to draw and disburse the amount for the said purpose.

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(3)

5. The Joint Director, Directorate of Finance, Food & Supplies Department

-He is requested to draw and disburse the amount by way of crediting the same to the Account bearing No. 10959186808 of this Department lying with the State Bank of India, Park Street Branch.

(5 copies)

6. Joint Secretary, IT Cell, Food & Supplies Department.

-with the request to upload the G.O. in this Department's Website.

7. The P.A. to the Additional Secretary, Food & Supplies Department.

8. The P.A. to the Commissioner, Food and Principal Secretary, Food & Supplies Department.

9. Budget Cell, Food & Supplies Department.

-Budget Cell is requested to frame Net Grant Statement for 2014-15 accordingly.

10. Guard File.


Joint Secretary to the
Govt. of West Bengal

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ANNEXURE

Enclosure to G.O. No. No. 397 (Sanc)/FS/N/Secc./BPI&F/6B-20/2011, Dated: 26-08-2014

Scale / quantity of festive package, extended to the BPL and AAY beneficiaries including Special Package beneficiaries for ensuing Durga Puja-Kali Puja- Diwali- Chhat Puja, 2014.

| Item | Scale per family & Time Schedule | |
|---------------|---|---|
| | 1 st Phase 1 FN starting from 15 th September (For Durga Puja) | 2 nd Phase 1 FN starting from 20 th October (For Kali Puja- Diwali- Chhat Puja) |
| Flour / Maida | 1.0 Kg. / family | 1.0 Kg. / family |
| Sugar | 0.750 Kg. /family | 0.750 Kg. /family |
| Mustard Oil | 1.0 lt. /family | 1.0 lt. /family |
| Rice Bran Oil | 1.0 lt. /family | 1.0 lt. /family |

• FN = Fortnight.

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 - A. Procurement Branch
 - B. Rationing Branch

3. Department of Home Affairs, GOI, NAI
 - A. Political Branch

4. Political Department, GOI, NAI
 - A. Intelligence Bureau Branch

5. War Department, GOI, NAI
 - A. Army Branch

6. External Affairs Department, GOI, NAI
 - A. War Branch

7. Mysore Residency, Bangalore, NAI

8. Secretariat of the Governor General (Public), GOI, NAI
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