

CHAPTER V

Drought, Scarcities and Famines: Ecology, Subsistence and Economy in Northern Bengal (1866-1909)

Famine signifies a situation caused by acute shortage in subsistence and even starvation that ultimately lead to mortality or crisis in human existence. The ecological dislocations, produced by the nature or human factors which are intensified by famine and subsistence crisis, have been very crucial in respect of identifying and analyzing the severity of famine.¹ Ecology is the systematic relationship between human and natural situations. When this methodical (or regular) connection breaks it creates crisis and aberrations in the socio-economic pattern. As the world ecology has been profoundly changed by western capitalism, first through trade and later by colonialism, in view of this alteration the ecological transformations in India during the colonial period deserve special interest in regard to the intimate connection that recent research has made between British imperialism and environmental degradation.² But this could not be attributed exclusively to the natural causes while artificial or human elements had played a decisive role in the outcome of famine or making ecological crises so intense.

Famine was a periodic event in British Indian history and since 1860s it grew in frequency and dimension. Famine-literature on colonial India is fairly rich by having diverse interpretations, varied from colonial officials to the nationalists and modern scholars; however, few have dealt with the vital questions of regional peculiarities and problems. Among the official versions of the colonial Government, the work of G. W. Forrest (1897) highlights the Government policy and relief measures during the famines of 1866, 1873-74, and 1896-97 in Bengal. Though Forrest has supported government's policy of non-interference in private grain trade during famines but at the same time he criticized government's attitude of such general principles irrespective of local circumstances, as it was evident during the Orissa famine of 1866.³ Another representation from British official circle of C. W. McMinn (1902) shows a clear outlook of political bias. In his opinion, this work (his book) is "not a monogram on famines" but an effort to "expose" the so-called famine

falsehoods “employed by several Bengali writers and Congress orators to blacken the character of English officials and administration.”⁴ On the other hand nationalist economic thinkers like, Romesh Chandra Dutt and Dadabhai Naoroji underscored the over assessment or revenue pressure on Indian peasants and drain of wealth from India to England as the chief causes of famines. Nationalist argument of increased food shortages due to growing food export and peasants’ inclination towards non-food crop for its high export-value has been countered by the colonial administration by clarifying that food exports increased in times of low prices and fell in times of high prices which eventually stabilized food prices and helped the peasants to get the actual returns.⁵

Among the modern scholars, Michelle Burge McAlpin (1979) while explaining the famines in western India between 1870 and 1920, stresses the role of climatological factor in causing crop failures. This analysis, based on rainfall statics and climate influence, underlines the natural or ecological issues, rather than the institutional or policy background of famines.⁶ But David Arnold (1988) has assigned climatic conditions as an “instrumental” and not ‘a causative role’ in stimulating crises of production or subsistence by eschewing the theory of ‘climatic determinism’.⁷ On the other hand it is also an important aspect that the agricultural dependence on natural supply of water sometime aggravated the risk of crop failure and that single cropping heightened the failure tendency of the monsoon crop. Moreover, El Nino – type disturbances of the tropical oceanic atmospheric occurrence could make rainfall more erratic.⁸

The Malthusian theory of disparity between production (and resources) and population (or demand) in the region illustrates the interrelation between the total output, current supply and per capita consumption (or availability) of food grains as the central point of famine. But an essential rather more valuable argument has been put forward by Amartya Sen in his entitlement thesis where entitlement relations in a private ownership market economy involve ‘*trade-based entitlement*’, ‘*productions based entitlement*’, ‘*own labour entitlement*’, and ‘*inheritance transfer entitlement*’.⁹ Sen in his theory of the Failure of Exchange Entitlements (FEE) questions the above approach of Food Availability Decline (FAD). He is of the opinion that “[I]n a market economy, a person....can do [the] exchange either through trading, or through production, or through a combination of the two. The set of all the alternative bundles of commodities that he can acquire in exchange for what he owns may be called the ‘exchange entitlement’ of what he owns.”¹⁰ Sen, thus, argues that most famines are

caused largely by an unexpected blow in the prevailing pattern of exchange relations rather than by a decline in food supply.

While commenting on the Famine of 1770 Vinita Damodaran has remarked that ‘the 1768–1770 droughts and famines were a profound blow not only to the system of revenue but also to the whole rationale of empire’, as ‘they provided an impetus for the evolution of a famine policy.’¹¹ Famine in colonial India had unleashed a continuous disagreement between the dominator and the dominated, when the later had to frequently adapt with their subsistence level and further survival. Sugata Bose has argued that ‘the structures and trends of demography, commercialization, production and appropriation were fashioned by the contest between the forces of domination and resistance.’¹² The ever-increasing lust of revenues in form of several taxes imposed upon the peasantry heightened tensions among peasant society of Bengal as well as India. R. C. Dutt was of the opinion that: ‘The uncertainty of the State demand hangs like the sword of Damocles over the heads of Indian agriculturists, deadens their energy, and withdraws all motives for improvement.’¹³ Exchange of money, credit relations and cash-based economy appeared to be most powerful elements in the realm of market economy under the colonial rule. Famine had, time to time, provided a major blow to the continuation of these elements which collapsed or shattered either by the human exploitation or ecological disruptions, or sometime by the combination of both of these. Governmental concern for famine relief was, however, motivated by a single agenda – to normalize the source of revenue as fast as possible from the ruins of the economic disaster caused by the natural abnormalities. But governmental response in terms of famine relief was not identical throughout the colonial rule, in fact, it varied so widely that any single explanation could hardly reveal the mechanism and dynamics of colonial justification of ‘charitable’ or ‘gratuitous’ relief. Along with Governmental relief operations, there were also numerous instances of active private charities which contributed to the lessening of the intensity and duration of famines in colonial India. Georgina Brewis argues that the unwillingness of the administration to acknowledge full accountability for saving lives, and the apprehensions regarding the increase of impoverishment, provided the background for the appearance of a parallel system of charitable relief which included indigenous traditions of relief with British models of organizing philanthropy.¹⁴ The chief aspects of voluntary famine relief in the 1890s ‘was careful selection of recipients, the principle that labour should be exacted in exchange for relief, and strict discipline and routine in poor-houses or kitchens.’¹⁵

Over a last few decades famine studies have been appeared as a distinctive genre of study which deserve to be treated as a separate ‘discipline’ with an interdisciplinary viewpoint. Among these there are many recent studies which delve into the regional famine conditions in several parts of colonial Bengal which became vulnerable to the ecological and environmental changes that acted as the catalyst of the famines.¹⁶ But there is hardly any effort to explore the different aspects of famine in northern Bengal where one may come across the prevalence of diverse complexities and elements which were not only distinctive for the region, but also provide the scopes for the development of new arguments and interpretations for the famine studies. The present chapter does not intend to focus on any particular viewpoint but to analyze the important aspects of famine-affected areas of colonial northern Bengal during the period from 1866 to 1909 which has hitherto been overlooked by the modern scholars. This chapter intends to find the magnitude of unpredicted ecological disturbances which could be hazardous for the normal continuation of the economy or society of a particular region. Moreover, it attempts to demonstrate the impact of short-run ecological dislocations caused by shortage of rainfall or drought on productions, food prices and subsistence. In 1770 Bengal had witnessed the first major famine under the colonial administration which caused death to thousands of people and great distress. Bengal- Orissa famine of 1866 mostly ravaged the areas of Orissa though affected some parts of northern Bengal. “The Bengal-Bihar famine of 1873-74” as C. E. Buckland puts it “began while Sir G. Campbell was Lieutenant-Governor and came to an end after Sir R. Temple had succeeded him”¹⁷ and in this famine northern districts of Bengal had to suffer exclusively in comparison with the other districts of Bengal.

The previous chapter has dealt with the excessive or heavy rainfall and its effect in economy and society in colonial northern Bengal. But on contrary, the present chapter intends to draw the impact of drought or shortage of rainfall in the economy, ecology and society of northern Bengal. The present chapter has been divided into three major parts viz. the first part explores the hitherto uncharted history of 1873-74 Bengal-Bihar famine in northern Bengal; the second part seeks to unearth the specific and distinctive aspects of the famine of 1896-97 along with a comparison of other parts of Bengal; and the third part deals with the scarcity of 1908-09 which was limited to some particular areas of northern Bengal. However, the main objective of the chapter is to critically examine the ecological and environmental changes took place in northern Bengal in terms of variations in rainfall, short and long lasting drought and their impact on the human-nature relations in form of agricultural production and

subsistence, which in turn had influenced the complex social-ecology of survival and livelihood, depended on State's and private charity and relief. Famines had brought into all these elements together in a single fold which was characterized by a consistent tension existed between market, politics and society.

I

The Bengal-Bihar Famine of 1873-74 in Northern Bengal

Before going into the discussion about Bengal-Bihar famine of 1873–74 it is necessary to look into the famine-affected areas of northern Bengal during the famine of 1866 because during these eight years i.e. between 1866 and 1874 northern districts of Bengal had to go through a major crisis in regard to the production and prices of agricultural crops. An agricultural economy, like Bengal, which relied almost exclusively on the natural supply of waters or the monsoons for irrigating its fields, was naturally sensitive to the periodic cycles of droughts or floods. These ecological or environmental phenomena had an inevitable impact on the production and prices of the food grains. There are four chief harvests in the Bengali agricultural year – a). the *Aus* rice, sown in April- May (in the Bengali month of *Baisakh*), reaped in August or September (*Bhadro*); b). the *Aman* rice or the winter rice (the great harvest of the year), sown in lowlands in April, May, and June or on highlands in June or July (*Assar*) ; reaped in November and December (*Aghrahan*); c). the *Boro* rice, an intermediate crop producing the coarsest quality of rice, sown in March-April (*Chaitra*), and harvested in either *Assar* (i.e. June-July) or *Srawan* (i.e. July-August); and d). the *Rabi*, or spring crops, consisting of peas, pulses, oilseeds, and miscellaneous green crops, sown in October, reaped in February.

Along with Bihar, the districts of Rajshahi Division (comprised of seven districts) of colonial Bengal were affected during the Bengal-Bihar famine of 1873-74. The chapter also draws a brief continuation since the Bengal-Orissa famine of 1866. The 1866 famine was created by several seasons of erratic rainfall and the situation was further deteriorated by the continuous unwillingness of the local administration to import food. W. W. Hunter has summarized the famine condition of Rajshahi Division in the following manner¹⁸ -

Table: 5.1

Famine condition of Rajshahi Division in 1866

Total Population	Agricultural Population	Labourers and Poorer Craftsmen	Highest Price of Rice per maund in 1866	Famine Prices Rice per maund; District Average.	Famine Warnings. Rice per maund in January; District Average.
8, 893, 738	5, 384, 868	1, 761, 654	Av. Rs. 4-10	Av. Rs. 4 - 4	Av. Rs. 2-10

Source: W. W. Hunter, *Famine Aspects of Bengal Districts*, p.10. Collected from the Tabulated Famine Warnings.

Malda, Dinajpur and Rangpur did not have to suffer much (in comparison with the severity of famine prevailed in the districts of Orissa) from this famine though there was a sharp rise in the prices of food grain, specially rice. In the district of Malda, there was a serious failure of the *aman* crop which coupled with great rise in prices in January and February and this accelerated the situation towards a famine. The District mainly depended on the *aman* or winter rice crop and even the *aus* or autumn crop could not make up for the total loss of the former. According to the report of the Collector of Malda district "...during the famine of 1866 the price of rice rose to 10 seers a rupee, or 4 rupees a maund ; and that of paddy to 18 seers a rupee, or Rs. 2-4 per maund."¹⁹ The overall agricultural scenario of the district of Malda in 1866 was as follows –

Table: 5. 2

Crop condition in the district of Malda, 1866

Total Cultivated Land (in acre)	Land (in acre)	Crops Cultivated Land (in acre)	Outturn of Rice (Rs./ <i>bigha</i>)	Outturn of Pulses and other Crops (Rs./ <i>bigha</i>)	Collective Outturn of Rice and winter Crops (Rs./ <i>bigha</i>)
426, 583		Rice-250,000 Wheat-25,000 Other Food Grains-10,000	Normal Land- 15-18; Inferior Land- 10-15	Rs.7- Rs. 10	Rs. 20 – Rs.25

Source: W. W. Hunter, *Famine Aspects of Bengal Districts*, pp. 119-20.

But Hunter's account had to face difficulties in displaying the actual total number of agricultural and labour population since the Census Report of 1872 failed to provide any authentic data about the Muslims "who live[d] by agriculture, and of the aboriginal and semi-aboriginal castes living by cultivation" and on the other hand the Census remained silent about the agricultural and labouring women of this district during the time of famine. The aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes of Malda were mainly cultivators but on the approach of famine they gave up their fields in search for hired labour, and were thus thrown on the labouring population.²⁰ Since River communication in the District is abundant at all seasons of the year, the Collector of the district suggested to build a 'good metalled' road to "connect English Bazar and other towns with the Ferry that crosses the Ganges opposite Rajmahal ; and further, that a similar road should be run to meet the new line of rail to Darjiling."²¹ In Dinajpur (extended from Champaran district on the west to Rangpur on the east) though the *aman* or winter rice did not fall short but still the price of best cleaned rice was Rs. 4-7 per maund and for common rice, it was Rs. 4-1-6 per maund and in 1871 it had returned to its ordinary rates prevailed before the famine.²² The increase in agricultural land caused by the large scale reclamation by the Santhals, as was the case in Malda, was affected in Dinajpur due to the non-availability of the necessary credit.²³ But the scarcity in this district was confined to a comparatively small area and it was not suggested to adopt any special measures for the relief of the distress.²⁴ In Rangpur (bounded on the north by the District of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar, on the east by the Brahmaputra river and the Districts of Maimansingh, on the south by Bogra ,and on the east by the Districts of Dinajpur) the unusual prices during 1866 caused considerable inconvenience in the District, but the scarcity fortunately never rose to a famine. At the beginning of November, just before the winter harvest, the price of rice had risen to the maximum; the cost of ordinary rice was eight seers per rupee, while the price of very cheapest rice was as dear as 9.5 seers. Though these prices, however, lasted for a short time, i.e. up to the gathering in of the new crop but with such rates prevailing, the winter crops were very scanty to feed the people, and the possibility to substitute it by the spring crop was also very poor.²⁵ Anticipating the approaching of famine in the district the Collector suggested for the import of grain from the other neighbouring districts so that "[T]he State purchases might induce neighbouring Districts to pour in supplies," but at the same time was frightened by the result that "too much imported, prices would fall, and the confidence of the merchants might be shaken, and private enterprise brought to a stop."²⁶ Still there was increasing fear in the official circles that if there would be "no import at all, the scarcity might turn into famine even for the provident portion of the

community, and irretrievable disaster might ensue.”²⁷ The continuous decrease in the wages of labour and the absence of any quick transport further worsened the situation. The years from 1864 to 1866 had witnessed a general collapse of stocks that disclosed considerable and rapid decline in the average quantity of rice obtained for one rupee at the major grain markets of the rice producing districts of north Bengal.

Table: 5. 3

Variation in food-grain prices from 1864 to 1866 in northern Bengal

Districts	September 1864	September 1865	September 1866
	<i>Seer</i>	<i>Seer</i>	<i>Seer</i>
Malda	30	19	11
Dinajpur	27	21	9¾
Rangpur	27	22	11

Source: *Document 17. Famine Report: Famine in Behar and Sonthal Parganas, 1866. Papers and correspondence, including the report of the Famine Commission and the Minutes of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and the Governor General.*²⁸

After the Bengal-Orissa famine of 1866 the northern districts of Bengal had fell into another severe scarcity of food crops which eventually lead to a famine in 1873-74. During the three successive years, from 1871 to 1873, the rainfall in Bengal had been irregular. Though the rainfall was fairly good in 1871, but it did not help to bring good production of crops. In 1872, inspite of insufficiency there was proportionate distribution of rainfall. But the year 1873, was “dry almost beyond precedent” and “[T]o the North of the Ganges the rain was far below the average.”²⁹ The crop failure of 1873 due to drought and its subsequent impact on agriculture has been aptly put forward by George Campbell, the then Lieutenant-Governor (on 22nd October, 1873) in the following manner: “in Bihar and North Bengal the rains, late in coming, had been so heavy as to do great injury to the *bhadoi* crop, and they had stopped so prematurely that the winter rice was almost all lost, and there was great fear that the ground would be too dry to admit of the *rabi* being sown. In East and Central Bengal the crops would be poor, but not extremely so: in Orissa alone they were good.”³⁰

But as the days of October, 1873 were passing by and no rain came, apprehension increased. When a considerable portion of October had passed without rain the Lieutenant Governor ordered a circular which was issued on the 13th October, and which directed that the crop and

price-current returns regularly submitted should be supplemented by further reports giving fuller details of the food supplies of the country. Lieutenant Government said that:

“The reports we have from Northern and Central Bengal and the whole of Behar are as bad as they can be; from East, West and South Bengal they are bad. There is an area north of the Ganges, comprising most of the Rajshahye Division, Purnea, and North Tirhoot, in which the rain has been extraordinarily short, and in which I fear, nothing can now save us from great dearth and distress. If the next two or three weeks should pass without good rain, the consequences in these districts would be painful”³¹

Meantime the reports from the Commissioners became more alarming. The Commissioner of Patna wrote that there was no rain, nor sign of rain. The Commissioner of Rajshahi reported a panic in the district of Bogra, where rice had risen from 24½ to 12½ seers to the rupee within two days. It fell, however, to 18 seers within two or three days afterwards. The Commissioner of Rajshahi added: Now I fear rain would do little good, and there is no probability of any further fall. On the 22nd October, the Lieutenant Governor wrote to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Agricultural and Commercial Department, that:

“In parts of this (northern Bengal and north-east Bihar) usually moist tract the rainfall [had] hardly exceeded that which is usual in the driest parts of North Western Provinces. It is in this tract that the greatest failure has taken place....”³²

In the districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, and parts of Rajshahi, Malda and Murshidabad of the Rajshahi Division the whole yield of all the food crops of 1873-74 was estimated to be less than three-eighths of the yield of an ordinary average crop, and relief works on a more or less extended scale would be required soon. The Government had sent a steamer and flats to ply on the Ganges from Kooshtea to Rajshahi, and had ordered a small light-draught steamer, with flats, to ply on the inland waters of Rajshahi. He had further directed the formation of bullock trains on certain traffic routes in Rajshahi for the carriage of railway material and of food grains to depots.³³ Apart from this various minor road works, have been sanctioned in different districts. In regard to the food supply of the distressed districts the Viceroy had laid down the general rule, that Government should trust to the trade and to the improved means of communication for the natural flow of food from other parts of India to make up the deficit in Behar and Northern Bengal. The Viceroy had authorised the Lieutenant Governor to arrange for supplying and storing food at centres of relief works where many labourers were likely to be gathered together, and where local supplies might be insufficient to bear any extra strain.

George Campbell, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal had narrated the advent of the famine in 1873 in the following manner:

The rainy season of 1873 commenced late and rather scanty, but during July and August the rain was sufficient for agricultural operations, ... after that the rains failed more suddenly and completely than had been known in the present century, and the effect on the main rice crops over great tracts was most disastrous... When September passed with scarcely any rain the situation became serious, and as October advanced without a drop of the final rainfall usually expected at that season, the reports from all sides became alarming in the highest degree. ... I had ... the extreme difficulty of making a sure forecast, especially where a statistical information was so very imperfect in Bengal. ... There were still slight hopes of an unusually late fall of rain, but nothing came; and in the first half of November the prospects became very black indeed. ... there was an excessive failure of the rice crop in Behar and parts of Bengal north of the Ganges, a short crop in a wider area; ... the prospects for the spring crops in Behar were very bad... owing to the failure of the latter rains, the ground was so dry that the seed could not possibly germinate.”³⁴

It is to be noted here that the famine of 1873-74 had introduced a template for the famine-relief operations in Bengal. In fact, organization and execution of famine-relief works had now been accentuated directly and responsibly for the first time in Bengal as well as in India. To quote Sir Richard Temple, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal:

“Lord Northbrook had, in the first place, to consider the question whether the Government should undertake the responsibility for counteracting the effects of this drought, and for averting the famine which would otherwise result. He decided that it should, although such a task had never yet been accomplished in India. During the former famines of this century, so much mortality had occurred despite the efforts put forth by the State, that loss of life had come to be regarded as inevitable. Nevertheless, it was announced in the Gazette that a widespread famine was anticipated, that much was expected of the people in the way of self-help and from the trade in respect of enterprise, but that the Government would interpose to do whatever could not otherwise be done in order that none should perish who might possibly be saved.”³⁵

Since the private enterprise was not capable enough to meet the situation, Government had decided to import large quantity of food-grains from the outside part of the country.

Over the greater part of the Bengal proper there would be, it was hoped, from half to three quarters of a full average crop, while in North Bengal and Behar (containing a population of 26 millions) the yield of the food crops was estimated to be from one-quarter to one-third of

full average years.³⁶ It was hoped that northern Bengal, which was ordinarily an exporting tract might have considerable stocks of previous years, and it was decided that from the other exporting districts (Sylhet, Backergunj, and Orissa) considerable old stocks would have to be brought to the market. In the Patna, Bhaugulpore, and Rajshahi Divisions the late rice crop, the main staple of the country, was said to be as bad as it had been anticipated by the Government and during the last week of November, 1873 there had been no rain. For a small parcel of rice (only 1300 maunds) which was loaded on the Government steamers transferred for service in the Rajshahi Division, where Government had to pay three rupees a maund, or very nearly the rate then prevailing in Calcutta.³⁷ The colonial administration was observing ‘a healthy private trade [which] was going on between Eastern Bengal and Rajshahi in small boats, from which rice was eagerly brought by the residents along the rivers.’

The erratic rainfall of 1873 in north Bengal resulted in a large scale loss of crops. In 1873, the rainfall in Malda was 27.26 inches, or half of the average (i.e. 53.88 inches).³⁸ In Malda, the monthly distribution of rainfall for the year 1873 was as below:

Table: 5. 4

Monthly Distribution of Rainfall in Malda in 1873 (in inches)

Janu ary	Febru ary	Mar ch	Ap ril	M ay	Ju ne	Jul y	Aug ust	Septe mber	Octo ber	Nov ember	Decem ber	Total Rainf all
0.45	...	0.29	1.1 9	0.0 6	4.3 6	7. 08	7.76	4.91	0.92	...	0.24	27.2 6

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply and Statistical Review of the Relief Operations in the Distressed Districts of Behar and Bengal During the famine of 1873-74*, Calcutta, 1876, p. 251. (Henceforth *Report on the Food Grain Supply*).

As a result of this erratic rainfall the outturn of *aus* or autumn rice was very poor and it returned on an average only a six-anna crop, or less than half of that of an ordinary year and the *aman* or winter lowland rice was short of half an average.³⁹ The proportion of the consumption of food grains of the people, while the prevailing ratio was seven-eighths of rice and one-eighth of all other sorts of grain, had declined drastically due to the damage of five-eighths or three-fourths of those crops in 1873.⁴⁰ The failure in the harvest consequently affected the markets. In January 1874 the price of rice had increased to more than double to the normal price in that month and the prices continued to rise and in April they reached to 10½ seers for the rupee. This situation was further worsened by the declining import of food

grains from Dinajpur, as this region was also affected by natural irregularities. Government had to intervene into this situation by extending relief measures to the victims. The relief statistics are mentioned below (all figures are in *tons*) –

Table: 5. 5

Relief Statistics for the district of Malda, 1866

Total Rice Stored	For Charitable Relief	For Cash	For Wages	For Advanced Loan
3, 946	1, 315	1, 253	243	907

Source: G. E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Malda*, Calcutta, 1918, p. 51.

Apart from the distribution of rice, government had also speeded up the relief measures through the distribution of money directly to the distress people. The costs of relief have been mentioned below (all figures are in rupees):

Table: 5. 6

Statement of Government Expenditure in the District of Malda in 1874

Charitable Relief	Wages for Relief Work	Advance for Loan
26, 951	1, 06, 762	48, 450

Source: G. E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Malda*, p. 51.

The outcome of these efforts was quite impressive – “[T]he number of persons charitably relieved rose from 1, 036 in the middle of April, to 6, 340 in the middle of May, and 13, 009 in the middle of July, but fell to 4, 458 in the beginning of September, and to 469 in the first week of October.”⁴¹ This data clarifies the improvement in the plight of the distressed and their reducing number displays the subsequent recovery of the region within a short span of time.

Dinajpur had to suffer a lot from the shortage of rainfall. The average rainfall in the district from 1868 to 1872 was as followed:

Table: 5. 7

Average Monthly Rainfall in the District of Dinajpur from 1868 to 1872

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
In. 0.57	In. 0.78	In. 1.28	In. 1.52	In. 5.08	In. 23.88	In. 17.12	In. 15.40	In. 13.13	In. 5.61	In.	In. 0.05	In. 84.48

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 223.

In 1872 though the rainfall was 5½ inches under the average, but the harvests did not fall into any trouble. In 1873 the rainfall was noticeably short from the average (84.88 inches); it was only 43½ inches, i.e. more than half of the normal. The September-October rains which were much essential for the winter rice crop were almost in a vanishing condition. The table below shows the monthly rainfall of the year 1873 in Dinajpur:

Table: 5. 8

Monthly Distribution of Rainfall in Dinajpur in 1873

Janu ary	Febru ary	Mar ch	Ap ril	M ay	Jun e	Jul y	Aug ust	Septem ber	Octo ber	Novem ber	Decem ber	Tot al
In. 0.50	In. 0.28	In. 0.61	In. 0.6 6	In. 0.4 1	In. 18. 27	In. 8. 24	In. 12.6 2	In. 1.62	In. ...	In.	In. 0.32	In. 43. 53

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 224.

As a result of the total deficiency in rainfall in the early months of rainy season, as the Collector, of the district, Mr. Robinson had mentioned, the early rice and other rainy season crops “were in the best parts one-fourth and generally one-eighth of an average crop, while in many parts the outturn was *nil*” and on the failure of the winter rice he further observed that “crop would certainly not yield more than three-eighths of an average crop in any part, in most parts not one-fourth of the average, and in very large tracts nothing at all.”⁴² The outturn of the autumn crop in 1873 was 9, 308 tons and for winter rice crops it was 1, 24, 462 tons which were too insufficient to meet the total deficiency of 4, 38, 000 tons of food grain.⁴³ In January 1874 the produce of the rice harvest raised to 1, 48, 310 tons and the total supply in grain which the district drew from local sources from January to September (1874) was 1, 50, 000 tons which was about six months’ supply at ordinary rates of consumption.⁴⁴ In spite of this, rice export from the district was much greater than the import quantity. In 1873 the quantity of rice exported from the district was 10, 93, 520 maunds while the quantity of import was 650 maunds. And in 1874 it was imported only 1, 121 mound whereas the quantity of export of rice was 20, 059 maunds, and this had operated exclusively through the river traffic. This tendency, however, resulted in the increase of price of rice and in January it was two and a half times as dear as it usually was in that month. The district had witnessed the fluctuation of prices of common rice throughout the year of 1874. The table below shows the monthly price of common rice in 1874.

Table: 5. 9

Monthly Price of Common Rice in 1874 (all figures are in *seers* for one rupee)

Janua ry	Februa ry	mar ch	Apr il	Ma y	Jun e	Jul y	Augu st	Septem ber	Octob er	Novem ber	Decem ber
12.5	13.8	12.1	9.5	8.3	8.9	10. 4	12.5	16	19	24.9	28

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 226.

The government had collected information from the local officers as to the extent of the scarcity and subsequently preparations had been made to import large stocks of rice from Burma and elsewhere. As a result of the breakdown of the ordinary machinery of the grain trade relief funds were opened and in April 1874 relief works were commenced in the severely affected areas of Kaliaganj, Raiganj, Hemtabad, Pirganj, Ranisankoil and Thakurgaon *thanas* and Government depots for the sale of grain at reasonable rates were opened at Raiganj and many other important places.⁴⁵ The relief works had been conducted mainly through public works like, construction of new roads, the repair of the old ones and digging of tanks. The daily number of labourers employed in this relief works reached nearly 95, 000 in May 1874 and by the end of the year the money spent by the government on the relief amounted to nearly Rs. 24, 00, 000., including the value of rice paid as wages and distributed as cost-free relief.⁴⁶

Table: 5. 10

Statement of Grain and Cash Expenditure by the Government in Dinajpur in 1874

	Charitable Relief	Wages of Labour	Advanced on Loan
Grain (tons)	2, 732	2, 934	12, 533
Cash (rupee)	37, 633	11, 61, 492	23, 300

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 227.

From the outcome of the sales and advances of grain and money, MacDonnell had assumed that each 20 *seers* of grain relieved an individual for a month and each thirty *annas* another individual for a similar period and in aggregate the number of people relieved by these measures during these days were 14, 71, 059. The zamindars of Dinajpur had also contributed according to their own way by extending cultivated areas in the district. The famine of 1873-74 encouraged the zamindars “to bring colonies of Santhal tribes from the Santhal parganas to clear huge Barind tract covered by jungle with the result that the cultivated area of the district was increased one third by the beginning of the twentieth century.”⁴⁷ For the reclamation of jungles the zamindars used to provide capital as advance and they acquired the

return of this loan by enhancing the rent of this new cultivable land. In Rangpur, the case was little different. Here the reclamation process was carried out under the *jotedars'* enterprise and the result was, the zamindars could obtain only a smaller portion of the profit, made by the increased rent of the land.⁴⁸

Cultivation of land or agriculture as a whole had possessed some exceptional characteristics in the district of Rangpur. The minimum increase in cultivation in Rangpur between Buchanan's time and 1872-73 could be attributed partly to the effects of recurring fever that resulted in the considerable decline in the population and partly to a "considerable deterioration" in the productive powers of the land in some parts of the district.⁴⁹ Gopal Chandra Dass, the Special Deputy Collector of Rangpur, had observed that the holding size of 50 per cent of the cultivators was below seven or eight *bighas* (i.e. less than three acres) of land and they were capable of using only one plough and a pair of bullocks.⁵⁰ The plight of the more poor peasants was too horrible to obtain their bare subsistence. Even in the pre-famine period, during the latter half of 1871 the ryots started to shift from their old land which they cultivated and frequently abandoned one and take another holding.⁵¹ Due to the lack of any permanent establishment in land a large section of peasants could not secure occupancy rights which caused an atmosphere of uncertainty and inconsistency in agricultural production. On the other hand the rates of rent in Rangpur, a district of large absentee landlords had already reached to its height that could afford any further enhancement.⁵² Indicating to the surprising difference between rental and revenue, being respectively Rs. 86, 89, 750 and 9, 74, 088, MacDonnell remarked, "In no other district of Bengal where condition has been reviewed is there such a great disproportion between the revenue and rental as in Rungpore."⁵³ All these factors together had made the whole agricultural sector so easily vulnerable to any climatic disorder.

There was not only serious deficiency in the rainfall in 1873; it was also very unseasonably distributed. In every month the rainfall was noticeably under the normal quantity. In May there was no rain, July it was only one-third of the average fall and it came to an abrupt end in the month of September when an ample rainfall was in utmost necessity for the maturity of the winter crop of the year.⁵⁴

Table: 5. 11

Monthly Distribution of Rainfall in the District of Rangpur in 1873 (in inches)

Janu ary	Febru ary	Mar ch	Ap ril	M ay	Jun e	Jul y	Aug ust	Septem ber	Octo ber	Novem ber	Decem ber	Tot al
0.05	0.24	1.10	6.5 4	0.9 7	12. 91	5. 88	13.2 3	4.90	0.16	...	0.54	46. 32

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 237.

The impact of the rainfall felt differently in the different parts of the district. The rainfall was much heavier in the east, along the line of Brahmaputra and this region produced the best harvest within the district; half of the average which was parallel to the production of eastern parts low-lying lands. There was shortage of rain also in the southern and western parts of the district but the central part suffered the worse by having a total loss to one-eighth or three-sixteenths of an average harvest.⁵⁵ The district was so hard hit by the shortage of rainfall that at the harvesting time in January 1874, the average produce of the whole district was of three annas or one-fifth of an average crop. The total outturn of autumn (*aus*) and winter crops (*aman*) in 1873 was 201, 318 tons with the total deficiency of 573, 000 tons of an ordinary year while in January 1874; the food-supply of Rangpur derived from all internal sources was 209, 000 tons.⁵⁶ But this deficiency was encountered by the end of the winter season of 1874 with its overall outturn which yielded a full average harvest.

Table: 5. 12

Prices of Common Rice and Wheat in Rangpur in 1874 (in *seers*)

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Common Rice	11.7	11.3	11.2	9	8.3	9.6	12.1	18.1	16.2	18.8	22.3	25.9
Wheat	10	10.8	11.9	12.5	12.3	12.1	12.3	13	14.2	12.7	12.5	12.5

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 239.

In the beginning of 1874 the price of common rice, which was the staple article of diet of all classes, was two and one-third times the usual price in that month. The continuous import of rice from Cooch Behar, Assam and Dacca was not capable enough to minimize the price and in April the trade had collapsed due to “a general failure of the supplies in the market throughout the district...”⁵⁷ As a result of this, prices at the headquarters market raised to 5-

8-0 maund which was nearly four times than the usual rates at that time of the year and in the remote areas they rose to Rs. 6. The high prices of grains produced a lot of distress to the poorer people who by no means had any scope to purchase grains during this time of scarcity and the crisis reached to that extent that a man, as it was reported, had to sale his wife for Rs. 10.⁵⁸

To prevent this famine situation, as Hunter remarked, the Collector of the District considered to make arrangements for “[E]their the food must be taken to the people, or the people to the food; and in that practice both courses would have to be followed” but at the same time realized that this would not have been possible without the improvement in the exiting communication system.⁵⁹ The construction of new and repair of old roads formed the major work initiated by the Government as a means of relief for the laboring and cultivating classes. The Northern Bengal State Railway which had been started earlier now expected to cover all areas of the district. But the greatest relief had been provided by the nature - sufficient rain during the rest of the months enormously contributed for the betterment of the condition. Government, thus, needed to provide minimum expenditure for the relief operations in comparison with the intensity of crises prevailed in the district.

Table: 5. 13

Statement of Grain and Cash Expenditure in the District of Rangpur in 1874

	Charitable Relief	Wages of labour	Advance on Loan
Grain (tons)	1, 517	922	1, 823
Cash (rupee)	1, 54, 975	4, 50, 909	1, 75, 934.

Source: A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply*, p. 241.

This nominal help of the state was substituted by the private charity on which the common people were more dependent. Relief centers were opened by Rai Lachmipat Bahadur who was known by his “liberality and benevolence” as “specially recognized by the Government” and his private charity helped to raise the confidence of the people in the early months of 1874. Apart from Rai Lachmipat Bahadur, “landed proprietors and wealthy classes of Rangpur” came forward to help “their tenantry in their hour of need.”⁶⁰ In addition to this the relief provided by the Government relieved “760, 889 individuals, or 35 per cent of the population,...for the period of one month.”⁶¹

George Campbell had stated that ‘The supply of funds to meet famine on a large scale rested wholly with the Government of India, so that I could have done little without their

sanction.’⁶² Apart from the execution of the provision of work and supply of food for the labourers, Campbell had argued for the prohibition of the export of rice from the affected areas for which ‘...Viceroy in Council was expressly empowered to take such action, and native opinion was all in favour of such a course.’⁶³ Campbell’s suggestion had triggered a debate in the official circle and the idea was negated by the British administration. In the final discourse ‘Her Majesty’s Government approved the decision of the Government to meet the emergency by the purchase and import of food rather by prohibition of export, and so it was settled.’⁶⁴

The situation became worse in the May of 1874. Richard Temple stated that:

“The month of May had now set in, and the famine had thoroughly declared itself. Employment, agricultural and other, was at a standstill, and there were no wages for the poor to earn. No supplies of grain were brought out and the corn markets were all closed. The Government, before opening its stores, waited to the latest safe day, in order to afford every possible chance to the trade. Its officers were however obliged to sell their grain in vast quantities, the prices being fixed at what were regarded as famine rates. Still starvation stared the people in the face, unless the Government should give them employment and pay their wages in grain.”⁶⁵

Among the districts of northern Bengal particularly Malda, Dinajpur and Rangpur where the deficiency of rainfall and price-rise were more prominent, were the worst sufferers of the famine of 1873-74. These parts were mostly dependent on the winter rice crop which had managed to overcome the scarcities of the famine period and the much desired rainfall during the winter and a favourable cold weather harvest delivered a great relief to the distressed. Southern and northern districts of Bengal showed a considerable difference in regard to the quantity of crop failures. In the former areas Government had merely to supplement the food supply of the districts through private trade or by supplying a small quantity of grain as a precautionary measure, whereas it had to undertake the responsibility to feed a large portion of population for the later and for this purpose it had to import into the three districts nearly 83 lakhs of maunds of grain.⁶⁶

Large scale imports had been continuing from the upper-Bihar and other surrounding places. The Luckeeserai consignments for the South of the Monghyr District had been sent. The Rajmahal consignments laden on 500 carts were sent to the Northern Bengal Railway, and Major Lindsay, the Superintending Engineer, had reported that some of it had already reached Parbatipur, the place of storage. Lindsay had reported that engineers were deputed



Map. 5.1. Extension of Bengal-Bihar Famine, 1873-74

Source: Correspondence between Government of India and the Secretary of State in Council relative to the Famine in Bengal, Part- I, 1874. (British Library).

along the line from Durwani in the north of the Rangpur District down to the swampy lands in the Rajshahi District where work had already begun and it was resolved that since there was no great demand for employment, all the able bodied *Boona* coolies (the “navvies” of this part of India) who were working on local roads would have to be transferred to the railway works, while the local roads would be kept for the destitute of the districts.⁶⁷ In Northern Chumparan, parts of Rungpur, Eastern Rajshahi, and South-eastern Purnia food had already been scarce. Despite of sincere effort in order to obtain information regarding the stocks held, the administration could acquire little information from the people who were ‘suspiciousness... in regard to such inquiries.’ However, the general outcome of the opinions given by local officers was that the stocks held were ‘small, not more than equal to a three months’ supply’ and this was corroborated by the fact that the new rice was in some places already coming into consumption. As parts of relief works various new roads had been marked out, and work had been commenced both upon new roads and upon the repairs of old roads. In parts of Saran, Monghyr, Purnia, Rajshahi, and Rangpur the demand for

employment was higher than in ordinary years.⁶⁸ Places of storage for Government grain had been selected, and the constructions of storage houses had been commenced during middle of December, 1873. It can be noticed here that the Government had made considerable delay in constructing storage houses or distribution of government grain among the sufferers, and on the other hand, no actual relief operations had been commenced, nor had any preparatory arrangements been made, except in Malda. The prevalence of cholera at Gualundo and on the banks of the Meghna made it desirable to avoid the Calcutta and Gualundo route. On the other hand, Government grains from Madras and Burma had continued to come in and further shipments from Saigon, Burma, and Madras had been advised. But the despatches to the Rajshahi Division were not going on so rapidly from Gualundo and Koosthea; and in this circumstances Government had decided to send more Bengal rice from Calcutta by a steamer and two flats for Kaliaganj and Chilmari on the mouth of the Tista.⁶⁹

Government had decided to promote emigration from the distressed tracts and in response to that a good number of emigrants had started for the Assam tea gardens via Durbhanga, Nathpur, Titalya, Julpaiguri, and Dhubri.⁷⁰ The Government of India has set aside the sum of five lakhs of rupees to promote a system of State emigration to British Burma.⁷¹ Apart from the appointment of a superintendent of State Emigration, District Officers were provided with a power to exercise discretion in selecting persons likely to prove useful colonists.⁷²

In Bogra, the scarcity of 1874 had produced a greater failure of the crops due to the premature cessation of the rains.⁷³ However, Government had informed the people 'two or three months before the winter crop was cut, so that the peasantry were alive to the danger that was imminent, and accordingly preserved for their own consumption whatever grain they were able to save by artificial irrigation or other means.'⁷⁴ About the middle of the March, Sir Richard Temple, the Famine Commissioner, visited the district and marched through some of the worst parts of it, and recorded in his minute-

“I consider, having regard to all the circumstances, that 240,000 mans ought to be provided for this district, of which 50,000 mans have been already ordered, leaving 190,000 mans remaining. Out of the 50,000 mans ordered, 20,000 mans have arrived. No time should be lost in bringing up fresh supplies, as the amount in hand is small as compared with the extent of possible distress.”⁷⁵

In the months of April and May the scarcity became more intense and the situation had aggravated more in the backward parts of the districts, such as the police division of Panchbibi

and the western jungle tracts of Sherpur. The condition of Bogra had been narrated by the Collector of the district on 1st June 1874 in the following manner:

“I have travelled a good deal in the interior during the fortnight and from ocular observation I am in a position to say that in no place which I visited was the condition of the country or the people such as to cause very great anxiety; although, undoubtedly, the great price of food must have inflicted hardship and some hunger on the very poor. The price of food everywhere is high, as will be seen from the following quotations, which represent almost accurately the bazaar rates down to this day, giving the number of pakka seer per rupee at which rice was selling during the last fortnight:-Bogra town, 9½ to 10 ½ seers; Dhupchanchia, 10½ seers; Panchbibi, 9 seers, Khetlal, 10½ seers; Sherpur, 7½ seers; Sibganj, 9 to 10½ seers. Notwithstanding the great dearness, which must cause pinching to very many, I cannot say that I anywhere observed upon the persons of the people signs of hunger or of deficient sustenance. Men, women and children have an appearance of being sufficiently nourished. Everywhere the village bazaars were adequately supplied with food, although at very high rates. Wherever I have been, I have found the people, with few exceptions, in their usual state, although it is universally said that if Government had given no help there would have been great distress. Nowhere have I observed any general depression. There is certainly no difficulty in getting food for anyone who has money to buy it. The very poor must be straitened, but measures for their relief are in full operation, and they have not been slow to take advantage of them.”⁷⁶

Hunter, however, had stated that ‘even in the low-lying lands the crops [were] for the most part destroyed.’⁷⁷ Babu Govinda Kanta Bidyabhusan, the Deputy Collector who visited the eastern part of the district had reported that ‘in *thana* Sibganj the *aus* crop did not yield an average crop in consequence of the want of the usual supply of the rain; and varied from a quarter to a half; and the general appearance of the crops ... [was] discouraging.’⁷⁸ From the month of December the situation began to change in many parts of the district and this change was brought by the use of irrigation, but the situation was not identical for all parts of the district.⁷⁹ Since the local production was not sufficient for the local people, so pulses were imported into the district and in addition to that it was reported that the failure of the crops in the east and south of the district was more prominent than to the west.⁸⁰ Government had to think about large scale importation of grains and maximum accommodation of labour recruitment in the tracts where crops had failed. Seven relief roads, including feeder roads were planned to distribute the reliefs as well as for the inclusion of labourers through public works.⁸¹ Even till the month of March 1874, the prices rose abnormally high and the Government thought of establishing storehouses for rice. During the month of April and May

the scarcity seemed to be increasing and in June it was worst. Situation became somewhat better due to the favourable rainfall of a total of about 4 ½ inches. However it was not known that how did the Collector on the 27th July become able to report that the scarcity was substantially at an end. It was believed that ‘no part of Government action during the famine was attended with better results than the manner in which the whole country was kept informed of the actual and possible extent of the failure in each district.’⁸²

On the 28th December, 1873 there was a little rainfall on Bihar and one or two parts of the Rajshahi Division. Although the letters from the Relief Commissioner’s Camp in Dinajpur had confirmed of ‘rain doing good, and of more rain being expected’ but on the whole the spring crop did not greatly improve the condition of purely rice tracts, like Northern Tirhut, Soopole, Dinajpur, and Bogra.⁸³ In Rangpur the prices were from 15 to 11¼ seers per rupee. At the same time, at two places on the Ganges the upward trade was registered – ‘at Gualando at the junction of the Ganges and Brahmaputra, and at Sahebganj, where the hills of Western Bengal about on the river.’⁸⁴ This upward trade was consisted of rice and pulses which came chiefly from Murshidabad and Rajshahi. On the other hand, 85,000 maunds had been despatched from the stations of Koosthea and Goalundo on the Eastern Bengal Railway to places in the Rajshahi Division. Both in Bihar and Rajshahi the local officers seemed to be more and more disposed to trust to carts rather than boats for carriage to places off the very great rivers. In the Saran, Monghyr, Tirhut, Bhagalpur, and Dinajpur Districts considerable bodies of men were employed on relief works which demonstrated the critical conditions prevailed in those districts and the great majority of the people had belonged from the ordinary labouring classes.⁸⁵ Foods in exchange of works were obtaining by the people either from petty dealers who set up shops there, or at neighbouring markets. The Government had proposed that while roads and waterways would be constructed as relief works from district funds and from such additional grants as the Government would make time to time; tanks and other landed improvements should have to be undertaken by the landlords themselves from the advances, and on the other hand river embankments and water courses would be brought under the new Embankment Act (VI of 1873).⁸⁶

After receiving the information from several local officers that their amount was decreased for importations cooperative associations had been formed at Murshidabad and Puthia (Rajshahi District) for importing grain and selling it at cost price. Some zamindars of the Rajshahi Division asked the Government to import rice for their estates and sell it to them at cost price but the Lieutenant Governor considered that it would be better to refer the

zamindars to dealers in the Calcutta market. The arrangements for sending grain to Malda, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, and the Northern Bengal Railway works were all part of one scheme.⁸⁷ Some 5,000 maunds were sent from Rajmahal by cart to Dinajpur, but as the route was tedious and costly, from Goalundo the river route by the Oorasagur, Baral, and Atrai was tried, and some 20,000 maunds had been supplied by that route. But the correspondences revealed that rivers were low and boats of the upper draught were few. Major Lindsay was of the opinion that the route from Rampur Boalia and Dhapari could be used, partly by land and partly by inland steamers. The district of Bogra had been supplied with grain purchased in Eastern Bengal, and sent up the Brahmaputra in native boats. For Rangpur grain from Eastern Bengal and Calcutta was sent to Kaliaganj and Chilmari at the mouth of the Tista, both by boat and by steamer. Part of the trade was to be carried up to the Tista in boats to the *ghats* opposite and above Rangpur, and rest of the part would be carted to the store houses in the interior from Kaliaganj.⁸⁸ In some parts of Bogra, complaints had been raised about the scarcity of drinking water which was, however, happened to be one of the greatest needs of rural Bengal and the chief cause of the bowel complaints of most of the population.

In Rajshahi, the year 1873 was ended with a deficient rainfall.⁸⁹ The deficient rainfall was resulted in an extensive failure of rice crops in the district and the *Barind* tract was the most severely affected area of the district where the outturn of *aman* rice (winter rice) was estimated only 3 *annas*, while elsewhere it was 6 to 7 *annas*.⁹⁰ The failure of crops had eventually led to the rise of prices of food grains to an abnormal level. In January 1874, the price of rice was twelve seers for the rupee which was more than twice in comparison with the normal rates. During the month of May and June there was sudden rise of the prices and in July it was reported that ‘several persons so emaciated that they could scarcely walk and a large number of children [was] in a very reduced condition.’⁹¹ This could be evident from the increasing number of people who received gratuitous relief. The number of people who received gratuitous relief in the middle of April was 1500 whereas at the end of July it increased to 59, 000. But from the August the situation had changed and by the end of August the number was reduced to 40,000 and by the end of September it was 8000.⁹² W.H. D’Oyly, the Collector of Rajshahi had provided the following account of Government grain expended for the purpose of Charitable Relief in the district from July to November 1874.

Table. 5.14

Expenditure of Government grain from July to November, 1874 in Rajshahi District

	Mds.	Rs.
Government grain actually expended in Charitable relief Up to the end of July 1874	36,812	1,06,714
Estimated expenditure of Government grain in charitable relief From 1st August up to November 1874	34,590	98,828
Total	71,402	2,05,542

Source: From W.H. D'Oyly, EsQ., the Collector of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division. –(No. 281C, dated Boalia, the 17th October 1874), WBSA.

In the district of Pabna, the rice production had been half of the average and the pulses were five-sixth of an ordinary year.⁹³ During the month of May 1874, peasants of few parts of Sirajganj subdivision had suffered from want of food. In order to determine the causes of shortage of rice production it can be said as a result of extension of jute cultivation, a great portion of rice land were converted to jute-land which had not only affected the rice production but also produced a condition when people got deprived of local supply and exposed to the export of rice from the outside area.⁹⁴ Government had organized relief operations through the local authorities in form of charitable relief, and also provided cooked and uncooked food to the people who were unable to work. The recipients of charitable relief mostly were the 'widows with families, sick labourers, old men without children.'⁹⁵

The difficulties in the way of rapid transport were much greater in the Rajshahi Division. Boat transport in shallow inland waters was very slow during the winter season and as a result the local officers had begun to open cart routes on a large scale, and to organise a large number of carts and bullocks. The failure of the water routes had convinced the Lieutenant Governor of the great need of the Northern Bengal Railway. Still the Government had taken some special measures to improve facilities for transporting grains. The Government river-steamer, Koladyne, had been sent to help the Tista at Koosthea. Since the Tista was proved too weak for the duty required of her, and native boats took from 12 to 15 days to go up-stream from Koosthea to Godagare; so it was expected that with help of the Koladyne the work of crossing grain from Koosthea to the river-side depots in the Rajshahi District would proceed more rapidly.⁹⁶ The tracts in which distress was most imminent were the eastern part of Purnia, the northern part of Malda, and all the north-western half of Dinajpur. The

Rajshahi Division was not, however, dependent on water carriage only, into the north and centre of Dinajpur grain was being carried by six routs, namely – (a.) by the East Indian Railway to Caragola, then by the Darjeeling road to Dengra Ghat and by cart across into Dinajpur; (b.) by the East Indian Railway to Rajmahal, and then by cart from the right bank of the Ganges to Malda and Dinajpur; (c.) by steamer from Koosthea to Godagari, and then by boat up the Mahanadi to Raiganj; (d.) to Godagari as before, and then by cart up to the old Darjeeling road to Dinajpur; (e.) from Koosthea by steamer to Rampur-Boalia, then by cart to the upper Atrai and by small boats up the river; (f.) from Koosthea to Dhapari, and then by cart to the Atrai above Natore and onward both by cart and by boat; (g.) by the Oorasagar, Baral, and Atrai rivers to Nowgong, and then by cart or by very small boats to the north of the district.⁹⁷

In Dinajpur, a district where intense famine conditions had prevailed 14,000 labourers were employed besides the labourers on the Northern Bengal Railway. The practical result of the comparisons instituted by Colonel Nicolls was that in North Bihar, wages were low and labourers were bring their women and children to the roads; while in the Rajshahi Division wages were high, and it was quite contrary to usage for labourers to bring their women and children to work.⁹⁸ Although Major Lindsay reported that the river Atrai would be navigable during February and March of 1874 but the Commissioner, Mr. Molony, was of the opinion that this river route was to be extremely tedious and uncertain and a boat could only make one trip into the Upper Atrai in the season.⁹⁹ Military officers for relief works were sent by the Government of India, Major Ker, of the Quarter-Master General's Department, and Captain Grant was sent to the Rajshahi Division. As the distress parts of Rangpur, Bogra, Malda, and Rajshahi were near to the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, so these areas could be supplied with certainty; but Dinajpur was the most depressed district of all – it had required from 600,000 to 10,00,000 maunds (37, 000 tons) and the latest reports showed that only from 35,000 to 40,000 maunds a week were moving forward.¹⁰⁰

The supply of food grain was still insufficient in all the large marts, except in north Bihar, and at occasional places in the interior of the Rajshahi Division. The Magistrate of Rangpur reported the condition of the people to be worse, and that a police officer employed on inspection reported severe distress leading to the sale of wives and children.¹⁰¹ The Commissioner's report showed that he had constituted six relief sub-divisions in Dinajpur district. In Malda district only one relief subdivision besides the district head-quarters had been opened. But in the worst tract of the district seven relief centres were in operation,

where from 140 to 200 people were relieved daily. The Magistrate of Rangpur had reported about the following relief centres and persons relieved in this centres – Pyraband (400), Mithapukur (231), Pirganj (76), Govindganj (34), Gaibanda (39), Sundarganj (150), Kalligunj outpost (16), Naldanga (120), Luckhipur (80) where total 1146 persons were relieved.¹⁰² The Commissioner of Cooch Behar had reported that in the protected state of Cooch Behar and in the young Raja's zamindaries, situated in the Rangpur District, there was much scarcity due to the reason that rents could not be collected by tenure holders, and that distress was prevailing among the old and infirm. In these circumstances the Commissioner had imported and stored grain from the revenues of Cooch Behar, had opened relief works, and arranged for indoor works for the women and infirm.¹⁰³

In Malda, Rajshahi, and Bogra, and especially in Rangpur, private trade in grain was rapid but rice from eastern Bengal was being carried largely into the districts on the Brahmaputra. The Magistrate of Rangpur wrote:

“The rice which is brought for sale is nearly all imported; very little of it is home produce. The southern part of the district is mainly supplied by boats from Dacca and Sirajganj, the west from ... Dinajpur and Bogra, and the north and east from Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguuri.”¹⁰⁴

The Government, however, possessed no statistics of the private importations, which reached the distress districts by many rivers and channels. From Rangpur it was further reported that ‘in some parts there and at the relief houses there were a considerable number of people suffering from disease and starvation combined.’¹⁰⁵ In this circumstances, the Government of India had agreed to help Dinajpur and other districts by ordering selected native officers of the army to the famine districts for work as Assistant Superintendent of Relief Circles and in addition to that Richard Temple put the grain requirements of Dinajpur at 12 00,000 maunds, ‘a quantity somewhat in excess of the estimate framed by the local officers and the Bengal Government.’¹⁰⁶

Table. 5. 15

Selling price of rice in the districts of Rajshahi Division

District	Number of seers of common rice sold for a rupee			
	On 31 st Jan	On 28 th Feb.	On 14 th March	On 28 th March
Dinajpur	13¼	14	12¾	10¾
Malda	11¾	12	12	9½
Rangpur	11¼	11¼	11⅛	11½

Source: Fourteenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 20th March to the 2nd April 1874.

It is evident from the above table that in course of the time though the rate of common rice in Dinajpur and Malda gradually became low, but the high prices were still stagnant in the district of Rangpur. The numbers of work-people on the Northern Bengal Railway were increasing, about the 15th March there were 9, 000 labourers on the railway bank, besides about 3,000 on the feeder roads and the earth-works completed was equal to a bank 24 miles long and 4 feet high; which showed the increasing intensity of the famine.¹⁰⁷ On a sharp contrast to this, the Lieutenant Governor's reports based on his tour of several north Bengal districts during this time were very 'favourable and creditable' to the Commissioners and Additional Commissioners who made it possible for Richard 'to express himself as thoroughly satisfied with the conduct of the Rajshahi officers and with the forwardness of their preparations.'¹⁰⁸ In Rajshahi silk crop faced a great loss and the accounts from Rangpur were also less favourable. Near Sadullapur and Govindganj of Rangpur the village inspection has disclosed "greater distress than was anticipated." The district report informed that:

"In the tract lying west of the Kurotya the state of the villages is wretched beyond description; the people have sold everything they possessed, and are now solely dependent on Govt. Many have sold their plough cattle, the last thing which a Bengalee ryot parts.... a man had sold the roof over his head. Many ryots have deserted the place altogether and gone Bogra and elsewhere..... the people seem to be most grateful for the relief works.....Everyone is to be found on the road; the women are now coming readily, bringing their children with them. All are most anxious to get Govt rice. The want of water is felt nearly as keenly as the want of food.... A few cases of cholera, with one death, have occurred among the coolies."¹⁰⁹

The number of people who received charitable relief of all kinds according to the latest returns from the districts was as follows:

Table. 5. 16

Number of people received charitable relief in Rajshahi Division from the 3rd to the 16th April, 1874

District	No. of people
Dinajpur	4,464
Malda	931
Rajshahi	185
Bogra	583
Rungpur	6,827

Source: Fifteenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 3rd to the 16th April, 1874.

Exports from the affected districts had been proved disastrous for the administration because it was resulted in the intensifying of famine condition in the affected tracts. There were many instances which proved the unplanned exports as harmful for the affected areas. Although some supplies had been reached to the riverside districts as Malda, Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, and parts of Rangpur; but no relief worth estimate had come to Dinajpur, which has the broadest area of distress in all North-Eastern Bengal. In this situation, the Dinajpur marts had already supplied all their own neighbourhood, and export largely to Rajshahi and Pabna and the east tract of Dinajpur, although had good crops, exported rice to the neighbouring tract of Rangpur, which was in distress, to such an extent that it became itself distressed in its turn.¹¹⁰ In the Cooch Behar Division (including the Jalpaiguri District, the Cooch Behar State, and part of Bhutan Duars) though there was but slight failure of crop (chiefly in a locality to the south of Jalpaiguri itself), but grain was exported rapidly to parts of Purnia and Dinajpur. Then in the Jalpaiguri district there arose panic in the grain markets regarding the amount of depletion of stocks and the quantity of grains stored by the dealers in their stocks.¹¹¹ The Rangpur and Bogra districts had obtained much of their food supply for many weeks from Mymensing across the Brahmaputra. The original allotments of rice for the five districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, and Malda, were stated as below:

Table. 5.17

Amount of allotment of rice in the Rajshahi Division between 12th to 25th June, 1874

District	Qnt. Of rice (Mds.)
Dinajpur	12,00,000
Rangpur	3,00,000
Bogra	2,40,000
Malda	1,50,000
Rajshahi	1,00,000
Railway works	1,00,000
Total	20,90,000 (=76,849 tons.)

Source: Twentieth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 12th to the 25th June 1874.

In Rajshahi and parts of Pabna, difficulties arose chiefly from a deficient supply of food grains, owing to the falling off in importations, and sanction had been given for the sale of Government rice in those places where the deficiency was serious. Due to the smallness of the executive machinery in Bengal the Government had endeavoured to set up 'large special machinery' to deal with the famine. The *Report of the Indian Famine Commission 1878-80* had summarized the famine condition and subsequent relief works in the following manner:

“The monsoon of 1873 was not abnormal during the 3 months, June, July and August, but in northern Bengal it ceased prematurely in September ; and much of the winter rice crop, which ripens in November, was consequently lost. The Bengal Government, from inquiries instituted for the purpose, was led to believe that the inevitable effect of this loss would be to involve the inhabitants of a large part of the province in a severe famine; it accordingly set about making preparations with the utmost energy to carry out relief measures on a scale and with a thoroughness which had never been equalled before. The principles adopted by the Government were very different from those accepted on any former similar occasion. It was considered that the operations of private trade could not be relied on, and therefore that it would be necessary to accept the responsibility of providing the distressed districts with the whole quantity of food likely to be required. After elaborate estimates had been framed, it was decided, with the approval of the Government of India and the Secretary of State, to import 480,000 tons of rice; and the greater part of this stock was purchased for

the Government in Burma, sent up-country by railway, and distributed to depots scattered over the famine area by the agency of Government officers. The estimates provided against every possible contingency, the failure of contractors, murrain among the cattle, the recurrence of drought in the ensuing monsoon. Relief was administered mainly in the form of employment on works and of gratuitous assistance to the infirm; but under rules which in their details were very different from those previously followed. Tests were not to be stringently enforced in localities where the distress was excessive and widespread. In place of the self-acting tests which on previous occasions had been held to be useful and to some extent necessary, reliance was placed on personal knowledge, on the part of the relieving officer, of the applicant's condition and want. A large special establishment of inspecting officers was appointed, and the country subdivided among them, in the hope that, with the help of the resident *zamindars* and leading *rai-yats*, they might obtain such personal knowledge of the condition of every village and its inhabitants.”¹¹²

It had been further stated that about 340,000 tons of grain were disposed of in the relief operations, ‘a quantity sufficient to provide sustenance for not less than 3,000,000 people for 7 months.’¹¹³ Rice had been imported from Burma to Calcutta ‘with entire efficiency and punctuality’ by the vessels of the British India Steam Navigation Company. Apart from this, where private trade was exhausted and failed to supply the people shops were established at a later period for the sale of Government grain.¹¹⁴ However, this time the Government ‘had a treasury full beyond all precedent and a large quantity of available cash’¹¹⁵ which denoted the successful and organized collection of land revenue during the previous years of the famine. Government had to face great difficulties for the transport of supplying rice in the remotest corners of the affected districts especially during the supplies of large quantity of grains, but the problem had been solved by the indigo planters who were under a contract with the Government.¹¹⁶ This practise had generated much criticism against the Government which promoted the exercise of the feudal authorities of the planters in such a critical time.

The great bulk of the relief operations in that district of Jalpaiguri had been carried on spontaneously at the cost of the Cooch Behar State under the guidance of Sir W. J. Herschel, Bart., the Commissioner of the Cooch Behar Division by a combination of Government officials with the zamindari agency of the distressed tract of Boda. The district was not expected to be badly distressed, and was not therefore classified as a distressed district. The relief had been organized and an improvised system of accounts and superintendence was in full operation when a panic occurred which threatened to reduce the rest of the district to famine. About 41,000 maunds of Government rice were poured rapidly into the district

outside of the Cooch Behar estates and another a sum of about Rs. 25,000 had been spent from Government funds almost entirely on carriage.¹¹⁷ The entire cost of the famine in the Jalpaiguri district and in the Chuklajat estates (as the zamindaris belonging to Cooch Behar State) were about 4½ lakhs, of which 3 lakhs had been spent by Cooch Behar and 1 lakh represented the value of 41,000 maunds was supplied by Government, and Rs. 25,000 was the cash outlay of Government.¹¹⁸ Despite of these circumstances it was believed that since the district of Jalpaiguri was 'bounded on the north throughout its entire length by the lofty range of the Himalayas, it [was] very probable that either the local rainfall, or the supply of water brought down by the rivers and streams would be affected by even the severest drought...'¹¹⁹

However, for Dinajpur which was the worst sufferer of the famine in Bengal, the Officiating Secretary of the Scarcity and Relief Department informed about the 'collection of advances direct from the ryots by a Government establishment, without the aid or intervention of the zamindars' as contemplated by the Relief Commissioner of the District of Dinajpur.¹²⁰ The Lieutenant-Governor had sanctioned temporarily for six months the agreements as proposed by the Commissioner for beginning the collection of the advances at the end of which i.e. at the end of April, the position should be reconsidered that whether such 'large establishment' would be retained or not 'through the rainy season.'¹²¹ The Relief Commissioner of the District was entrusted with the 'discretion as to how far [he would] direct the employment of zemindars on the work of realizing advances' was instructed to 'make proposals for realization of advances in other districts.'¹²² The *haimanti* late rice crop yielded a full crop in many parts of the district and the surplus stock of the Government had almost been disposed of. However, no cash advances had been made in this district to the traders for purchase of grain.¹²³

In Malda the amount of grain advanced was only a little over 25,000 maunds. The Collector of the District proposed to employ Baboo Ishan Chunder Sen as a Special Deputy Collector on a consolidated allowance of Rs. 200 a month, with two pyadas on Rs. 5 each a month, for the collection of the advances. Apart from him, Inspectors, Mohurir were also appointed to assist him and expedite the collection.¹²⁴ Being the Manager of Chunchal estate Mr. Raily was expected to realise all advances made to his own ryots along with the other ryots to whom he also made advances in that relief circle. In the month of December the reaping of the great winter rice crop was conducted and it was reported that rice was 'very plentiful in the district.'¹²⁵ There were few cases of cholera reported in Kaliachak, Shibganj, and Gazole

thanas of the Malda district.¹²⁶ In Bogra the advances amounted to 73,000 maunds, and a Sub-Deputy Collector, Mohurir, Inspectors were appointed since a larger establishment would be necessary.¹²⁷ Regarding the collection of advances W. LeF. Robinson, the Relief Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division had anticipated that a very large proportion could be realised in full after the harvesting of the winter rice crop, which was the main staple in all four districts.¹²⁸ This idea, however, gained the sanction of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal who shared the same view 'that a second instalment may be collected in April 1875 in those parts of the country which yield a cold-weather crop.'¹²⁹

Table. 5. 18

Relief-woks in the Rajshahi Division till November 1874

Famine Districts	No. of relief centres	Amount of grain actually stored	Amount of grain in transit	Daily avg. no. of persons employed on relief works			Rate of wages expressed in money and grain	No. of persons receiving gratuitous relief	Amount of grain consumed
				By P.W.D	By Circle Offices	Total			
Murshidabad	10	4,281	.....	1,008	1,138	2,146	2½ annas worth of grain per 100 cubic feet. ½ seer rice, 1 chittack dal, with salt and oil	3,630	3,393
Rajshahi	9	4,175	.....	376	269	645		261	2,905
Pabna	2	1,195	.....	.....	.....	.....		1,458	1,014
Total	21	9,651	.....	1,384	1,407	2,791		5,349	7,321

Source: From the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department, to the Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of India, Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce. – (No. 6643 – S. R. , dated Calcutta, the 14th Nov. 1874), progs. no. 132, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department*, January, 1875, WBSA.

With regard to the execution of relief-works, Sir G. Campbell's, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (1873), view was that-" to render effectual aid to the people, it is of all things most necessary that work should be offered in good time, so that the existence of public works may be known to the people at large, and those who stand in need of work may find their way to the work and be suitably provided for, before the greatest stress comes."¹³⁰ Water routes were used for the movement of grain wherever it was possible, but the dryness of the season hindered navigation. Steam ferries were established to cross the grain over to the north of the Ganges, and steamers were bought or built in the country, and overall 41 steamers ordered from England; and about 7,000 country boats and canoes were employed on the ferries and the water routes.¹³¹ Another important step to overcome the shortage of production was the import of food grains from the better yielded areas. But as imports collapsed in the April of 1874, Government's estimates of import were affected due to the nature and extent of the shortage in the districts concerned. In 1873-74 the crop failure was so intense in nature in comparison with the 1865-66 periods that private trade was almost incapable to meet the deficiency. Furthermore, it contradicted the Government's perception that high prices would obviously entice supplies from surplus to deficient zones. In 1866 private trade in the famine areas was stuck at several points by the physical difficulties of transport and communication; and in addition to this the underlying problem of exchange failure and the persistence of existing trade pattern made it almost impossible to cut through the prevailing lines of inflow and outflow or to repair a system of imports in the face of a crisis for normally surplus district.¹³² On the other hand inspite of having normal quantity of production; exports from the affected districts, sometime, increased to such a magnitude that the balance was reversed and famine rates continued in the district.¹³³ The Government measure of public works did not serve the purpose of their own because the peasants or artisans were not trained to do such work and ultimately this could not help to bring out any permanent solution of the improvement of communication system. But at one extent it had been admitted by the Government that ".....methods of relief administration were devised during the Behar[-Bengal] famine, upon which subsequent experience has only improved."¹³⁴ Finally it was believed that:

“It was also a subject of great satisfaction and congratulation that the event proved that the people were by no means pauperised and demoralised by the liberal relief given. When the rainy season of 1874 commenced in due course, very large numbers of the people receiving relief voluntarily went off to their own fields; before long they had almost wholly disappeared. The new crop was

cultivated, and- the famine ' came to an end. The advances made to the cultivators were eventually recovered with wonderful punctuality...”¹³⁵

Sir Richard Temple was of the opinion that: ‘Thus the famine of 1874 was over ; the deaths from starvation were so few compared to the many millions concerned, that practically there had been no loss of life.’¹³⁶ He further stated that: ‘this disaster affected 20 millions of people in a greater or less degree.’¹³⁷ But regarding the mortality in the famine periods (1873-74) Romesh Dutt was of the opinion that“...there was no loss of life from this famine.”¹³⁸ It had been observed in the ‘*Census of Bengal, 1881*’ that “[t]he Bengal famine of 1873 was fortunately not attended with any great loss of life, so that persons have been found to deny the occurrence of any famine at all in the strict sense of the word.”¹³⁹ The fact of the absence of ‘*any great loss of life*’ was corroborated by several other official documents of colonial administration, though these documents identified the year 1873-74 as the famine year, however, it was not known to acknowledge that whether in any ‘*strict*’ sense or not. The deficient rainfall of 1873-74 was substituted in 1875-76 with the increase in average rainfall and this caused an outstanding harvest of autumn crops. The production of winter crops was also great in the districts of northern Bengal with the exceptions of Dinajpur and Rangpur where the rainfall in 1875 was respectively half of the average and thirty per cent short of the average.¹⁴⁰

Table: 5. 19

Rainfall in 1875 in the Districts of Malda, Rangpur and Dinajpur (in inches)

Districts	Rainfall in 1875	Average Rainfall
Malda	54.40	53.33
Rangpur	60.45	83.93
Dinajpur	43.60	78.92

Source: *Document 12. Annual Report 1875-76: Weather, crops, and Prices of Bengal.*¹⁴¹

Shortage of rainfall, once again, contributed to the rise of prices in Dinajpur and Rangpur. In 1875, the price of rice gradually rose from April to July and though reduced for the time being after the harvesting of the *aus* or *bhadoi* crop, it was increasing gradually from October to December and fell again in January and February; and this reduction was caused by the major production of the autumn or *haimanti* crop.¹⁴² But this crisis was too intense to call for a Government intervention. An agrarian crisis caused by a shortage of production eventually turned into a famine due to the failure in exchange relations. With the introduction of railways and the successive diffusion of market economy into the agricultural field in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the effect of crop failure was less intense, but more

widespread in nature. A famine or acute dearth now came more frequently in the form of a noticeable rise in prices which generally caused suffering over a wider area as in 1873-74 in Bengal rather than a severe hunger, starvation and mortality confined merely to the famine area.

The south-west monsoon rains of 1884 were ill-distributed and insufficient in greater part of the province of Bengal. A prolonged break occurred during August in North Bengal, Behar and Chota Nagpur. This was in a measure made good by favourable rain in September and October over most of the province, but the crops were generally below the average, and a more or less pronounced failure of the winter rice crop was reported in November to have occurred in the Sadar and Nawada subdivisions of Gaya, the Behar sub-division of Patna, the Sadar sub-division of Darbhanga; in parts of Nuddea and Murshidabad; and in parts of the Burdwan, Birbhum and Bogra districts.¹⁴³ The prolonged cessation of the rains in August alarmed the local Government, and inquiries were instituted in all divisions as to the state of the crops and the condition of the people, but with the copious rainfall of September and October these anxieties were greatly allayed, and it was considered that distress would at the most be now confined to strictly limited areas in the above mentioned districts and would nowhere be very severe. Accordingly in November, further and more minute enquiries were directed to be instituted in those areas in order to determine the villages likely to be actually affected, the classes of people in each village likely to need relief, the best means of affording it and the probable cost.¹⁴⁴ Special attention was also directed to be paid to stimulating private charity and enlisting the co-operation of local residents of influence and public spirit in meeting such distress as might be expected to occur. The total State expenditure on relief in the province amounted to 3½ lakhs of which Rs. 2,41,900 were for loans and advances, and the rest chiefly for gratuitous relief. Relief works were, as stated, provided by the district boards.¹⁴⁵

The district of Dinajpur had again fallen into a scarcity in 1891-92.¹⁴⁶ The rains were very deficient in the months of September and October 1891 in parts of Bengal, especially in Behar and districts lying north of the Ganges. The *bhadoi* or early rain crop was generally a full average, and the districts where this crop was largely sown enjoyed, mainly on this account, comparative immunity from distress in spite of the failure of the succeeding winter and spring crops. The general good harvests of 1890 were another helping fact. The winter rice crop of 1891 in the affected parts of Behar was nowhere above 50 per cent of an average crop and in the most affected parts it was considerably less.¹⁴⁷ On the high lands the crop in many parts of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur totally failed. In the cold weather no rain fell till February,

and the *rabi* crop was exceedingly bad in all districts.¹⁴⁸ The total area affected in Dainajpur was 1,030 acres where 447,000 numbers of people were influenced by this scarcity. It was believed that since the districts were well stocked and trade was active, therefore, no anxiety was at any time felt as to food supplies. Prices of the chief staple grains were high, rice being at 11 and 12 seers and wheat at 12 and 13 seers the rupee throughout the scarcity; but the commoner grains of the early rain crop were procurable at 16 to 20 seers, and this had a great effect in limiting distress.¹⁴⁹ For the district of Dinajpur, Rs. 27,000 was spent on charitable relief from the District Funds, which was, according some other estimates, Rs. 23, 076; for establishments and other charges Rs. 3,582; and for loans and advances Rs. 5838.¹⁵⁰ The distinctive features of the relief works of 1891-92 was the substitution of piece-work or rather payment by results for task work for all able-bodied labourers, and these proved to be the immense majority of the relief workers who were classified into three categories – (a.) persons who were paid by piece-work, (b.) persons who were paid by task-work, (c.) persons paid by daily wage.¹⁵¹ After the prices became moderate and even over the whole distressed area then it was thought to fix a uniform wage in all districts in Behar and North Bengal to avoid the danger of emigration from the neighbourhood of home to a district where a labour could receive a higher wage.

II

1896-97 Famine in Northern Bengal

The overall meteorological condition in India which instigated the advent of famine in 1896, as mentioned in the 'Narratives' of the famine was as follows:

“The cause of the famine of 1897 was the early cessation of the autumn rains of 1896. The south-west monsoon was late in establishing itself in June 1896 on the West Coast, and from its first appearance was ill-distributed and fitful in character. Throughout July the rainfall was more or less deficient in Bengal and Central and Northern India, and gave rise to apprehensions. In August the monsoon appeared to have recovered strength, and frequent cyclonic storms gave heavy rain to the Central Provinces, Central India, and Rajputana. Elsewhere in Upper India the rainfall was in defect. Early in September the hopes of an improving monsoon were disappointed.”¹⁵²

The famine of 1896-97 in Bengal had caused by the failure of the monsoon rain and subsequent remarkable rise of food-grain prices. The failure of the September rice of 1896

had made the *aman* prospects doubtful which contributed to the abnormal price-rise in the market. Throughout the year of 1896 prices had been much upwards and it rose suddenly since the mid-October and persisted for a long time.¹⁵³ Although the harvesting season of 1895 was on the whole favourable to *bhadoi* crops but it was good for the production of winter rice and the rainfall of 1896 was very nearly as short as it was in 1873 and had been un-proportionately distributed.¹⁵⁴ The *bhadoi* crops had to suffer from short rainfall in all parts of the province except in Orissa, and the average outturn of the whole province was estimated at 10½ annas. The harm caused to the winter rice crop by deficient rainfall during the sowing and transplanting season had been affected by the overall cessation of the rains at the most crucial period when no rain fell after the 19th September.¹⁵⁵ The acute scarcity of grains had produced grain-riots in many areas of Bihar, and even though the government had provided a subsidy grant of 8 *annas* per maund on the import of rice in the affected areas but the hindrances in transporting the grains through roads and shortage of carts had greatly caused inconvenience in trading food-grains.¹⁵⁶ However, many regional or local factors which were closely associated with broad ecological changes had brought out the peasant-society in an acutely vulnerable position. Lance Brennan and other argue that behind the famine of 1896–1897 in Nadia District in Bengal lay a series of ecological disasters, from the drying up of some of the Ganges tributaries to the debility of the population caused by epidemics of malaria (linked to stagnant water from atrophying rivers and railway embankments).¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, Bihar and Lower Bengal was the worst sufferer of the failure of the winter rice which coupled with excessively low wages ‘remained practically unaltered for the past 20 years or more’ had been altered in a zone of acute scarcity and starvation.¹⁵⁸ Although it was widely accepted in the contemporary official and semi-official documents that the districts of northern Bengal were ‘slightly affected’ by the famine, but detail investigations and objective analysis of the fact had provided sufficient evidences to place these areas at par with the other areas which were critically affected by the famine of 1896-97.

Famine operations in the province of Bengal was commenced in the Patna division, where test• works were opened in October and were followed by relief works in November 1896. The only clear direction of the provincial Code on the point of relief administration was that each affected district should be divided into relief circles and a relief inspector should be appointed to each circle to discharge prescribed duties, the chief of which were concerned with the preparation of gratuitous relief lists in villages and the superintendence of this form .of relief.¹⁵⁹ Vinita Damodaran

in her essay titled *Famine in a Forest Tract* has shown the larger implications of colonial forest policy among the tribes of Chotanagpur region where colonial denial of forest use for the tribals triggered famines as a result of the absence of even minimum access to the forest products during the times of scarcities. Constant reduce of forest areas and openings of new coal mines in the cultivable land made the tribal population more vulnerable to any slightest fall in their entitlement. Though the famines of 1866-67 and 1873-74 were mitigated by the use of forest product but the 1896-97 famine, which ‘developed in the context of a failure of the monsoon’ which was intensified by the destruction of forests that ‘led to a decrease of jungle products and ... deprived the people of one of their chief means of resistance to famine.’¹⁶⁰ The famine in Chotanagpur was accompanied by cholera epidemic which took a heavy toll due to the ‘hesitancy in instituting relief’ by the colonial state which ‘reluctantly set in motion a system of famine relief.’¹⁶¹ The consecutive famines in this area since 1866 had contributed to a large scale migration of tribal population as coolies for the tea garden areas of northern Bengal and Assam which eventually resulted in the increase of population in these areas.¹⁶² However, most ironically, ‘specific regulations with regard to forests and fodder were proposed during the famine of 1896-97.’¹⁶³ The most authoritative study on 1896-97 famine has come from Malavika Chakrabarty who in her book *Famine of 1896-97 in Bengal: The Availability or Entitlement Crisis* (New Delhi, 2004) has vividly depicted all the aspects of 1896-97 famine in Bengal. The book has provided new insights in studying the famine of 1896-97 and adds new dimension in the realm of famine-studies. Though there is hardly any space left by the book in discussing the famine of 1896-97, but the distinctive and critical conditions which prevailed in the districts of northern Bengal deserve to be mentioned and analyzed separately.

In Bogra, rainfall was deficient during the years of 1895-96 and 1896-97 and as a result crops had to suffer a great loss. Although there was a widespread failure of crops in the district but the ‘actual scarcity [was] only in the portion of the district east of the Karatoya in *thanas* Shariakandi and Dhunot and a famine charitable relief fund had to be opened towards the close of the year.’¹⁶⁴ The famine in Murshidabad was called forth by the failure of crops caused by the shortage of rainfall. This time prices rose in an unprecedented manner during the later part of the famine which severely had affected parts of Sadar subdivision, which was located on the east of the river Bhagirathi and was known as the Bagri, along with a few areas on the west of the river in the Kandi subdivision.¹⁶⁵ Short rainfall and the lowness of the

rivers in 1895 was resulted in a partial failure of the autumn and winter crops and in 1896 in many parts of the district autumn rice had completely failed to yield a full turn.¹⁶⁶

Table. 5.20

Comparison of the outturns of the various crops in 1895-96 and 1896-97 and 1873-74 in Murshidabad

Crop	1895-96	1896-97	1873-74
	Annas	Annas	Annas
<i>Aman</i> paddy	8	7	6
<i>Aus</i> paddy	9	8	12
Wheat	8	3	12
Pulses	14	7	12
Other <i>rabi</i> crops	10	8	12

Source: L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Murshidabad*, p. 112.

This time the situation was worse than it was in 1873-74. Test-works had been introduced in February and the maximum wages which the workers were allowed to earn in a day was 1½ annas for a task of 66 cubic feet. Since increasing number of people were engaged in the tasks so the administration towards the end of April found it necessary to convert the test-works into ordinary relief works under the Famine Code. The supply of gratuitous relief was started in March in Barwa and Bharatpur thanas which were the most severely affected parts of the district.¹⁶⁷ The suffering was predominantly experienced by the landless and labouring classes, and by those who in ordinary years were relied on the charity of the others.¹⁶⁸ During the month of July the situation became more severe and the price of common rice was prevailing between 6 to 7½ seers per rupee in the affected areas. The Government had to open new relief centres at Nawada at the end of April and later on at Jalangi. The whole of the Sadar subdivision was more or less affected, and where circles were not opened, relief was administered by private enterprises like zamindars, big landlords of the district.¹⁶⁹ Mention can be made of Maharani Swarnamayi, the Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad, Bai Sitab Chand Nahar Bahadur, Rai Budh Singh Dudburia Bahadur of Azimganj, Babu Jogendra Narayan Rai of Lalgola, Bibi Hani Mena Kumari and Babu Narpal Singh and many others.¹⁷⁰

There is no doubt that these private charities were in many respect had contributed to the lessening of the severity and duration of the distress caused by the famine and had complemented the Government relief operations in the district.

In Rajshahi, crop was half the average in 1896 and as a result boro rice was planted on an abnormally large area of field (77,000 acres). Though there was no such great deficiency in rainfall during the early monsoon period but by the coming of August there was a serious shortage and the drought persisted even till the middle of September.¹⁷¹ October went rainless. The crop production in lands which were nearer to the river beds was also below the average due to the short-lasting of the floods of this year. However, it was the 'abnormal meteorological conditions and the abnormally low inundations of the Padma [which] injured the year's winter harvest, prejudiced the prospects of the coming spring crop, and affected the condition of the people at large.'¹⁷² There were contradictory estimates put forward by the Collector and Commissioner of the district.¹⁷³ There was complete absence of any work in the agricultural fields between mid-October and end-November and the price of agricultural labour had become drastically low viz. 1 *anna* per diem in the Boalia and Durgapur outposts.¹⁷⁴ Though in 1873 the worst affected part of the district was the Barind tract but in 1896-97 famine the areas which were severely affected were located in *thanas* Boalia, Puthia, Charghat, the southern half of Bagmara and that portion of the Nator *thana*. The prices of rice had eventually increased - the market price of common rice was 7½ seers per rupee at Rampur Boalia in October 1896 and at Nator in November and it rose abnormally high in July 1897 when rice was selling at 6 seers to 7 seers 12 *chittaks* and in August it was 6½ seers at Puthia and 8 seers at Mahadebpur.¹⁷⁵ In these circumstances gratuitous relief was undertaken by the Government and as a result 9,000 persons were relieved from the Charitable Fund who were mostly impoverished women and children and a great portion of the relief was extended in form of gratuitous doles of rice.¹⁷⁶ When the test works were started it was initially found that except from the place near to the Ganges, where the people were hard hit by the decline of silk industry and there was constant want of employment, no such demand was raised for it. The test works in the primary stage was aimed to bring the Ganges water into the inland *bils* and was limited in the two canals of Narad Khal and Bairagi Khal for this purpose, the former was 5½ miles and the later was 3 miles long.¹⁷⁷

Table. 5. 21

Statement showing the actual expenditure incurred in Pabna and Rajshahi for 1896-97.

District	Relief work and gratuitous relief					Amount advanced for village works under the modified rules under the Land Improvement Loans Act.	Total expenditure debited to general revenues
	Amount paid as wages	Amount spent in giving gratuitous relief	Cash of establishment tools and plant, &c.,	Total cost of relief works and gratuitous relief	Portion of cost defrayed from District Funds.		
1	2	3	4	5	6		
	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.
Rajshahi	3,748 13 3	136 3 0	1,336 8 6	5,221 8 9	5,221 8 9	1,400 0 0	1400 0 0
Pabna	51 94 0	-----	78 15 3	598 3 3	598 3 3	1000 0 0	1000 0 0

Source: Extracted from letter from P. Nolan, EsQ., Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department.¹⁷⁸

P. Nolan, the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division on his *Resolution on the Rajshahi Report* had noted the impoverished condition of the people of the Rajshahi Division and asserted that ‘the general condition of the people was said to have got worse during the fortnight; a result which is unfortunately to be expected as the season advances and with reference to the insufficient fall of rain.’¹⁷⁹ The assertion had show an attendance at test-works averaging 670 male units during the first week and only 626 in the second which overall demonstrated that no woman or child was employed, since as it was believed, ‘the result of the test in regard to the existence of famine [was] negative.’¹⁸⁰ But it was noticed

that there had been a marked increase of participation in test works since the close of the fortnight probably due to the opening of new works. The gratuitous relief under the Famine Code, which was also an indication of the degree to which scarcity prevails, had been reported as nominal, the cost being Rs. 3-10. Public health is reported fair, although cholera has appeared, as is usual in this season. As a method of test works coolies were sought by the administration. Nolan stated that:

“I called the Collector’s attention to the demand for 5,000 coolies on the Bogra Railway adjoining his district, and would glad if he can state in his next report under the head of emigration, whether the labourers of Rajshahi have availed themselves of this opportunity. The opening of new test-works is in accordance with my instructions. It is to be recommended that a work not conducted in strict accordance with the Code is no “test” so far as Government is concerned.”¹⁸¹

In his letter on 19th April 1897 N. K. Bose, The Collector of Rajshahi wrote to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division that ‘The general condition of the affected tracts [was] gradually becoming worse and worse, particularly portions of Boalia, Nowhatta, Charghat and Rajapur Circles.’¹⁸² There was 6.30 inch of rainfall in Naugaon till the third week of April, but practically there was no rain elsewhere. Although it was reported that the condition of *boro dhan* in Tanor was good, and *boro dhan*, onions and jute in Bagmara were also good, but in parts of Godagari, *boro* and *jail dhan* was said to be drying for want of rain. Only a quarter crop of *til* and sugarcane were expected in Charghat and elsewhere in the Sadar Subdivision the prospects were not positive and in Rajapur the condition was noticeably worst.¹⁸³ Importation from Panchupur and Singra *thanas* into Boalia and from Dinajpur had been going on, but not in sufficiently large quantities to meet the demand. In ordinary years the price of rice did not get much higher but in 1897 the condition was alarming due to the shortage of rainfall, as the *rabi* crops did not turn out well. In these circumstances the District Superintendent reported that ‘only the well-to-do cultivators had any food-stocks; many poor persons [were] subsisting on fruits or berries, greens, kachu, &c., and [had] to do without cooked food for a day.’ The scarcity of food and water had been accompanied by severe cases of cholera in Boalia, Putia and Baraigram *thanas* and there were 31 cases reported in Boalia town alone. Till the middle of April there had been three test relief works open and the price of rice at the relief works had fluctuated between 8 to 9 seers per rupee. Besides the above test works initiatives had been taken there to open several works in which the labourers were paid wages according to the Famine Code. Two tanks near Purila

were being excavated under the modified piece-work system where 80 persons on an average could work daily. Eight works were being carried out with the loans granted under the modified rules under the Land Improvement Loans Act. Besides these works, opening of several tanks were being executed throughout the district by some private individuals either from their own funds or from loans granted under the ordinary rules under the Land Improvement Loans Act.¹⁸⁴ The Collector of the district of Rajshahi had informed about the opening of three new test- works in the district which were ‘ready to be started at a moment’s notice’ – in Boalia the Narad Khal, Tank at Hat Godagari and Tank at Sridharpur. In the meanwhile the work at Narad Khal had already begun, and regular estimates had been sanctioned for the tanks at Hat Godagari and Sridharpur. But despite of all these initiatives there were only 16 cases of gratuitously relieved people informed by the police under section 12 of the Famine Code. Till the end of 15th April, nearly 8,000 people were gratuitously relieved from the Charitable Relief Fund.

Table. 5. 22

Statement of gratuitous relief by Police for the two weeks ending 15th April 1897 in Rajshahi

Name of circle and Heads of gratuitous relief.	Number of persons receiving gratuitous relief				Money expended		
	Men	Women	Children.	Total	Rs.	A.	P
Relief by Police under section 12 Godagari	....	3	....	3	0	3	6
Tanor	1	2	3	6	0	8	6
Rajapur	1	6	.....	7	0	13	6
Lalpur	Particulars of men, women, &c., not given. Gratuitous relief administered by the Charitable Relief Committees were not shown here.				2	0	6
Total	2	11	3	16	3	10	0

Source: From N. K. Bose., EsQ., Collector of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 228G., dated Rampur Boalia, the 19th April 1897), WBSA.

From the above table it is evident that from among the recipients of gratuitous relief of the district of Rajshahi women formed the overwhelming portion viz. almost 69%. This shows the relatively increased crisis prevailed among them and their sheer dependency on the government relief. This has also reflected that the drought had peeped into the domestic order which was shaken vigorously by the scarcity and wanting of food. Gendered social hierarchies became more intense during the crisis time viz. famine and scarcities when women did not get even for their bare subsistence and their male counterpart captured the whole subsistence. In November 1896, it had been informed that in Hatia and other affected areas of Noakhali-Chittagong rice obtained from the relief actions were consumed by the ‘pater familias, at the cost of the female, minor, old and infirm members of the family.’¹⁸⁵ As ‘for many of the poorer households survival was a balancing act requiring the strategic operation of all economic and cultural resources’,¹⁸⁶ thus the household itself became a site of competition and contestation instead of showing cooperation in a time of crisis. Bina Agarwal argues that ‘there is a systematic anti-female bias in the allocation within rural households of subsistence resources controlled by men, including resources used for food, health care’ etc.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, since the women had mostly relied on the ‘specialized’ job, so they had to go through within a severe crisis of employment during the time of drought or scarcities when the occupational opportunities gradually contracted and ultimately stopped. Arup Maharatna argues that ‘the age-sex composition of mortality effects of famine is usually an outcome of two factors, namely, physiological vulnerability and social protection.’¹⁸⁸

There were also certain peculiar characteristics which prevailed in the district of Pabna. The Commissioner of Pabna had remarked that the lower class of Muslim women in Pabna did care very little for the *purda*, which was used for hiding themselves behind a curtain, but it did not follow that they had no objection to earthwork – on the contrary it was observed in Rajshahi by their abstention from doing the work despite of prevailing the same condition in that district.¹⁸⁹ The Collector pointed out that the women had no prejudice against husking rice – a task assigned to them in the ordinary course of village industry. Employment of this class, however, was afforded from charitable funds – not by the Government. C. A. Radice, the Officiating Collector of Pabna in a letter to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division (18th July 1897) had remarked that he was informed by native gentlemen of Pabna that Muslim women did not care much for the *purda* in this district, this idea, as argued by him, had been attested fully by his personal observation.¹⁹⁰ It was found that at the relief circles the paddy huskers were almost all Muslims, mostly widows, many with several children and

when they came for their paddy from villages even 5 or 6 miles distant many appeared to be endowed with very little modesty. The incident had shaped the Governmental apathy of the fact that the number of women recipients were gradually increasing and also guided them to be 'greatly disinclined to attach importance to the fact that women still [came] to the test-works and they [had] taken to carrying earth as well as turf on the Rajapur-Dasuria road work.¹⁹¹ It was further noted that despite of the considerable presence of women workers it was reported that 'their number [had] moreover, remained on the whole comparatively constant,' and the numbers of males was increased by the junior males of less indigent families who were attracted by the lightness of the tasks set.¹⁹² There was a 'rumour', according to the administration, of several deaths in Sara jurisdiction and the 'rumour' of these several deaths from famine had resolved itself on enquiry into one death only, that of a child about 7 years old, the son of a chaukidar who was of the opinion that the death was due to fever. But further enquiries which were conducted amongst some women of the same village showed that the boy had had nothing to eat for two days and had taken a long drink of water for which he began to vomit and died.¹⁹³ In the tribal societies where social restrictions were not powerful to restrict them, the tribal women had shared their duty in the initial years of famine – women were engaged in collecting jungle products and men went to the relief works, whereas during the critical famine years men were first to respond to the outward migration leaving their families behind in the famine areas but ultimately the women too had to migrate for the tea gardens of Duars and Assam and for the coal mines of Bihar and Bengal.¹⁹⁴ There existed forms of social prejudices and bindings which were predominant among the poor people even in the days of acquiring famine relief and test-works. Though women were not much familiar with the works that they had to perform for obtaining the reliefs but sometime they still went out from their houses to do such works. This propensity became so widespread that even the Muslim women did join and perform the test-works for which they had to go beyond their *purda* restrictions. Apart from the central and eastern Bengal, these kinds of practises were prevailed in north Bengal. The higher and lower class women of Hindu and Muslim families came to join the test-works during the relief periods when they had to do rice-husking, jute twisting etc. and other women were engaged in cleaning Burma rice.¹⁹⁵ The women's participation in the test-works had disclosed the severity of famine-condition which had critically impoverished the household of the poor and dragged the women from their *antapur*. The acute scarcity in the district of Pabna had brought the Muslim women into the test-works where they could care very little for their *purda*.¹⁹⁶

In the district of Pabna there were no crops of importance on the fields except the *boro dhan*. The sowing of the *aus* had been delayed by the want of rain. There was no rain during the middle of April in Pabna and this had prevented *aus* sowing and kept the price of rice even higher than it would probably otherwise had been. The normal for the Sadar Subdivision for the whole month of April was 3.12 inches.¹⁹⁷ The retail prices of common rice and paddy was returned as follows from the different police stations. The figures were standard seers of 80 *tolahs*. (80 *tolahs* = 1 *seers*)

Table. 5. 23

Retail prices of common rice and paddy of different police stations in Pabna

Thanas	Rice	Paddy
Pabna	9	13
Sara	8¼	13
Chatmohar	10½	25
Faridpur	10	Not returned
Dulai	8	Ditto
Mothura	8	15
Ullapara	9	14
Khamarkhand	8	13
Shazadpur	8¼	13½
Sirajganj	8	13½
Subgacha	8¼	13
Raiganj	9	14
Taras	10	20
Chohali	9¼	13

Source: From W. Maude, EsQ., the Collector of Pabna to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, dated Pabna, the 19th April 1897), WBSA.

The above table has shown the great variations in the prices of rice and paddy at different places due to the state of local supplies and the peculiar fact that, although owing to rain holding off the price of paddy had been steadily increasing up whereas the price of rice has remained stationary. The rise in the price of paddy and the great increase in the numbers

attending the one test work which was open during by that time indicated that the position was one of considerable deterioration which had been attributed chiefly to the rain having kept off altogether. On the other hand, the Subdivisional Officer of Sirajganj had further reported that distress in his subdivision was confined to the very poorest people.¹⁹⁸ The imports and exports of food grains registered during that time was as follows: -

	Standard maunds
Imports	28,682
Exports	2,123

The remarkable feature of the relief works during the 1896-97 famine was that this time Government had acknowledged the necessity of both import and export from the districts affected by the famine whereas in the previous famines import and export had both become a matter of dissension among the Government officials. The policy of restrictions on export and increasing quantity of import became widespread in many affected district of the Presidency. The Collector of Darbhanga observed that

“The local feeling, as is invariably the case on such occasions, was very strongly in favour of measures being taken to check the export of food grains from the district, and of Government taking measures to import food grains; Measures to check exports have never been adopted by Government as a part of their famine policy, but in 1897 Government was obliged to import largely.”¹⁹⁹

The total numbers of task-works, persons who had been relieved by the gratuitous relief and the cost of the same at the circles of Pabna and Dasuria were as follows:

Table. 5. 24

Total numbers of task-work, relieved persons and their cost in Pabna and Dasuria

Circle	Task Work	Gratuitous	Cost (Rs.)
Dasuria	1,172	Nil	1,997
Pabna	343	223	269

Source: From W. Maude, EsQ., the Collector of Pabna to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, dated Pabna, the 19th April 1897), progs. no. 393-94, WBSA.

The condition of the tracts threatened with distress in the districts of Rajshahi and Pabna, during the first half of the April had been demonstrated from the Secretary of the Government in the following manner:

“It appears to the Lieutenant Governor that the Collector of Rajshahi [was] inclined to take an unduly gloomy view of the state of things in his district and I am to request that you [would] take steps to check this tendency on the part of Mr. Bose. His Honor [did] not think that there can be any severe pressure at present in this or any other district in the Rajshahi Division.”²⁰⁰

N. K. Bose was of the opinion that the price of rice at the relief works varied between 8 and 9 seers, and as a result of this he had therefore raised the maximum wage from 8 pice to 9 pice.²⁰¹ As the operations in the district of Rajshahi were still at the test-work stage, the Lieutenant Governor was of opinion that two *annas* a day should be sufficient as a maximum wage on test works, and that the tasks were to be strictly enforced with an objective to ascertain whether the people were under the necessity of working on a mere subsistence wage.²⁰² But on a sharp contrast with the Government, A. M. Bose., President of the Indian Association wrote in a telegram about the severe famine condition of the Rajshahi district in following terms:

“Funds for charitable relief in Rajshahi completely exhausted. Rice selling 8 seers, even less, and at places no adequate quantity procurable for money. Scarcity and starvation prevailing. Advance of seed grains to cultivators necessary. Unless Government or Central Relief Committee comes to rescue immediately, many will die.”²⁰³

The telegram had disclosed an extent of distress which required the immediate attention of the Government. Rai Raj Kumar Sarvadhikary, Bahadur, Secretary, British Indian Association had also acknowledge the ‘prevalence of severe distress in the Rajshahi district’ to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal.²⁰⁴

The Collector of the district of Pabna had anticipated a good *aus* crop by the middle of May which was generally coming up well and was already six inches high in many parts. The crop had been ‘benefited by the break without rain for the last week’ for which ‘good occasional showers were needed to bring it along well.’ Therefore, it was expected that there was ‘a good deal to make up during the next fortnight, but constant heavy showers may now be confidently expected.’²⁰⁵ But there had been a steady rise in price all over the district. This had been attributed to the uncertainty of the probable fate of the *aus* crop owing to the long drought that had prevailed up to the middle of April. There had been a large import of Burma rice, both in Pabna and Sirajganj. The Sub-divisional Officer of Sirajganj wrote most miserably in his reports about ‘the very high prices and on general rumours’ –

“... in the Sadar, at any rate, things are much in the same condition as before, and, if anything, slightly ameliorated by the recent rains and the promising condition of the aus paddy crop. I am satisfied that the distress is much exaggerated.”²⁰⁶

The Naib of Shazadpur reported on the first week of May that there was great distress in some of his villages which required serious attention on the part of the Government. Although Government wanted to tackle the problem through the introduction of test-works for the victims but the Naib ‘replied with equal promptness that they would not.’ On the other hand the Naib had insisted the Collector to compel the mahajans to lend money at a small rate of interest. The proposal did not get any approval from the Government which instead of extension of any further loans to the peasants had suggested that the estate (the Tagore’s) should lend money to their tenants at a reasonable rate and as a result the ‘old idea that Government [would] give innumerable loans [was] still hanging on.’²⁰⁷ There had been importation of 18,141 maunds of food grains whereas 1,207 maunds were exported from the district. Though cholera had again overwhelming presence in the district of Pabna too but gradually cholera was receding from there. The amount which had been allotted for the districts of north Bengal for relief works was as follows:

Table. 5.25

Amount of distribution of relief funds among the districts of North Bengal

District	Amount (Rs.)
Rajshahi	3000
Dinajpur	1000
Jalpaiguri	1000
Darjeeling	Nil.
Rangpur	1000
Bogra	2000
Pabna	2000
Reserve	8000

Source: Memorandum by P. Nolan, EsQ., Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division – Circular No. 21M., dated Jalpaiguri, the 5th April, 1897, progs no. 401-402, WBSA.

It was decided in a meeting of the Bengal Provincial Executive Committee that a sum of Rs. 25,000 (inclusive of sums already remitted to Rajshahi and Pabna) would have been disposed to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division for the expenditure in charitable relief in the Division. The Executive Committee had instructed that the money would be distributed from time to time in accordance with circumstances, among the Local Committees which had been formed in all the districts of the Rajshahi Division at the Commissioner's discretion, in response to their respective needs. It seemed to be axiomatic to the Committee that no districts other than Rajshahi and Pabna were likely to require money for charitable relief. The above table (5.22) has shown the amount of distribution of this money which was in total 18,000 and the rest of 7000 had already been remitted to the Rajshahi Division.²⁰⁸ The table below shows the number of persons on the relief list on the 31st March: -

Table. 5. 26

Number of persons on the relief list on the 31st March, Rajshahi Division

Category of people	Number of people
Number of paupers gratuitously relieved	5,103
Number of huskers, spinners, &c.	1,649
Number of persons to whom rice is sold at a cheaper rate than the market rate	597
Total	7,349

From E. N. Baker, EsQ., C.S., Honorary Secretary, Bengal Branch, Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 314, dated Calcutta, the 31st March 1897), WBSA.

The centres which were opened up to 31st March in Rajshahi were - in Sadar Subdivision relief centres were opened in Boalia, Nowhatta, Bagmara, Muchmal, Tanore, Charghat, Rajapur, Putia, Durgapur and in the Nator Subdivision relief centres were opened at Nator, Lalpur and Bagatipara.

In addition to the miseries of the people caused by the shortage of rainfall and failure of crops, there had been two disastrous fires, one at Boalia, and the other at Putia, besides small fires here and there.²⁰⁹ The fire at Boalia occurred on Good Friday at the poorest part of the

town. Although the wind was very high but the open space afforded by the Rajshahi College compound and for the untiring exertions of some people to cut off connections by breaking down huts, the conflagration had been tamed at last but otherwise it would have been much more disastrous than it actually was. A tiled hut belonged to the college and another, in the Boalia Hospital were burnt down. In Boalia, it had been roughly ascertained that 50 poor families turned out homeless and in Putia more than 40 families. These poor persons deserved to get some assistance to build up some sort of shelter along with the arrangements for famine-relief. The fires had triggered the sale of food-grain by the mahajans of Murshidabad and other places. In April 1897, the Rani Mena Kumari of Jeagunj and Babu Narpat Singh of Azimganj had sold rice for 10 seers a rupee which was excessively high during the famine periods.²¹⁰ In areas of Rajshahi where there was no such systematic grain trade, rich peasants had acted as the mahajans like former and had 'controlled a large part of the surplus engaged in petty retail trade.'²¹¹

The Rules for the Charitable Relief in Rajshahi were as follows:

“To advance half a maund of paddy (*kachi*) to each indigent female who can husk it, but cannot procure it for want of capital, on her undertaking to return 12 seers (*kachi*) of clean rice. By this arrangement a margin of above one seer of rice with bran and husk is left to the husker as her remuneration. To *pardanishin* ladies, unaccustomed to husking, may be insisted on a return of 10 seers of rice for half a maund of paddy.

To register all lame, blind, decrepit, and infirm persons, and give them a dole of rice at two seers (*kachi*) a week (say on Sunday) and their dependent children below 10 at 1 seer each.

To make house to house search and pick out cases of starvation with a view to supply each one with so much of rice *gratis* as the committee consider necessary. The doles should be given weekly on a fixed day.

If no paddy is available, *khesari* or *musari* pulses may also be issued. Half a maund (*kachi*) may be issued to each female, who is required to return 13¼ seers (*kachi*) of clean dal.

It has been decided to give relief to indigent weavers. The police has been instructed to prepare a list of those indigent weavers who are ready to supply us with clothes and *gamchas*, with advances made from the fund. These lists will be forwarded to the Branch Committees, and they may, after due enquiry, make advances. The Committees may also on their own knowledge make advances. Not more than Rs. 10 should be advanced at one time to any person.

Each weaver taking advance shall have to execute an agreement on a stamped paper (of 8 annas value) in the form enclosed. It should be executed in favour of

the Magistrate and President of the Relief Committee. The cost of the stamp should be paid from the fund.

Two or more weavers may execute a joint agreement, but the total advance made on subjoint agreement should not exceed Rs. 50.

When the weaver brings in the clothes, their market price should be appraised and paid in cash. The cloths received from the weavers should be distributed *gratis* to the poor and needy.”²¹²

Regarding the offering of the advances to weavers there were, however, certain pre-conditions which were set by the Government. In the matter of giving advances to the weavers, no steps were taken until the Committee were satisfied that necessity had arisen to aid them in their industry. While reports were received from the Police, as well as from the Branch Committees, that several indigent weavers were in great distress at the same time objection had been taken to the police preparing a list of indigent weavers.²¹³ As a matter of fact, the lists were in the first instance submitted by the panchayats, which were as far as possible checked by the police, and then they were sent to the Branch Committee. The members of the Committees were required to make due enquiries personally before any advances were made. The Committee was always in a state of receiving any better plan for preparing the list. Despite of all the above evidences and instances, famine had not been officially declared in the district of Rajshahi till the mid-April of 1987, and the rules laid down were strictly applicable to tracts in which famine prevailed. Therefore, considerable confusion prevailed centering on the question that although the affected persons were entitled to State relief; but as famine had not been officially declared in this district; then they either might be left to die of starvation or be given some relief from the Charitable Fund. In these circumstances, it was decided that supports would be given to the distress people through the weekly distribution of dole of two *seers kachi*, or 1½ *seers paki*, which implied that they were to be provided with ‘only two days’ subsistence allowance, leaving them to pick the other five days’ diet from private charity.²¹⁴ It was resolved finally that this form of relief would be discontinued as soon as famine would be declared to prevail in this district. P Nolan was of the opinion that in the adjoining districts of Pabna and Rajshahi there were almost identical conditions in regard to the degree of deficiency in rainfall and of failure in crops. In Pabna, the number employed on the 30th April was 407 and the only difference between them was that charitable relief had been much more freely distributed in Rajshahi.²¹⁵ From 16th April to 30th April 1897 the total rainfall in Pabna was 1.99 inches and in Sirajganj was 2.37

inches.²¹⁶ W. Maude, the Collector of Pabna wrote to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division that the only standing crops in Pabna were *boro dhan*, *jali dhan* and sugarcane. *Jali* paddy was a later kind of *boro dhan* coming between that variety and the aus crop. It was more extensively cultivated in the Sadar subdivision than the regular *boro dhan* which was rare, except in some low *bil* lands whereas *jali* paddy was cultivated on char lands. There had been a good deal of cholera prevalent, especially in Pabna town and the Pabna, Dulai and Mathura *thanas*. There was also an unusual prevalence of fever and dysentery, and general sickness around Dasuria for which a compounder was sent out with medicines.²¹⁷

The Collector of Rajshahi argued that till the half-month of the May there had been good rainfall throughout the district and the table below shows the rainfall recorded in the several rain-registering stations in the district:

Table. 5.27

Rainfall at different places in Rajshahi till the month May, 1897

Stations	Rainfall (inches)
Boalia	2.35
Naugaon	2.69
Nator	1.77
Manda	2.02
Lalpur	1.16
Mahadebpur	1.32

Source: From N. K. Bose, EsQ., Collector of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 400G., dated Rampur Boalia, the 3rd May 1897), progs. no. 405-406, WBSA.

The Collector continued to state that on the 1st May there was a very smart shower at Boalia which had contributed to the improvement of the agricultural prospects considerably. *Boro* paddy for which some anxiety was being felt had been reported to be safe and the sowing of *aus* and *aman* paddy and jute was about to start.²¹⁸ Despite of these changing conditions the prevailing high price of rice had become however, a source of great anxiety. In several hats

the prices had varied from 7½ to 8 seers per rupee and paddy was still being imported in the affected tracts from Panchupur side though in very small quantities.²¹⁹ The stocks had fallen low, and the import trade was turning gradually dull which inspired the grain dealers to begin importing Burma rice from Calcutta. This was equally known to the Government who believed that ‘no doubt that they [grain dealers] [would] do so if the present high prices continue.’²²⁰ The prices of labour had largely fluctuated in several places – prices were high in Naugaon and Nator, but low in all other parts of the districts. A large number of landless labourers were searching for work in the fields, as well as in the excavation of tanks; but owing to the high price of food grains, their earnings were insufficient to maintain them and their family. Though the condition of ‘public health fortunately continues fairly good’ but still ‘incomplete’ mortuary returns had been received for the month of April from certain *thanas*, which showed that the rate of mortality was higher than in the previous month. Cholera broke out in the Boalia town, and 50 deaths were reported.²²¹ Although as a result of the vigorous measures taken by the Municipality at the instance of the Civil Surgeon and the Magistrate, the disease had been stamped out but in the Baraigram *thana* cholera was said to be rather bad, and a necessity for Civil Hospital Assistant for this *thana* was strongly felt by the administration. It was reported that there was no immigration of famished people, but on the other hand the District Superintendent of Police reported that some people left Bagmara, Chorghat and Puthia to obtain employment elsewhere beyond the district. The demand for coolies on the Bogra-Sultanpur Railway was widely circulated throughout the district, but it was not known that to what extent it helped the labourers since it was not informed that how many of the labourers had availed themselves of the opportunity.

The last return of May had showed 881 male units on the test-works and the number for the three weeks were 646, 503, and 566 respectively. Though there was no objection in allowing the full famine wage from the Collector but the fact was that the charitable relief at the cost of Government was almost nothing.²²² The death-rate was 3.47, against an average of 4.11 for the month of April. The *boro* crop estimate had been raised from 7 *annas* to 13 by the Collector, which was to be rose to 16 *annas* but the specific estimate after the personal enquiry conducted by the Deputy Collector, as it was anticipated would be 20 *annas*. The area sown this year was 116,600 acres among which more *aus* had been sown in 1897 than usual. Since the prospect of this crop was excellent, therefore the Commissioner ‘s view was that ‘under the favourable circumstances of the season, not a seer of seed-grain or an acre of land would be left unutilized for want of advances.’²²³ Bengal Government had tried to

generalise the sufferings of the people of Bengal in relation with the other parts of India regarding the long prevalence of high prices and surprisingly commented that Rajshahi was 'in the position of those districts which shared the common misfortune of the country at large, but where the prescribed test show[ed] that there [was] at present no famine.'²²⁴ Raiyats had been left upon the mercy of the mahajans for lending money during the famine-time which frequently turned out as perilous problem for the raiyats. Although the raiyats of Bogra and Jalpaiguri had tried to obtain loans from the mahajan for the *aus dhan* and jute, but the mahajan had declined to lend money to the raiyats till the prospects of the crops could be settled.²²⁵

Report of the middle of the May had disappointedly demonstrated no material change in the generally bad condition of the affected tracts, excepting that rain had fallen and had slightly improved agricultural prospects. The recent rainfall had saved the *boro* paddy. Aus paddy had been very extensively sown, and everywhere it had germinated well. At the end of the last April and in the beginning of this half-month of May crowds of raiyats came into Boalia and informed that they had no seed-grain and no money, and they would not be able to get through the next two months unless grain was advanced to them.²²⁶ It was noticed by the Collector that 'most of these applicants appeared to be well-to-do, wearing good cloths, carrying umbrellas, and presenting none of the appearances of want or privation [whose] object was apparently to make a profit for themselves.'²²⁷ Prices have remained high throughout the month of May, in some places as high as 7 seers 4 *chitaks* per rupee. Babu Sasi Bhusan Dutt, Deputy Collector, reported some importations from the eastern *thanas* of this district and Dinajpur, and the Subdivisional Officer of Nator stated that Messrs. Watson and Company had imported about 6,000 maunds of paddy, yet there had been no importation of Burma rice in the district.²²⁸ There was little doubt that the high price of rice was caused by the almost total cessation of importation. Although the Collector had observed improved agricultural prospects caused by the recent rainfall but there was undeniably a good deal of distress. The majority of the people were now living on only one full meal a day, and as far as the poor and destitute, this even was not always procurable by them. Though death-rate was reduced to some extent but it did not stop. The death rate per mile during the month of the April was 3.47 against 4.11 which was the average death-rate in April for five years (1892-96). The average daily numbers of labourers at work at different relief works were 385 at the Narad Khal, and 239 at the Bagha tank. The average daily number of labourers in the Mohunpur tank and Rahimpur tank was about 30.

Government seemed to be anxious not about the deaths caused by famine but about the reports which were sent by its servants. It was argued that ‘the readiness with which the false report of three deaths from starvation was at first accepted is instructive.’²²⁹ Being confident and assured by the enquiries of Mr. Bose who had ‘properly caused a full enquiry’ it was stated that ‘

“Rajshahi may now be classed with the rest of this Division as distinctly outside the famine line (it was never within it, but doubts existed), although the people do and must suffer greatly from the prevalence of famine prices at a time when their means have been diminished by a partial failure of crops. This causes general and searching distress which in many cases reaches the point at which charitable relief is requested.”²³⁰

For the district of Pabna P. Nolan, had remarked that the agricultural prospect seemed to be excellent, but there prevailed the marked rise in prices in some places to six seers a rupee, the appearances of women on the test works and the increased imports indicated that there was a great pressure. On the other hand the works attracted but a limited number of labourers, the highest figure was the attendance of 414 on the first day of the month of May and the lowest 172, on the 26th, after which it again rose to 262 on the last day of the month.²³¹

For the districts of Rajshahi and Pabna the grants allotted from Government fund for the month of April were Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 1,000 respectively, for Pabna which had been paid as advances for village works under the modified rules of the Agriculturists’ Land Improvement Loan Act.²³² The estimate for the district of Rajshahi under the head of relief works and gratuitous relief for the month of May was as follows:

	Estimated daily number	Estimated cost (Rs.)
1. Relief works -	2,000	8,125
2. Gratuitous relief -	500	1,440
3. Establishments, tools and plant, &c. -	---	1,000
Total	-----	(Rs.) 10,565

The estimates under (1) and (2) demonstrated a grant of ‘over Rs. 4 per head for the month for relief works, and nearly Rs. 3 per head for gratuitous relief’ which the Lieutenant Governor regarded as ‘very high’ rates for men, women and children.²³³ Mr. M. Finucane, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal had ordered an investigation to find ‘an explanation

showing why the estimate [was] so high, and why no part of the estimated expenditure [was] to be borne by the District Board.²³⁴

In the meantime the report of the Collector of Rajshahi on 2nd June had informed that there had been good showers of rain throughout the district. But he was equally aware of the fact that the general condition of the district, however, was still bad owing to the continued high prices of food-grain. The head-constable of Godagari police-station reported three cases of deaths from starvation.²³⁵ Babu Upendra Chandra Mukerjee, Sub-Deputy Collector, was directed by the Collector to make a full enquiry which subsequently confirmed the police report as true incident. But still it was believed that the 'report was very meagre, and the enquiry was most perfunctory.' Babu Atul Chandra Ker, Deputy Collector was therefore deputed to make a searching enquiry on the spot and his report demonstrated that 'one of the deaths was due to chronic fever, the second case reported was the result of a boy aged about 7 years, the son of the man who was 30 *bighas* of land, 2 ploughs, 4 plough bullocks, 3 cows, 4 calves, 3 fowls, 12 or 14 brass bell-metal utensils.'²³⁶ Thus it was conceived by the Deputy Collector that it was 'absurd to think such a man will allow his son to die of starvation.' According to Babu Atul Chandra Ker, the boy probably died of cholera after eating some raw mangoes with chillies. The third case was that of a baby of 18 months old. The family consists of father and mother and three other children who all looked healthy and well fed. The report, however, did not unfolded the 'truth' behind the deaths and there still prevailed a doubt that despite of their well-to-do conditions why these people had died. It was reported that there were no immigration and emigration of famished people worth noticing, but it was, however, stated that many persons in Charghat *thana* have left their homes to seek employment elsewhere.

The Collector of Pabna had stated that from 16th May to 31st May in Pabna total rainfall was 2.56 and in Sirajganj was 6.60 inches and for the whole month of May the rainfall in Pabna was 7.08 inches and in Sirajganj 10.59 inches, against a normal fall of 6.95 and 7.27 respectively.²³⁷ Though this statistics have shown an increase rainfall than the normal rate, but this did not contribute to the lessening of the prices of rice in the district. The price of common rice was reported as follows:

Table. 5. 28

Price of common rice in Pabna in May, 1897

Places	Prices (<i>pucka Seers</i>)
Pabna	8½
Dulai	7
Chatmohar	8
Mathura	7½
Sara	7
Faridpur	8
Ullapara	8
Kamarkhand	6½
Shahzadpur	6
Subgacha	6
Chohali	6¾
Taras	7½
Raiganj	9
Sirajganj	6½

Source: From W. Maude, EsQ., Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. –(No. 424G., dated Pabna, the 3rd June 1897), WBSA.

Therefore, it can be seen from the above table that prices were very high in all parts of the district of Pabna and only few seers of rice could be obtained for a rupee which dragged the poor people in the crisis of their livelihood. Instead of acknowledging the high prices, the Government was of the opinion that there had been ‘a slight but general rise in the Sirajganj subdivision, while in the Sadar subdivision prices of common rice [were] stationary.’²³⁸ The total amount of import in the district was 31,009 maunds and on the other hand the quantity of export from the district was 1,822 maunds. The death-rate returns from February to April 1897 for Pabna were as follows as compared with the average:

Table 5.29
The death-rate returns from February to April 1897 for Pabna

Month	1897	Average
February	3.37	1.87
March	4.00	2.05
April	4.69	3.07

Source: From W. Maude, EsQ., Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. –(No. 424G., dated Pabna, the 3rd June 1897), WBSA.

The above table has shown a considerable increase in the death-rates during the months mentioned above from the average rates. Despite of that it was stated that the state of public health showed ‘a marked improvement if one may judge by the police reports.’ In addition to this there had been many returns of cholera and small-pox which shows a severe deterioration of public health conditions triggered by the drought and governmental callousness.

Test-works were, however, still continuing on at the Manikair tank, the Dasuria tank, and the Pokuria tank. A test-work was tried at Gunaigacha, but did not draw due to unknown reasons. The chief feature of the test-work of this time was the appearance from the commencement of it of women workers on the Manikair tank. These women generally carried out baling work which was very muddy and nasty work. Their appearance showed that how deep the distress was in this particular quarter. The Collector was ‘confidently assured by many babus some months since that no pinch would ever induce the women of this district to come to a Government relief work.’²³⁹ But the acute crisis had driven the women from their home and compelled them to do such works with which they were not accustomed neither they were suitable. On the other hand, this also demonstrated that how meagre was the knowledge of babus that they could not even sense the gravity of the condition prevailing in their areas and who lived in a state of oblivion about their surrounding world. On the other hand, it was revealed that the Collector had sent an incorrect report regarding the average death-rate which was subsequently corrected by P Nolan, Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. Showing the ‘correct’ information Nolan stated that ‘The statement in Mr. Maude’s fortnightly report was incorrect, and the mortality in Pabna, during the months referred to, really indicated the necessity for watchfulness.’²⁴⁰

The Lieutenant Governor had sanctioned a grant of Rs. 5,000 to meet the expenditure under the above mentioned three heads and in addition to that he also approved a grant of Rs. 9,000 for advances for village works in the districts of Rajshahi and Pabna during the month of May. For the district of Rajshahi an expenditure of 3,139 Rs. 9 annas 6 paise had been incurred for relief works and gratuitous relief, including Rs. 382 -12-3, the cost of establishment, and that the entire cost had been met from the grants of Rs. 14,000 made by the District Board. At the end of May it was found that there was still a balance of Rs. 10,860 available from this grant for expenditure in May, the estimate for which is Rs. 10,565, and the Lieutenant Governor anticipated that the grant of Rs. 5,000 sanctioned from provincial revenues (in paragraph 2 of Government order No. 138 T.R./Fam., dated the 4th May 1897) would not be required.²⁴¹ It was also reported that from the amount placed under the Agriculturists' Land Improvement Loan Act for the district of Rajshahi and Pabna only Rs. 1,850 had been advanced in the former district and nothing in the latter.²⁴² The estimates for June 1897 for the Rajshahi District were as follows:

	Rs.
Relief works -----	4, 062
Gratuitous Relief -----	719
Establishment, tools, plant, &c. ----	500
Total -----	5,281

It was directed that out of this amount Rs. 281 only would be provided from District Funds, and that the balance of Rs. 5,000 should be paid from Provincial revenues. Along with a grant of Rs. 3,000 for Rashahi for June under the head of advances for villages, the Lieutenant Governor had sanctioned a grant of Rs. 5,000 from the Government Funds on the pre-condition that the amount could not be met by contributions from the District Fund. On the other hand, the local banias were still continuing to hoard rice in their private stores which had led to the abnormal rise in prices in Rajshahi and paved the way for grain riots in Rampur-Boalia in June-July.²⁴³

For Pabna the estimates for June was as follows:

	Rs.
Relief works -----	4, 500
Gratuitous Relief -----	Nil.

Establishment, tools, plant, &c. ----	200
Total -----	4,700

The above amount which had been sanctioned by the Lieutenant Governor was to be made from the District Funds.²⁴⁴ However, the estimates which had been forwarded by Mr. E.M. Konstam, Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division had included the expenditure on famine relief during August 1897 along with the statements of actual for the month of June where it was shown that the cost of giving doles to 500 persons daily was amounted to Rs. 1,500 and the cost for establishment, tools, and plant was Rs. 500.²⁴⁵ The grant applied for from Government was Rs. 2,000 for the district of Rajshahi under the heads of gratuitous relief and establishments, tools, and plant etc. The weekly telegraphic reports for the first three weeks of the month of July regarding the test-works and gratuitous relief for Rajshahi were as follows:

Table. 5. 30

Weekly report for the Rajshahi district for July, 1897

Weeks	Test-workers	Gratuitous relief
3 rd July	405	-----
10 th July	Works closed	6,901 from the charitable fund
17 th July	-----	6,674 from the charitable fund

Source: From E.M. Konstam, EsQ., Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 1452 (Fam.), dated Calcutta, the 24th July 1897), WBSA.

It is to be noted here that the Government wanted to initiate an enquiry against the estimate for establishment and other expenditure for the district of Rajshahi which was Rs. 500 whereas ‘the estimate under this head for the district of Pabna [was] only Rs. 250, against Rs. 4,700, the estimated cost of test-workers and gratuitous relief.’²⁴⁶ But the fact was that the circumstances in terms of intensity of scarcity and number of population were not identical for the two districts. The rainfall had been insufficient in the Pabna subdivision to allow

transplantation of the *aman* to begin which had added a new difficulty in the existing state of crisis.²⁴⁷ It was said to believe that since the residents of the Gangetic tract of Rajshahi were well-off than the average of Bengal in terms of wealth, therefore, the local workers of this tract and also the workers of Bogra and Pabna did not incline to work at the famine rate on 2 *annas* a day.²⁴⁸ This tendency of ‘sacrifice’ was much prominent in Pabna, and at Sirajganj in Pabna, the workers and coolies were demanding for more wages despite of the fact that they had been paid at the ‘high rate of four to five rupees per thousand cubic feet.’²⁴⁹

To meet the famine situation and to prevent such condition in coming days the Government of Bengal had placed a scheme of advances to the Land Revenue Department. It was stated that ‘the proposed advances should be given freely in tracts declared by the District Officer, with the sanction of the Commissioner, to be affected by scarcity or famine, care being taken to see that the works for which the advances [were] given [we]re really executed, and that the money advanced [was] not spent on purposes other than those for which it is advanced.’²⁵⁰ For the maintenance and proper functioning of the scheme it was decided that the advances should be made in instalments, no further instalments would be made till the Government officers were satisfied that the sums already advanced had been properly spent. The works on which these advances were to spent should be directed towards relieving distress through the relief works, and for the increase supply of water for drinking and irrigation purposes for the needy people which would consist of tanks, wells, village reservoirs for the storage of water, and irrigation channels (pynes); and this work would have to be ‘approved by local officers of Government.’²⁵¹ Another provision which was inflicted was that the labourers who were to be employed upon these works should not receive more than the maximum and never less than the minimum wage calculated according to the provisions of the Bengal Famine Code under the supervision of Circle Officer who would be ‘able to regulate the wages paid on it and to see by periodical inspections that the condition as regards giving the minimum wage [was] fulfilled.’²⁵² The Government of India had sanctioned not only the grant of these advances free of interest, but also the remission of a portion of the advance, representing the difference between the cost of executing the work in ordinary years and the increased cost entailed by the employment of famine labour. Since it was difficult to estimate the exact amount of this difference in each case, the Lieutenant Governor was of the opinion that ‘if the work [was] completed to the satisfaction of the collector, one-third of the total amount advanced [would] be remitted.’²⁵³ Citing the instance of a notification of 1873-74 Famine dated the 20th November 1873 which was published for relaxing temporarily some of the

rules under the Land Improvement Act then in force (XXVI of 1871), the Lieutenant Governor had suggested that a similar notification should now be issued in order to modify the existing rules under the Land Improvement Loans Act. In addition to the above mentioned clauses the chief modifications of the Act were as follows:

“... (Rule 4.) – The Lieutenant Governor thinks that the limits upto which Collectors and Commissioners may sanction individual loans may, under the special circumstances of the case, be raised from Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000, respectively....

(Rules 9 and 10). - The Lieutenant Governor does not think it desirable that in the present case the maximum period for repayment of the advance should be ten years. It is sufficient to provide that the first instalment shall be paid by the end of February 1898, subsequent payments being made in equal half yearly instalments till the debt is discharged in five years from January 1898.”²⁵⁴

The modified rules of the Land Improvement Loans Act, XIX of 1883, had issued the following provisions regarding the relief works for tracts affected by scarcity or famine which had come into existence from the 5th January 1897. –

“...It will be in the power of the Commissioners to divide the sum so allotted among the Districts of their Divisions at their jurisdiction, and to transfer assignments from one district to another, but expenditure in the Division must be kept within the amount assigned.

....Subject to the provisions of these rules, the Collector may sanction loans not exceeding Rs. 5,000, provided the district allotment is not exceeded without the sanction of the Commissioner of the Division. Loans exceeding Rs. 5,000 require the sanction of the commissioner, and exceeding Rs. 10,000, the sanction of the Board.”²⁵⁵

Table. 5.31

Statement showing the net imports and exports (tons) of food-grains from January to September 1897 in Rajshahi Division [Net Import +] [Net Export -]

Districts	January to March	April to June	July to September	Total
Rajshahi	+ 5, 573	+5,084	+1,260	+11,917
Dinajpur	-7,920	-4,930	+23	-12,827
Jalpaiguri	+ 3,018	+5,148	+4,523	+12,699
Darjeeling	+1,793	+2,171	+1,965	+5,929
Rangpur	-408	+433	-889	-864
Bogra	-5,631	-4,632	+1,712	-8,551
Pabna	+3,894	+4,864	+702	+9,460

Source: T. W. Holderness, *Narrative of the Famine in India in 1896-97, Appdx. VII.*

The figures for the districts have included the quantity of import and export done by only the rail borne traffic. The figures mentioned above have indicated the net figures, i.e., the imports have been deducted from the exports, or vice-versa. Since the imports of one district were the exports of another, therefore, no inference as to the gross volume of trade could be made by taking the aggregate totals. As the above table have included the figures of the districts which were engaged in the rail-born traffic of grains, so it can be said that by the end of the nineteenth century the districts of northern Bengal had already been connected with the railway networks that helped to import to and export from the districts of this part of Bengal. So far the import was concerned, the districts of Rajshahi, Jalpaiguri and Pabna had the largest amount of import, and on the hand the districts of Dinajpur and Bogra had witnessed

largest export from the districts. This revealed that the famine condition was more intense and critical in the former districts and relief operations were largely carried out through the export of grains from the later districts to meet the necessity of former districts. It is to be noted here that despite of having a greater degree of import the district of Jalpaiguri did not receive much attention in the relief administration or official correspondence. In some of the codes viz. Bengal and others District Boards were deemed to form an integral part of the administration and to be the primary agency for coping with famine, to which object they might subordinate the ordinary objects and methods of their expenditure.²⁵⁶ The position assigned to the chief revenue authority in regard to famine relief administration did vary greatly in the different provinces. In Bengal and the North- Western Provinces the Board of Revenue finds no place. Regarding the detailed management of relief works, the prescriptions of the Bengal famine code were found as imperfect as those of the code of the North-Western Provinces. The code in recommending the grouping of the relief workers into gangs did not specify the size or composition of the gang, and its schedule of tasks proved to be unworkable.²⁵⁷ But in a later development, the Indian Famine Commission of 1901 agreed with the 1898 Commission that 'a considerably low wage should be given on village works, because 'experience [showed] that people [could] live on less at home than elsewhere.'²⁵⁸

The famine of 1896-97 had been also attended by numerous cases of cholera in different parts of northern Bengal. Cholera usually became frequent when there was a scarcity of water. During the time of drought as a result of the absence ample source of water people were compelled to consume dirty and polluted water which caused severe cholera. Many parts of the districts of Rajshahi and Pabna were affected by serious cases of cholera which aggravated the overall condition of public health. Despite of prevalence of many cases of cholera, most surprisingly the year of 1897 had been declared as one of the comparatively 'healthy' year 'owing perhaps to short rainfall, which caused many of the shallower *bils* to dry up.'²⁵⁹ The people of the district was generally depended on *bils*, ponds etc. for their regular water supply. Due to the shortage of rainfall when the regular source of water had been dried up then the people had to take any other source of water which was not properly maintained or got polluted. Moreover, during the hot weather tanks were either dried up or became very low and the water was polluted by the indiscriminate washing of cloths, house linen, and kitchen utensils and by the bathing of cattle as human being who frequently had to drink the same water. This tendency turned into practices during the prolonged season of drought which triggered the appearances of severe cases of cholera. The district of Pabna as a whole became unhealthy due to the long absence of inundation since 1871 when in a report

‘the beneficial results of flushing by the rivers and the deterioration caused by their failure [had] long being recognized in this district.’ Mr. W. V. G. Tyler, the Collector of Pabna in a report had argued that:

“Within the districts [were] tracts, at places miles in extent, almost without a ryot, and there [had] been a time when they were as highly cultivated as the best tracts are now. These results were generally due to the simple cause that the rivers’ inundations [had] ceased to extend so far.... When the river ceased to keep open the jolas and water courses, they became gradually choked up and all the hollows of the plain became an unhealthy plain. This breeds fever. The prosperity and energy of the ryots die[d] away, they allowed their own drinking water to become foul...sickness increase[d], cultivation decrease[d], and the small remnant [were] driven away by the wild beasts. This was happening...within a few miles of the Sadar station, as it had happened over and over again in the interior.”²⁶⁰

The environmental transformations in terms of drying of river channels of the district had contributed in intensifying ecological vulnerability which was also responsible for the heightening of tensions of famine. Apart from the relief administration the Government hardly look into this sort of problem. Supplying of clean water in the drought affected areas was not a part of governmental concern which only blamed the habits of the people of having polluted water. What appears more interesting in this situation was the Governmental refusal of acknowledging the actual conditions caused by cholera in the affected parts. For several occasions the Government had declared the public health condition as ‘fairly good’, without taking into consideration the prevalence of cholera in the district or it was observed that in a widespread attack of cholera only minimum initiatives had been under taken by the administration. Government was indifferent towards securing the supply of clean and hygienic source of drinking water, and as a result cholera made its repeated visits in a single famine year which proved disastrous for the health of the poor and distressed who were already suffering from starvation, malnutrition and absence of any proper medical care or treatment. The death-rate in the 1896-97 famine was quite high in comparison with the previous 1873-74 famine. Deaths were caused by starvation and disease viz. cholera, influenza etc. But Government in no occasion had admitted the fact that death were caused by the starvation or failure of obtaining food either from the market or through the relief operations. It was projected either as health problem or any other causes. This showed that relief administration was not successful in rescuing the people from starvation and death. Till the end of the nineteenth century communication and transport remained a major problem which acted as serious impediment in the organization and circulation of relief operations.

The interior areas were still going on without any relief or assistance that could resist the poor people from deaths. Moreover, the reports collected and sent by the district officials were in many cases not only incomplete or contradictory but even generated much confusion in the official circles which misguided the relief operations in the affected areas. In several occasions, the estimates and account of food-movement, crop failure, and death-rates sent by the Collector or Deputy Collector proved to be unreliable by the Commissioners or Secretaries who had to but rely on the reports of the formers. Police reports could not even provide the actual truth regarding the famine conditions prevailed in different *thanas* or police stations. Thus the whole set of ground level administrative machinery sometime became a source of misconception which ultimately misguided the famine administration.

III

The Scarcity of 1908-09

The district of Dinajpur was again visited by a scarcity during the autumn of 1908-09. Although the rainfall in 1908-09 was normal in May, and both the jute and *bhadoi* crops were good, but it did not continue for long because a prolonged draught persisted in June, July and August.²⁶¹ As a result the *bhadoi* was spoiled and jute did not turn well due to the lack of steeping water. The continuous drought severely affected the main crop of Dinajpur – winter rice. The almost total absent of rain made it impossible for transplanting of paddy seeds for most parts of the district. The rain in September was too late to save the crop and the result was a total loss of winter rice in the *thanas* of Pirganj, Hemtabad, Raiganj, Itahar, and Ghoraghat, and there was widespread loss in all over the Balurghat subdivision and also in parts of Thakurgaon and Birganj.²⁶² The rabi crops which were to be followed later was also in a state of total failure except in Kaliyaganj and Gangarampur, where a small crop of chillies was obtained. In the district of Rangpur the scarcity of 1908-09 was like what was in 1873-74. The scarcity of 1908-09 was felt in the *khiyar* tract of the district of Rangpur and its adjacent parts. This was caused by the partial failure of rain in 1907 and 1908. The hard *khiyar* soil which was found chiefly in the *thanas* of Govindganj, Pirganj, and Mithapukur, was capable of producing only one good crop namely, the winter rice but as there were no system of irrigation in these tracts so people had to solely rely on the rainfall.²⁶³ Although there was a dire necessity of heavy rain in July and August for the betterment of rice crop but this was in total absence in both 1907 and 1908. The outturn of the winter *aman* rice was

much below the normal in the rest of Rangpur and in other parts of the province the price of rice rose in February 1908 to $7\frac{1}{4}$ seers per rupee which remained same till the July when, at cost of the failure of the monsoon rain, it started to rise again and in September the price reached its maximum limit - $5\frac{3}{4}$ seers.²⁶⁴ This situation had continued till December 1908, when the price fell to 7 seers per rupee and remained stagnant at that figure throughout 1909, till a good crop of *aman* had contributed to the lessening of prices to 11 seers in January 1910. The *barind* tract of the district of Rajshahi had been also suffered by scarcity in 1908-09 caused by the deficient rainfall which led to a partial failure of the *aman* crop.²⁶⁵

In the district of Dinajpur, the real distress was not due to so much of a shortage of stocks in the market, which were 'ample', nor to high prices, but rather to the inability of the people to buy food owing to lack of money and the contraction of credit. Because, as it was reported by the Collector of the District, the total loss of one season's crop could not ordinarily cause a famine or even a serious distress in the district for the fact that people had 'become thriftless and extravagant.'²⁶⁶ The shortage of money was caused by the fact that in the previous year when the price of paddy suddenly rose up with remarkable rapidity to the unprecedented figure of Rs. 3-12-0 per maund, the cultivators had hurriedly sold their entire stocks and in some cases, even seed grain. The shortage was remarkably present in the *pali* areas which was nearer to the railway exposition and where recurrent crops being possible the raiyats had larger stocks.²⁶⁷ It was not, however, stated that since the raiyats had received extra money for selling their crops then why in the next year they did not have any money to spend for buying food. When the scarcity was apprehended in the *khiyar* tracts a famine programme had been commenced there, but the greatest distress was prominent in the *pali* area. Although in comparison with the 1873-74 famine, the scarcity of 1908-09 had been regarded as less severe but it should be noted here that the smallness of the affect was due to the shortness of the duration of the scarcity. It was argued that the scarcity was met by the governmental relief and by the 'general increase in prosperity among the agricultural classes resulting from the high prices for produce obtained in recent years,' and by the 'improved communications and better organization of trade which enabled rice to be exported from Burdwan, Buckergunj, and Burma into the district.'²⁶⁸ The famine of 1908-09 in the district of Dinajpur had been declared by the administration as 'a money famine.'²⁶⁹

In Rangpur, in order to meet the distress, large quantities were imported by merchants through the nearest railway stations, viz. Mohimganj and Panchbibi and a great part of the imported rice was imported from Burma.²⁷⁰ People were, however, did not show much

inclination in accepting this imported rice due to its coarse quality. Although the distress had extended to many places but relief measures were confined to an area of about 40 square miles around the village of Kamdia and Govindganj *thana*. Rangpur District Board had spent Rs. 12,000 on repairing the roads in this area and Rs. 15,000 on the excavation 15 tanks which eventually provided works to the able-bodied men and women.²⁷¹ A considerable amount of money had been collected through public subscription for the distribution of gratuitous relief to the old and infirm, and to women and children with a definite belief that starvation did not cause any loss of life, yet it triggered the process of migration of people into the other parts of the district.²⁷² Apart from this, loans of about Rs. 1,20,000 were distributed under the Agriculturists Loan's Act of 1884 which coupled with the 'improved state of district, inter-district and railway-communications' had contributed in the rapid recovery of the district from the scarcity.²⁷³ In the districts of Rajshahi, test works were opened and agricultural loans were also distributed. But no other relief measures were carried out in the affected tracts of the district.²⁷⁴

Conclusion

The above analysis which shows serious inconvenience caused by the natural disorders and its subsequent impact that had reached to the extent of famine due to the considerable shortage of food grains in the districts of north Bengal during the period from 1866 to 1909, asserts a justification of human dependence upon nature and simultaneously the human reciprocity towards the response against the nature for its survival in the earth. This study of man-nature relationship places itself in the broad contour of ecological and environmental structure that has some historical implications on it. Bengal famine of 1770 took a heavy toll of life and nearly a third of the population was perished in this famine. During the period of 1870-1910, as Mike Davis has argued, more than thirty million famines related deaths occurred in British India and this phenomenon has been considered by him as the "Late Victorian Holocaust".²⁷⁵ It is in this context that the famines of 1873-74 and 1896-97 deserve a closer look of the historians in order to understand the changed relation between environment, production and demographic pattern of certain less highlighted regions in a broad spectrum under a colonial authority which dominated almost every part of the material world till the end of the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, the devaluation of currency that began in 1873 and continued over the next twenty years increased not only the

burden of Home Charges but also heightened the demand for compensation from the British officers in India. The principal sources of revenue, at the time, were land revenue, excise, salt tax, stamps and opium. Leaving aside the opium revenue, the burden of all these taxes fell on the rural classes in general and the poorer classes in particular.²⁷⁶ Since the establishment of colonial rule in Bengal and the great famine of 1770, as Sugata Bose has remarked, to the post-colonial conditions of widespread endemic malnutrition and hunger poses all the conceptual problems of an agrarian society depending on a subsistence base which in course of time increasingly got connected to wider economic systems including a capitalist world market.²⁷⁷ Hence, natural or ecological dislocations and their subsequent impact on the economy or production system during the colonial period were not confined only to the concerned regions but demonstrated an eclectic characteristic formed by their ultimate link with the broader world economic structure, dominated by the British. It is evident from the analysis of the above famine that the colonized people had never been recognized beyond their minimum subsistence level and even though, during the time of scarcities the administration's concern was only to restore that but public health and over-all well-being of the people was never a concern for them. Although the causation of famine had been chiefly and regularly attributed to the shortage of rainfall, but the problem of irrigation or its virtual absence was neither a part of relief operations nor public-works for the administration. Moreover, the contradicted official reports sometime hindered the pace of policy formation. On the other hand, despite of prevalence of widespread distress the official pronouncement of 'famine' came too late to propose any long term development plan which could protect the famine affected areas from such future disasters.

Notes and References:

-
- ¹ Rajat Datta, *Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialization in Rural Bengal, C.1760-1800*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2000, p. 238.
- ² Madhav Gadgil, Ramchandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, first published 1992, Thirteenth impression, 2010, p. 116.
- ³ G. W. Forrest, *The Famine in India*, Horace Cox, London, 1897, p. 16.
- ⁴ C. W. McMinn, *Famines: Truths, Half-Truths, Untruths*, Calcutta, 1902, p. 39.
- ⁵ Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic History of India, 1857- 1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Second Edition, 2009, p. 362.
- ⁶ Michelle Burge McAlpin, 'Dearth, Famine and Risk: The Changing Impact of Crop Failures in Western India, 1870 – 1920', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 39, no. 1, March, 1979, p. 145.
- ⁷ David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change*, Oxford, 1988, p. 31.
- ⁸ Tirthankar Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 361.
- ⁹ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Eleventh Impression, 2007, p. 2.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ¹¹ Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in Bengal: A Comparison of the 1770 Famine in Bengal and the 1897 Famine in Chhotanagpur,' in Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (eds.), *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, Lexington Books, UK, 2009, p. 206.
- ¹² Sugata Bose, *The New Cambridge History of India III: 2; Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 4.
- ¹³ Romesh Dutt, *Indian Famines: Their Causes and Prevention*, P. S. King & Son, London, 1901, p. 5.
- ¹⁴ Georgina Brewis, 'Fill Full the Mouth of Famine': Voluntary Action in Famine Relief in India 1896— 1901,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (JULY 2010), p. 888.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 907.
- ¹⁶ Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in a Forest Tract: Ecological Change and the Causes of the 1897 Famine in Chotanagpur, Northern India,' in Arun Bandopadhyay (ed.), *Nature Knowledge and Development: Critical Essays on the Environmental History of India*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 109-142; Nirmal Kumar Mahato, 'Environmental Change and Chronic Famine in Manbhum, Bengal District, 1860-1910,' *Global Environment*, 6, 2011, pp. 68-94.

¹⁷ C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors: A Narrative of the Principal Events and Public Measures during Their Periods of Office from 1854 to 1898, Vol. I*, S. K. Lahiri & Co., Calcutta, 1901, p. 555.

¹⁸ In his study, in order to calculate the weights, money and prices Hunter has made these according to his own convenience in the following manner respectively – “To convert the weights multiply the seers by 2 to find the pounds, and the maunds by 82 to find the pounds — i.e., 2 lbs. = 1 *seer* ; 82 lbs. =1 *maund*”, “[A] rupee for all practical purposes in small calculations may be taken as two shillings ; and an anna as three-halfpence, or 1-16th of a rupee”, “[T]he rate of rice is expressed either by so many rupees and annas the maund, or more commonly by so many seers per rupee.” W. W. Hunter, *Famine Aspects of Bengal Districts*, Trubner & CO., London, 1874, p. xii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²¹ Hunter, W. W., *A Statistical Account of Bengal Vol. VII: Districts of Malda, Dinajpur and Rangpur*, Trubner & CO., London, 1876, pp. 92-3.

²² W. W. Hunter, *Famine Aspects of Bengal Districts*, p. 115.

²³ B. Chaudhury, ‘Eastern India’, in Daharma Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II: c. 1757-2003* (henceforth *CEHI*), Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2008, p. 160 and 309.

²⁴ F. W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Dinajpur*, Allahabad, Pioneer Press, 1912, p. 65.

²⁵ W. W. Hunter, *Famine Aspects of Bengal Districts*, p. 97.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8. Though Hunter has taken into account the number of population, engaged in agriculture and the people worked as labour in the above mentioned districts as highlighted by the Census of 1872, but he did not show any specific implications of these population statistics during the famine year of 1866.

²⁸ Amiya Kumar Bagchi and Arun Bandopadhyay, (eds.), *Documents on Economic History of British Rule in India, 1858-1947: Eastern India in the Late Nineteenth Century, Part I: 1860s-1870s*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2009, p. 283.

²⁹ *Document 10. Annual Report 1873-74: Land Settlements, production and distribution, weather and crops, land revenues of Bengal in Ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁰ C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors: A Narrative of the Principal Events and Public Measures during Their Periods of Office from 1854 to 1898, Vol. II*, S. K. Lahiri & Co., Calcutta, 1901, p. 577.

³¹ ‘First Special Narrative of the Drought to the 14th November 1873,’ *Special Narratives of the Drought in Bengal and Bihar, 1873-74, Papers*. Bengal Famine, Mss Eur F86/127 : 1874.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Sir George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career, Vol. II*, Macmillan & Co., London, 1893, pp. 320-322.

³⁵ Richard Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India*, John Murray, London, 1882, p. 394.

³⁶ *Second Special Narrative of the Drought from the 15th to the 21st November 1873*, Mss Eur F86/127 : 1874.

³⁷ *Third Special Narrative of the Drought from the 22nd to the 28th November 1873*, Mss Eur F86/127 : 1874.

³⁸ Amiya Kumar Bagchi and Arun Bandopadhyay (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 157.

³⁹ A. P. MacDonnell, *Report on the Food Grain Supply and Statistical Review of the Relief Operations in the Distressed Districts of Behar and Bengal During the famine of 1873-74* Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1876, p. 251.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁴¹ G. E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Malda*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1918, p. 51.

⁴² A. P. MacDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ F. W. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Ratnalekha Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society c. 1760-1850*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1979, p. 197.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ B. Chaudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

⁵⁰ The condition of the distressed group, who formed 35 per cent of the agricultural labour population, as recorded by Dass, had no land or implement of their own and they survived by the *bhagai* or *batai* (a very negligible part of the produce) i.e. on others' mercy. Gopal Chandra Dass, *Report of the Statistics of Rangpur for the year, 1872-73* (Calcutta, 1874), p. 85.

⁵¹ B. Chaudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

⁵² Asoke Sen and Others, *Perspective in Social Science Vol.2: Three Studies on the Agrarian Structure in Bengal, 1850-1947*, Calcutta, 1982, p. 31.

⁵³ A. P. MacDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 237.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 238.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 239. The grain import had shattered because of induced rise of prices in Assam and Cooch Behar which resisted export of rice from these areas and on the other hand there was a joint effort of local grain dealers to boost up prices to an extreme point. p. 240.

⁵⁸ *Glazier's Further Notes on the Rangpur Records*, p. 48 cited in J. A. Vas, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers ; Rangpur*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1911, p. 71.

⁵⁹ W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. VII*, p. 299.

⁶⁰ A. P. MacDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 243.

⁶² George Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁶⁵ Richard Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

⁶⁶ *Document 11. Annual Report 1874-75: weather crops and prices in Bengal, meeting of food deficiency, effect of the rain on crops, floods in the northern districts* in Amiya Kumar Bagchi, and Arun Bandopadhyay (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁶⁷ *Fifth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 6th to the 12th December 1873*, Mss Eur F86/127: 1874.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Sixth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 13th to the 18th December 1873*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ The terms offered were a three year's agreement on wages, of which the minimum was guaranteed to be, for men, Rs. 10 each; for women, Rs. 6; and for children of between 10 and 16 years of age, Rs. 3. A superintendent of State Emigration had been appointed, and instructions had been given to the district officers to make the terms widely known not only to labourers but to influential local men, who were invited to assist in including emigrants to come forward. *Tenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 23rd January to the 4th February 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

⁷² Aged, sick, and infirm people would not be sent 'unless their infirmity [was] one temporarily caused by privation, and likely to pass away with proper care.' The experiment would be, as it was hoped, proved advantageous to British Burma, where the demand for labourers and colonists was nearly increasing. *Ibid.*

⁷³ The average rainfall of the four years 1871-74 had been 73.89 inches, the rainfall of 1865 was 80.2, and that of 1873, 37. 13 or 47 inches less than the normal fall. J. N. Gupta, *District Gazetteers of Eastern Bengal and Assam: Bogra*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1910, p. 75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. VIII: Districts of Rajshahi and Bogra*, Trubner & Co., London, 1876, p. 253.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ The thanas of Adamdighi, Badalgachhi, and the south-west of Bogra had witnessed a good crops whereas the thanas of Khetlal and Panchbibi had been provided with 'bad account of the crops' because 'in these parts the people had not been able to effect irrigation. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁸² J. N. Gupta, *District Gazetteers of Eastern Bengal and Assam: Bogra*, p. 77 and 75.

⁸³ *Seventh Special Narrative of the Drought from the 19th to the 31st December, 1873*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

⁸⁴ A very small amount of rice was exported to Bihar by this route and the figures of this upward trade past Sahebganj were, for the period between the 1st November and the 23rd December, pulses 1,05,000 maunds, and rice 88,000 maunds. *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Grain was sent by the Eastern Bengal Railway to Koosthea, from there it was taken by Government steamer and flat and dropped at Dhaparee, Rampur Boalia, and Godagaree. From Godagaree it was carried by boat to Malda and Raiganj; from Malda and other parts on the Mahanadi it moved by cart to Gazole; and from Raiganj the Khurba depot was supplied. *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ The average rainfall in the Nator subdivision was 61 inches annually, but in 1873 only 43 inches had fell; and in Sadar subdivision there was a deficiency of 27 inches in a normal fall of 59 inches. Out of the normal fall of 18 inches in September and October in Nator, only 6 inches fell in 1873; while in Sadar subdivision the normal fall during those months, had fell short by 13 inches. L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1916, pp. 89-90.

⁹⁰ In general throughout the district the *aus* or autumn crop was one-half or 8 *annas*, and the *aman* or winter crop was 6 *annas* or three eights of an average crop. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁹¹ Though there was no report for any deaths caused by starvation, the Collector argued, as it was believed, that ‘had it not been for the relief afforded, there would have been many deaths from starvation.’ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ L. S. S. O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Pabna*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p. 45.

⁹⁴ Hunter had, however, praised the transformation and he was of the opinion that ‘the jute might succeed when the rice failed, and the rayat would then have something wherewith to purchase food.’ W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. IX: Murshidabad and Pabna*, Trubner & Co., London, p. 328.

⁹⁵ The total cost of the charitable relief in 1874 was Rs. 83,000; and the amount spent on roads and relief works was Rs. 28, 000. Apart from these Rs. 76, 000 was spent on money and grain as advance to the cultivators through their landlords, ‘from whom security was taken for the repayment of the loans.’ L. S. S. O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Pabna*, p. 45.

⁹⁶ *Eighth Special Narrative of the Draught from the 1st to the 15th January 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

⁹⁷ *Tenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 23rd January to the 4th February 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Eleventh Special Narrative of the Drought from the 5th to the 19th February 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

¹⁰¹ *Twelfth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 20th February to the 15th March 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Thirteenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 6th to the 19th March 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ The Engineer-in-Chief was very anxious to complete the railway bank from Jalpaiguri down to the Ganges this season, and he had arranged to import labourers from other

distressed districts. The Magistrate of Bogra also had also been instructed to send over for work-upon the railway any distressed people of his district who might be willing to take work away from their homes. *Fourteenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 20th March to the 2nd April 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Fifteenth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 3rd to the 16th April, 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

¹¹⁰ *Twentieth Special Narrative of the Drought from the 12th to the 25th June 1874*, MSS EUR F86/127: 1874.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Cited in C. E. Buckland, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 556-557.

¹¹³ “The famine area was estimated at 40,000 sq: miles, and the population affected at 17 millions. Of these 735,000 were employed on works for 9 months, 450,000 received gratuitous relief daily for 6 months, and 3,200,000 bought grain at low rates enough to support them for 7 months, or received advances of grain or cash, large part of which was repaid to the Government.” *Ibid.*, p. 557.

¹¹⁴ George Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

¹¹⁵ Richard Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

¹¹⁶ This system was mostly prevailed in Bihar where indigo was not managed on usual mercantile principles, rather they had received estates from zamindars who leased out lands to the planters. The planters through this process enjoyed some feudal power which had been exercised to get the carts and bullocks of the ryots at the planters’ disposal for the carriage of indigo and other purposes. Now these carts and bullocks were exercised for carrying the grains to the distressed districts upon terms very advantageous to themselves. There was no doubt that the terms of their contracts had provided them with the increased rates from the Government rates which was enormously in excess of those which they paid the ryots. George Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 329.

¹¹⁷ It was argued that in dealing with the Parliamentary returns called for and since the funds were supplied by a Native State, therefore, the returns should be drawn up for the whole district as a whole, by treating the Cooch Behar expenditure as a contribution to the Government treasury. Finally it was concluded that the work was wholly done by Government officers or under their orders. From Sir W. J. Herschel, Bart., Commissioner of the Cooch Behar Division, to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department. – (No. 420 – S.R., dated Julpigoree, the 14th November 1874), prog no. 34, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Scarcity and Relief department, Calcutta, January 1875*, West Bengal State Archives (Henceforth WBSA).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ John F. Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1911, p. 79.

¹²⁰ He further stated that ‘in case, where advances have been made direct, and where the zemindars have not stood security for repayment, it may be best to realise through such zemindars as may tender their services, and may be trusted not to realise more than is due.’ From the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department, to the Relief Commissioner of Dinagepore. – (No. 6860 – S.R., dated Calcutta, the 30th November 1874), progs. no. 21, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Scarcity and Relief department, Calcutta, January 1875*, WBSA.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² The realization of advances was declared to be collected as soon as possible and the instalments were also to be collected during this first six months. *Ibid.*

¹²³ From A.C. Brett, EsQ., Joint-Magistrate, in charge of the Dinagepore Magistracy, to the Officiating Secretary Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department. – (No. 2109 – S.R., dated Dinagepore, the 14th December 1874), progs. no. 116, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Scarcity and Relief department, Calcutta, January 1875*, WBSA.

¹²⁴ From W. LeF. Robinson, EsQ., Relief Commissioner of the Rajshahye Division, to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department. – (No. 2411, dated Dinagepore, the 21st December 1874), progs. no. 22, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Scarcity and Relief department, Calcutta, January 1875*, WBSA.

¹²⁵ From F. Wyer, EsQ., Magistrate-Collector of Maldah, to the Officiating Secretary Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department. – (No. 694, dated Maldah, the 14th December 1874), progs. no. 117, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Scarcity and Relief department, Calcutta, January 1875*, WBSA.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ From W. LeF. Robinson, EsQ., Relief Commissioner of the Rajshahye Division, to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Scarcity and Relief Department. – (No. 2411, dated Dinagepore, the 21st December 1874), progs. no. 22, WBSA.

¹²⁸ Moreover, he was of the opinion that though in some parts of the country there was in fact no other harvest, but in some portions where there were cold-weather crops a second instalment, be fairly asked for in April, after what was called here the *chitali* harvest, i.e., all cold-weather crops had been gathered. *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ From R. Knight, the Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Relief Commissioner of the Rajshahye. - (No. 7286, dated Calcutta, the 30th December 1874), progs. no. 23, *Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Scarcity and Relief department, Calcutta, January 1875*, WBSA.

¹³⁰ C. E. Buckland, *op. cit.*, vol. II. p. 577.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p. 582.

¹³² Malavika Chakrabarty, *Famine of 1896-97 in Bengal: The Availability or Entitlement Crisis*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2004, p. 232.

¹³³ For example, mention can be made of Jalpaiguri, where prices of rice would never have reached to 8 or 6 seers for the rupee by May 1874, but for the exceptional rate of exports by traders coming in from Purnea, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Darjeeling. *Ibid.* p. 234.

¹³⁴ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission*, Calcutta, 1901, p. 2.

¹³⁵ C. E. Buckland, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 566.

¹³⁶ Richard Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

¹³⁸ Romesh Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹³⁹ 'Census of Bengal, 1881', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 46, No. 4 (Dec., 1883), p. 682.

¹⁴⁰ *Document 12. Annual Report 1875-76: Weather, crops, and Prices of Bengal* in Amiya Kumar Bagchi, and Arun Bandopadhyay, *op. cit.*, p. 177 and 180.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.180.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p. 181

¹⁴³ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898*, Government Central Printing Office, Simla, 1898, p. 9

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ F. W. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁷ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ F. W. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 67 and *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898*, p. 28.

¹⁵¹ Labourers in class 'a' received the full ration wage of the code on performing a given quantity of work, and a corresponding smaller wage if they failed to complete it. They were

not permitted to earn more than the full ration wage, nor was any minimum wage secured to them. Labourers in class 'b' were required to do a fair task for people of their calibre for a $\frac{3}{4}$ ths wage. If they did less they were fined, but never received less than the minimum wage. Persons in class 'c' were encouraged to do what they could, but their work was not measured, and they received the minimum wage. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁵² T. W. Holderness, *Narrative of the Famine in India in 1896-97*, Government Central Printing Office, Simla, 1897, p. 1.

¹⁵³ Malavika Chakrabarty, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

¹⁵⁴ C. E. Buckland, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 988.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Malavika Chakrabarty, *op. cit.*, p. 304 and 305.

¹⁵⁷ For details see Lance Brennan, Les Heathcote, and Anton Lucas, 'The Causation of Famine: A Comparative Analyses of Lombok and Bengal, 1891–1974,' *South Asia*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (1984): 1–26.

¹⁵⁸ C. E. Buckland, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 990.

¹⁵⁹ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898*, p. 65.

¹⁶⁰ Vinita Damodaran, 'Famine in a Forest Tract,' p. 129.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁶² Almost 250,000 tribals were recruited in the tea gardens of Assam from Chhotanagpur. For details see Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Accessing Nature: Agrarian Change, Forest Laws and their Impact on an Adivasi Economy in Colonial India*, in Arun Bandopadhyay (ed.), *Nature Knowledge and Development: Critical Essays on the Environmental History of India*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 98-99.

¹⁶³ Michael Mann, 'Forestry and Famine in the Chambal-Jamna Doab, 1879-1919,' in Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds.), *India's Environmental History, Vol. 2: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Nation*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2014, p. 445.

¹⁶⁴ 'One hundred and forty-two applications for loans under the Agriculturists' Loans Act were received, and Rs. 1,991 were lent to the applicants in 27 cases.' J. N. Gupta, *District Gazetteers of Eastern Bengal and Assam: Bogra*, p. 78.

¹⁶⁵ L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Murshidabad*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1914, p. 112.

¹⁶⁶ . In 1896 there was an early cessation of the rains, and due to prevalence of low rivers a small portion of the Kalantar was flooded which was resulted in an almost complete failure of the rice crop over a portion of the Kalantar and a partial failure in the Barh. Due to this rain,

the outturn of winter rice in the Karh was about 9 *annas*, but the average outturn for the district did not exceed 7 *annas*. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁸ . The closing of several of the silk filatures in the Barwa and Bharatpur thanas also deprived numbers of labourers of employment at a time when it was most needed. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ During the end of July when the prospects of the *aus* crop seemed good the relief operations were gradually relaxed and by the end of August when the new *aus* came into the market, prices began to fall, and the Government found it necessary to discontinue the relief works. *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁷¹ The average rainfall for the district was only 4 *annas*. L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*, p. 91.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ The Collector of the district had estimated the outturn of the *aus* paddy as 8 *annas* and for *aman* paddy as $6\frac{2}{3}$ *annas* – viz., 2 to 4 *annas* in the Gangetic tract, 6 to 8 *annas* in the Barind, and 8 to 12 *annas* in the Barind area. The Commissioner had provided a different account of the outturn – 4 *annas* for the Gangetic tract, 8 *annas* for the Barind, and 12 *annas* for the Bils. *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Malabika Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

¹⁷⁵ L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*, p. 91.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ (No. 125Met., dated Darjeeling, the 16th April 1897), progs. no. 26-27, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part I), WBSA.

¹⁷⁹ Resolution on the Rajshahi Report, under the section 13 of the Famine Code, for the half-month ending on the 17th April 1897. Memorandum by P. Nolan, EsQ., Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 88Met., dated Darjeeling, the 22nd April 1897), progs no. 391-392, File No. 2-S/11 – 13, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² From N. K. Bose., EsQ., Collector of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 228G., dated Rampur Boalia, the 19th April 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Malabika Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

¹⁸⁶ Vinita Damodaran, 'Gender, Forests and Famine in 19th-Century Chotanagpur, India;' *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 9:2, 2002, p. 139.

¹⁸⁷ Bina Agarwal, 'Gender, Environment, and Poverty Interlinks: Regional Variations and Temporal Shifts in Rural India, 1971-1991,' in Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds.), *India's Environmental History, Vol. 2: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Nation*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2014, pp. 460-461.

¹⁸⁸ Women health was also an important issue in analysing the issues on infant mortality which was chiefly relied on 'prenatal exposure' and 'postnatal exposure', when the former depends on 'maternal nutritional stress and associated material infections' whereas the later is related with the 'infants' own nutritional deficiency, poor care etc.' For details see Arup Maharatna, 'Infant and Child Mortality during Famines in Late 19th and Early 20th Century India,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 27 (Jul. 6, 1996),pp. 1774-1775.

¹⁸⁹ [Proceedings No. 431-432.] Commissioner's remark on the Pabna Famine Report under section 13 of the Code for the fortnight ending on the 15th July 1897, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part III), WBSA.

¹⁹⁰ From C. A. Radice, EsQ., Officiating Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. (No. 730G., dated Pabna, the 18th July 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part III), WBSA.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Vinita Damodaran, *Gender, Forest and Famine...*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁹⁵ Malabika Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, pp. 389-390.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

¹⁹⁷ From W. Maude, EsQ., the Collector of Pabna to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, dated Pabna, the 19th April 1897), progs. no. 393-94, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ R. W. Carlyle, 'Famine Administration in a Bengal District in 1896-7,' *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 39 (Sep., 1900), p. 425.

²⁰⁰ [Proceedings No. 395] From M. Finucane, EsQ., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 75T.R. – Fam., dated Darjeeling, the 29th April 1897), progs. no. 395, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ From the Hon'ble A. M. Bose., President of the Indian Association, to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department. – (No. 28., dated Calcutta, the 24th April 1897), progs. no. 396, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²⁰⁴ From Rai Raj Kumar Sarvadhikary, Bahadur, Secretary, British Indian Association, to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department. – (No. 251, dated Calcutta, the 14th May 1897), progs. no. 397-98, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²⁰⁵ From W. Maude, EsQ., I.C.S., Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 334G., dated Pabna, the 18th May 1897), progs. no. 399-400, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ From E. N. Baker, EsQ., C.S., Honorary Secretary, Bengal Branch, Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 314, dated Calcutta, the 31st March 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ In November 1896, the mahajans had increased prices through the exportation of large stocks in Pabna, Bogra, the Santal Parganas, Hazaribagh and Singhbhum, but on the other

hand in Cuttack, Puri and north Bihar majajans had retain their stocks ‘in the hope of a further price rice.’ Malabika Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² From E. N. Baker, EsQ., C.S., Honorary Secretary, Bengal Branch, Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 314, dated Calcutta, the 31st March 1897).

²¹³ From N. K. Bose, EsQ., Magistrate of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 190J., dated Boalia, the 30th April 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon’ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Commissioner’s resolution on the Pabna report under section 13 of the Famine Code for the fortnight ending 30th April 1897, progs. no. 403-404, *Proceedings of the Hon’ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²¹⁶ From W. Maude, EsQ., Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. (No. 245G., dated Pabna, the 3rd May 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon’ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ From N. K. Bose, EsQ., Collector of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 400G., dated Rampur Boalia, the 3rd May 1897), progs. no. 405-406, *Proceedings of the Hon’ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Commissioner’s remarks on the Rajshahi Report under section 13 of the Famine Code, for the fortnight ending the 15th May 1897, progs no. 407-408, *Proceedings of the Hon’ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Malavika Chakrabarty, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

²²⁶ From N. K. Bose, EsQ., Collector of Rajshahi, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 586G., dated Rampur Boalia, the 17th May 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Commissioner's resolution on the Rajshahi Report under section 13 of the Famine Code, for the fortnight ending the 31st May 1897, progs no. 412-413, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Commissioner's remark on the report under section 13 of the Famine Code from the Collector of Pabna District for the fortnight ending the 31st May 1897, progs. no. 414-415, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²³² From M. Finucane, EsQ., the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (Agriculture. – No. 138 T.R/(Fam), dated Darjeeling, the 4th May 1897) [File No. 3-B/6.3.], progs. no. 29, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part I), WBSA.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ From N. K. Bose, EsQ., Collector of Rajshahi to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 754G., dated Rampur Boalia, the 2nd June 1897), *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ From W. Maude, EsQ., Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (No. 424G., dated Pabna, the 3rd June 1897.), *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ The 'correct' figures for column 3 of the statement regarding the average death-rate, as started by Nolan, would be February - 1.98, March – 2.35, April, 3.65, May, 2.70. From P.

Nolan, EsQ., Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department . (No. 574Met., dated Darjeeling, the 30th June 1897), progs. no. 417-418, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part II), WBSA.

²⁴¹ From M. Finucane, EsQ., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (Agriculture – No. 461 T. R. /Fam., dated Darjeeling, the 31st May 1897), progs. no. 34, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part I), WBSA.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Malavik Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

²⁴⁴ Since 'the estimated average cost of relieving each individual appear[ed] to be high, being in the case of relief workers equal to the maximum wage laid down in the Famine Code [therefore] in future the estimates should be framed on the basis of the numbers of individuals, men, women, and children, to be relieved, as [was] done in other Divisions.' From M. Finucane, EsQ., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. – (Agriculture – No. 461 T. R. /Fam., dated Darjeeling, the 31st May 1897), progs. no. 34, WBSA.

²⁴⁵ (No. 1452 (Fam.), dated Calcutta, the 24th July 1897, progs. no. 40, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part I), WBSA.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ From C. A. Radice, EsQ., Officiating Collector of Pabna, to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division. (No. 730G., dated Pabna, the 18th July 1897), WBSA.

²⁴⁸ Malavika Chakrabarty, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ From M. Finucane, EsQ., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Land Revenue Department. – (Agriculture – No. 5610 Agri., dated Calcutta, the 31st December 1896), progs. no. 42-43, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897* – Revenue Department. (Part I), WBSA.

²⁵¹ In Bihar for digging tanks acre should be taken especially from the areas which were selected and approved by the officers of Government with due regard to level, so that it might be possible to connect those tanks with rivers by pynes or channels, and thus to open them flushed with water when required, and so made permanently useful for purposes of irrigation and consequent prevention or mitigation of future scarcities from drought. *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ In order to solve this problem, the Lieutenant Governor had followed the precedent of 1873-74, when Government agreed to defray up to one-third of the cost of village relief works (paragraph 70, page 131, Part III of the Report of the Indian Famine Commission). *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Notification No. 69, *Modified Rules under the Land Improvement Loans Act, XIX of 1883, for tracts affected by scarcity or famine*, progs no. 46, File No. 3A/9-5, Proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during August 1897 – Revenue Department. (Part I), WBSA.

²⁵⁶ *Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898*, p. 47.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁵⁸ *Report of the India Famine Commission 1901*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1901, p. 44.

²⁵⁹ L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Rajshahi*, p. 67.

²⁶⁰ L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Pabna*, pp. 39-40.

²⁶¹ F. W. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ J. A. Vas, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Rajshahi*, p. 92

²⁶⁶ F. W. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²⁶⁷ In the *khia*r tracts where the raiyats had practically only one crop (winter rice) to depend on, the sales were not so extensive, and even where stocks had been sold the money was not wasted. However, the circumstances were different in the *pali* area where, the raiyats with their extreme seriousness invested all their money and as a result the subsequent coming failure of successive crops left them without food-grain or money. *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ J. A. Vas, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁷³ Since 1871 the increasing necessity of the improvement of the communication system was surfaced on the official circle in order to efficiently meet the agricultural distress. The improvement in the roads and railway communication, it was anticipated, would ‘facilitate both import of food supplies and migration.’ People were, however, criticized on account of not having the ‘habits of thrift and Postal Savings Banka and Co-operative Credit Societies. *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ L. S. S. O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazeetter: Rajshahi*, p. 92.

²⁷⁵ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*, Verso, London, 2001.

²⁷⁶ B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India, 1860-1945*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, p. 22.

²⁷⁷ Sugata Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 4.