



# **Political Instrumentalisation of Famine**

## **A Comparative Analysis of 1943 Bengal Famine & 1983 Sudan Famine**

by

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under supervision of

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## Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of political and governance strategies with famine management through a comparative analysis of two significant historical events: the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Sudan Famine of 1983. Amartya Sen's entitlement theory provides a theoretical framework to understand famine vulnerability beyond mere food availability decline (FAD), by integrating socio-economic and political factors. The paper argues that famine is the result of unequal food distribution formed by complex interactions of social structures and personal endowments. Unrestricted markets often seen as signs of prosperity, paradoxically make famine worse by ignoring the nuanced realities of many civilizations. This crisis is sustained by institutional systems, market volatility, political manoeuvrability, and breaches of rights. The enigmatic concept of famine prevents it from being examined closely, allowing officials to avoid taking responsibility. A comprehensive legal system must be established to hold governments accountable for the deliberate mismanagement of famines.

**Keywords:** Famine, Denial, Governance strategies

## Résumé

Cet article explore l'intersection des stratégies politiques et de gouvernance avec la gestion des famines à travers une analyse comparative de deux événements historiques significatifs : la famine du Bengale de 1943 et la famine du Soudan de 1983. La théorie des capacités d'Amartya Sen fournit un cadre théorique pour comprendre la susceptibilité à la famine au-delà du simple déclin de la disponibilité alimentaire, en soulignant les facteurs économiques et politiques. Famine est éventuellement le résultat d'une distribution inégale des aliments formée par des interaction complexes entre les structures sociales et les dotations personnelles. Le marché libre qui est souvent perçu comme un signe de prospérité, aggravent paradoxalement la famine en ignorant fondamentalement les réalités complexes de nombreuses civilisations. Cette crise est soutenue par des systèmes institutionnels, la volatilité des marchés, les manœuvres politiques et les violations des droits. Le concept énigmatique de famine empêche sa profonde scrutinisation permettant aux responsables d'éviter de prendre leurs responsabilités. Un système juridique compréhensive doit être établi pour que les gouvernements rendent des comptes pour leur mauvaise gestion délibérée des famines.

**Mots-clés :** Dénî, Famine, Stratégies de gouvernance

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# Introduction

Amid the Holodomor, a man-made<sup>1</sup> famine that claimed millions of lives in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-33, the Soviet Foreign Minister said, there was no famine, and the present hunger was temporary because it would be difficult to call it famine over a longer period (Loroff, Vincent and Kuryliw, 2015). The famine during China's Great Leap Forward in the 1960s was initially denied by Mao's government attributing any food shortages to natural disasters, which he argued could be circumvented by the power of mass mobilisation and the potential of the peasantry (Bianco, 2013). In August 1977, Joe Appliah, a Ghanaian Member of Parliament refuted a report claiming that people were dying of starvation in the country's north by declaring that there was only a serious food shortage, which could not be called a famine (The New York Times, 1977). In February 2024, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy informed the lower house of parliament that Ethiopians are not dead due to hunger but due to malnutrition-induced sickness (Voice of America, 2024).

A century's worth of cases demonstrates that famine has been extensively denied for a variety of reasons. Establishing a definition of famine requires answering certain questions. How long must hunger last before it is deemed famine? When can a severe scarcity of food qualify as a famine? Is malnourishment-related disease the same as famine-related death? When can a scarcity of food brought on by a natural calamity qualify as famine and when can it not? The debate over the definition of famine is of great significance. Throughout history, leaders have been able to reject the existence of famine due to the very lack of understanding of what famine constitutes. Whether the denial is intentional or just the result of the absence of tools to measure famines is a subject that has not been widely studied and subsequently becomes the topic of interest for this research. The denial of two famines has been central to political discourses.

The cause of the Bengal Famine of 1943 (see map in Appendix A, page 32) has been extensively studied by historians and famine scholars and has become a famous point of contention as the famine materialised in the setting of colonial governance and assumed up to 3 million lives (Malik, 2022). The British colonial administration attributed the Bengal famine of 1943 to natural disasters that are the cyclones and tidal waves of 1942 (Mukerjee, 2018). Many scholars have instead identified wartime exigencies and colonial economic objectives that delayed the acknowledgement of the magnitude of the food shortage and the extent of human suffering as the cause (Dutt, 1944; Sen, 1976; Greenough, 1980; Tomlinson, 1979; Mukerjee, 2018; Siegel, 2018; Patnaik, 2017; Roy, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2014; Mishra, 2000; Brahma, 2011; Dianda, 2018; Bhowmik, 2021; Choudhury, 2021; Kalim, 2020; Bowbrick, 2022; Malik, 2022). Experts from IIT Gandhinagar, who have analysed 150 years of drought data, concluded that the British government's policy failings, not a drought as is often believed, were the cause of the 1943 Bengal famine (Sen, 1981). Contrarily, Tauger (2009) presents meteorological evidence that indicates that the weather in 1942 was exceptionally uniform and conducive to the spread of a plant disease throughout Bengal in late 1942, subsequently causing the famine.

Concurrently, the 1983-1985 famine in Sudan has been largely understudied due to limited reports published during the authoritarian Nimeiry regime (Locke, 1993). Although the drought in Sudan has not been contested as the immediate cause of the food supply decline, the

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<sup>1</sup> Alludes to occurrences that are human caused rather than unpredictable natural disasters (Mayer, 1975).



instrumentalisation of the drought by the government through conflicts has only recently received attention (Tar, 2005). On the other hand, scholars have also extensively examined the role of British colonisation in the segregation of the Sudanese community through "divide and rule" for colonial economic goals and its enduring legacy in post-independent Sudan (Elsammni, 1985; Ibrahim, 1983; Niblock, 1987; de Waal, 1989; Daly, 1991; Hamid, 1995; Ateem, 1999; Burr, 1999; Ali, 2002; Ibrahim, 2004; Ylönen, 2004; Young and Badri, 2005). Thinking of the case of Sudan in 1983 in comparison with Bengal in 1943 invites important questions: If famine is merely a consequence of natural disasters, why did the Bengal Famine end in 1945 while the famine in Sudan endures to date despite the end in drought? Why did the Bengal famine of 1943 take place when India had seen more severe meteorological droughts than in 1945 (Collier and Webb, 2002; Nash, 2002)? If famine is a consequence of natural disasters, why was there no famine in India after the 2013 worst-in-40-year drought in Maharashtra, one of the major wheat-producing states in India?

Sudan, on the other hand, faces a challenge to be posed the same questions due to its persisting food insecurity since 1955, the cause of which has been constantly juggled between environmental disasters and political machination. Recently, starvation crimes as a weapon of war have begun to be denounced as a violation of human rights either by using the international legal framework or by the UN Security Council acknowledging the direct links between armed conflict and famine. If the ambiguity surrounding the definition of famine allows leaders to first, dismiss famine as non-existent and second, to ascribe the source to the natural disaster, then nature becomes a convenient reason to conceal the exploitation of famine for political ambitions. The instrumentalisation of famine has surprisingly been understudied but this paper contends that famine is mostly a political tool, rather than a mere incident as nature stands as a factor over which anyone has little control thus removing the accountability of sufferance from the governance. Hence, the following question emerges:

How did political factors influence the management of famine by governing bodies in the face of natural disasters during the Bengal famine of 1943 and the Sudan famine of 1983?

The work will first begin by identifying literature on the ambiguity of the definition of famine and the constantly evolving scholarly discourse on famine in a range of historical and geographic contexts to analyse its complex biological, social, and economic aspects surpassing the frequently fragmented depiction of famine in modern research. The second section shall introduce the theoretical framework of the research, Sen's theory of entitlement which is especially relevant to studying famine beyond the quantitative aggregate decline in the food supply through the engagement of multiple layers of political, legal, social and economic analysis. The focus on the role of individual entitlements and capabilities in determining famine vulnerability enables a detailed study of the disparities both within and between societies and provides a framework for analysing contemporary famine dynamics in a globalised world, which has often been overlooked by the rather broad FAD approach that will be discussed in the theoretical framework of this paper. The body of the research is a comparative analysis of the Bengal famine of 1943 and the 1983 famine in Sudan. The persistence of the famine in Sudan over the years is juxtaposed with the end of the Bengal Famine as the last major famine of India. While both countries have experienced colonialism, climate, and denial of famine, they differ in terms of the extent of international intervention and internal conflicts. These similarities and differences shall be then analysed in response to the objective of the research.

## Methodology

This paper aims to examine the complex relationship between environmental demands and socio-political manoeuvring to identify the fundamental mechanisms influencing the occurrence and perpetuation of famine. The ever-shifting political landscape significantly limits the contribution of single-case studies to the existing literature on famine (Blatter and Haverland, 2012). The research is intended to be a theory-generation project in which two sets of similar cases that exhibit different outcomes are compared to derive valid inferences. Two cases are chosen after careful examination of their similarities and differences. To increase the temporal and geographical generalisability, validity and reliability of the generated theories and hypotheses, two cases of different temporal and geographical institutions are chosen. This allows for the examination of significant patterns, trends, and relationships within a global framework for the development of more robust inferences about causality especially because famine is a global phenomenon transcending national boundaries and is a systemic threat that may propagate beyond regional and global borders.

This research is a comparative analysis of the Bengal famine of 1943 and the famine in Sudan in 1983. While the Bengal famine has been labelled as one of the worst 20th-century catastrophes in South Asia (Malik, 2022), the food crisis in Sudan today is on its way to becoming the world's worst hunger crisis (United Nations, 2024). While the 1983 famine in Sudan is specifically chosen, it must be noted that after the 1983-1985 famine in Sudan, famine occurred continuously through 1990/91, 1993, and 1998 (Hamid, 1995) and from 2003 till date (UN, 2002). The study of the 1983 famine in Sudan is therefore of high relevance today and its study in comparison to Bengal would help identify the evolution, if any, of the political dynamics of famine over time. The main difference between these two famines is that Sudan received extensive coverage and international aid in 1983, but the famine stirred conflict and violence that in turn exacerbated the famine to date. Meanwhile, in Bengal, despite receiving limited coverage and international aid, the famine united Indians against colonial rule and became the last major famine in India. The dynamics of colonialism, climate and denial of famine are kept constant to identify to what extent conflict and international intervention play a role in the protraction of the 1983 famine in Sudan and consequently to discern if famine can be avoided even as natural disasters immediately trigger a decline in the food supply.

The methodology employed in this study integrates qualitative data obtained from comprehensive interviews with five notable historians, who were selected upon deliberate consideration of their extensive contributions to the field and level of expertise. Semi-structured interviewing was employed during these sessions, facilitating open-ended discussion to enhance and supplement the existing volume of material through viewpoints that extend beyond written sources. This research aims to enhance the robustness and depth of the study's findings by personally interacting with these experts to capture the richness of their intellectual contributions and incorporate them into a larger analytical framework.

## Literature Review

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1964: 662) defines "famine" as "an extreme and general scarcity of food". All English definitions of famine suggest that a lack of food is the primary cause of starvation, leaving the afflicted population out of the causative chain. Since the late 20th century, the term "famine" began to refer to an externally quantifiable change in the state of a

population (Sen, 1981). Mayer (1975) proposed that while endemic malnutrition and the ensuing starvation are generally characterised by low levels of typical food consumption further accentuated by a declining trend in food consumption, famine is usually characterised by a sudden collapse of the level of food consumption. Sen (1975) would suggest that the term "shortage", "scarcity" or "lack" ignores an important component of famine dynamics. While these words typically imply there is enough food, they often have to do with people not having adequate access to food. Sen (1975) does not consider famines to be merely food crises, but rather economic catastrophes. This directly also refutes the international definition of famine agreed upon at the 1972 Swedish Famine Symposium as "widespread food shortage leading to a significant regional rise in the death rates" (de Waal, 1987:257)

De Waal (2015) and Sen (1975) contest the underlying discrepancies of purely quantitative measurement methods in determining an incoming famine and its outcome. While De Waal (2015) contended that statistics can occasionally miss the signs of a drought, Sen (1981) challenged the tendency to record proximate cause (normally a disease) as the cause of death instead of a supposed underlying cause such as starvation as it causes a faulty measurement of death rate. Murray et al. (1975) supported this argument by putting forth the case of the 1969-1974 Sahel Drought, which they argued was not a famine of mass starvation since the rate of death declined gradually during that period. However, this challenges the common idea of famine and starvation. Since the word "to starve" originally meant "to suffer or die, whether from cold, hunger, thirst or any other cause," native English speakers find it extremely difficult to accept the notion that a famine could occur without people starving (De Waal, 2005). However, many significant famines have happened when there has not been a general drop in the availability of food; instead, people have starved to death as a result of either a sharp rise in food prices that made it impossible for them to purchase enough food—like in the Great Bengal Famine of 1943—or a collapse in employment due to significant flooding that prevented them from purchasing food in a market economy, as in the case of the Bangladesh famine of 1974 (Sen, 1981).

The report by Leftwich and Harvie (1986) on the current state of famine research highlighted the underrepresentation of prominent social science disciplines in the famine literature. This is attributed to the focus on biological or environmental causes of famine, which aligns with the ideological tenets of environmental determinism and social biology. The emergence of the idea of famine as a man-made phenomenon in the aftermath of changing international political perceptions of famine has received corroboration by recent scholarship. Preston King (1986) argued that the United States' shift in focus from Ethiopia to Somalia during the superpower rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States exacerbated the famine situation in northeast Africa as Ethiopia struggled to manage internal tensions brought on by droughts and maintain military and diplomatic offensives, while generous American food supplies bolstered Somalia's resilience. Ethiopia's near-landlocked situation is made more difficult by its adversarial, well-armed, and well-supplied neighbours.

Graziosi (2017), on the other hand, studied the dynamics of power politics in famine through the case of legitimization of the use of food as a weapon and hunger as punishment during the civil wars in Russia and China in 1921 and 1936 respectively. Yang (2011) maintained that a parallel can be drawn between the "you-eat-as-you-work system" that the Soviet Gulag camps and special settlements selectively employed to resolve the Ukrainian "problem" and the Chinese party secretaries of communes' directive to withhold food from those who were unable

to work, including the sick, to convey to the peasants the necessity of accepting collectivisation. The President of the People's Republic of China publicly stated in May 1961 that peasants in China during Mao's reign blamed the party for 70% of the famine and natural disasters for 30%, referring to it as a "man-made tragedy" (Graziosi, 2017).

Meanwhile, another prominent theory attributes the causes of famine to liberal capitalism. According to Watts (1972), previously effective coping strategies in the wake of drought in Hausaland's pre-capitalist moral economy of stable social relations such as that of patron and client, were rendered impossible by the circuits of reproduction of merchant's capital and the cash economy that was based rather on fluctuations in market price compared to social relations in the past. Stahl (2016) argued that millions of Indians starved to death as the colonial government enforced stringent laissez-faire policies that relied predominantly on market forces and a non-interventionist posture during the catastrophic famines that shook the sub-continent including during the Bengal famine of 1943. Conversely, relief from the colonial authority was only to be obtained in exchange for arduous work (Lytton Declaration, 1932). The threat of starvation, according to Karl Polanyi (2001), was used by liberal reformers and proponents of laissez-faire to coerce the impoverished into working, a tactic that Mill referred to as disciplining labourers "by the power of the lash" (Mill, 1909: 363) as their options were now limited to either work or hunger.

Rosa Luxemburg (1913) asserted that the institution of capitalism necessarily requires the annihilation of the domestic traditional economy of a host country and the social and economic ties of the natives that hold the means of production and labour power because the natives' rudimentary associations offer the best defence for their social structures and material means of subsistence. The application of her theory to the case of India would suggest that the traditional method of famine relief, which relied on local magnates distributing grain, collapsed because of the integration of the Indian economy into the global market leading to a skyrocketing spike in grain prices during crop failure in 1973 (Ahuja, 2002). Her argument that political violence is the mechanism by which capitalism expands as a means to circumvent the restriction of accumulation by the organisations of a natural economy presents a fair distribution of political strategy and liberal capitalism as the drivers of famine.

Nevertheless, liberal imperialist Adam Smith denounced the rapacious plundering of the Indian economy and its populace, particularly the Bengal region, by British capitalists (*Wealth of Nations*, 1776). Indian Finance Minister John Strachey (1878) stated that Bengal had never experienced such prosperity among all classes, one that was fuelled by the inflow of capital and the high demand for local industry and goods as a result of the Madras Famine (Lytton, 1878). While the significance of Malthus' population theory in shaping famine policies during that era has been emphasised by researchers like Ambirajan (1976) and Davis (2017), Stahl (2016) argues that it was mostly the public view of India that was shaped by concepts about overpopulation and intrinsic backwardness rather than by the policies and rhetoric of the colonial government. According to Brien and Gruenbaum (1991), Sudan was largely spared from the famine that ravaged Ethiopia and the Sahelian countries in the 1960s and 1970s due to a trend of agricultural development influenced less by export crop output and more by the growth of capitalist agricultural output feeding domestic consumer markets. This was the case even though Sudan had poor harvests due to rainfall amounts comparable to other famine-affected areas of the Sahel. This questions the validity of the argument that liberal capitalism contributes to famine as at the same time, arguments that agricultural development reduces vulnerability to famine are as legitimate, especially in the context of the raising of socioeconomic

standards in both North and South countries since the advent of liberal capitalism, though this must be read with nuance.

## Theoretical Framework

The comparative analysis of the famines in Bengal and Sudan in this paper mobilises Amartya Sen's institutional theory, the entitlement theory. Sen (1981) emphasises the difference between *having enough food* and *there being not enough food*. This theory that emphasises the legal, political, and socio-economic context of famine asserts that individuals possess "ownership", which can vary from money to livestock and power, and is exchangeable for "chances" such as employment or commodities. These exchanges are manoeuvred by "entitlements" that Sen (1984:497) defines as "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces". In a market economy, the most common types of entitlements are labour-based, inheritance-based, trade-based, and production-based. This theory of entitlement is relevant for this study predominantly because it does not assume that entitlement has a linear relationship with need, which has often been the conventional wisdom. Sen argues that needs do not automatically grant the right to be disposed of the need despite its abundance. In the case of famine, Sen (1984) argues that focusing only on declining trends in the quantity of food available per capita, or FAD is misleading because it focuses more on aggregates than on the relationship between people and the food they need. FAD assumes that famine can be studied in terms of the capacity of food production within a specified geographical and temporal boundary. As such, the causes of famine according to FAD mostly turn to natural disasters, insufficient production skills and underdeveloped infrastructure.

Despite a decline in food available on average per person, one's entitlement might still be protected. Similarly, even in the absence of a reduction in the total availability of food, any entitlement to food may collapse due to economic and social changes in the area or the nation as a whole (Ringen, 1985). A decline in food production is termed a direct entitlement failure while the failure of logistics that halted the transportation of food into affected areas from other provinces is termed a trade entitlement failure. A collapse of the direct food entitlement can function even in the absence of an increase in market prices. As an example, in the Wollo region of Ethiopia, the drought reduced purchasing power and made it harder for the impoverished in Wollo to exert market pressure to demand food from outside sources, but supply constraints led to a critical excess demand for foodgrains, which was reflected in higher prices (Kumar, 1991).

Nevertheless, Sen acknowledges that food availability does restrict access to food. He only argues that the change of entitlement remains the central determining factor. This framework shifts the focus of famine prevention from food availability to entitlement protection. FAO (2005) reported an increase in the number of "man-made" food emergencies from 15 percent in the late 1980s to 35 percent in the ten years following 1992, underlining the pressing need to establish political dynamics as a component of paramount importance to famine analysis (Rubin, 2010).

This theory makes explicit the need to look beyond the decline in food supply as a cause of famine as this can only be explained if the total available food is below the minimum amount of food required by the total population, a phenomenon history has never recorded.

Famines, such as that of Bengal in 1943, have occurred despite the total food supply in the year of the famine being only 5% below that of previous years (Sen, 1981). According to this theory, the focus should not be on what exists but on who has the power and right to allow something. In a nutshell, the entitlement theory explains famine by in terms of opportunities and ownership through the concept of entitlements. Thus, *power* is a main component in the analysis of famine in the paper as the position of a person within a society determines the access to food.

## Comparative Analysis

After decades of intellectual debate, the question remains: is hunger more often caused by political manoeuvring or by natural disasters? A comparative study is made possible by examining the case studies of Darfur and India. Three constant variables—colonial heritage, climate vicissitudes, and denial of famine—are carefully examined in this analysis.

### 1. COLONISATION

#### *India*

##### 1.1. British role in perpetuating Indian agrarian dependency

Famines occurred far more frequently in India in the Victorian era than in the Mughal era that preceded it (Siegel, 2018; Mukerjee, 2011). The outlawing of spinning machines and import taxes from 30 to 80 percent on Indian cotton and silk goods decreased Bengal exports by 95% between 1790 and 1830 while by 30% across the rest of India (Jennings, 2009; Dutt, 1906; Bose, 1990). Consequently, failing to sell in the English market, Indian textiles frequently cost more than English textiles that are cheaply produced using raw Indian cotton and silk. Tariff restrictions continued impeding the development of homegrown industry (Jeffrey, 1985) despite the permission of spinning machinery in 1848. By the mid-1800s, all of India's exports were agrarian, and half of the UK exports were cotton manufactures. The villagers' reliance on the fields' production increased while income generation through cottage industry halted (Louis, 1992). The colony was reduced from a manufacturing state to one of agriculture (Baillie, 1823).

##### 1.2. Exports amidst domestic food decline

As the United Kingdom engaged in a war with Germany in 1939, India was assigned to deliver the majority of the supplies for war theatres to protect British interests in the Middle East, Malaya, and Southeast Asia—approximately 40,000 tonnes of grain monthly, one-tenth of the country's railway engines, carriages, and uprooted railway rails of less significant train lines, three-quarters of the colony's steel and cement output, entire commercial output of timber, woollen textiles and leather goods (Mukerjee, 2018). The refocusing on producing war materials decreased exports by the British which became more dependent on food and industrial raw material imports that were borrowed. This was to be paid off by India under its obligation to cover British expenses incurred eastward and within its borders (Siegel, 2018). Compelled to create paper money to finance its share due to insufficient tax collection and bond sales, inflation and shifted resources to the defence sector caused severe food shortages in rural regions (Prest, 1948; Bose and Jalal, 1998). According to a 1933 survey, 41% of Indians were classified as "poorly nourished" and 20% as "very badly nourished," with Bengal having the

worst rates of 47% and 31%, respectively. Despite the impending famine in the first seven months of 1943, India exported more than 70,000 tonnes of rice, on which 400,000 people would have survived for a whole year (Choudhury, 2021).

### 1.3. Colonial policy failures and mismanagement

Preparing for Japanese seaborne strikes, the civil government was ordered to deny the adversary access to essential resources, while the military was charged with destroying important military, industrial, and transportation infrastructure (The National Archives, 1940-1945). Concerns over the large coastal population and logistical obstacles limited the spread of the British scorched earth measures. Only Bengal was targeted for the "Denial Policy"<sup>2</sup> for its alleged disloyalty and its proximity to Burma (Secretary of State to the Government of India, Defence Dept, 1942). Soldiers had deliberately destroyed rice stores and ordered districts to remove extra rice. Authorities seized and destroyed rice stores, and largely disposed of rice in rivers or seas (Mukerjee, 2018). Bengali peasants suffered economically as the boats that provided them employment and sustenance were destroyed (Mitra, 1959). The suspension of Southeast Asian rice imports further disrupted rice markets and hiked rice prices (Woodhead, 1945). The limited relief operations of grain and cash supplies in Bengal's rural areas only went to the Hindu urban middle class and relatively wealthy landowners (Greenough, 1982). Many poor people with little to no land were denied agricultural loans and were put in direct competition with wealthy Bengalis to buy goods at drastically inflated costs (Brennan, 1988).

## **Sudan**

### 1.4. British influence on Sudanese regional disparities

Before the British, under Turco-Egyptian authority, most of the northern riverine region became the *de facto* administrative and economic hub, while Darfur and Southern Sudan were subjected to resource exploitation through violence (Ylönen, 2004). The pacification and consolidation of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Rule in Sudan was manifested through the redefinition of territories and retention of tribal leaders to avoid the disintegration of the existing system (Sudan Archive Durham University, 2024, Appendix 1, p. 30). The British promoted the commercial interests of a few powerful families of religious leaders, tribal leaders, and merchants to reduce the likelihood of resistance against the colonial regime (Ali, 2002). This policy exacerbated the already-existing development gaps both within and between the North and South (Johnson, 2004). The leaders represented Muslim Sufis' dominance in northern society (Ali, 2002); additionally, development and education policies were carefully considered with the intention of educating only the sons of tribal chiefs (Daly, 1991); Darfur did not have any province agronomist, magistrates, or educational administrators by 1947 (Young and Badri, 2005).

The Native Administration,<sup>3</sup> established by the British, led to a division between the educated Sudanese and the tribal leaders, who saw the reformers as agents of colonial rule and a dan-

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<sup>2</sup> "Denial Policy" refers to the removal of excess rice from Indian coastal regions and the destruction of boats with the capacity to hold ten or more people to deny food and transport to the Japanese (Malik, 2022)

<sup>3</sup> Under the guidance of the British staff, the Native Administration provided a system of local governance that managed the use of natural resources and maintained peace and stability between the various groups (Shazali and Ghaffar, 1999).

ger to their authority and standing (Elsammni, 1985). Following independence, the Native Administration was superseded by a local administration, which eliminated the administrative power and jurisdiction of the tribal leaders in the rural councils. This restructuring by "insensitive" Nile officials upset the traditional authority (Burr, 1999). There has been much discussion about how this initial component of reorganisation<sup>4</sup> is what set off tribal wars on a larger scale in Darfur that caused its famine (Ateem, 1999).

### 1.5. British divide and rule

When the British forcibly annexed Darfur in 1916 (Niblock, 1987; Ibrahim, 1983), one of its main interests was to supply Manchester's thriving textile industry (Young and Badri, 2005). To establish and grow cotton on vast, centrally administered estates or schemes was a British strategy, and the many millions of small farmers who were not part of these projects saw very little improvement in their situation. Provinces in the periphery were entirely disregarded as a result of the development efforts of the Condominium Rule being focused on a triangle region consisting of Kosti, Kassala, and Khartoum, which profited most from the expansion of health and education facilities. By 1955, as Table 1 demonstrates, Sudan had about 1,170 implemented schemes, of which none were in Darfur, one of the peripheral provinces (Niblock, 1987).

Table 1: Distribution of agricultural schemes in Sudan in 1955 (Source: Young et al., 2005: Table 2).

Province	Scheme (Name and/or type)	Number of Schemes
Blue Nile	Gezira (gravity)	1
	Pump (schemes)	581
Northern	Pumps schemes	430
Kassala	Gash (gravity)	1
	Tokar (gravity)	1
	Pump schemes	4
Upper Nile	Pumps schemes	34
Khartoum	Pumps schemes	117
<b>Total</b>		<b>1169</b>

### 1.6. Political marginalisation and economic stagnation in post-independence Sudan

Although the Sudanese government gained economically from the Condominium Rule policies after obtaining independence in 1956, they resulted in major regional inequities that predominantly hurt peripheral provinces like Darfur (Niblock, 1987). Social entities with an inherent motivation to uphold the existing social and economic structure that had benefited them during colonial rule controlled the Sudanese government following independence (Young and Badri, 2005; Niblock, 1987). Consequently, instead of being used to alleviate regional imbalances, revenue generated during colonialism was invested to strengthen schemes for cotton production, further widening the regional economic and social disparity (Young and Badri, 2005). Commissioners overseeing Darfur overlooked the people's fundamental needs in favour of advancing the goals of the federal government (Ibrahim, 2004). Although Darfur experienced several favourable economic developments in the two decades following independence

<sup>4</sup> There have been records of 16 distinct border disputes and clashes between village councils in the province of southern Darfur shortly after this statute was put into effect (Elsammni, 1985).



(Elzein, 1998), the region's nascent economic growth and limited development<sup>5</sup> were overthrown by a national economic crisis, poor management that resulted in a drop in exports, and rampant corruption (de Waal, 1989). As Table 2 demonstrates, the most neglected Darfur suffered the most from poverty of all the regions.

Table 2: Disparities in regional income (in U.S. Dollars) in Sudan from 1967/68 to 1982/83 (Source: Mamdani, 2009: Table 3).

Region	Income 1967/68	Income 1982/83
Khartoum	236	283
Middle (including the Blue Nile)	183	201
Eastern (including Port Sudan and Kassala)	180	195
Kordofan (including South Kodofan)	153	164
Northern Region	124	130
Darfur	98	102
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	44.5	57

Indeed, while the narrative attributing famines in Bengal and Darfur predominantly to the spectre of colonisation holds sway within these scholars, an equally compelling argument posits climate as the principal protagonist in the tragedy of famine.

## 2. CLIMATE

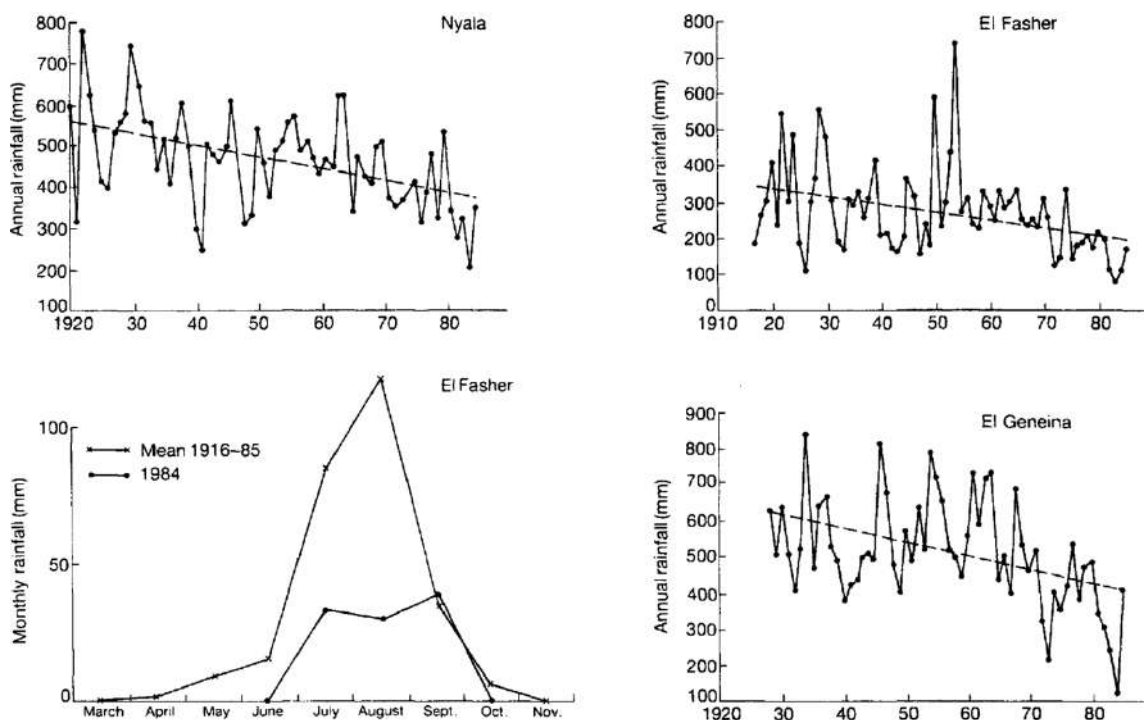
### Sudan

#### 2.1. Undisputed account of drought in 1983 Sudan

According to an analysis of the available data from Darfuri rainfall stations, sixteen of the twenty-eight sites show statistically significant declines at a 99% confidence level, and all but one show decreasing rainfall. Figure 1 shows that El Fasher and El Geneina have seen average yearly declines of 3 mm, 2.1 mm, and 3.7 mm, respectively from 1910 to the late 1980s (De Waal, 2005: 81). Official data indicates that Sudan's mean average rainfall decreased by 6.7% between 1960–1969 and 1970–1979, and by 17.7% between 1970–1979 and 1980–1986, respectively (Young et al., 2005).

Figure 1: Monthly and annual rainfall in El Fasher, Nyala and El Geneina in 1984 and mean value from 1916 to 1965 (Source: De Waal, 2005: Figure 4.1.).

<sup>5</sup> The transfer of administration from central government to state governments suspended the only two international organisations-funded development projects in Darfur, the Jebel Marra Rural Development Project, and the Western Savannah Development Project (Ateem, 1999).



Douglas Hamilton and Johnson (2011) argue that the tensions between the main Darfur native ethnic group and Arabs were caused by the devastating drought that hit the region in the seventies and eighties. A shift of pastoral societies from northern parts of Darfur to areas populated by farmers caused pressure on natural resources and incited conflict between the new “immigrants” and the settled population. In fact, according to a 1986 poll, about 2.5% of Darfurians migrated to Central and Eastern Sudan in one year following 1984 (de Waal, 1989). There has not been any contention that drought did occur in Sudan in 1983.

With a 0.0008% chance of occurring, the protracted drought that ravaged the Sudan region from the 1970s to the 1990s was extensive and intense (Winstanley 1985). Many previous droughts were limited events, and the impacted communities were able to relocate to nearby, unaffected areas to avoid the affected area. The existence of such enduring local-level fluctuations is evidence that droughts were not as common in the past (Hamid, 1995), which could all the more attribute the occurrence of famine in 1983 to drought at first glance. Due to disparate income and asset bases, variations in access to governmental assistance and community risk-sharing networks, and a significant decline in agricultural output and farm employment, the famine of 1983–1985 was addressed with uneven success across households (Teklu et al., 1992).

## India

### 2.2. Disputes over the occurrence of natural disaster in 1943 Bengal

Mishra et al. (2019) discovered that only the Bengal famine of 1943—which occurred in a year with above-average rainfall—was not spurred by drought among India's six significant famines that occurred between 1870 and 2016. However, the paper excludes important factors such as the October Cyclone or the Brown Spot epidemic. Based on data from rice research institutions in Bengal, the region experienced a huge crop failure and severe rice shortage in 1942

(O'Grada, 2008). Indian economist Omkar Goswami concluded that the 1943 Bengal harvest was about one-third smaller than the year before so there had been a significant decrease in food availability (Tauger, 2009). Tarakchandra Das's (1949) harvest data, which he admitted was speculative, unsupported by reliable statistical studies and harvest measurements and collected in a variety of methods, was one of the primary sources for the Famine Inquiry Commission Report of India during the Bengal famine. These data however became the basis of argument for many proponents of the man-made famine theory inviting contestations by authors like Tauger (2009) about its validity. In the Annual Review of Phytopathology of 1972, Padmanabhan (1973) concluded that the unusually heavy rainfall in September 1942, the prolonged cloudy weather in November with little sunshine hours and sporadic rains, and higher minimum temperatures than normal created highly favourable conditions for spore release and infection—which spread more widely due to winds. This led to the outbreak of the most destructive epiphytotic helminthosporium disease of rice ever documented leading to the significant loss of yield of all types of paddy in Bengal that year (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** The yield of rice by variety per hectare in the epiphytotic year (1942) and in a normal year (1941) in two cities of Bengal (Source: Padmanabhan, 1973: Table 1).

Variety of paddy	Bankura			Chinsurah		
	Yield kg/ha 1941	Yield kg/ha 1942	Percentage Loss in Yield	Yield kg/ha 1941	Yield kg/ha 1942	Percentage Loss in Yield
Bhutmuri Aus (early)	1289	1242	6.81	372	1252	
Kataktara Aus (early)	1421	1205	15.1	1250	1215	
Tilakkachri Aus (early)	1867	1328	28.9	1713	965	43.7
Marichbati Aus (early)	1365	723	46.9	1365	674	50.3
Dharial Aus (early)	1323	669	49.5	1323	669	49.6
Charnok Aus (early)	1208	443	59.2	762	446	41.5
Dudsar Aman (med late)	2105	559	73.5	2102	1274	39.5
Badkalamkatti Aman (med late)	1504	909	39.5	1737	686	60.5
Indrasail Aman (med late)	2962	755	74.5	3094	755	75.6
Nonaramsail Aman (med late)	1693	426	74.7	1691	424	74.8
Chinsurah Aman (med late)	3778	880	76.7	2501	713	79.1
Sundermukhi Aman (med late)	2599	267	76.9	2362	272	88.5
Latisail Aman (med late)	5427	1122	79.3	2906	1125	61.3
Ajan Aman (med late)	3168	600	81.1	3173	561	82.3
Badshabhog Aman (med late)	1938	316	83.2	1189	757	59.9
Juijasail Aman (med late)	2499	331	85.5	2252	306	86.4
Boldar Aman (med late)	2426	306	87.3	2426	309	87.3
Raghusail Aman (med late)	2563	328	87.4	---	---	---
Rupsail Aman (med late)	2156	284	87.7	2166	284	86.9
Patnai Aman (med late)	2751	336	87.8	2256	336	85.1
Dandkhani Aman (med late)	1722	152	91.2	1725	159	91.1

### 3. DENIAL OF FAMINE

#### Sudan

##### 3.1. Efforts to conceal the famine

The sorghum and millet harvests in eastern and central Sudan and the traditional agricultural regions of western Sudan, Darfur, and Kordofan, were in jeopardy by mid-1983 due to ensuing drought (USAID, 1984). District administrators in Bara, Sodari, Khartoum and other Kordofan districts regularly reported to the regional government in El-Obeid about the deteriorating conditions in their administrative localities between 1983 and 1985 so the central government and the local administrations were aware of the worsening situations in their respective districts (Hamid, 1995). The government tried covering the impending disaster instead of acting proactively and stabilising prices or importing food supplies from areas with excess supply. During one such attempt, the Governor of Kordofan threw a lavish luncheon for a wealthy audience

in the Hilton Hotel in Khartoum to publicly deny that there was a famine (Bush, 1988). To preserve the appearance of stability and economic prosperity to both internal and external allies, the administration stifled word of the famine when it eventually made its way to Khartoum (Hamid, 1995). Assuring foreign donors—the United States (U.S.), the European Community, the World Bank, the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and several Gulf Arab states—of its capacity to repay debts and generate returns on investments was the Sudanese government's top priority. A widespread famine put the regime's claims of stability and economic expansion in jeopardy and endangered its crucial political and financial backing from these allies (Keen, 2008). To preserve the impression of normalcy, the authorities began using routine policing operations to drive displaced people out of the city. The Nimeiry regime's persistent denial of famine significantly postponed the government's response to drought victims and the call for foreign aid (Hamid, 1995).

### 3.2. The role of international donors in famine denial

The donors essentially allowed the intentional escalation of the famine to continue by ceding their financial influence over the Sudanese government (Keen, 2008). Donors repeatedly overlooked their duty to provide aid to famine victims by failing to supervise relief aid distribution, circumventing conversations about the relationship between raiding activities and the occurrence of famine, and falsely labelling politically contentious areas as unreachable (Cater, 1986). The outbreak of the famine shocked foreign funders and supporters, acting as a clear reminder of the shortcomings of development initiatives established in the early 1970s. The external stakeholders' backing for the "open market policy," which included deregulation, minimal government intervention, and promoting foreign commerce and investment in Sudan, exposed the government's and its international backers' inefficiency (Hamid, 1995). International and intergovernmental organisations chose to widely publicise the famine as a means of "clearing" themselves of accountability (FAO, 1983). Many people around the world were outraged by this notoriety and the extensive media coverage it received. Governments were ultimately pressured by several organisations to issue provisions and other types of assistance despite their alleged tactical motives (Cutler 1991: 177-8; Gill, 1985).

## **India**

### 3.3. Minimisation of famine

Grain shortages and speculations led to a continued rise in prices in India by 1943 and increased unemployment (Sen, 1985; Rana, Appendix B, pg. 34). The ministers that were responsible for food supplies refused to admit there was a problem and played down scarcity while minimising the reasons responsible for high prices, a pattern of equivocation that was to be continued through the worst months of the famine to avoid blame and public panic (Greenough, 1980). It was impossible to determine that the stock of grains was running low as substantial purchases were made by the British government from the Calcutta market to feed its officials, troops, railway workers, and employees and to everyone who worked for the government (Mukerjee, 2018; Greenough, 1980) especially because no data nor regulation of grain trading was available at that time (Greenough, 1980). As famine slowly broke out, Mr. Amery refuted reports of a nationwide illness breakout or a scarcity of healthcare equipment (Mukerjee, 2011), which would have triggered actions based on the provisions of the Famine Code (Mazumdar, Appendix B, pg. 53). Mukerjee (2011) refutes Amery's claim that roughly a thousand people each week died from malnutrition on the basis that mortality due to scarcity of

food would amount to up to a thousand weekly deaths in sub-divisions alone, indicating the degree of distorted public announcements. Amery would further minimise the scarcity by questioning the public panic as he claimed no exceptional shortage of grains as other foods were equally in slight decline while maintaining that political opponents were deliberately exaggerating the situation (Mukerjee, 2018).

### 3.4. Diversion of attention from famine to war

Although Churchill's colleagues foregrounded the urgency to alleviate India's wheat scarcity, the minister of war transport argued that Ceylon's needs should take precedence over India's, while Churchill's close advisor suggested deceiving Indian hoarders by claiming in public that sufficient grain imports were available to ease price pressures. However, the Secretary of State for War disagreed with the claim that bluffing would work as this would necessitate a request for 500,000 tonnes of wheat that would not be met due to the extreme scarcity of rice. The insufficiency of wheat to prevent famine on its own suggests the extent of food shortage at that time (Mukerjee, 2018). Churchill's geopolitical vision outlined a system of grain distribution in which Europeans were designated to receive wheat upon their freedom while Indians were to eat barley (Siegel, 2018). Every Indian ship capable of a round voyage was engaged in the war effort when wheat was available in Australia. In addition to his growing hostility against Indians, Churchill was hesitant to release warships to transport grain to the colony because lower supplies at home would jeopardise the British economy and restrict the War Cabinet's capacity to conduct military operations (Behrens, 1943). To create a stockpile in the Mediterranean region to support liberated Greeks and Yugoslavs, the War Cabinet of the United Kingdom shifted its secondary military focus from India to the Balkans in the autumn of 1943. As a result, shipments of wheat from Australia travelled through famine-stricken India on their way to storage rather than immediate consumption (Phillips, 1955).

Despite the dimensions of colonialism, climate, and famine denial, the Bengal famine became the last major famine in India while the famine in Sudan persists to date. Two major and relevant differences in these two famines have been identified, internal conflict and international intervention.

## 1. INTERNAL CONFLICT

### Sudan

#### 4.1. Appropriation of labour and resources from Sudanese peripheries to centre

The reinforcement of well-established centres of economic and social progress in the centre of Sudan and the surrounding regions along the Nile's banks, enabled by the appropriation of cheap labour and resources from outlying areas to the Gezira Scheme and other Nile cotton fields created a trajectory of uneven development and distribution of wealth, intensified political asymmetries, and highlighted social divisions (Mamoun, 1957). This phenomenon defined by the appropriation of labour and resources from the periphery to maintain the wealth of central hubs, had a pivotal role in inciting the civil conflicts in Sudan that demolished food infrastructure and caused famine that was further exacerbated by the drought-induced decline in food supply (Hamid, 1995). Darfur's 1984–1985 famine was a major factor in the region's social unrest and internal relocation (De Waal, 1989). Social institutions could have addressed this without resorting to violence, but militarisation and poor regime management stoked the conflict and slaughter (De Waal, 2007).

#### 4.2. Incitement of violence by the government

The second Sudanese civil war that occurred in 1983 grew into a full-fledged uprising headed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) against the regime in Khartoum after the re-election of Nimeiry with 99.6% of votes (Johnson, 2006). Against the convoluted landscape of Sudanese governance, the regime employed a recurring tactic to mitigate the growing threat this insurgency posed: inciting conflict and division within the southern provinces (Young, 2007). The use of militias as a tool to attack the SPLM/A's effectiveness and cohesiveness was a key component of this Machiavellian strategy. As a result, a large amount of the conflicts that followed during the lengthy North-South conflict were defined by rebel battles within the southern region. These battles, which frequently followed ethnic fault lines, created a vicious cycle of violence in which villages were singled out for attack because of their racial affinities. According to Johnson (2006) and Jok (2007), this harmful dynamic created a generalised sense of animosity among South Sudan's heterogeneous population. The fear of the war in Southern Sudan spreading northward and the limited resources Darfur had to offer to the government merged with the community's constant severe threats to the regime, prompted the government to mobilise tribal rhetoric to incite the Arab communities against the non-Arabs—the possibility that non-Arabs would eventually outnumber Arabs in the region—to topple the non-Arab rebels (Tar, 2005).

### India

#### 4.4. Crisis that united Indians

Contrarily, the Bengal famine served as the definitive verdict on British rule in India, following decades of marches, boycotts, and strikes against the economic effects of imperial control (Nehru, 1989). India's government and populace linked the goal of providing food for all Indians to the promise of self-rule, viewing the famine as the most glaring example of colonial politics and economics gone wrong, contributing to a growing sense of disillusionment with colonial authority and heightened desire for Indian sovereignty (Mukerjee, 2018). Although hunger had long been a fundamental part of Indian conceptions of imperial injustice, the eradication of hunger became a nationalist goal after 1943. Relief efforts were primarily supplied through cash donations, food aid and clothing by Indians, who were rich businessmen, women associations, communists, and socialists as well as expatriates in Karachi and East Africa all from diverse political groups both supporters and adversaries of the colonial rule (Siegel, 2018; O'Grada, 2008). Accounts of the tumultuous ten years<sup>6</sup> leading up to independence have underestimated the impact of the Bengal famine on Indian politics and hope for the country. These accounts reduce the hunger to a graphic wartime anecdote, ignoring how a localised tragedy became an important focal point for political stakes-taking (Siegel, 2018).

## 2. INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

### Sudan

#### 5.1. Extensive foreign emergency assistance and food relief

Beginning in 1984, foreign groups—the World Bank, the European Community, Britain, Arab countries, Oxfam and the IMF—began delivering food aid in Sudan outside of official channels

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<sup>6</sup> For further details, read Siegel, B.R. (2018). *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

(Cater, 1986), which locals perceived as a threat to state security (Jaspars and El Tayeb, 2021). In response to the drought crises in Darfur and Kordofan in 1984–1985, the U.S. significantly boosted its emergency assistance and food aid, and for the past 25 years, it became the country that provided the most humanitarian aid to the Sudanese people. In 1984, the budget of USAID for Sudan consisted of \$25 million for development assistance, \$50 million for financing agricultural product sales, and a \$120 million program for commodity imports (USAID, 2024). Food aid was delivered by international organisations to Sudan's peripheries and became more emergency response-focused due to the rise in famine, refugees, and warfare. Nevertheless, rather than focusing on ensuring that everyone has access to enough food over the long run, enormous amounts of aid money have been allocated to efforts to develop the Sudanese economy, which has had the unintended consequence of bolstering the regional disparities in infrastructure and services (Cater, 1986).

## 5.2. Manipulation of aid

Because food aid schemes were the primary form of help at the time, the government rigging of exchange rates entailed that Sudan's Central Bank was receiving hard currency (Jaspars and El Tayeb, 2021). Furthermore, emergency food aid, except from Darfur in 2004–2005, hardly reached populations affected by crises in the amounts anticipated, while it did assist government-affiliated businesses in central Sudan (Young et al., 2005). Food aid has frequently been denied to contested areas throughout Sudan's conflicts and diverted to feed soldiers or support local authorities (Hamid, 1995). Food aid was manipulated by local government agencies, and armed groups, or by taxing or stealing it and then inflating beneficiary figures to receive more funding (Macrae and Zwi, 1992). According to Africa Watch (1991), if only 5% of Ethiopia's humanitarian aid had been diverted in the late 1980s, up to 400,000 people—the equivalent of the country's armed forces—would have been nourished. This necessarily illustrates the extent to which the diversion of aid in Sudan could have directly fuelled violence. In the 1980s and 90s, dealers and transporters with ties to the government slowed down food delivery and provided less than anticipated (Jaspars and El Tayeb, 2021), from which governments and the corporate sector profited because it increased food costs causing the poor to sell their land or cattle to afford food, and provided a supply of cheap farm labour when people were uprooted, such as from southern Sudan to Kordofan (Slim, 2004).

## India

### 5.3. Less international coverage and aid

Compared to the famine in Sudan, the 1943 Bengal famine received significantly less media coverage and aid because of the dominance of World War II. Even though a group of military and political personalities had been demanding food imports for India through official channels since December 1942 (Mukerjee, 2018; Dianda, 2018), these requests were difficult to fulfil and took a long time to complete due to the constant disapproval from Churchill's War Cabinet (Sen, 1981). News about the famine was subject to censorship and the use of the word, "famine" was deemed illegal (Mukerjee, 2015). Beginning in early 1943, private domestic humanitarian organisations began to distribute a small amount of aid, which over time increased, mostly in Calcutta but also to some extent in the countryside (Sen, 1990). However, in August 1943, the publication of vivid images of the casualties by the editor of *The Statesman*, an Indian newspaper, inaugurated the first time that the famine was becoming widely recognised

both domestically and globally (Mukerjee, 2010; Mukerjee, 2015). However, aside from criticism towards British colonial rule, in no way had this brought about concrete international aid.

#### 2.4. Refusal of aid from international donors by the British government

In Bengal, the government of His Majesty exhibited measured discretion even when faced with offers of support from allies (Siddiqui, 2020; Panda, 2023). Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South America all declared their willingness to help India in case of necessity. A minister from Canberra stated that Australia could supply all the wheat needed for the starving people if the United Kingdom provided transport by sea (Mukerjee, 2018). According to Reuters (1948), Australia was prepared to ship supplies, as there were enough supplies on hand (Sinha, 1964). No significant progress was made despite requests for the release of these ships for famine relief efforts. The War Cabinet held authority over almost all dominion shipping and seventeen merchant ships registered in India, with a combined gross tonnage of almost 80,000 but as they had been commandeered to serve for war purposes, relief efforts by international entities were impeded (Greenough, 1980). The unavailability of appropriate shipping allowed only extremely concentrated food items to be carried aboard (Mukerjee, 2018). This limited aid often fell short of needs. New Zealand, which had set aside £10,000 for famine relief, reported that the contribution of powdered or condensed milk would be most practical considering the available shipping method (Dutt, 1901). The goods, which included milk powder, vitamins, and medications, were helpful but not an adequate replacement for staple cereals like wheat or rice (Dirks, 2006).

#### **Responsibility of Famine: Nature or Politics?**

The identification of causes of famine necessitates a detailed investigation that surpasses the naive dichotomy between political manipulation and natural disasters. Even while the disease in Bengal and the drought in Sudan both significantly contributed to the severity of food scarcity, a reductionist narrative that ignores the complex interactions between political, economic, and social processes would be derelict in explaining the famines. Tauger (2009) asserted that a clear contradistinction must be made between acute triggers and underlying systemic shortcomings, implying that the latter must not be confounded as the former and concludes that disease is the cause of the Bengal famine. His argument ignores the larger scene in which the famine occurred. It is also dangerously simplistic especially considering that employing starvation as a weapon of war was legal by 1948 Geneva Convention rules until 1977 (Mulder and van Dijk, 2021). The removal of the agency of governing bodies from the responsibility of famine misgovernance would conveniently facilitate their complicity in exacerbating humanitarian crises.

Everyone, as recognised by many international conventions<sup>7</sup>, has the fundamental right to food. Accordingly, state responsibility for protecting this right is emphasised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) underlining the prime responsibility and duty of the state to guarantee food security for all citizens. However, as the case studies of Bengal and Sudan

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<sup>7</sup> Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, p.7).



demonstrate, the failings of the ruling class to fulfil this responsibility via censoring and denialism have prolonged hunger and impeded the timely implementation of effective countermeasures. Although there is little doubt that natural catastrophes resulted in variations in food availability, condemning famine exclusively on these occurrences ignores the structural inequalities and systemic vulnerabilities that render populations vulnerable to severe food poverty that should be studied using the framework of the theory of entitlement.

### 1.1. Power to Design an Economy

The British colonial regime designed the Indian economy to adapt to its economic needs. India became the principal producer of the U.K.'s manufacturing industry raw materials. When English textiles failed to compete with Indian textiles in the English market due to its low cost, tariffs were introduced to raise the price of Indian textiles inducing its eventual departure from the English market. While India possessed an overwhelming potential to expand into a manufacturing state, the British colonial policy spawned its stagnation as an agrarian economy. The increasing dependency on agriculture, which later became the primary source of income and sustenance, limited the means to acquire "ownership" to only one trajectory, agricultural production. In 1943, as natural disasters suspended this only means, they were alienated from the endowment of monetary capital and were soon not entitled to food, socially constructed to be an "opportunity" in exchange for money as the "ownership".

If the natural disaster was the source of these famines, then it must have inevitably impacted all people equally and ceased when the climate improved, which is untrue. Although drought affected most of Sudan, famine predominantly affected the peripheral cities due to the discrepancies in the development of the country. The developed regions that demonstrated a political benefit to the regime in terms of political survival and income generation to both colonial and post-independent regimes were significantly more developed than regions of ethnic minorities that constituted a threat to the regime. This logic of political survival also informs Bengal's selection for the "Denial Policy". The choice of development was also based on the return on investment as the underdeveloped peripheries did not own many income-generating natural resources, the development of which would not garner much profit for the regimes. This division, which was first introduced by the British had transgressed generations that have maintained and further deepened the communal heterogeneity leading up to violence expediting the famine.

The British as well as the post-independence government held the power to decide the entitlement of each person as they developed the economies of some regions above others. This is why despite a decline in food on average per person, the entitlement of the people residing in the centre was protected. Recognising that social, economic, and political systems influence an individual's access to resources and that entitlements are dependent upon them is fundamental to Sen's approach. The governments in Bengal in 1943 and Sudan in 1983 adopted development paradigms according to their respective political agenda. They functioned as entitlement arbiters, directing the allocation of chances and resources. As a result, entitlement inequalities continue to exist even in the face of natural variations like drought, which drives vulnerable groups, a social group created by the arbiters of entitlement, to starvation. The accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of powerful political figures in both situations fed entitlement deprivation patterns and increased the susceptibility of marginalised populations to hunger.

## 1.2. Power to Control the Flow of Resources

Despite claims that the famines were only caused by inefficient resource allocation or natural disasters, political authorities in both regions revealed a determined agenda to control, dominate and influence entitlement structures, as evidenced by their denial of famine and suppression of information. The denial and suppression assisted the British and the Sudanese government to maintain monopoly control over the distribution of resources and thereupon decide the flow of resources, often, in a way that reinforced their power and political standing. Examples of the arbitrary distribution of entitlements are the diversion of food supplies in Bengal to support British war operations and the allocation of international aid to Sudanese economic development instead of a sustainable food distribution plan. Such entitlement dynamics are characterised by a callous disregard for human wellbeing, as evidenced by the purposeful prioritisation of military needs over the basic needs of millions of Indians. The volatile nature of entitlements—shown by sharp price swings and capricious distribution choices—highlights how unstable food security is, especially for groups unfavoured by the dominant.

Thus, the availability of food and endowment alone shall not suggest that one is entitled to the available resources as the decision of entitlement endowment escapes oneself if they are in the position of the dominated. The position of civilians in both Bengal and Sudan famine faced their right to control the flow of resources. In fact, “opportunities” that had already been attained through past entitlements could also be eliminated. The entitlement to the food of people with a sufficient endowment is, for instance, removed by an increase in food prices resulting from factors outside their immediate control. Sen's entitlement theory is based on the understanding that rights are not just passive privileges granted by kind authority, but rather dynamic capacities that people have to obtain and manage resources necessary for their survival. However, in environments characterised by structural injustices and political oppression, the ruling class routinely subverts and manipulates these rights, hence extending cycles of vulnerability and deprivation. These two events are fundamentally rooted in the deliberate manipulation of entitlements and the wielding of political power by governing bodies through distribution and political favouritism. The glaring discrepancy between resources and entitlements emphasises the crucial role that political choices play in maintaining starvation conditions and denying fundamental rights to marginalised groups.

### **Analyzing Post-Famine Recovery in Bengal Compared to Sudan**

Incessant violent removal of access to goods by the targeted segment of the population by the Sudanese government has consistently deliberately and systematically removed their entitlement to food (Osmani, 1991). Manipulation and deliberate targeting advanced by power imbalance became the ground of government policies locking the powerless, across ethnic lines, in a cycle of poverty and dependency. Contrarily, the Bengal famine of 1943 which elucidated the dangers and weaknesses of colonial governance based upon economic exploitation served as a moment of political and economic reflection and restructuring. Post-independent efforts had been critical in the improvement of food security and governance leading to substantial agricultural and economic institutional and policy reforms.

Secondly, in Sudan, the mismanagement and manipulation of aid along with aid diversion intensified already-existing conflicts, drove up food prices and worsened the already unstable socioeconomic standards of residents in developing regions as donors fail to closely monitor

aid delivery. The intergenerational fights for socio-economic equity are sustained by this phenomenon, which not only prolongs cycles of poverty and suffering but also provoke social unrest among marginalised communities, leading them to express their rights before situations worsen irreversibly. The same regional inequality that fed the strife leading to famine is also intensified by international food aid, creating an endless circle. Meanwhile, although Bengal received limited external aid, this also gave less room to precipitate conflict along religious lines through an unequal distribution of aid.

Bengalis responded to the famine with outstanding solidarity. They were inspired to reject division and fragmentation by their shared consciousness of the economic exploitation perpetrated under colonial rule. Rather than succumbing to despair and discord, communities banded together, pooling resources and support networks to mitigate the impact of the crisis. In India, communities came together to integrate resources and support systems to mitigate the effects of the crisis. In contrast, in Sudan, ethnic differences and conflict, instrumentalised by political powers, greatly influenced the society's response to famine, further enhancing fragmentation along ethnic lines. The different ways in which these famines turned out highlight how important political action is in determining the dynamics of famine. A sense of community responsibility was fostered and post-independence India's economic institutions were reevaluated as a result of the famine, which incited social and political transformation. On the other hand, the divisive policies of the Sudanese government served to strengthen the existing power structures, prolonging inequality and aggravating the suffering of the most vulnerable as the cycle of violence continued diminishing the endowment of the poor while enhancing the power of the rich as a result of poor governance-led unfair distribution.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, while drought and disease triggered the Bengal famine of 1943 and the famine in Sudan in 1983 respectively, political decisions and governance heavily influenced the extent and severity of their impacts. In both cases, the colonial and government priorities, economic design and entitlement systems, alongside information suppression and denial augmented the intensity of the phenomenon of food decline into a famine. However, the case of India shows that effective post-famine governance and social cohesion are indispensable in the mitigation of famine. The study is especially important because it demonstrates the inadequacy of the current theory of famine which oftentimes has a narrow focus of associating famine to the unavailability of food supply. This leads to inefficient anti-famine policies that focus only on supplying food and not on regulating the distribution of food according to needs. Famines, as demonstrated in this study, are more often caused by food deprivation rather than food shortage.

The question of why, despite the increased connectivity of global citizens due to commercial shipping since the mid-1800s and the abundance of resources, some countries, especially those on the periphery that supply raw materials to more developed countries, are disproportionately vulnerable to these famines must be asked more frequently. The lack of consensus on what constitutes famine conceals the political tactics that surround its onset and aids in its denial. No mechanism was founded to measure famine and because of this, there is no legitimate legal framework that is established to hold governing bodies accountable for denying

famine. It has thus become convenient to attribute the cause of famine simply to natural disaster when as has been demonstrated by the comparative analysis, there is rarely one factor that causes famine.

As demonstrated through the framework of the theory of entitlement, famine necessarily becomes the aftermath of a failure to distribute food according to needs determined by individual resources, social opportunities, and mechanisms connecting the two. The free market is the biggest ally of famine as it assumes a given and constant environment without considering the complex and changing environments alongside the different dynamics of societies around the world. Consequently, famine is a consequence of power dynamics and rights deprivation, where access to food is hindered by institutional mechanisms, market forces and political decisions, rather than solely by food decline. The historical trend from the 1940s through the 1980s till date shows that famine has continued to be caused by conflict for more than a century after the end of the Bengal famine and is only becoming more and more significant given the geopolitical environment of today.

The limitations of this study are acknowledged and should be considered during the interpretation of the results. The examination of the Sudanese famine in 1983 and the Bengal famine in 1943 was primarily dependent on secondary sources. Records pertaining to the Bengal famine were not accessible for consultation by new members since they are only accessible on-site at the British Library for existing members. On the other hand, the censorship policies of the Nimeiry dictatorship restricted the range of primary data on the 1983 Sudanese famine that are available for this investigation. The investigation of the "denied factor"—the search for something that purports not to exist—was another difficulty this study encountered. This work was frequently harder than sifting through an abundance of resources because it needed to be done by identifying absence rather than presence. Furthermore, the emergence of sophisticated meteorological monitoring techniques is not contemporaneous with the historical context of the events being studied. This chronological gap suggests that the analytical techniques employed to evaluate the impact of natural disasters on the famines were not as advanced at the time of these occurrences, which could have an impact on the accuracy of the correlations found in this study. Moving forward, the contrast between independent India's food politics to that of Sudan begs the question of the extent to which democratic governance is effective in managing famine. This contrast emphasises the importance of conducting further in-depth research on the complex effects of political systems on famine response and management techniques, which is a topic for further exploration.

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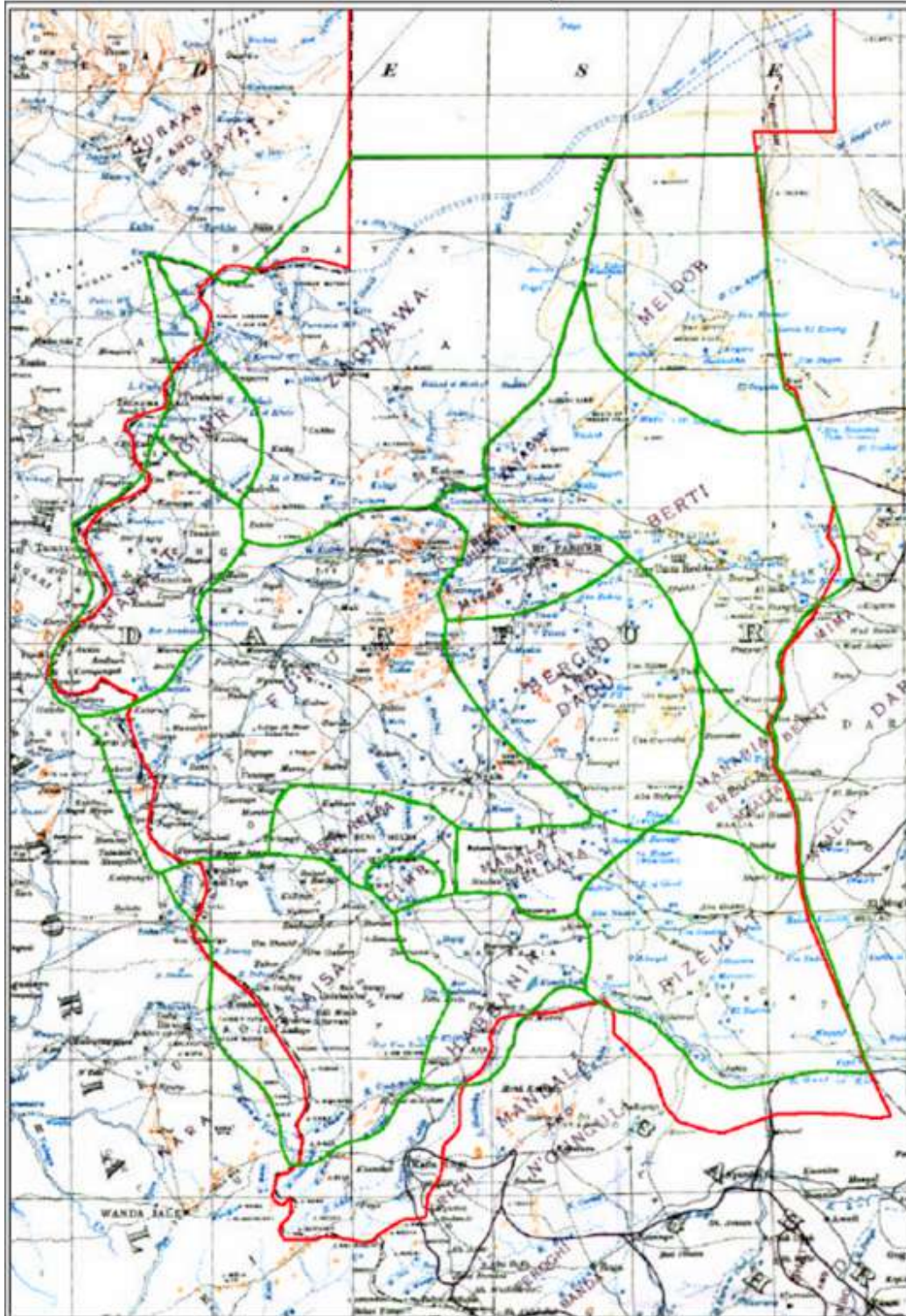
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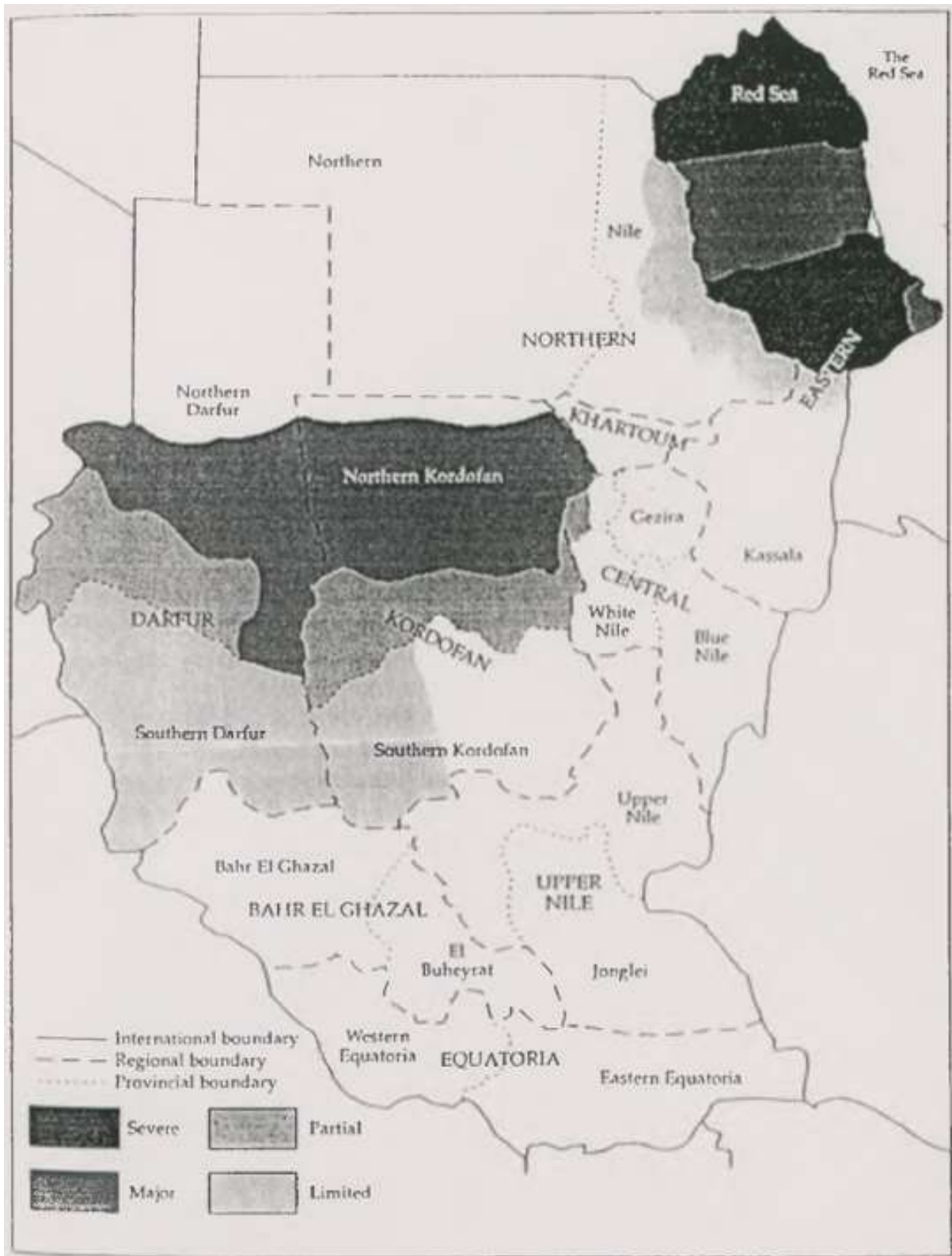
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## Appendix A. Maps

Map 1: Sudanese tribal areas, referred to as the Dars of Darfur following the 1928 Anglo-Egyptian rule of Sudan (Source: Sudan Archive Durham University)

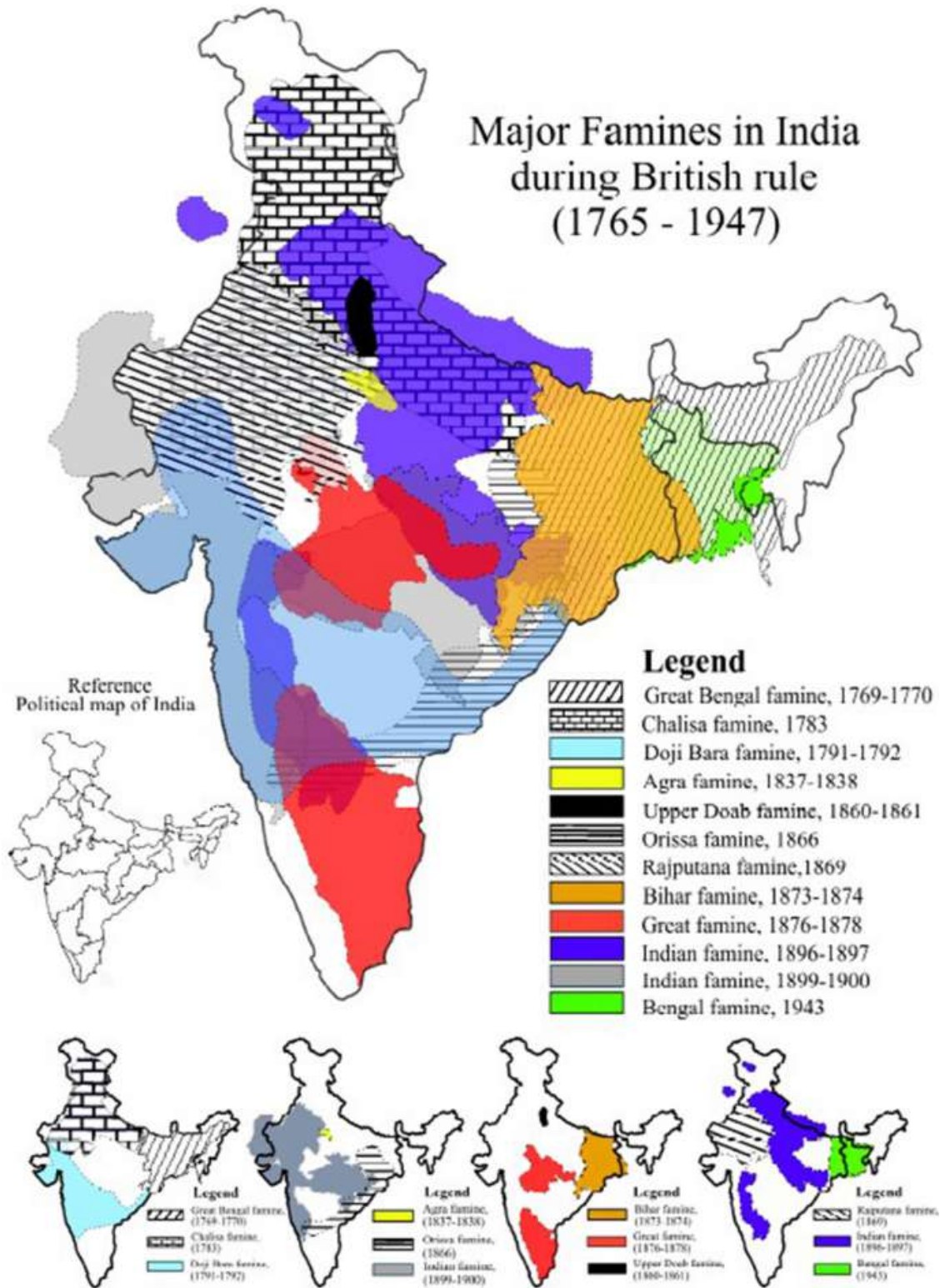


Map 2: Areas of chronic food insecurity in the mid-1980s, Sudan (Source, Hamid, 1995: Figure 1)





Map 3: Bengal famine of 1943 (Source: Mallik, 2022: Figure 1)



## Appendix B. Interviews

Interview with **Professor Kishan S. Rana, 2024**

**Interviewer:** Hello, can you hear me?

**Interviewee:** I'm good, how are you?

**Interviewer:** I'm well, thank you. Thank you so much for agreeing to attend the interview today. I'm really grateful for this opportunity.

**Interviewee:** OK, thank you.

**Interviewer:** Where are you based?

**Interviewee:** I am from Malaysia actually, but I'm doing my bachelor's in France, so I'm currently in Lille.

**Interviewer:** OK, there you go, good. OK, we can begin whenever you like.

**Interviewee:** OK, sure. So, I have already explained to you a bit about my research in the email, but just to give a little bit of a preview, my main question is: to what extent does the ambiguity in the definition of 'famine' facilitate the political objectives of governing bodies? I'm studying this question through a comparative analysis of the Bengal famine of 1943 and the ongoing Darfur famines.

**Interviewer:** Well, you know, let me say that I'm not sure if that comparison would work out very clearly because the famine of 1943 was the result of misgovernance by the British government in British India, primarily, but also due to indifference in London. How would you compare that colonial situation with the mismanagement in an African state, which is essentially self-mismanagement? You are not going to blame a foreign power for it, but on top of that, the context of the war was really a crucial factor. Japan was rampant in Southeast Asia, it had marched into Malaysia, and was into Burma and Singapore. India felt the British government, the British Indian government, felt enormously threatened. It was really a consequence, a result of several interconnected factors.

**Interviewee:** Yes, uh, anyway, uh, you can start with your questions whenever you like.

**Interviewer:** OK, thank you for the comment, though. I think that's really relevant. That's something that I've been thinking about as well, to use which approach. I think one of the reasons why I chose this approach is because to increase the generalizability of the conclusion. Also, because I think it could be interesting if these comparative analyses could be made because, through them, we could extend beyond colonization and then into today's context. Could be interesting if I use the correct approach. OK, so to start with the interview, in the minds of the general public today, famine is always associated with an excess of population and a deficiency of food, or maybe even with low agricultural output, for instance, because of drought, etcetera. So, to you, in what sense do you think this is accurate to reality?

**Interviewee:** Yes, as in like, the general conception that famine is because of too much population and too low food? Yes, yes. OK. So, um, you know, it's not population does not increase suddenly; population increase, publishing pressure is a gradual affair. So, that is your

challenge. I leave it to you to figure that out, but if you think of the famine of the great Indian—I mean, I would say that to call it a Bengal famine is a misnomer. I think I said that in my book, and I said it in articles elsewhere because people died in Assam, Bihar, and Odisha. So, it really was the great Indian famine of '42-'44. I prefer that term to the Bengal famine, and the British deliberately called it the Bengal famine because they did not have to take into account the deaths that occurred in the neighboring states of eastern India. Putting that aside, it was a coincidence of the failure of the monsoon, the war impacted in two different ways. First, it made it impossible for people in eastern India to obtain imports because the Japanese occupied Burma, and secondly, fearing that Japan would surge into eastern India, there was a deliberate policy of hoarding, even destroying food stocks in households as a kind of scorched earth policy so that the Japanese invading force would not have access to this surplus food. This had terrible consequences. On top of it, there was an actual misadministration because the British Indian authorities hopelessly kept looking for additional supplies of shipping to bring food grains from Australia and Canada, and the British government in London was very difficult. Lord Cherwell, as he's called, a person of German origin, was extremely hostile to Indians, very much a racist. His attitude was that no extra shipping will be provided, and he was the master of all shipping allocations, directly working and reporting to Winston Churchill. He was part of the inner circle of people who were close to Churchill from his office and Churchill's prime ministerial office. In that situation, you had a calamity. The Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, was particularly incompetent. He did not once visit Bengal, and in any place in any country, when the head of government visits a place, it means action is taken; people are on notice. They have to show that they are doing the best they can. Linlithgow couldn't bother, and it was really negligent. When Lord Wavell became Viceroy in September '43, one of the first things he did was to go to Bengal and push the administration into doing all that they could. We also forget that the British had a lot of experience of dealing with famine. There had been no famine in Rajasthan in the 18th century, as pointed out by historian I.T. Raja, that there was not really so much a shortage of rice as there was hoarding of rice stocks by merchants. This is what the administration should have stopped. They should have seized the stocks held by the traders and simply said they are taking over the stocks, give them a fair price for it, and make the food available to people. None of this was done. So, if you're going to make your comparison, you will have to think about how this elemental mismanagement, distribution is a factor. There is a professor at the London School of Economics of Indian origin who is an apologist for the British, and he talks about this. It's a very sophisticated argument that academics love to use. These are Churchill had no agency, 'agency' is a very stupid word, frankly, because what it really means is he did not have the power, he did not have the authority, which is nonsense because India was ruled from New Delhi by the Viceroy. The Viceroy was supervised by the Secretary of State and by the British government. So neither the Secretary of State nor the Prime Minister did enough to help East India. It is out of need, and this particular professor says that there was a major failure in the internal fighting between the Bengal administration and the elected government, which was in power there because this was one of the provinces which was under the Muslim administration, so to speak, and people, the Congress party, which resigned as war broke out. But the Muslim administrations, which were not really directly under the Muslim League, or Jinnah, but they belonged to that cluster, and they were not being seven of them perhaps as against 11 or 12 which were led by the Congress party which resigned. So, it is a fact that the head of the elected provincial government did not get along well with the provincial officials, but again, that doesn't clear off the British India administration of New Delhi, which was in charge. They did not step in. And then to say that

Churchill had no authority or had no responsibility is nonsense. Have you seen a discussion on famine that took place in the group that calls itself the Argumentative Indians?

**Interviewer:** Yes, I did.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, you have. This professor spoke over there, and I spoke, and I blasted him quite severely for making the nonsensical position he must have been a little bit upset. Madhusree Mukerjee was also there, and she, of course, has done splendid work; her book is very important one. But you know, it's very funny, historians in India seem to have a good mentality. They are fascinated by the vital techniques of politics in New Delhi, who said what, who did what, which leader was talking to who, was Gandhiji really so soft towards Panditji, was he really so much opposed to Sardar Patel, or even Jinnah as possible alternatives. They're fascinated by that, but none of them have bothered to look at what was happening in London, what was happening out of London. Partly it's a matter of resources, yes, the British government documents are really reliable in London, but the British government documents, are you willing to live in London? Then nobody's bothered to check those, hardly anybody has bothered to go through them. Amory's diary, Leo Amory, as Secretary of State for India, kept a meticulous diary, which he typed, which was typed up by his secretary. He used to dictate his diary on the wire recorder in those days, this was high technology. The recordings were made on wire, which traveled at a fairly fast speed, and those recordings were then transcribed by Leo Amory's secretary. I have gone through all the three volumes of Leo Amory's diary, page by page, literally, and I have my notes on that, which I, I did my best to pick up all the information that related to India, particularly Churchill, particularly British misrule in India, and I must say that I did not find very much material, really, on the Bengal famine, or as it was called at that time, on the famine. And the, uh, I think the first thing the famine is mentioned is around December '42. I may not remember the date accurately, but really, it's in my notes, and I'd be happy to share my notes with you. I mean, it's valuable material because it would save you an enormous amount of trouble to go through the Churchill archives where this material is held in storage. So, this is a rather long reply to a fairly straightforward question, but I come back to my point. It would be multiple reasons for the famine that took place in India, being other realms, these topics will supply from Myanmar, the destruction of wood stocks by the British India government were fearful that the Japanese would march into eastern India, and it looked like a very real danger for a while, and misadministration by the British India government in New Delhi, the failure of the Viceroy personally, Lord Linlithgow, and the failure in London, and my, the burden of my song, really was the failure for which I would leave Winston Churchill and his government. Now, Indian historians have not bothered very much about the British, the DEA, the marine manner in which India was ruled out of London, and you have this fool, this professor who says that the Churchill had no agency, which is, of course, nonsense. Finally, there is the fact that Britain was doing its best to build up stocks for the end of war. That started in '43, for sure, and in '44 it continued when deliberately huge stocks were built up, and I think, according to what's her name, um, the Bengali scholar, but usually according to Madhusree Mukerjee, something in the, you know, 18,000,000 tons of food were stocked in anticipation of the end of war when the soldiers would return home, and they would need food. Britain had undergone table rations; food was no spare food, and therefore these stocks had to be built up. And then, of course, there's Churchill's supercilious statement that the, uh, there was apparently a shortage of food in Greece also at that time, and he said, "Please need food more recently than Bengal," and he said, "The Bengalis are housed out anyway all the time." I mean, this is a very, very dismissive, nasty, pejorative, offensive,

uh, hatred that Churchill had for India which came to the fore. So, this is the long and short of it.

**Interviewer:** It's really interesting that you mentioned about Linlithgow, that he never visited [Bengal] once, but it's very contrary to the statement that one of the authors I studied made in his book. He said [Linlithgow] was actually an honorable man that made a lot of visits to the place, and that he was very committed in making sure that everyone had everything—the food supplies and that. He never went to Bengal exactly, that's my question actually. How do we reconcile these very different statements that are made?

**Interviewee:** I think Nehru said about him that he is a wooden person and he kind of implied that his head was also made of wood. He said something pretty nasty—I think I have it somewhere in my book, I have that quotation. But the point is that in a large country like India, it was always considered to be an essential act of policy that the Viceroy, as the head of the administration and the principal British representative, would travel to different areas. Any his visit would spur a flurry of activity of remedial actions, and he didn't do that. I mean, this is criminal neglect; it borders on not just incompetence but I would say brutality. And famine historians have, as I said at one point in my conversation today, they were so fascinated with all the pyrotechnics of the personalities in New Delhi that they have not examined the famine at all. There is a major historian by the name of Sarkar, whose books are used as textbooks all across India. Every school uses a Sarkar book as a textbook, and one of his important books that deals with British administration in India from the 1830s all the way till the independence, he does not even mention the famine in the text of the book. It is in the appendix that the Bengal famine is mentioned by the by. So I asked the question: can Indian historians justify their failure to give any serious attention to the famine, to the causes of the famine, and why the famine was an act of misgovernance or misrule? It seems not to have bothered them. And then, of course, there's the question that there is not a single memorial to the 2-3 million that died in the famine. There is not a plaque, there is not a memorial, there is not a garden that is named in memory of the victims of the famine. I think Bengalis have to ask themselves, are they so callous that they don't care? Is this something simply that we shrug off and say, "Oh, it wasn't important"? Then you know, there was this Commission that was set up by the British in '45, and they gave their report in '46. It was headed by a bank called Woodhead, where he applied by guess, and Mr. Woodhead ran the Commission in such a way that the personal notes made by the members were confiscated. The National Archives in New Delhi has the personal notes of one of the two Indian members of that Commission; maybe there were three. It has one of those sets of notes, and they are very carefully guarded over there, and nothing very revealing comes out, except that again, it shows that that Commission was really an act of whitewash. Why did the independent Government of India, which came to power in August '47, why did they not set up a Commission? Look, this is the biggest single tragedy, the biggest single calamity in terms of the number of people that died in the entire period of British rule in India, and why is it that we pay no attention to it? Our historians are not interested, the politicians of Bengal, the intelligentsia of Bengal, have not shown any interest in setting up a memorial, and the new Government of India looked disinterested. I suppose Nehru's attitude, and Nehru did a number of extremely stupid things, but that's another story. Maybe Nehru's attitude was that we shouldn't begin our new government by throwing mud at the predecessor government. And then there was his own personal, or shall I say, his personal softness towards the British, and how easily he was manipulated by the British at different times. All this comes out one way or another. But I go back to Indian historians: why is it that

Indian historians have not paid any serious attention to the famine and the victims of the famine? Why is it that the data, the memories, the personal narratives of families that went through that calamity in the eastern part of India, and not just Bengal, why are those records not brought out anywhere? So again, we come back to this kind of attitude of avoiding inconvenient truths, uh, in the name of being fair to the British. Fair to whom? I mean, no country in the world did what Nehru did, which was to retain [the British Governor General] as the Governor General of India when India became independent. What utter nonsense was that? How could this ever be condoned? But nobody talks about it. So I would say that the mismanagement of the famine is matched by the indifference of historians and Indian politicians and Indian public figures to consider the famine, which, after all, took place just three years before independence, and to examine it with the thoroughness that it deserved. So I'm glad that you are working on this as a topic, even if it is as an undergraduate thesis. But that's a good thing. The undergraduate thesis should not be undervalued by anyone, really, not by me, and I wish you well in digging up some interesting details. Now, I was reading a review of my book by Sumit Ganguly, who's a major Indian historian. You viewed my Churchill book, and he mentions the book by Mukerjee, and he calls her an "amateur historian." Now, what is an "amateur historian"? Just because you did not study history at university for your master's or even as a PhD thesis, that tags you an "every child historian"? So if I write a novel without having studied literature, then I would be called an "amateur novelist"? If I write a commentary on the economic situation in India and I'm not an economist in terms of my university education, I'm an "amateur economist." Once, this is as if there is somebody who will give us a certificate to a person and say, "Oh, you are a professional historian." But I will tell you that when my book was launched, one of the speakers, who is a historian, actually provoked about it as a professional historian, implying that I was not a professional historian at my own book launch. So what I'm trying to say is that Indian intellectuals can be sometimes very arrogant, believing that they know everything when, in fact, they are as ignorant as all of us. We're all groping for the truth. It is not that I have a monopoly of wisdom. I mean, I am an absolute amateur, of course, but that doesn't prevent me from having a viewpoint. And if you want to challenge ideas, challenge ideas, challenge conclusions, but don't challenge a person's— I mean, this would be like somebody saying, "Oh, X has written a paper on the Bengal famine, but X is only doing this for a B.A. degree." So what? You may be doing it as a school project. A school project ought to be a project of importance; it all depends on the seriousness with which you examine the issue and the conclusions you offer.

**Interviewer:** The main pool of scholarship about the Bengal famine has attributed the responsibility of the famine to mismanagement of the famine by the British government. But there is also another part, another school of thought, that says that, well, first we have this criterion that says that there was the drought, the famine was not due to soil moisture drought, so there was no drought, and another says that no, it is fully attributable to, not it's because of natural calamities, and it's not mainly because of the British. And then we have scholars who say that it is unfair.

**Interviewee:** I don't... I misunderstood your point; I don't understand your coming.

**Interviewer:** OK, what do these people—so the first one says that there was not actually a kind of soil moisture drought, so the famine did not happen because of natural calamities.

**Interviewee:** Well, how did those two or three million people die? They would attribute the reason to liberal capitalism; they would say it's because of trade, when, because they would

say there were grains, there were food, but it was just directed to other people. That is sophistry. I mean, for the person who was dying of hunger, you go and tell them that you are a victim of trade. Supposing you had been around in those days and you encountered three families, and you could see that they are dying of hunger, would you tell them that no, it's nothing big, it's not a big deal, you're simply a victim of global trade? To the needy, I think they were trying to make the point of when, uh, well, the people did not get food, and it's legitimate, like the reason of them getting food is not because there were no rain, there were no drought, etcetera, but because the British actually—so, take me if you were going to deal with this kind of nonsense. I mean, there are people who talk nonsense, but do you really think it is important for you to refute nonsensical positions? I mean, anyway, this is for you to figure out. I'm not writing your thesis, but you should, you should see it as a serious examination of what happened and why the issue. Why did the British set up a Commission of Inquiry? Setting up a commission is a serious process; you don't set up commissions every day. So you set up a commission to inquire into something because you accept that there was a major event that took place. The event was famine, the event was the death of 3+ million people. It's not a small thing; it's the largest number of people who perished in any single event in the 200 years of British rule. So anyway, that's something for you to figure out.

**Interviewee:** Now that we're talking about trade, I think it's also interesting for me to ask the question of because we do see this was a time when, because one of the books that I read by Mike Davis, 'Late Victorian Holocausts,' there was an interesting book. He took the stance of, you know, he was influenced by Marxist ideology on famine, etcetera, and then he wrote that one of the biggest reasons for the famine was because of the false integration of India into the liberal capitalistic structure because he said, in the positive integration of India into the liberal capitalistic structure as in the trade, etcetera. These are, for me, these are meaningless statements. I wouldn't bother about it, but you are welcome to examine this as you wish. I have no comment on that. I think it's just nonsense.

**Interviewee:** So, and another problematic aspect of my research is also about the integration of the colony of India, the British colony of India, into the global trading system. It was something that took place from the days of the East India company right up to even the modern age. We are still, in a sense, exploited by— to me, it is not colonial imperialism that exploits us but it is the residual capitalist system, this dominated trading system which uses the WTO and the process of the WTO in order to make life difficult for us. And this applies to India, this applies to Malaysia, this applies to Africa, this applies to all the countries which are exploited by a certain global trading system, a global economic system which is essentially dominated by the capitalist West. It's a fact of life. What can you do about it? You can sit and write scholarly articles and say what's a terrible thing. But so what? That's not going to change anything. So, you have to build up your own strength as a country, whether it is Egypt, or Nigeria, or Thailand, or China, or India, or Pakistan, or wherever else. You have to build up your own economy, you have to build up your own economic and political and strategic strength in order to deal with that system. And I think that's what we're trying to do, sometimes successfully, sometimes we could do better. But that's part of a whole process. There is always a tug of war in the world between the haves and the have-nots, and we are sadly, we have been in the category of we have not. You have no—that's slowly trying to shift our economic capabilities, and it's a long struggle, it's a tough struggle, but you have to do it because there are no free lunches available anywhere.

**Interviewer:** Another part of my research is also trying to look into the aspect of denial of famine. Like, for instance, recently the Ethiopian Prime Minister, he told that there are no people dying due to hunger in Ethiopia, but maybe they are dying due to—

**Interviewee:** That's an interesting point, word things happening, but I have no—I have no insight into that. I don't know enough about the subject to be able to say if there was really a conscious act of denial, but there probably was, and that's the issue that certainly needs to be studied carefully by somebody like you.

**Interviewer:** Also, in an article by Professor Tirthankar Roy, he interpreted, he didn't—he said that the interpretation of the word "natural" in famine was this man-made, has been a subject of many debates. For instance, people also attribute this—for instance, trade—for instance, they say that it's natural, but others would say that it is man-made, it's structured by the society. And to you—

**Interviewee:** Since that same professor, this is the same professor who goes around saying the Churchill had no agency—oh, OK, I see. But what is this, what name at 3:00? That's right, Roy, yes, yes. He's the guy who says, you should listen to his comments in that Argumentative Indians discussion, in which there were five speakers, and you should listen to what he says, and note how towards the end of that one-hour fifteen-minute discussion, finally shut up, you realize that he has run out of arguments and that he could not uphold his position. Now, I think he's a—I think he's a look if you are of Indian origin, and the main goal here, that, and you work in England, uh, there are those who will say that I must now be more British than the British, and therefore his position will be modified in the expectation that he will be treated better by his system if he comes across as a critic of those lusty Indians because he thought that nothing Indian anymore, he's a brown-skinned Englishman. So I—I paid no attention to what he says. You know they control studies, ratings, and come out with your own interpretation.

**Interviewer:** Also in contrast with the Darfur famine, which has been a subject of interest for so many years over the decades, the Bengal famine lasted from one to two years. What made it possible to alleviate the famine in the next, in few years?

**Interviewee:** Funny like, wait, when, what made it possible to alleviate the poverty, the famine in immediate possible to alleviate, and what has made it India has not suffered any famine since 1947. Yes, we've had shortages of food, we had a major crisis in the 70s, late 60s, early 70s. I think it is simply the big glare of publicity to simply. Today particularly, you can't have a major tragedy like a shortage of food in any part of a country like India without it being noticed immediately and remedial action is then taken. So it happened in those days because we were a colony under a government that was on the edge of collapse in the middle of World War II, etcetera, but still, it was a draconian government. Look, let me point to something else. Find me a good reference that an Indian historian, a professional historian, has talked about Britain's valence, my administration, and, uh, brutality in locking up the leaders of the Indian national movement from August '42 till the early days of '45 when Gandhiji was released after his wife died and there Patel, Azad were released a few months later. I think they were released in April or May of '44, sorry not '45, '44. So between August '42 and mid '44 the leaders of independent India but not only not to be, the British government did not engage them in any kind of dialogue, any kind of political discussion, but he held political discussion with Jinnah continually. No manner in which Jinnah was cultivated by the British intelligence authorities in



India is again something that nobody has researched because no documents are available, everything was destroyed in the, the British left India, all the papers held by the Intelligence Bureau of India, which is the premier internal intelligence agency till today, all those documents were either sent away to London or destroyed but the fact is that we know that Churchill was in direct communication with Jinnah all the time and we know that Churchill was also in direct communication with the viceroy directly. Anyway, that again there is no paper trail that exists because British intelligence documents have not been opened up. So obviously, that nobody has talked or few have talked of the total misgovernance by Mr. Churchill in terms of being ready for partition but not talk to the leaders of India about how to prepare for partition. So how do we know that Churchill was committed to partition? Because Roosevelt let the cat out of the bag in his letter to Churchill sent just before Cripps left India on the Cripps Mission. And Roosevelt was trying to persuade Churchill to retain Cripps in India for another week or so in the final attempt to come to a solution on the, to come to a solution vis-a-vis the return of the Congress party into the dialogue process with the British government during World War II. And in that letter, whose letter said that it's a bonding comment that he makes, it's a kind of sarcastic comment, and he says that you are not willing to talk to the leaders of the Indian independence movement, and yet you are ready to carve out of British India a Muslim state. So we know now, we know through that letter of minute that Churchill, educated by, be sorry, it was me 9 or 10 or something of 1942, Churchill had decided, and they had told Roosevelt, that post-World War II, a Muslim state would be carved out of British India. So partition was decided. How come he didn't begin to prepare for it? And then how come professional historians, and then they're asked this question, was this not an act of massive ordnance failure that you pushed the country into a partition without any preparation for partition? And this is not a question that has been posed by—and tell me if I'm wrong—tell me if you come across Indian historians who have examined this and with castigated the British government in London because this is not something that the British India administration in New Delhi could handle up; this had to be the authority of the British government, which was the master of the rule of empire. How come nobody has bothered to ask these questions when the evidence is in front of you? Now, I want to tell you that I happened to be the first person to have read that Bigler message of Roosevelt to Churchill of May '42 in the end interpret his words to mean exactly what I have said in its again in my book, and the references are there. How come no historian has made this, has looked at this, and the evidence is open, the available, it's been available, the documents of the British, of the documents of the Roosevelt Churchill correspondence have been openly available in a book, in a three-volume book set of books, uh, since about the mid-70s. Nobody's read this. No, of course, the people who study the Roosevelt-Churchill correspondence, they are not desperately interested in what was happening in India. That's not their primary focus, but I would imagine that Indian historians or professional scholars of Indian history would have read these papers, and nobody made the commission that here Roosevelt is pointing Churchill that you are not willing to talk to the Indian leaders about the post-war arrangements, and you locked them up. Look them up, there he was about to lock them up, but that you are already, you have already decided on carving out a Muslim state. So you are actually carrying out a division of India, the Jinnah. I just wonder why these issues are not examined. I remove with these thoughts.

**Interviewer:** That's such an intriguing thought, actually. Not now, I've never really thought about that point because as someone who's very far away from the Indian scholarship, it has never really occurred to me. The Bengal famine is very understudied, and also, with other topics, so it's really a new input to me.

**Interviewee:** Your voice is breaking up a little bit, sorry.

**Interviewer:** No, sorry, can you hear me now?

**Interviewee:** I can hear you, but I may have missed some words.

**Interviewer:** Oh, just repeat your point. I was just saying that as someone who's very far away from the Indian scholarship, also because in Europe, when you come to Europe, they didn't really study Indian scholarship much. They like to remain in the area, you know, like the European civilization studies, thoughts, and everything. So, and it never really occurred to me how understudied the history of India is, in a lot of senses, like for instance, the famine, the mass famine in India, and then the partition, etcetera. It is really, really a useful thought for me, really. And I also have another question, uh, in regards to this famine. We're talking about ethnic and religious diversity in India. Do you think that played any role in influencing conflicts over access to resources?

**Interviewee:** I am not sure about that. I don't know enough. I don't think there is any—I've not come across any comments on this, but you should maybe look again at the work done by Mukerjee, in particular, to see if she has any angle on that.

**Interviewer:** OK, OK, and I think I have a last question. Aside from the very understudied aspects of famine and all the other scholarship that you mentioned, do you think there's any particular aspect of this famine that you think I should really look into?

**Interviewee:** I think I've covered all the points that come to me. Uh, if anything else occurs to me, I will drop you a line, but for the moment, I got and think of anything that I would particularly recommend needs special attention. You just look at the whole issue, especially, consider the points I made, consider the questions that come up in your own mind, and try and try and deal with all that.

**Interviewer:** Alright, alright. And also, about the sources for the examination of the famine, where do you think I should find like the most available sources? For instance, where can I find...

**Interviewee:** Oh, really, I think you, you would know this as well as anyone else. I have no special insight. Whatever sources I had, I've used them. I've quoted them, covered them in my book, and that's about all that I could think of, but maybe you'll find some new material.

**Interviewer:** OK, OK. Thank you so much, and that's all the questions. I will send you one or two recent writings of mine which touch on some of these points, and maybe that might give you a few ideas also.

**Interviewee:** Definitely, I'll look into your work, definitely. You have great, you have so I can guide you on, or help you with, uh, too. Let me know.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much, that's really nice of you.

**Interviewee:** Thank you so much. Have a good day.

Interview with **Professor John Drèze, 2024**

**Interviewer:** Good evening, Professor John Drèze. Good evening, can you hear me?

**Interviewee:** Yes, hello. Because the connection is not very good here.

**Interviewer:** No worries at all. How are you doing?

**Interviewee:** Fine, thanks. And you? You're somewhere in Europe?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I'm in France currently. I'm doing my bachelors here. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to engage in a conversation with you, Professor.

**Interviewee:** I might not have much to say, but we can try it. So anyway, let me ask you a little bit of what you said you were doing. You're redefining the concept of famine?

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly. Because I'm now like looking forward to looking at the definition of famine to see if, like, actually just nowadays the necessary definition of famine is revolved around the idea that famine has a necessary relation to food shortages. So, my research is centrally an attempt to contribute to the scholarship that defines famine because the way we think about famine has changed across time because now we see famine has been defined differently across cultures by people who experience them versus researchers who study them, and lastly, also because the definition between these researchers has been largely different. So this is what I come to study. So, I narrow down the topic into looking at whether there is a connection, a necessary connection between famine and food shortages. So, that is the main idea.

**Interviewee:** I don't think that's— I think it's connected with food deprivation, that's not the same thing as food shortages. You can have malnutrition without food shortages, vice versa.

**Interviewer:** Alright. I would say that the main, at least in the days when I was working on this, the accepted understanding of famine was the situation of intensified food deprivation leading to a rise in mortality. Now, that seems like a sensible definition, but are you questioning that?

**Interviewee:** Because now I'm studying how the conceptualizing of famine has changed over time because we have some scholars who say that, yes, deprived—there is a difference between there being no food and there not being—people not having access to food. So, I'm trying to study like, for instance, do you find that the current definition captures the complexities and experiences of affected populations? But I don't see anything wrong with that understanding of this function. That's why I was asking you, you have questioning that? I suppose you could. The part you could question is whether an increase in mortality is necessarily a component of famine. I think it's very difficult to imagine a situation where there isn't an intensification of deprivation without an increase in mortality. So, in that sense, I feel mortality increase is an integral part of the famine, but maybe some people might dispute that because, considerably, if there was something else—environment or something—so happening so obviously so that there is no increase in mortality, but there is mass starvation, then you could still say it's a famine. But, you know, this is just practice. Hmm. Yeah. How useful is it to question the definition into the facts?

**Interviewer:** Well, I think because now, for instance, during the Bengal famine, there were few people who disputed the fact that it is necessary because who taught us because we had

studies saying that it is not because of drought but because there was a different measurement of what food supply actually meant. Then people cannot—there wasn't a sort of like consensus just to say that it is because of not having enough grains, for instance. So I think in that sense, it was actually it would have been useful to have a common understanding of what famine meant or like what food shortages mean in its actual sense.

**Interviewee:** See, everything in the case of the Bengal famine, I mean, there's an important debate about the role that was played by the food shortages, right? Yes, that's what I'm saying. This is a fact. It's not about the definition of famine. I think the fact that nobody is disputing that arguing about this happened, which is—so that's what I'm saying—that maybe it's more useful to look at, focus on facts rather than on the definition because the definition, I personally don't see anything wrong with it. You know, this is just—You're doing this in international relations?

**Interviewer:** Yes. I'm also studying the political dimensions of famine, so to redefine famine, I'm also looking into the complexities of it in terms of economy and politics, of course, and I've chosen to study two case studies, and one of which was the Bengal famine of 1943. So, how would you—how do you view the Bengal famine of 1943 in terms of its historical significance, especially in shaping the Indian politics and national aspirations during British Raj?

**Interviewee:** So, I never studied the Bengal famine. OK, we did write about it in several books, um, so I have not read more than, you know, close things here and there. I think that—I mean, there's some word that you must be aware of—word that came later. By—I can't remember the name of the person who wrote about Churchill—must have seen. What's her name? Is it Alex Duval? On the Bengals, I'm in—is the person who wrote a book about Churchill's rule? I will look into that. I think that, you know, I think that's—three. OK, so her contention is that it was basically racism and colonial colonialism and more or less delivered at them to starve the people, maybe as a reaction to the—so that adds a new dimension to the debate. I have not really read her work in detail, but I think there was—it must have been an element of that for sure because, you know, they could have responded. So, I think that's an important element on the question of food shortages. So, my understanding is—oh, the question of shortages. So, my understanding—this is also memory of a long time—so my understanding is that it was a harvest failure, but I think I might just—sentence—Craig, was it when he first—itself, the shortage only—only later that at the time of the famine, there was no shortage, and that it was the—that created an artificial shortage. Cortana, say that he's pretty careful, so we tend to trust his analysis, but—but you don't have to look at—so there was a guy called Bob—look, but I don't think—I don't think he was a very serious guy, but it was the other more serious critiques. OK, um, so my colleague discussed before—you—you say that it is better to focus on facts rather than the definition of famine, so I wanted to come back to that a little because now we have seen that the term "famine" it has been mainly limited to an externally quantifiable change in the state of population in which the definition of famine—he's replaced by increasing the death rate of a group of people who are medically diagnosed to have gone through starvation and are causally linked to a measurable decreasing the availability of food. That is more or less the definition of famine that we are used to seeing, but there is a uh like the other school start like I've said before that say that famines occurred even without a significant decrease in the availability of food and even when there existed more food in the year of famine occurrence compared to the preceding years when famine did not occur.

**Interviewer:** So would you think it is important to understand famine not just as technical malfunctions or like you said before—you stand with the argument—sorry, not sentence—yeah, like would you think it is important to understand famine not just as a technical malfunctions but to include more of a nuance and to take into consideration of all the complexities politically, economically into that because maybe one part of the school might say that to understand famine only as the income of functions might be to limit it. What might be your opinion?

**Interviewee:** Firstly, I'm not sure I agree that famine is necessarily a quantifiable thing. I mean, you may know that there was a significant increase in mortality without being able to quantify it. You mean other people are hungry without being able to quantify it. So I'm not sure I agree with that part. No, uh, in practical terms, so far as I know, and you can tell me if I'm wrong, but I think all the famines in recent times from somewhere around the late 70s onwards have all been connected with war. I don't know if that's true or not—we're seeing it again now, right now because basically, and I think the reason is that in most countries now, people are sufficiently well off that it's not easy to push them to starvation except through something like war that completely destroys the economy and disrupts the administration and everything. So, I feel famine is really a bit of a war, and that, uh, to come back to this second part of your question, that means yes, we have to look at the political aspect because that's what—that's what it's all about. I mean, there's no reason why something should occur otherwise known the world because we have plenty of ways of preventing it, and you know, there are aid agencies, markets, Social Security to some extent. So it takes something like war to precipitation. So I think it's—it may be useful to look at it in the context of war basically, the warfare.

**Interviewer:** I'll look into that, into the context of war in during Bengal, and also I think, going back to the causes of famine, right? That there is often a multifaceted cause of famine, and so it might be quite difficult to pinpoint one particular factor or even a few in some of the famines that we study. So, in studying too, in this research as well, I find it quite quite daunting to find one specific theoretical framework, for instance, to look at famine and to study the causes of famine. So, might you have a sort of elevation, probably on any theoretical frameworks that you find particularly conducive so a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play during famine? But I'm, I'm sure it is always dependent on the different famines that we study in different contexts, etcetera, but how do you often study the causes of them, and where do you start?

**Interviewee:** I'm not really studied because of Family Guy studied the prevention of family pets and the role of static works programs. Causes of famine, I don't know what you mean by surgical framework, but causation is intrinsically complex thing, many levels of causation manufacturers that they interact with each other. So, you could say it's a crop failure, you could say no, it's because the land is buddy distributor, then you can see no, it's because backward induction quite slow, but see that's why do I need attention to the fact that this now is today, little bit—how long is this thing? It's—it's not true that we're always of course, but sometimes it does, so we try to understand what is it, uh, please support you have to look at the prevention of relief and the breakdown of health services because the mortality, as you know, is usually driven more by disease than by starvation. Basically, that would lead to—to look at the whole politics of the war, you know, frankly. I don't know. I don't know exactly what the—because these social processes are very complex and too complex, they put into a kind of the prespecified theory that's why you see if you look at the entitlement approach from that, but it's not

exactly the series physically approach is basically saying that we have to look at the focus on people's entitlements and not on the food supply. So that I think is useful to the framework.

**Interviewer:** You also mentioned about famine being kind of social experience, so I, I have this one question, but quite specific to Bengal, for me, I'll try to make it more general so that we both can—um, to understand famines as social experience. Um, have you encountered any sort of region-specific histories or community narrative that is very much useful in the context of famine prevention?

**Interviewee:** Explain that again.

**Interviewer:** Like in this is particularly in terms of understanding famine as a social experience. So, for instance, in examining responses by local organizations and individuals, and this was very much prevalent during our Bengal famine, but anyhow, to make in Montenegro, have you encountered any region-specific histories or community narratives that, in your view, it provides a better understanding of grassroot initiatives during famine?

**Interviewee:** Oh, as I said, I've been working mainly on India. Yeah, I think one interesting recent work is by, on the Orissa famines, work that brings out what you call a social—you say it's a social process, and I think that's true, certainly in the case of India, for example, she brings out the custom mansion and how, in these relief kitchens, because in those days, the 19th century, relief was—this—lost in relief pitchers, at least in the country. So, they were passed—that just would not eat there because they don't want to share food with people who they consider to be allowed us. So those were some of the victims that ended up starving because they wouldn't share. So, I think that's an interesting study that looks at the social dimensions of a family and brings out that, as you say, that is the kind of social process. That's one thing that comes to mind, and I think there are other studies of that nature, peacefully India. I can't think about—you have to look at the literature because these are spaces.

**Interviewer:** OK, so I'll look into that too. And just now, when I asked you one question, you brought it back to the British responsibility, there must be a British during the—during the famines in India, so I was wondering if you would have an idea, in your opinion, what are the—if there are the institutional mechanisms within the colonial governance structure that played a role during the famines in India that you believe it warrants a form of further scrutiny, perhaps something that is not commonly addressed in existing literature.

**Interviewee:** During the colonial period, the main form of interventions are examined. This was basically relief works and, to some extent, going to kitchens. And I think one reason why the famine happened in Bengal is that for some reasons this means of intervention activated, and I think that's why—that's why Manushi's work is possibly important because I think she gives a reason why it wasn't that. So I think that was the—you must have seen the swimming goals for India, yeah. So, so it was—it was a reasonably well—her—understood system, clearing something relief, and then providing relief through public works and also—also other means like direct feeding and that's something that's—and so on. So, I think that was basically the framework, but the effectiveness of this framework depended entirely on the way—willingness to intervene, and I think that's where something went wrong. It doesn't mean Bengal. It's some of the earlier famines as well because the family courts go back to the 1880s, but after that, there was still some major failings like in 1989 and 1901. So in fact, putting the citizen—just thinking aloud—interesting to see why those huge famines occur in spite of just—letting

close—being in place. I mean, what was it? It was a passivity and reluctance to intervene or was it that the intervention system was affected in some way? Because these were two famines that cost millions of this. So I don't really know what the answer is.

**Interviewer:** So if you were to investigate the post-famine political landscape, do you think there are nuanced political policy shifts or institutional changes, beating the immediate aftermath or later after the famine that played a role in shaping the subsequent governance strategies?

**Interviewee:** So it's like after the postponement in the post-famine political landscape, do you think the experiences during the British Raj have led to a nuanced policy shift or institutional changes in the immediate aftermath that played a role in the current Indian governance strategies for famine prevention in India? Some sort of lesson that has been learned during the British Raj, but I think the seven prevention approach of the—I mean, cause was basically further developed the post-independence. I mean, to this day, I think actually there was a change maybe in the last 20 years I was here until the end of the—of the 20th century, it was basically relief works and weather interventions in from the family goals that played a role with the important difference that in the post-independence. Pressure to intervene was much greater than that goes back to the question of the importance of the willingness to intervene, and I think in the for sentence. The pressure between the greater because as soon as there is a pending family, there's a lot of agitations and questions in parliament and the media and so on. I think in the last 20 years, perhaps there has been somewhat of a change in the sense that, oh, we are not really seen these big anti-family interventions anymore, and I think the reason is to some extent that delivers of living—living have improved so the vulnerability to swimming is less. People can withstand drawings in the way that they could not earlier, and also that now there are some permanent forms of Social Security in place, some extent like the possibilities and the act and things like pensions and so on and for that matter, child feeding programs, school needs and so on, so that creates a kind of automatic protection against women. So if you look at the COVID—the COVID crisis, I mean, it's conceivable—it's conceivable that there could have been some kind of—I mean, maybe a big one, but some miners—I mean, in the absence of intervention, but the intervention came up kind of automatically through mainly systems that were already in place like the full subsidies in particular, and the teams are all areas. So you're not really seeing the relief works of the old days except to some extent in the form of the improvement that here but the incoming Garcia is not exactly like the old relief works it's a different system in some ways a better system in some ways more limited system because it's kind of administered administratively a little bit more complicated in the old relief was given people could just turn up at other work sites and get a job and they were paid in cash at the end of the week there are some digital properties and so on so it's not like you can just turn up at the work site but on the other hand it's it's in place on the permanent basis and so during the COVID crisis it was relatively easy to simply activate the from that yet and increase the scale So what I'm saying is that there's been a bit of a change in this sense that there's more reliance now on the permanent Social Security measures and less on the emergency measures in fact the emergency measures or disappearing actually we're not really seeing them anymore so but I would say until the end of the 20th century it was basically the same work of the family codes plus a very important additional dimension in the photo for personal question to respond to the crisis so

**Interviewer:** I'm looking from the famines from the 1800s until the famines of today do you think the dynamics of the diverse ethnic and religious landscape of India influence food access

during food deprivation for instance like uh from the period of 1800s until the India of today do you think the dynamics of the diverse ethnic and religious landscape of India influenced food access they have had the dynamics changed or have been maintained or did the dynamics not exist before?

**Interviewee:** I think some of the problems I mentioned earlier like you know people they have certain guests being willing to join the relief kitchens or join the work sites for that matter I think this has to a significant extent disappeared I mean it's even today it's true that for example that forest person may not want to be seen it works right but there are in any case not available to family anymore upper caste people put their land and their some of the means of indomitable so so I think that's I think the social factors perhaps have become little less importance and now it's more like um citizenship is system where for example the full subsidies are nothing to do with thank you also and similarly the employment guarantee the bases participate so I think some of the social barriers that contributed earlier famine significantly reduced even though the cost system is a whole of course is still very much there because there's still there too talk to the extent of causing in a few minutes so um.

**Interviewer:** I I think I I have one last question probably is there any specific aspect of dimension or dimension related to famine that you find particularly relevant or or you believe it deserves further investigation like maybe other effects of family that you think are often overlooked or underexplored in existing scholarship ?

**Interviewee:** See it I must follow the recent institute but there was a lot of research on this in the like 70s eighties 90s insurance by the Bengals having the Chinese having of course maybe we which means this one and I think that something has changed it's been particular as I said in our families basically warfare one way of we're putting it in a new perspective and obviously the levels of living have improved in most countries so the vulnerability to come in less and that's why basically the circumstances where it's still happens so I I think if I if I want to look at the new angular I personally try to look at it in the light of armed conflicts and all armed conflicts are still causing famines today in spite of the fact that we have so many ways of preventing the family in the recent families or near families in in Africa in Sudan the country's basically have something to do without conflict so I think that's really is the way we look at them it's not it's not the crop failure and so on failures can play a part but on their own I don't think they can still today easily causes that OK so understand what is new about the context and you really shouldn't exist anymore so I would maybe try to understand why they still happen from time to time and whether make sure that we can clear over the still happen So what I think that would be more interesting to redefine families because at least at least I don't see anything wrong myself.

**Interviewer:** OK I'll definitely do that I'll study you the I'll try to study more literatures on how conflicts is a huge part in famines etc and I'll look into it I'll definitely thank you so much for your suggestions on literatures too to look at my work and also with you OK yeah definitely thank you so much I'm so I'm so delighted to talk to you thank you so much

**Interviewee:** you too bye bye thank you.



## Interview with **Dr. Madhusree Mukerjee, 2024**

**Interviewer:** In the minds of the public, famine is frequently associated with an excess of population and a deficiency of food, or with low agricultural output brought on by natural calamities like drought. In what sense is that accurate to reality?

**Interviewee:** The Malthusian concept of population growth outrunning food production does not really apply to the modern world (by which I mean a world interconnected by commercial shipping, which means at least since the mid-1800s). Colonial countries like the UK relied heavily on Indian agricultural outputs, for example, especially wheat, throughout the Victorian era. It was the export of food that caused famine. Population growth had nothing to do with it. Famine brought about by natural calamities tend to be localized and circumscribed, and traditional societies had measures to deal with these situations. In the past, at least in India (which is the only culture I can speak about with some knowledge), what farmers harvested in one season was enough to last them two or three years. In modern times, with climate change and massive shipping, the situation is much more complex, and every famine can be said to be man-made—created by the appropriation of land or resources or the dumping of waste, including carbon dioxide, into the commons.

**Interviewer:** In today's context, what do you think of the statement, "The ambiguity in the definition of famine facilitates the political objectives of governing bodies"?

**Interviewee:** That seems reasonable to me. In the British Indian famine code, a key marker of famine was mass migration and mass death, which is already too late to do anything.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, how has the way that famine is understood evolved over time, and do you find that the current definitions adequately capture the complexities and experiences of affected populations?

**Interviewee:** I cannot speak to current definitions of famine.

**Interviewer:** In the article *Were Indian Famines 'Natural or Manmade?'*, Tirthankar Roy wrote that the interpretation of the word natural in famine has moved away from Malthusian food vs population discourse towards trade costs and barriers to market integration. He also discussed that the man-made famine approach overstates the capacity of the states. We see the increasingly divergent definitions of man-made and natural that point to different ways in the course of analysis. To you, what does the term famine caused by natural factors and by manmade factors mean respectively?

**Interviewee:** Best summarised in this essay.

<https://www.himalmag.com/archives/imperial-roots-hunger>

It argues that market integration on unequal, exploitative terms, is itself responsible for hunger and famine.

**Interviewer:** In studying the role of colonial policies during the Bengal famine, we have authors like Prof Mark Tauger who would contend that the Bengal Famine of 1943 happened necessarily because of natural calamities (more specifically disease: brown spot). Mark Tauger emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the cause and relief effort as the latter must not be counted as the first. Whilst he agrees that there is negligence by colonial

government officials, that is not the cause of the famine to him. Do you think this is a valid argument?

**Interviewee:** I think part of Tauger's argument, that there was a substantial rice shortage in 1943, may be valid, but it does not relieve the British government of responsibility. See the enclosed paper.

**Interviewer:** How did colonial policies perpetuate or exacerbate existing ethnic and caste disparities in access to food resources, particularly during times of famine?

**Interviewee:** This is too broad a question for me to answer. Basically, people of upper castes were useful to the British because they helped administer India, and were protected during the 1943 famine. It was the people of lower castes who were devastated.

**Interviewer:** One prominent aspect of my research is also the denial of famine. Was there a denial or minimization of the Bengal famine in 1943? If so, how has the denial and minimization of the crises affected relief efforts, food aid distribution, and development programs?

**Interviewee:** This again is a large question. Yes of course there was denial of famine by the British authorities. Famine was never declared and those who warned that famine was approaching were penalized.

**Interviewer:** There have been arguments that British colonisation dismantled the social cohesion of the Indian community which before the British were committed to providing relief in case of famine. To what extent is this true?

**Interviewee:** I don't know enough about this. I do know that the previous Mughal system was much more responsive to the needs of the people.

**Interviewer:** Sen's argument that market failure and speculative hoarding of food by merchants had been plagued by disagreements as others contend that such practice by few individuals was insufficient to explain the famine. What is your opinion?

**Interviewee:** I think that war-related inflation was a key factor in the famine. Hoarding was widespread, yes, but it was exacerbated by the shortage of food and the fact that many of the hoarders were government agents, authorized to buy and store food.

**Interviewer:** In what ways do you think the Bengal famine of 1943 is comparable to the famine in Darfur?

**Interviewee:** I am afraid I know nothing about the Darfur famine.

**Interviewer:** How has academic analysis contributed to understanding the root causes of the famine of Bengal in 1943, and what gaps or areas need further exploration for more effective policy interventions?

**Interviewee:** I hold that the root cause of the Bengal famine was colonialism. That is not an aspect that any scholar other than myself has seriously explored.

## Interview with **Professor David Keen, 2024**

**David Keen** graduated from Oxford with a PhD. Princeton University Press released his analysis of the political economy of starvation in *The Benefits of starvation. The Best of Enemies: Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (James Currey/Palgrave Macmillan, expected for 2004) and *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars* (Oxford University Press) are two more books he has written. He has previously held positions as a journalist, consultant, and researcher.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, how has the conceptualization of famine evolved over time, and do you find that the current definitions adequately capture the complexities and experiences of affected populations? Is it important to understand famines not just as technical malfunctions but also as social experiences?

**Interviewee:** I think the more technical definitions of famine that we have now have the potential for more objective decisions on when famines occur but also lend themselves to new types of manipulation, eg preventing the collection of the data that would allow the declaration of a famine.

**Interviewer:** Are there any notable findings or patterns that have been identified concerning the participation of multinational actors in Sudan's conflicts, and do they engage with the situation with their own objectives?

**Interviewee:** With patterns of multinational engagement in relation to conflict/famine, I would say Susanne Jaspars' work is extremely important. It points to a non-engagement in politics/conflict over several decades but for reasons that change, eg now the emphasis on technical data gathering and remote management.

**Interviewer:** Reflecting on your work with research think tanks, how has academic analysis contributed to understanding the root causes of famine in Darfur, and what gaps or areas need further exploration for more effective policy interventions?

**Interviewee:** I think Alex de Waal's book *Famine that Kills* on famine in Darfur remains extremely important, alongside Jaspars' *Food Aid in Sudan*. Currently, de Waal's 'political marketplace' is also helping us to understand conflict and famine in Sudan and South Sudan.

## Interview with **Dr. Surajit Mazumdar, 2024**

### **Questions:**

1. What do you think of the traditional link between famine and food shortage—do you think famine is necessarily caused by food shortage? Has the conceptualization of famine evolved over time, and do you find that the current definitions adequately capture the complexities and experiences of affected populations?
2. How did colonial policies vis-à-vis land tenure and infrastructure development impact, the ability of Indian farmers to mitigate the effects of famines?
3. To what extent did the colonial trade policies contribute to the dependency of Indian agriculture on cash crops, thereby increasing vulnerability to famines?
4. Could you elaborate on the role of indigenous political and social institutions in responding to famines during the colonial period, and how did colonial authorities interact with these efforts? Analogously, how did colonial authorities navigate the tensions between providing famine relief and maintaining control over colonial subjects, and what were the political implications of these relief efforts?
5. How did colonial policies perpetuate or exacerbate existing ethnic and caste disparities in access to food resources, particularly during times of famine?
6. What were the gendered impacts of colonial policies on famine vulnerability, and how did women's roles in agriculture and household food security intersect with these policies?
7. To what extent did colonial land-use policies and environmental degradation contribute to the occurrence and severity of famines in colonial India?
8. Can you discuss instances of political resistance and mobilization against colonial famine policies, and how these movements shape colonial governance and post-colonial politics?
9. How did the geopolitics of colonialism influence international responses to famines in India, and what were the political implications of foreign aid and intervention?
10. In what ways did post-colonial governments inherit and perpetuate colonial-era policies that influenced famine vulnerability, and how have political dynamics shaped attempts to address these legacies?
11. Is there a specific aspect or dimension related to the Indian famines that you find particularly relevant, especially in relation to the question of whether famine is caused by the shortage of food, or that you believe deserves further investigation? Alternatively, are there aspects of the Indian famines that you think are often overlooked or under-explored in existing scholarship?

### **Response:**

To begin with, a famine situation could be said to be affecting a population when a significant section of that population experiences acute shortage of food for some minimum duration of

time such that it leads to acute malnutrition and significant number of deaths by starvation and other associated factors. For a population that is normally able to sustain itself, a famine would require a significant drop in access to food of that population, either because it is unavailable or because they for some reason cannot access it. This itself indicates that an overall food shortage is not necessary for a famine to arise – it can be the result of some disruption of the channels through which that access is usually achieved. These disruptions can be caused by economic or other man-made factors which are not natural, and even natural factors play a role, they are not necessarily the only ones. For any given level of aggregate availability of food to a population - its distribution is always a factor in determining whether a significant section of it faces acute hunger or not – certain shifts in distribution could produce mass acute hunger even when overall availability is adequate, while others could prevent such hunger even when the overall availability is below normal. What is the aggregate food availability for a population in a particular period of time is also determined by how its capacity to produce that food has developed over time. The availability of food to a population can also be affected by flows into and out of that population through trade or other means.

For a famine situation to be exclusively on account of overall food shortage, therefore, the deficit has to be so large that no redistribution from those who have more to those who consume less could prevent it, and there should also be no scope for covering that deficit by drawing on food stocks or surpluses available outside the affected region. For a population that otherwise has had a viable basis for sustaining itself over a long time, and is not living in a state of complete isolation from other communities and populations, such extreme conditions are not likely to be very frequent. The influence of that society's social and economic arrangements and that of its relations with others must usually matter a great deal in the making of a famine.

Looked at in this way, there was nothing inevitable about the 1943 Bengal famine. Bengal was a part of a British India inter-connected by the railways, which in turn had long been part of an inter-connected world economy, at that time affected by a World War. It would also be hard to accept that administrative structure colonial state which had been built over a long period to impose its writ on the entire sub-continent, extracting revenue and tribute from it, and of connecting every part of it to the international economy to meet imperial imperatives – was lacking in capacity to address the challenges in Bengal in 1943. The reality is that the colonial administration never even declared it as a famine, which would have triggered actions based on the provisions of the Famine Code. That was a political decision that had nothing to do with overall food shortage. Further, the last half century of British rule was marked by a declining trend in per capita production of food and overall agricultural production that again was not inevitable, and was arrested after independence.

Long before the 1943 Bengal famine, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century itself the colonial administration and the Famine Commission had concluded that famines in India, while originating in drought induced crop failures, were not 'famines of food' but 'famines of work'. It is this understanding that it was the effect on the means to purchase food, via the employment effect of the disruption of the rural economy, that underlay the famine 'relief' system and the Famine Code adopted in 1883. The emphasis in this system was thus on initiating public works programmes in the areas affected by famine. This perspective emerged partly out of the need for rationalization of the refusal of the colonial state to intervene in the trade in food commodities and to allow exports of food from India to continue, and to limit the fiscal burden of relief activities. To that extent, how completely it reflected the reality of all the Indian famines of the colonial era,

specially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, can be questioned. Nevertheless, it still gave an indication about the *possible* mechanisms of famine which were not dependent on overall food shortage.

One may not accept the notion of some golden age before the advent of British rule and the idea that the principle cause of Indian famines was the colonial destruction of the effective mechanisms 'traditional' Indian society had for dealing with failures of the rain. However, it would be hard to dispute the impact of the logic of colonialism on creating a gap between the famine prevention possibilities that existed during the colonial era and their actual extent. From the land tenure systems introduced, the commercialization of India agriculture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the relatively low investment in irrigation relative to the railways, the pattern of railway development such that every part of the country was connected to the ports more than with each other, the pursuit of the fiscal principle of 'sound finance', etc. - all of these were driven by the imperial imperatives of extracting revenue and tribute from India even while using it as a market for British industry, and the commodity surplus that constituted its basis. It worked to depress the level of agricultural productivity and simultaneously reduced the domestic availability out of the production, specially of food – on account of diversion of land to non-food cash crops as well as exports of food. On the other hand, the limited development of the infrastructure was also oriented in the same direction rather than towards ensuring availability of food across the country. Market related volatility increased compared to the past while land revenue demands became more inflexible. The colonial context also affected the calculus of 'costs and benefits' – and gave rise to extreme reluctance to mobilize resources and to loosen the purse strings in order to mitigate disasters.

Despite all the above factors, the incidence of large scale famines did appear to have declined in India in the period after the the First World War – and this is said to be one of the factors behind population growth picking up after 1921. Since this happened in the background of a declining trend in per capita availability, the fundamental reason was not agricultural improvement but the absence of recurrent and large scale monsoon failures for an extended period – in other words, nature took a benign turn. It has also been argued that while the formal framework of famine relief remained unchanged, the system in practice evolved as colonial administrators reflected the changing ideological context back home and came to attach greater value to the saving of human life. The nature of the relationship between Britain and her most important colony also changed over this period – towards the end of British rule, India's export surplus had disappeared and import-substitution in the cotton textile industry had been completed. To that extent, the 1943 Bengal Famine was an exceptional event and took place under circumstances somewhat different from those prevailing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The priorities generated by the context of war at the world level (including in the East) which was effectively putting a stamp of finality on Britain's decline from the position of being the world's preeminent power, the economic consequences of wartime conditions including on government finances, and the attitudes generated by the increasingly weakening hold on India – all must have also played their part.

In the changed political context after independence, the calculus inevitably changed and the rulers of independent India could not let millions die in the way the colonial administration did on several occasions. Significant failures of the rains returned – two successive droughts in the mid-1960s producing the most significant crisis in food availability. India's land reforms after independence remained largely on paper and did little to alter the agrarian structure inherited from colonial rule – thereby maintaining what was described the 'built-in depressor'. This structure also had caste and gender dimensions. Caste was clearly a factor in shaping

the membership of large landowning groups, and that of peasant workers and landless agricultural labourers. While women worked in agriculture, ownership rights were vested typically in men.

However, other measures of intervention by the state which the agricultural labourer colonial rulers had been loathe to take, which involved different kinds of subsidisation and other forms of market intervention - to induce technological changes in agriculture on the one hand and ensuring minimum availability of food to consumers on the other- were put in place. The extent of all of these were of course subject to fiscal constraints that persisted with independence – the failure to enforce land reform measures reflected a larger inability of the Indian state to discipline propertied interests, including the failure to tax them sufficiently. The outcome of this was a two sided ‘resolution’ of the food constraint over time – involving an increase in production at a pace slightly above that of population growth and at the same time keeping food demand growth also in check. The latter was the consequence of the limited growth of non-agricultural employment and the persistence of a labour surplus situation – which kept a large population dependent on agriculture even at low incomes, which in turn held down the wages in non-agricultural employment also remained low. So widespread hunger and malnutrition remained, but episodes of large scale mortality became a thing of the past.

How the changed political imperatives after independence worked can be gauged from the following. The ideas prevalent during the colonial era – of letting the market including its international dimension do its work without intervention, and the valuing of fiscal ‘prudence’ - eventually made a return and have been the guiding philosophy of economic policy making for over three decades. One of its effects has been an agrarian crisis pushing out large numbers from agriculture – selling the ranks of those unemployed more than those in non-agricultural employment. The response to this crisis forced on the state in one way or the other, however, has been such that both the proportion of Indian foodgrain production that is procured by state agencies, as well as the proportion of its availability that goes through the public distribution system, are significantly greater today than they ever were before 1991. This is the persistent tension that prevails in the relationship between the state and India’s food economy – the more it has tried to ‘withdraw’, the more it has been drawn in on account of the political imperatives created by that withdrawal. That the promise of free grain is still seen as an important means of garnering political support, more than 75 years after independence, reflects something about the underlying economic realities.

## Interview with **Dr. John Prendergast, 2024**

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, how has the conceptualization of famine evolved over time, and do you find that the current definitions adequately capture the complexities and experiences of affected populations?

**Interviewee:** Honestly, I haven't looked at the definitions. I guess I'm more interested in how the international community responds to food crises as they escalate from food insecurity to famine. And it does seem like the system is either broken or damaged, eliciting little response.

**Interviewer:** As an activist working on global issues, how do you view the importance of understanding famines not just as technical malfunctions but also as social experiences?

**Interviewee:** It's very important that we convey and understand the human dimension of famine, and focus on the holistic causes. Otherwise, there will be no durable solutions.

**Interviewer:** Considering the prolonged nature of the famine in Darfur, how do you see the role of conflicts in perpetuating food shortages, and what strategies do you advocate for conflict resolution in the region?

**Interviewee:** It seems that the majority of folks living in the most food insecure places are for the most part conflict-affected. It seems to be the surest variable to create famine, especially when food is used as a weapon of war. Because of that, there can't just be technical responses, like more targeted aid deliveries. We also have to prioritize peace strategies, which include but go beyond mediation. Creating leverage for mediators to have a chance at stopping conflict is a critical ingredient to countering famine and extreme food insecurity.

**Interviewer:** As the co-founder of The Sentry, how has kleptocracy fueled and prolonged conflicts in Darfur, and what strategies does The Sentry employ to advocate for transparency and accountability in the country's financial systems?

**Interviewee:** Kleptocracy is the biggest driver of violence in Darfur. A small group of people hijacked the state institutions and pursued their objectives, which fueled the genocide in 2003. Then as the main partners in the kleptocratic government split in 2023, they went to war over who would control the kleptocracy that Sudan has become. So we advocate for tools of financial pressure like network sanctions and anti-money laundering measures to create accountability for the crimes and give leverage to the mediators.

**Interviewer:** From The Sentry's investigative work, are there any notable findings or patterns that have been identified concerning the participation of multinational actors in Sudan's conflicts, and do they engage with the situation with their own objectives?

**Interviewee:** Of course. The United Arab Emirates, Russia, Iran, and Egypt are the worst offenders, indeed pursuing their own political and economic agendas with devastating results for the Sudanese people.

**Interviewer:** Drawing on your experience as the former director for African affairs at the National Security Council, how did the U.S. government perceive and respond to the famine in Darfur during your tenure?



**Interviewee:** I was in the government from 1997 to 2001, so it preceded the genocide and resulting famine in Darfur.

**Interviewer:** As a special adviser involved in multiple peace processes, were there common themes or lessons learned from your experiences in the peace processes for Burundi, Sudan, and DR Congo, particularly regarding food security and famine prevention? How did these insights inform your broader approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in relation to food-related challenges?

**Interviewee:** I think the main thing was to develop international consensus on the humanitarian/food security side. With all the competing agendas in the region and internationally, that was always difficult to get everyone on the same page. That was 25 years ago! It is much more difficult now that the Gulf countries, Turkey, China, and Russia are much more involved now, and often unwilling to follow anyone else's lead.

**Interviewer:** From your extensive research and experience, is there a specific aspect or dimension related to the famine in Darfur and its connection to food shortages that you find particularly relevant or that you believe deserves further investigation? Alternatively, are there aspects of this historical event that you think are often overlooked or underexplored in existing scholarship?

**Interviewee:** I think the worst suffering results from forced displacement, the deliberate destruction of people's (and community) coping mechanisms, and then denying access to humanitarian organizations. Attacking that deadly nexus is imperative if fighting famine stands any chance of success.

**Interviewer:** In the minds of the general public, famine is frequently associated with an excess of population and a deficiency of food, or with low agricultural output brought on by natural calamities like drought. In what sense is that accurate to reality?

**Interviewee:** Droughts and inadequate food production certainly contribute to food insecurity. But full-blown famines are usually associated with war or violent state repression. Conflict is surely the leading cause of famine in the world over the past decades.

**Interviewer:** Some attribute the cause of the Darfur famine to liberal capitalism. Would you agree? Similarly, what role, if any, do you think colonization plays in bringing about the famine?

**Interviewee:** I think whether there was a capitalist or socialist system is a less important factor in the creation of famine in Darfur than the kind of development model that was followed in that region since the 1970s, specifically the lack of any kind of soil preservation and water management strategies, turning the region into a dustbowl. Colonial economic arrangements prioritizing export products over the local market certainly have also contributed to tremendous food insecurity.

**Interviewer:** From your perspective, does ethnic and religious diversity in Africa, again if possible particularly in Darfur, play any role in influencing conflicts over access to resources, including food, and what implications does this have for famine dynamics?

**Interviewee:** Yes, the state has weighed into the intercommunal competition over increasingly scarce resources, and that state intervention has created massive human suffering by siding with some groups over others based on race/ethnicity.

**Interviewer:** How do you assess the immediate and long-term impact of conflicts on food security, and what strategies can be effective in addressing this issue?

**Interviewee:** Conflict is the leading cause of famine and food insecurity. Sustainable peace is really the only antidote.

**Interviewer:** In your analysis, has rapid population growth in Africa, if possible specifically in Darfur, intersected with food scarcity? If so, what challenges has it posed for sustainable development and humanitarian efforts?

**Interviewee:** It has only insofar as the government at the federal and state level has so demonstrably failed to deal with population increases.

**Interviewer:** Has the famine been denied by the government or other responsible authorities as such? If so, how has the denial and minimization of the crises affected relief efforts, food aid distribution, and development programs in Darfur?

**Interviewee:** Yes, the authorities have caused the famine and denied that it exists, and stymied efforts to provide humanitarian aid. This is a direct cause of famine. The deaths will be on the hands of the authorities involved in using the denial of aid as a weapon of war.

**Interviewer:** How has academic analysis contributed to understanding the root causes of famine in Darfur, and what gaps or areas need further exploration for more effective policy interventions?

**Interviewee:** I'm not familiar enough with the academic literature to comment on this.

**Interviewer:** What are the challenges to addressing famine in Darfur? Looking ahead, how do you see the international community's responsibility in addressing famines, and what are the main priorities or changes you believe are crucial for improving the situation in Darfur, specifically in relation to food shortages and famine?

**Interviewee:** First, progress has to be made in getting the two warring parties to allow aid agencies to do their work in an unhindered fashion. Second, a major diplomatic push is needed to secure a ceasefire between the warring parties. What is missing in the diplomatic efforts is the creation of serious consequences for all those benefiting from the deadly status quo.