

**FAMINE AND RURAL SOCIETY
OF 17th-18th CENTURY
RAJASTHAN—A SOCIO-ECONOMIC
PERSPECTIVE**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
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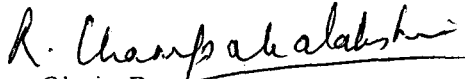
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DECLARATION

This is to certify that this Dissertation entitled, "FAMINE AND RURAL SOCIETY OF 17th - 18th Century RAJASTHAN - A SOCIO - ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE" submitted by Miss Alka Rehani in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. All the sources used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

We thus recommend the Dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Chair Person

Dated


SUPERVISOR

DILBAGH SINGH

**TO
MY FAMILY**

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(ALKA REHANI)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RSAB	-	Rajasthan State Archives Bikaner.
BR	-	Bikaner Records.
JR	-	Jaipur Records.
HS	-	Historical Section.
DDH	-	Daftar Diwan Huzuri.
VS	-	Vikram Samvat.
IESHR	-	Indian Economic and Social Historical Review.
IHR	-	Indian Historical Review.
PIHC	-	Presidential Indian History Congress.
PRHC	-	Presidential Rajasthan History Congress.
JNU	-	Jawaharlal Nehru University.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years there has been an increased research on study of problems of dearths, famines and poverty. The very centrality of these issues to the existant socio-economic and cultural systems explains this academic interest. For, though often set in motion by droughts, floods or other natural factors, phenomena as these highlight the limitations and weaknesses inherent in the very structure and dominant values of the society. Theoretically speaking, one can in fact, argue for a dialectical relationship existing between famine and poverty. In agrarian economies of medieval period, the socio-political subordination and economic exploitation of the peasants, particularly at the lower levels and of the other harvest sensitive groups, namely the artisans, agricultural labourers, menials etc. left them often between a state of survival and extinction, so that any natural calamity could for them easily assume the form of a famine. Distinction must however be made between short term scarcities and food shortages, which were a continuous problem for the peasant societies and famines which were the 'multiplication of existing conditions of inequality, poverty and malnutrition into a crisis of massive

proportions,¹ a crisis of excess mortality and sheer subsistence, where food availability and its distribution became the most acute problem.

The Mughal period of medieval Indian history, itself witnessed a number of these severe famine situations all throughout its three centuries (16th-18th). Though the criteria applied to understand these periods is different amongst different scholars, our estimate brings out six acute famines during Akbar's reign (1556-1605), two during Jahangir's (1605-1627). Shahjahan's period in the seventeenth century (1628-58) saw the 'crisis of mortality' almost everywhere from Kashmir to Coromondal and from Marwar to Bengal, while during Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707), northern and central India, Bihar, Bijapur, Golconda were all affected by major famines². The medieval chroniclers and

1. David Arnold, Famine : Social Crisis and Historical Change, Oxford, 1988, p.7.

2. The famines during Akbar's reign were those of 1556 in Delhi and Agra, 1573-75 in Gujarat, 1576 in Kashmir, 1577 in Kutch, 1583-84 in Kashmir and of 1595-98 in a large portion of Northern India, especially Lahore and Kashmir. Jahangir's period saw major famines in 1614-15 in Punjab and 1618-19 on Coromandal Coast. During Shahjahan's period, these included the included the 1630-31 Gujarat - Golconda famine, 1641 Kashmir famine, 1645-46 Conromondal and 1647 Marwar famine, while during Aurangzeb's reign, there were famines in Northern and Central India in 1658-59, Bihar in 1670-71, Bijapur-Golconda in 1685-87 and Deccan in 1705, A.D. This information is based on our study of various sources on medieval Indian history.

European travellers coming to India have constantly drawn our attention to the distress and mortality caused by each of these. Since the problem was clearly structured in the peasant mind and its impact was most visible in the countryside, it is important to understand the functioning of the rural society as affected by the 'crisis'. The significance of this study is all the more because often the implications of famine were not short lived. The agrarian dislocation due to human and cattle mortality and migrations in this period, often shaped rural conditions over the following years in terms of land use, nature of agrarian relations, overall agricultural production and so on. Further these changes affected also the urban efficiency, the administrative stability and at times the very maintenance of the state structure.

Unfortunately, there is almost a near total absence of even a general work on the nature and genesis of famines in medieval India. The analysis of socio-economic conditions of medieval India by Moreland³ and Irfan Habib⁴ led them to

3. W.H. Moreland, From Akbar to Aurangzeb, Delhi, 1923, pp. 205-12.

4. I. Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707, Bombay, 1963, pp.100-110.

give some consideration to the problem of famine. Particularly, in a very brief sketch, Habib highlighted the crucial social implications of the phenomena in terms of resulting in cannibalism, slavery and migration on part of the poor cultivators. For both these historians, however, the central question was the poverty of the medieval Indian peasant under Mughal misrule and in this context famine served as an indicator of how limited his reserves were. In their analysis famine was thus only a facet of the wider historical explanations, as Moreland says, 'an exceptional circumstance of secondary importance. Moreover, certain limitations were also apparent in their arguments. For example, the imperialist bias of Moreland led him to use the argument of Muslim misrule and rackrent as a comparative point to the benevolent rule of the British. Thus, his sweeping comment that "in the seventeenth century, famines were food famines in the strictest sense; while under the British rule the very idea of a food famine has been banished from all but the few tracts still inaccessible" (the famines being now work famines). Implicit in this argument was the belief that the technical backwardness of the Indian economy, the risky system of food production based on unstable monsoon climates in the pre-British period made the calamity inevitable. While such an approach

rightly stresses the vulnerability of the medieval times, a comparison with the British period without taking into consideration the changed socio-economic circumstances in the nineteenth century, is highly untenable.

Other than these general references, a student of medieval Indian history, faces a complete scarcity of any conceptualization on the problem of famine. Unlike the Indian case, in medieval Europe the writing of famine history has acquired an independent place within the realm of social and agrarian studies. Aided by studies of demography, climate and food habits, famine history has become richer there and has provided significant insights into changing popular attitudes to food supply and control. Especially stimulating are the works of Thompson, Rude and more recently the 'Annal School' of historians. In their pursuit of total history, the Annals have specifically emphasized the historical importance of climatic change, cycles of seasons and harvest and to discover the consequences these had for agriculture, movement of food prices, population trends, epidemics all having a bearing on famine. The idea is, as Braudel says, 'to reject history as simply a narrative sequence of great events and personalities towards a history of underlying structures and recurrent patterns observable only in the 'longue duree

Subsistence crisis' is seen as one such recurrent crisis of Europe,⁵.

Certainly, there are practical problems in making such *longue durée* studies in medieval Indian context (arising mainly from the lack of adequate sources of the entire period, for all the regions). Also in posing a dialectic only between man and nature, there is a risk of making human beings passive spectacles of natural cycles, of droughts and epidemics, and of reducing history to a series of structures. To some extent, this problem was understood by later Annales historians as Ladurie, who stressed the need to concentrate more on the study of dramatic events as famines and plagues instead of letting them get lost in search for long term structured history⁶. Apart from this visible interest in the theme, the emphasis of these historians on collective values, beliefs and cultural system of a given society, 'the mentalite' is a significant contribution to study social problems like famine.

5. F. Braudel, Civilisation and Capitalism - 15th-18th Century, Vol.I. The Structures of Every Day Life, trans. from French by Sian Reynolds, London, 1981, pp.35-50.

6. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Territory of the Historian, trans. Ben and Sian Reynolds, England, 1979.

In theoretical terms, our work has also greatly benefited from the debate on famine and other associated problems in the modern literature. With the development of historiography from Colonial to Nationalist Marxist and more recently to Subalterns, famine analysis here has moved along similar lines. Particularly, in the polemics between Imperialists and Nationalists on the wider question of nature of British rule and its impact, the problem of famine and its causation figured crucially. The British officials concerned with explaining away the awkward development of increasing famines in the nineteenth century (and diverting attention from the more fundamental socio-economic problems), insisted on factors like the historic poverty of India, of a continuous tradition of famines in India, fatalism of the Orientals, operation of caste system⁷. The misrepresentation of Indian past, that thus resulted in the official analysis of famines is well apparent here. Further in a unilinear manner, famines were here linked directly with the uncertainty of climatic conditions. As in the words of Charles Blair, 'an act of God which hand of man could do nothing to stay or deflect.

7. Charles Blair, Indian Famines : Their Historical, Financial and other Aspects, Reprint, N. Delhi, 1986.

On the contrary, in the nationalist discourse monsoon failures per se were seen to precipitate famine conditions only in the context of a colonised economy. Thus, B.M.Bhatia established a causal relationship between structural change which accompanied colonialism (in terms of creation of a market in land, high revenue, railways chiefly for grain exports, lack of adequate irrigation facilities and so on) and famine, which was an outward manifestation of the ensuing impoverishment of the masses⁸.

In so far as this analysis led the famine causation to shift from a pure and simple climatic aberration to the very structure of society, it was a significant development. Famine became now more of a social problem, a result more of human and institutional factors. However, this uncritical indictment on colonial rule led the analysis to be narrow and limited. This often resulted in distortions of the Indian past, in this case an idyllic representation of socio-economic conditions prevailing in medieval India. As we will see in our analysis later, the advantages and capacity of pre-modern societies to bear and respond to conditions of famine should not be exaggerated, as the under developed market conditions and communication system acted as severe

8. B.M. Bhatia, Famines in India : A Study in some Aspects of the Economic History of India, 1860-1965, Second Edition, Bombay, 1967, pp. 1-25.

limiting factors here to grapple with the cumulative effect of famine.

Some other erroneous assumptions have also been made about the nature of famines in pre-colonial period. For example, Ronald Seavoy's recent work on famine,⁹ rounds up all peasant societies, past and present with a similar social value of high fertility behaviour and low per capita production leading to peace time famines. The major problem of these 'subsistence cultures', as he sees it, 'is the indolent ethic of the peasants, a desire on their part to expend as little labour as possible, so as to provide only for their own subsistence needs. Thus, even a partial failure of crops lead to starvation and famine. In this analysis, as one sees, the narrow Malthusian subsistence equation of production not meeting the increasing demographic requirement is used too sweepingly, without going into the specifics of a society. What is ignored is the nature of the social structure, based as it was in medieval India on appropriation of the bulk of the peasant's surplus. Also for our period peasants dilemmas and constraints in terms of technological limitations, climatic

9. Ronald Seavoy, Famine in Peasant Societies, Greenwood Press, New York, 1986.

variations, social conservatism are equally important. The evidence available to us also shows peasants taking great interest in increasing and diversifying production when given added incentives. Thus, in any analysis of a multifaced issue as famine, generalisations like Seavoy's should be clearly avoided.

Our conceptual understanding of the problem has also been greatly enriched by the studies of M. Alamgir, Amartya Sen, Greenough and David Arnold. Alamgir gives a rigorous definition of famine emphasizing on shortfall in food availability as a crucial variable in famine causation¹⁰. A. Sen on the other hand, sees famine not in terms of an absolute decline in food for all, but a food distribution problem resulting in deprivation of some. 'Famine starvation', as he points out is the characteristic of some people 'not having' enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there 'not being' enough food to eat¹¹.

Though applicable more to modern societies, this contention

10. Alamgir defines 'Famine' as representing, 'a general state of prolonged foodgrain intake deficiency per capita, giving rise to a number of accompanying substates, involving individual and community, that lead ultimately to excess deaths in a region or a country as a whole.' Famine in South Asia : Political Economy of Mass Starvation, Cambridge, 1980, p.14.

11. Amartya Sen, Poverty and Famines : An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation, Oxford, 1981.

is also borne out by evidence of our period. What is also significant about Sen's analysis, for our purpose, is his understanding that a fairly close relationship existed between the inter occupational ordering of pauperisation in the immediate pre-famine and famine periods, meaning thereby that famine led to an increased vulnerability of mainly those social classes and groups who were already on the verge of starvation.

The Cultural anthropological study of 1943 Bengal famine by Paul Greenough explores this problem further.¹² He goes beyond the statistics of mortality and food shortages to see the meaning of the starvation in terms of its societal values. Though too much is made of the innate Bengali character, what is important is his emphasis on how in periods of famine each society distributes its social costs and how victimisation proceeds in perfect harmony with the existing values of the social structure. Thus, as seen by him, the Bengal famine reinforced the existing structures of authority, leading to the deliberate exclusion of less valued members (like women) by the male head (*karta*) of the family; and simultaneously to the abandonment of the clients and dependents (*Posyas*) by the dominant patrons (the

12. Paul Greenough, Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal : The Famine of 1943-44, Oxford, 1982.

annadata. The exploitation of the weaker sections that followed in a famine period becomes crucial to our study.

A social study on famines leads one immediately to study the responses of the affected. The recent work of David Arnold¹³ seeks an answer to the question of how to understand peasants in history; whether as abject victims or active responders to the crisis. Using also literary sources and folklore, the existing view of a powerless peasant, totally incapable of affecting his socio-economic conditions is contested to show the dynamism of his response. The Subaltern notions of peasant consciousness, power, rationality, moral protest are all weaved here in a synthetic whole. Despite the problematic assumptions in the paradigm, his notion of peasant to respond, has been well taken by us.

Despite not pertaining to our period of study, an understanding of these works and their significant arguments becomes essential not only for a theoretical analysis of the problem, but to see whether these and other similar questions of social history can be raised to sources of our own period.

13. David Arnold, Famine : Social Crisis.....

The above survey, establishes the problem of famine as a complex issue, having its basis in both long term (structural) and short term (climatic) factors. The most direct impact of a famine becomes visible in the rural society on the already vulnerable groups. The question that comes up for us is, how was the problem of famine observed and experienced here and particularly how did the lower peasant groups in medieval India, burdened as they were by high revenue payments, take this infliction of frequent famines? In context of the limited survival strategies, how did they maintain and continue their cycle of cultivation on a long term? What was the nature of relationship between the various segments of peasantry during periods of stress? Also important to inquire is the tensions and strains that acquired momentum between the peasants and the dominant rural aristocracy of *zamindars* and upper caste groups. The concern here is thus not exclusively with famine, its causation, definition and varied dimensions. In context of the problem of famine, the purpose is also to study the changing inter and intra class relationships that developed in the rural society in these years of crisis.

Since regional variations and variables determining the course and nature of crisis differed, generalised answers to questions and issues as these cannot be sought for all the

regions under the medieval (Mughal) rulers . A clear picture of the existant socio-economic framework and the historical processes is essential to understand the structure and texture of famines as it emerged. Put in Sen's words, we need to understand, ' who when and why starves', for the same degree of crop failures and food shortage may have widely different results in different communities, generating a different famine response.

Though a historical analysis is made of famines in medieval India, our work concentrates on study of problems of famine in the rural society of seventeenth -- eighteenth centuries, Rajasthan. Forming a famine belt, the region was subject to frequent famines from a very early period. To this extent, it was more of an exceptional case, in comparison with the other core territories under the medieval rulers. However due to this very reason, a study of all the strains and tensions in the fabric of rural society (dramatised here in the most concrete form) becomes easier.

It is also true that the region was not very significant to the Mughal system financially so that any problem of successive failures here did not have any important bearing on the imperial revenues. Yet, the area's

strategic location on routes of ports of Gujarat and manufacturing centres of Ahmedabad and Surat, made firm central control on this region, particularly, its desert areas very important for trade and military control. Thus, Akbar garrisoned Jalor, Merta and Nagore as stronghold and outposts of the Mughals¹⁴. Similarly, Aurangzeb made strenuous efforts to keep Marwar under him¹⁵. Also from sixteenth century onwards the rulers of most of the states here were integrated in the Mughal administrative system as imperial *jagirdars*. The close association with the empire thus meant to a great extent a replication of the central system and policies at the local level. A study of famines and deeper socio-economic processes, relationship, conflicts and tensions at the local level would thus give us an insight into the functioning of rural society at the broader imperial level.

As there are variations in the climatic conditions within the region of Rajasthan, an attempt is made by us to seperately understand the problem in totally an arid region where famine was an occurrence in almost every second or

14. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol.II, Eng. trans. by Jarett and Sarkar, Calcutta, 1949, p.277.

15. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, Eng. trans. by J.N.Sarkar, Calcutta, 1947, p.175-176.

third year and one where semi aridity of the soil left scope for some fertile agriculture and thus a different famine response. The reference is here to the two geographical/physical divisions in Rajasthan, the first falling in the north west desert area, including the regions of Bikaner, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer and the other in Eastern Rajasthan, comprising mainly the areas of Jaipur, Alwar, Bharatpur. In our first chapter, we have thus highlighted the environmental problems of both these zones, their pattern of land use, irrigation and settlement to broadly understand how ecological conditions could condition and shape the impact and response of famine differently. Also seen here are the peasant's definition of nature, his understanding of the environmental problems of the areas and the linkages established in the peasant mind between changing weather forms and an impending scarcity.

Since, as we have argued, mere climatic disorders do not explain the nature and form of famine, a study of the power structure of the rural society in seventeenth-eighteenth centuries is also attempted. Our second chapter, thus analyses the relations of domination and subordination, how they in the long run accentuated the actual 'crisis, the nature of change affected in these

relationships in famine years and the emerging conflicts associated with the surfacing of structural contradictions.

The story of responses and reactions of the affected becomes crucial to any study of famine. As mentioned, in any famine it was the vulnerable groups of peasants, agricultural labourers, artisans etc. who were most directly hit. However since in our sources (primarily archival records), the information provided concentrates mainly on the tax paying cultivator, the 'raiyat', an attempt is made by us (in our third chapter) to analyse his approach to problems of scarcity and famines. A broad difference in the strategies of survival is here noted between the peasants of the two ecological zones of our region. Though the overall social structure did limit the peasant's capacity to considerably alter the course of famine, our evidence does bring out various forms of peasant responses, both active and passive.

A conventional problem taken up by us for analysis in our last chapter is State attitudes, its ideology and practice of relief mechanism. Since the peasant response was to a great extent defined and modified by state initiatives, only a study which sees this interaction and which sees the limitations of these interactions, can convey

to us the real problem that crisis like famine could unfold in medieval times. Certainly, under discussion here are the temporal bottlenecks but also under criticism is the ideological apparatus of the medieval state as far as it understood its own role in mitigating and preventing this crisis.

Other than the crisis of famine in rural society, a very elementary sketch of urban economy as affected by famine is given in our Appendix. Since this is not related to our main body of research (even the famines studies are not of Rajasthan), only some light is thrown on the critical consequences in years of crisis of the interdependence of town and countryside.

Due to the limited scope many crucial issues have been however left out of our study. For example, within the rural society the entire question of the role of village panchayats and village communities in famine years. Certainly the powers of arbitration in civil and criminal matters enjoyed by the former would have greatly increased in years of crisis when dislocation often resulted in disputes over rights on land, cattle, water and theft, loot and appropriation of various assets by different groups. The nature of fines, punishment

and significantly, the definition of 'famine crime' as understood by these bodies of village elders is an interesting aspect of research. Equally important is the changing role of village community, which has been seen as offering framework for 'sub exploitation' by the dominant groups, (the headmen, *patwari* and *khudkashta* peasantry) who controlled its financial pool, even in normal years.¹⁶ Even conceptually, one needs to work out the nature of various linkages between problems of famine and disease, famine and social unrest, famine and gender exploitation, so as to place the phenomenon in its broader societal context. This then requires a detailed analysis of varied kind of sources ranging from archival records to the local accounts, narrated^m 'oral literature'.

For the present, our work is primarily based on archival records preserved at Rajasthan state Archives Bikaner. For eastern Rajasthan, these mainly include the *Arzadashts*, or petitions written by the *amils*, *faujdar* or other *pargana* officials to the Jaipur Raja. These officials constantly reported to the ruling authorities various revenue and administrative details about the areas under

16. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Irfan Habib ed., Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.I, 1220-1750 A.D., Orient Longman, Cambridge University Press, p.249.

their control the problems arising in the cultivation process due to any political disturbance. Illegal exactions, or scarcities and famine were also frequently highlighted. Since this category of documents is particularly rich for the latter half of the seventeenth century and early half of the eighteenth, we have greatly relied on them. Also studied to some extent are the *Chithis*, or letters written by the Diwan of the Jaipur states mainly to the *amils* but also to other *pargana* officials like *amin* and *faujdar*. Each *chithi* contains the substance of the complaints received by the Diwan followed up by instructions on the matter. One thus gets an insight into the nature of peasant complaints, state attitude towards different social groups and its methods of redressal. Their importance increases, as they are available to us for more than hundred years (1690-1800 A.D. and even beyond) for the entire region under control of Jaipur Raja.

For understanding of our problem in the North Western States of Bikaner and Marwar, we have used the *Bahiyats*, also available in Bikaner Archives. The *Kagda Bahis* of Bikaner, available mainly from the latter half of the eighteenth century to that of nineteenth century are particularly significant for studying the nature of land revenue system. Since famines were a frequent phenomena here

a good deal of light is thrown on state policy towards the problems created in the villages by these. In these Bahis, there is infact a seperate set of remission papers throwing light on the short and long terms concessions. The Sanad Parwana Bahis pertaining to the eighteenth *and* nineteenth centuries, ^{also} give detailed instructions on various aspects of revenue administration .

Despite the extreme value of these sources, their official nature limits their use. For, the information provided in them is repetitive and concentrates more on details of administration, leaving out many other relevant social issues in the peasant society. Thus certain oral sources of Rajasthan have been studied by us. These include some folk songs, created by the bards who roamed from place to place recording events and glorifying personages of real worth and values. This bardic literature certainly is based on a lot of allegory, mythological details and improbable circumstances, and thus has to be used with great caution. However, a concern with local elements makes them an important source of our study. Also despite being individual creations, the very process of transmission of oral culture from one community to another, one generation to the other makes them representative of community beliefs. Along with this, we have also studied the proverbs and sayings, popular

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in the culture. Since these are full of worldly wisdom, since these are full of worldly in daily and were widely circulated in daily conversation, their importance for a socio economic history is considerable.

For a study of medieval famines, we have studied the English translations of the relevant Persian works written by the medieval Indian Court Chroniclers. Also, the Accounts and Narratives of the European Travellers coming to India from fifteenth century onwards, the Factory records maintained by English Company and a few Famine Commission Reports and Gazetteers pertaining to Rajasthan (Rajputana) have been used.

However despite study of these varied sources, no conclusive picture of the nature of famines in medieval India is sketched. Since ours is mainly a preliminary exercise, for the present we have only been able to highlight the significant implication and ramifications of the phenomena in the rural society.

FAMINE AND CLIMATE : SOME LINKAGES

CHAPTER 1

FAMINE AND CLIMATE : SOME LINKAGES

In precolonial times, famines were to a great extent a problem and result of drought or dryness of weather or climate and lack of rain. The peasant agriculture was primarily dependent on sufficient and timely rainfall so that the food crops, mainly the *kharif* could grow. The literature of the period throws light on how an absolute failure of autumn harvest could cause distress in the rural society. Followed by a failure of the winter (*rabi*) crops this could lead to acute scarcity and famine. The partial loss of a single crop, if it be the climax of a succession of bad harvests, may in itself cause a famine. The nature of the 'crisis' however, depended on the intensity of drought, stage at which it occurred, i.e. at weeding, flowering etc., whether all crops or only sown ones had failed, whether only grain harvest or fodder was lost, the situation of scarcity in the neighbouring villages and so on. The influence of short term climatic disturbances might not be so true of the economically and technologically developed modern societies, yet for the medieval period this impact was true and in most cases direct.

One cannot however, posit an automatic co-relation between 'Climate and famine' for, the same factor of climatic change, could result in a varied impact in different regions and communities. Moreover, climate itself is a complex phenomenon having long range, medium range and short range influences. Also it is easier to document and agree on the primary impact of climate on biosphere (the crops, animals etc.), while the secondary impact on the existant food supply, the price situation, the nutritional and living standards of various sections of society is so complicated by other factors, that it is almost impossible to construct any general theory.

Modern researches by Braudel, Ladurie and other 'Annal' school historians while emphasizing the importance of climate, ecology and other environmental factors in social change, also reveal their complexity. Braudel for example, believes that 'the rhythm, quality and deficiency of harvests ordered all material life in the pre eighteenth century economics and these changes happened at the same time everywhere'.¹ But despite this determinism, he also realised that the complexity of the climate made its effect

1. F.Braudel, 'Civilization and Capitalism - 15th-18th Century', Vol. I, p.49.

on plants, animals and social communities different in different environmental conditions. Thus, his stress on the need to refer any social reality to the space or place in which it exists, i.e. its geographical context. His own work on Mediterranean puts into practice this interweaving of history and geography, of human and non human forces, in making and changing the distinctive Mediterranean milieu.² To Ladurie, this study of role and place of nature in human life was a part of the movement towards 'historical ecologique'.³

These and other recent studies on environmental history have helped us to go beyond the nineteenth century simplistic co-relation between climatic change in temperature and rainfall and levels of poverty, starvation and social crisis in a given society. The fruitfulness of the dialectics they establish also becomes obvious when within the scope of environmental history, we can raise questions not only on climatic reconstruction, but also on adaptability of society or lack of it to climatic stress.

2. F. Braudel, 'The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II', translation (of the second edition of 1966) by Sian Reynolds, London, 1972.
3. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'The Territory of the Historian' pp. 293-319.

This second level analysis brings in the socio-economic set up as it interacts with the environment. Locating the configurations of power would also be a part of this level of analysis. Even more dynamic is the purely mental encounter in which perceptions, ethics, myths and other structures of meaning become a part of an individual's or group's dialogue with nature. Since all human societies are continuously engaged in defining and constructing the world around them, the question of societal beliefs also become interesting. This endeavour is also significant, as human adaptability to any climatic change and stress depends in part on how the society perceives climatic change.

The two sections here take up these various issues. In our first section we have discussed the environmental problems of the arid and semi-arid zones of Rajasthan, the nature of resource command in each area and the resulting famine response. Attempt is made here to see how each zone could function, to some extent, only according to the limitations of its 'eco-system'. The second section is an elementary effort to see the reflection of all these limitations of nature in the popular mind and to examine how was climate and seasonality socially perceived.

I

All aspects of climatic complexities are brought out in the study of our region of Rajasthan. The Aravali Range, divides the region diagonally into two natural divisions; the climate, rainfall, agricultural conditions, natural vegetation of one belt differing markedly from the other. To the west and north-west, covering three-fifths of the total area and comprising the whole of Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Shekhawati region of Jaipur and most of Jodhpur are the arid planes and ever shifting sand -dunes (dhora or teeba), collectively bearing the term 'Maroosthulli' or 'Region of Death'.⁴ On the east and south are the forests and semi arid planes of black loam trenched by the running streams of Mewar, Jaipur and Hadoti region.⁵

In both these arid and semi arid regions, the ecological balance between man and environment is intrinsically precarious and the crops that are able to flourish in favourable years of high rainfall, wither in the intervening period when precipitation is scant. The climate itself is not a constant factor. Long term shifts as well as

4. J. Tod, 'Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan', ed., Willian Crooke, Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, London, 1950, p. 234.
5. Famine Report of Rajputana 1870, P. 42.

short term variations in climate and rainfall, ruin crops and dry up pasturage, creating situations of scarcity and famine. Water here is the most limiting factor for crop production, as the supply of water by natural precipitation is meagre and sporadic, even while the climatically induced requirement for water is highly incessant. However it is not simply the amount of rainfall and its regularity but its effectiveness in terms of soil moisture available for plant use that makes the difference in altering the balance with the environment. Irrigation thus by necessity, becomes the primary concern for crop production in both areas.⁶

Despite this similarity, there are important variations in the quantity and nature of rainfall, the extent to which irrigation can ameliorate the environmental stress in both areas. It is important to mention here, that semi arid areas in general allow for the continuous occupancy of areas.⁷. Their environmental balance thus, to a certain extent, is more delicate than that of fully arid areas, which in contrast, are distinguished by an unequal pattern of spotty population. An idea of this can be had if one sees the

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6. M.Shafi, & Raza M.ed., 'Dryland Agriculture in india', Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1987.
 7. Y. Mundlak & Singer. F., ed., 'Arid Zone Development Potentialities and Problems, Cambridge, 1977.

population density of the region. On an average, Rajputana as recorded in 1891, is said to have supported 76 persons to a sq. mile; nearly 35 in sandy plains of the west, 79 in more fertile but broken and forest clad country of the south and 165 in well watered eastern division.⁸ Within the states also the density varied considerably. In Jodhpur, it was 100 per square mile in fertile south east and 10 in desert west; in Jaipur, 332 in north east and 92 in the Shekhawati desert of south west.⁹ The meaning and impact of a crisis like famine, which is a crisis firstly of mortality and subsistence, would thus greatly vary in the two regions.

Also in an arid region the scanty rainfall, non perennial streams, low water table and poor natural vegetation makes pastoralism an important component of the economy. The adaptations and survival strategies here, thus would differ from a region more reliant on rain-fed agriculture, which by virtue of keeping the cultivator tied to the land and crops increased the scale and extent of his

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8. H.B. Abbot, Census of India, 1891, Vol. XXVI, Rajputana, Part I, Calcutta 1892. Jaisalmer in the extreme west had the density of only seven persons per square mile, while its every hundred square miles of patch had only two villages.
 9. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Rajputana, Calcutta, 1908, pp.28-29.

misery. To thus highlight these ecological variations, we have focused on the states of Bikaner and Marwar (Jodhpur) in North-Western Rajasthan and the State of Jaipur (as it emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century) with its important *parganas* of Sawai Jaipur, Bahatri, Chatsu, Dausa, Lalsot and Malarna in Eastern Rajasthan. The location of all these states with their important paragans (known as *cheeres* in Bikaner) has been shown on the enclosed map. Since our documents from Bikaner often refer to villages within the administrative unit of *cheeras*, some important ones have also been shown on the map.

The climate of Rajasthan desert region is characterised by extremes of temperature and by a marked degree of aridity. Rivers play only a very subordinate role in moulding the surface features of the area. The only river of any consequence here is river Luni, which originates in the hills near Ajmer and flows into the Rann of Kutch. The region falls outside the regular course of both the south-western and north-eastern monsoons. The rainfall is thus scanty and so irregular that the village folk see one horn of the cow lying within and the other without the rainy zone¹⁰. Droughts and famines are thus frequent. Although it

10. Rajputanta Gazetteer Vol. III A, the Western Rajputana State Residency and the Bikaner Agency, Allahabad 1909, p.44-45.

is difficult to arrive at any mean figure or to point out the actual years when the area was subjected to famines in our period (since the documents used are only of a few years and not the entire period of study), roughly speaking, the official and literary sources testify to its existence almost every second or third year.¹¹ Col. Tod in fact, calls famine the grand natural disease of the western region,¹². Even the name of the region is synonymous with droughts and famines as attested by the local proverb, 'My (Famine) feet are in Pugal (a district of Bikaner), my head in Kotada (Marwar), my belly in Bikaner and sometimes I can be found in Jodhpur but Jaisalmer is my permanent residence".¹³

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11. The *Bahiyats* of both Bikaner and Jodhpur, mention famine as the most crucial and recurrent reality of the economic life of the regions. Particularly, the *Kagada Bahis* of Bikaner, with their annual reference to famine remissions and other economic incentives to the peasants, *jagirdars*, and *zamindars* to resettle the famine deserted areas, highlight how much the phenomenon was integrated in the socio-economic and political life of the period. Local proverbs spread over in the literature also speak of it as the perennial problem. For example, it is said, मारवाड में क्वले उभी काल, i.e. Famine is always on the doors of Marwar.
12. Tod, vol. III, p. 1258.
13. The local version is, 'पग पुगल, घड़ कोटड़े, बाहां बाय उमेर, जोयो लाये जोधपुर, ठावो जैसलमेर । J.S. Gehlot, '*Rajasthani Krishi Kahavaten*', Jodhpur, 1941, p.1.

Not all of the western area however is a famine prone desert area. Local variations exist within the region itself. In Bikaner, the greater part of the state i.e. the southern, central and western portions including the *Cheeras* of *Shekhsar, Gusainsar, Mahajan, Jasrasar, Magra, Khari Patti, Pugal* and *Sadar* form part of the unproductive and illwatered desert, having the lightest kinds of sandy soil. The northern limit of the desert is the old bed of Ghaggar, beyond which particularly in *Suratgarh* and *Anupgarh Tehsils* one finds light loamy soil, fertile with irrigation. In north east and east in *Cheeras* of *Nauhar* and *Rini* and *parganas* of *Rajgarh* and *Bhatner* the soil has considerable admixture of loam (*Kathi*) in place of sand. This not only retains moisture well but with proper irrigation is capable of producing the highest classes of crops.¹⁴

The state of Marwar has also similar variations. Although like Bikaner the area is generally speaking, a sandy sterile tract, it improves gradually from a mere desert in west, north-west and south-west to comparatively fertile areas in the neighbourhood of Aravali hills. It is here, mainly in the southern *Parganas* of *Bali, Desuri,*

14. P. J. Faigan, Settlement Report of Bikaner State, 1893, p.1. Also, P.W. Powlett, Gazetteer Bikaner State, 1874, p.91.

Jaitaran, Jaswantpura, Jalor, Merta, Marot, Pali, Siwana, Sojat that the river Luni with its several tributaries deposits alluvial remains, yielding crops of barley and wheat.¹⁵ A local proverb puts half the produce of the state as gift of Luni.¹⁶ The river is however, non-perennial and even erratic. For the greater part of the region including the *parganas* of Sheo, Shergarh, Phalaudi, Mallani, Nagore, Didwana the soil is so salty and sterile as to nurture only grass, which springs up with rains and withers away immediately.¹⁷ Also high winds often cover the sown fields with a layer of sand and thus prevent the germination of seeds or by carrying away the light soil leave the young plants exposed, thus causing them to dry up. Frequent visitation of locusts, which breed in these sandy areas, particularly in the 'teeburs' of Mallani, also do damage to the crops.

15. Rajputana Gazetteer Vol.III, A, p.124.

16. Many local proverbs exist in Marwar, on the fertility created by the river. For example,
बले बूठी, तले तूठी, i.e. River of Aravalis, benefits the plains below.

17. Imperial Gazetteer of India, (1908), p.54. The dryness of the region is well conveyed in the saying, that 'more spears grow than spear grass heads, and blades of steel grow better than blades of corn.'

Our sources suggest that though scarcities and droughts were not uncommon here even in the twelfth century, famine was not a permanent feature. The Persian source *Tabqat-i Nasiri*, mentions a deep perennial river with many tributaries in the Bikaner-Jaisalmer belt, on sides of which as many as 300 to 500 big villages and towns existed and which was used by Indian traders to carry on trade with Arabian countries.¹⁸ In 1809, Abu Bakar, sent by Col. Tod to explore this river, found the dry bed of a stream called Khaggar near Shahgarh between Jaisalmer and Rori- Bakhar. It seems that somewhere round the twelfth century the river due to geographical disturbances was absorbed in the sand. This has been understood by Col. Tod as the main reason for the depopulation and desolation of the area.¹⁹.

Whatever be the context behind the prevailing desert conditions, the fact of frequent famines here is hardly

18. Minhaj-us-Siraj, '*Tabqat i Nasiri*', Eng. trans. by H.C. Raverty, pp. 79-80.

19. Tod, Vol. III Pp. 1263-1264. The historian Mir Tahir Muhammad Nasyani, writing in 1621, in his '*Tarikh-i-Tahiri*' mentions the drying up of this river as a result of the efforts of a trader, who wanted to escape the claims of Rana Soda, the king of Sindh (capital Raohri, ruling in 1044) on his wealth and wife. It is said, that so scared was he of these illegal exactions, that he got the river flowing in Bikaner and Jaisalmer diverted Multan with the help of skilled men, due to which, the villages here became desolate and famine became a permanent occurrence. Quoted in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol.I, p. 256.

doubtful. The fundamental reason for the drought conditions in the north-western portions of our region is the acute scarcity of water. The depth of water from the surface varied here from 150-250 feet, at times even more, in comparison to the moderate 15-35 feet in the fertile areas²⁰. In West Bikaner, Dr. More found a well 400 feet deep and in village Bhakri of Phalaudi district, the Trigonometrical Survey of India located a well 450 feet in depth.²¹ Muhnot Nainsi's 'Marwar Ri Pargana Ri Vigat' which gives a rich, detailed, statistical account of each pargana of Marwar mentions different kinds of well in the region; the Kosita (shallow), Kohar (deep), Chanch (Dhenkli or lever device, used on shallow wells) and Arhat (geared Persian wheel).²² However, as analysed by a recent historian, these

20. Powlett, Gazetteer of Bikaner, 1874, p.93.

21. Rajputanta Gazetteer Vol. III A p. 44. Popular sayings also bring out this fact of deep water levels. For example, in Marwar a saying goes,

मारवाड़ का ऊँड़ा कुआ, रात्यू लोग तसाया मूवा
फूटे कुलस्यो, टूटे नेक, उम्मा सेचड़ा पड़े न बेज ।

i.e. In Marwar, so deep are the wells and so tedious is the process of drawing water, that people desirous of quenching their thirst immediately, but having a broken pot and a rope, have to wait for long, as the little water that is able to reach up the surface is also lost because of this depth.

Manohar Sharma, 'Rajasthani Kahavaton Mein Lok Darshan' in Shodh Patrika, Sept. 1969, Part I.

22. Muhnot Nainsi, Vigat Vol. I, ed., N.S. Bhatti, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, p.

various wells were not equitably distributed; the fertile parganas of Merta dependent mainly on well irrigation, having half the wells recorded by Nainsi. Likewise ninety per cent of the villages of pargana Jaitaran had wells while the number was almost negligible between the comparatively dry areas of Pipar and Jodhpur.²³

This unequal distribution can be appreciated when one realises that well irrigation becomes unprofitable in areas where depth of wells exceeded 75 feet which was the usual case in desert areas. Also the brackish water here made only one out of twenty wells fit for irrigation (those having the 'meetha' water).²⁴ Even fodder could not be grown here on a large scale with well water. Thus cattle maintenance which was the chief source of livelihood in these areas was also the chief problem in times of drought and famine.

These environmental constraints clearly conditioned the subsistence pattern and the nature of economy of the desert area. Since growth of rabi crops required fertile soils and some irrigation facilities, in most of our region (this is excluding the fertile portions in both Bikaner and Marwar)

23. B.L. Bhadani, 'Well Irrigation in Marwar in the 17th century, Shodh Patrika, Jan.-March 1989, Part I. p.55.

24. Rajputana Gazetteer Vol. I, p.96.

it was the *kharif* (or *Sawanu* as called here), including low value bajra as cereal and moth or mung as pulses which formed the dominant harvest.²⁵ Even where *rabi* crops were grown, the autumn harvest was far more relied on for annual food supply.²⁶ A nineteenth century estimate puts ratio of the out put of food grains from *kharif* to *rabi* as roughly 9: 1 in Bikaner and 11 : 5 in Marwar.²⁷

The autumn crops however, depended for cultivation on rains of July and first half of August and for their maturity on good falls in September and slight showers early

25. Local sayings abound on how bajra and moth were the only food crops (subsisted on, more so by the poor) of any value in the region. It was thus said,

(a) आकन का झोपड़ा, फेगन की बाड़,
बाजरी का सोठरा, मोठन की दाल,
देखी राजा मानसिंह तेरी मारवाड़ ।

(b) कुछ करणी, कुछ करम गत, कुछ भावी की खोट,
मोहू नै उमगयो फरयो, लिख्या करम में मोठ ।

K.L. Sahel, '*Rajasthan Ki Bhaugaulik Kahavaten*', Shodh Patrika, Mar. 1958, Part 3, Also S.S. Choyal, '*Rajasthan Ki Kucch Kahavaten*', Maru Bharti, Jan 1967, Part 4, p.24.

26. This can be seen from the fact that even in the fertile north-eastern Bikaner, in the *Cheeras* of Rini, Nauhar and Gandhili, *Rabi* crop was only 0.09%, 0.29% and 0.26% of total production of *kharif* crop. G.S.L. Devra, '*Rajasthan Ki Prashasnik Vyavastha*' 1574-1818 A.D. Dharti Prakashan, Bikaner, 1981, pp.212, 221.

27. Rajputana Gazetteer, Vol. III A, p. 101, 343.

in October. However, as we have pointed out, rainfall was very irregular here and rainy season itself was of a short duration. On an average the state of Rajputana received 21.6 inches of rainfall. This varied from 7 and 11 inches in Jaisalmer and Bikaner in the west to 37 inches in fertile Banswara and Jhalawar in south.²⁸ In Marwar, the September rains become light and erratic and cease altogether before the end of the month; the symbolic reference to which is found in the saying, 'the scorching heat of Asoj (Sept.-Oct.) drives a Jat to ascetism.'²⁹ With the failure of monsoons the resultant water scarcity makes both cultivation and cattle maintenance a problem.

It needs however, to be emphasized that the region has certain inbuilt advantages and natural benefits which offset and considerably moderate the harshness of the desert environment. Firstly, despite the irregularity and scantiness of rainfall when it falls it sinks into the sandy soil and does not flow off the surface, due to which even a very small rainfall suffices for the crops. It has been estimated that in eastern Rajasthan with its comparatively heavier soils, hilly country and much of water drained off

28. Rajasthan Irrigation Research Institute, Jaipur Bulletin, Vol. I, March 1975, p. 15.

29. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Rajputana 1908, p.66.

by Banas, Chambal and other smaller rivers, not less than 30 inches of annual rainfall is required for sufficient agricultural operations; while in north-west Rajasthan rainfall of 12 inches suffices the needs of cultivation³⁰. Also with the help of camels or a pair of good bullocks in light sandy soils each cultivator is able to bring a large extent of ground under crop (two to three acres). Moreover, the population is so scattered that one bumper *kharif* crop of bajra and moth can feed them for three-four years and a total failure of *kharif* does not bring very great suffering, unless it is followed by several partial failures.

Slight rainfall here also produces a number of trees and grasses, which not only provide excellent fodder for the cattle and camels but also serve as food, particularly in years of famine to the poor. The important ones are trees of 'ber', 'khejra', 'phog', 'kair'. Of grasses the most commonest and abundant in years of scarcity is bharut, used by poor even in normal years as food³¹ Bikaner especially has a lot of excellent fodder grasses--daman', useful for cattle breeding; ganthil, for production of wool and ghee; 'kiu,' abundant in north, for cattle and 'sewan' for sheep.³²

30. Famine Commission Enquiries, Rajputana, 1879, p.4.

31. Rajputana Gazetteer Vol. III A, p.43.

32. Faigan, Settlement Report, pp. 10-11.

The prevalence of so many grasses and trees make the region more reliant on a pastoral economy. Since even in normal years the desert area is chiefly a grazing land, comparatively little arable land goes out of cultivation in famine years. It is estimated that in Bikaner only three to thirty four percent of the ground was under plough even in normal years.³³ Practically the whole of Bikaner was otherwise a vast pasture ground and the pastoral tribes of north-west and west relied heavily on camels, high milk yielding cows (particularly of Pugal district) and the sheep, kept principally for its wool. The importance of cattle wealth to the entire socio-economic life of the region can be gauged from the innumerable taxes imposed on them, the important ones being, 'ghascharai', pancharai, and fodder taxes like, 'korad' 'bhuraj', 'sehat' and jakhiro.³⁴ The total income from them was equal to the 'house tax' or 'dhuwan bacch' which itself was as highly ranged as forty to

33. Ibid, pp. 6-7. Most of the land here was 'Parat' i.e. cultivated periodically as and when there were rains.

34. P.W. Powlett, Gazetteer, Bikaner, p.94.

- 1) ghascharai - A tax on grazing of cattle.
- 2) pancharai - Tax on leaf eating animals, mainly camels, goats.
- 3) korad - Grass of dry moth and til.
- 4) bhuraj - Bhurat grass
- 5) sehat - Sewan Grass

fifty percent of 'rokad rakam' (a collective name for many taxes). There is evidence, as argued, of income from ghascharai, bhuraj and korad even becoming more than that of 'dhuwan bacch' in the eighteenth century thus indicating the growing significance of pastoral activities.³⁵

Muhnot Nainsi highlights the importance pastoralism occupied in the socio economic life of Marwar in the seventeenth century. Two types of grazing land are mentioned by Nainsi; the first being the dry land situated on elevated grounds (mainly in the desert region) and the second near rivers and nallahs (mainly in parganas of Sojat and Jaitaran)³⁶. The first category of grazing ground was of great utility in the famine years since it mainly comprised of Parat or Ajoti (left for grazing) land. And it was here that pastoralism as an economic activity was most significant. Thus, while charai tax was about 11.54 percent in Phalaudi and 11.46 percent in pargana Sanchor (both desert areas) in the years 1654-1663 in wetter areas of Jodhpur (which with its sandy loamy soil was considerably good for kharif cultivation), it was between 2.17 percent

35. G.S.L. Devra, 'Rajasthan Ki Prashasnik.....', p. 169.

36. M. Nainsi, 'Vigat Vol, I', p.456-458.

and 7.24 percent of the total income.³⁷ Likewise in Jalor sheep raising, wool manufacture (also for export) and camel breeding were the main economic activities. Marwar was particularly known for its strong and best variety of camels coming mainly from Sheo, Shergarh, Mallani and Phalaudi³⁸. The milch cows of Mallani and Sanchor (giving 5 to 10 seers of milk at a time) and the bullocks of Nagore were also famous and were sold with their milk and milk products at all the principal regional and local fairs.³⁹ The pastoralist thus survived to a great extent from the income earned from his livestock.

This survey then of north-western Rajasthan shows the desert region to be having a harsh environment with a proneness to frequent famines. The sandy soils and deep water tables makes any major irrigation impracticable. The

37. B.L. Bhadani, 'Satrahvin Shatabdi Mein Marwar Ki Charagrahi Vyavastha - Ik Mulyankan' Maru Bharti, Oct. 1981 Part 3, p.32-41.

38. It is a popular saying that even while dying, the camel looks towards Marwar,

उंट मरे जद मारवाड़ सामो जावे ।

A comparison should be made here with similar Gujrati and Bhojpuri sayings. In the former, it is

said - उंट मरे त्यारे मारवाड़ सामुं जुए। while in the latter - उंट बहरलाला तो पोछमे जाला ।

K.L. Sahel, 'Rajasthan Kahavaton Mein Pashu-Pakshi Tatha Per Paudhe', Maru Bharti, Jan. 1957, part 4.

39. Rajputana Gazetteer Vol. I, p.55.

region had thus little option but to rely on rains for its limited cultivation. Since however pastoralism was an important component of the economy water was more required for the growth of fodder. Camels and goats, as one knows, can subsist largely on thorny bushes (available here in abundance) even in years of drought.⁴⁰ For cattle however, some water requirement was a must. Thus, what one sees here is that in years of drought on the first sign of scarcity before the grass withered and the scanty resources of water dried up, the inhabitants to save their production basis, left the famine affected areas with their flocks and herds. Since pretexts other than famine (disease, epidemic, wars and political disturbance) were also the occasions for migration this was an ongoing process in the region.

Our Bikaner and Marwar Bahis bring out this phenomenon adequately. In Bairathwas village of Bikaner in 1774 A.D., it was reported that the area had become sick and was thus

 40. This is brought out aptly in a popular saying,

काल कुसमे ना मरे, बामण बकरी उरुट

वो मागे, वो फिर चरे, वो सूका चाबे ठुठ ।

i.e. During famine, a Brahmin goat and camel never die in the desert, the first takes recourse to begging, goats eat the grass, and camels survive on dry bushes.

Govind Agarwal 'Rajasthan Lok Sahitya Mein, Ont' Maru Bharti, Oct. 1965, Part 3, Also, Manohar Sharma, 'Rajasthan Kahavaton Mein Ont', Shodh Patrika, Year 20, Part 3.

deserted.⁴¹ Similarly in village Kalasar in 1771 A.D., it was reported that the region was weak and so people migrated.⁴² While village Surjansar, also in the same year was deserted due to famine.⁴³ In Marwar, it was reported that many villages in 1786 A.D. had become dry, the beris (source of irrigation) had also dried up and so the villages were deserted.⁴⁴ Thus in cases even when severe famine conditions were not prevailing in the villages migration took place.

Where did the migrating peasants and herders go, it is difficult to say. Since the forests were located almost entirely on the eastern frontier of Marwar and Bikaner (the grazing of pargana Bhatner in Bikaner was most famous), some migration would certainly have been within the region itself. However, the number of cattle which could be

41. गांव बैराठवास बीमार हुवो.....

तेसूं सूनो हुवो । दिलासा दे बस्ता कीजो

Kagda Bahi, Kartik Vadi 4, V,S, 1831/1774 A.D. Bikaner Records, RSAB.

42. गांव केलासर निबलो थो, सूना हुवो
दिलासा कर लोका नूं बसावा छे ।

Kagda Bahi, Asoj Sudi 11, V,S, 1831/1774, B.R, RSAB.

43. गांव सुरजनसर केतसाली छे, उज्जर हुवो ।

Kagda Bahi, Chait Sudi 2, V,S, 1831/1774, B,R, RSAB.

44. गांव समस्ता बबडू नीवो, बेरी सूखो तेसूं सूनो.....

Sanad Parwana Bahi, K. Vadi 3, V.S. 1843/1786, Jodhpur Records, RSAB.

admitted here was limited. Thus in most cases the pastoralists migrated to Malwa, Sind, United Provinces and other places where good pasturage was available.

Did this early migration, influenced considerably by the nature of the eco-system, really enable the peasant to cushion off the crisis, i.e. was the effect of famine in the long run lessened by this survival strategy, are questions the conclusive answer of which will have to await a more intensive and detailed study. For the present, one can say that being removed from the epicentre of famine crisis at the initial stages, the peasant cum pastoralist could fare far better than the full fledged agriculturist, tied to the land till the most advanced stage of famine in eastern Rajasthan.

Eastern Rajasthan, comprising the present day districts of Jaipur, Alwar, Sawai Madhopur and Bharatpur forms a different ecological niche, different in temperature, soil pattern, rainfall, irrigation facilities from the dry western zone. The semi aridity of the region makes it also a problem zone with extremes of temperature and uncertain rainfall. Water is again the main limiting factor, making the rain dependent farming a fluctuating one. From the point of view of famine and its frequency, the eastern half is

better protected as unlike western Rajasthan rainfall is heavier and more regular here, different variations of soil are found, from light sand of the west to the richest alluvial loam with extensive tracts of black mould, producing excellent crops of wheat and barley without artificial irrigation. Also water is nearer the surface, numerous wells, rivers and streams exist and a two crop economy is the rule rather than an exception.⁴⁵ Our contention however, is that this very fertility of soil and capacity to grow diverse crops, which made the economy far more reliant on agriculture, resulted also in its more precarious balance with the environment. The same harvest failure which in western Rajasthan could result in the peasant's increased dependence on pastoral activities, spelt a different and in most cases an intense crisis for the raiyat here.

Coming to the details, the region is well irrigated by River 'Banas', which is a perennial river. Numerous other rivers like *Banganga, Mashi, Morel, Gambhiri, Dhol, Bandi, Khari, Mitha, Sabi, Sota, Ruparel* and *Chuharsidh* also exist, although they are all seasonal. The region also receives sufficient rainfall, ranging between 50 and 100 cm. annually (most of it in July August and about 10 to 20 percent of it

45. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Rajputana, 1908, p.42.

during winter), although this is of an erratic nature.⁴⁶ The effect on crops of failure of any of these rains is a scarcity in harvest outrun, often in proportion to the extent and duration of failure of rains.⁴⁷ The position is often intensified by the prevalence of strong dry south west winds, which blow here with great force during the critical months of sowing, causing the crops to ruin. Thus from pargana Aamer (Amber) in 1705 A.D., Purohit Harsaram reported that from *Sawan Vadi 7* to *Sawan Sudi 1*, there were very less rains in the pargana and along with it strong winds blow, because of which no ploughing was done and production of grains fell severely.⁴⁸

Similarly in Qasba Chatsu, it was reported, that some rains had fallen on *Sawan Sudi 11*, due to which Moth etc. was grown. After this however, there were no rains and strong winds hardened the land, causing a great unhappiness and sadness among people.⁴⁹

46. R.L. Singh, 'A Regional Geography, Reprint, Varanasi, 1987, p.528.

47. Rajputana Gazetteer Vol.II, Calcutta, 1879, p.61.

48. Arzdasht, *Sawan Sudi 3*, VS 1762/1705, JRHS, RSAB.

49. Arzdasht, *Bhadva Vadi 7*, VS 1774/1717, Descriptive List of Jaipur Arzdashts (Rajasthani), VS 1762-1775/1705-1718 A.D., RSAB.

Our documents are in fact full of instances of how anxiously the peasants waited for the July - August rains for their *kharif* crops. In 1705 A.D., it was reported to Maharaja Jaisingh II, that since in most *parganas* there were no rains in the crucial period between *Sawan Vadi* 5 to *Sawan Sudi* 6, the *raiyat* was losing all patience.⁵⁰

For the *raiyat*, setting in of the rainy season meant beginning of sowing and other agricultural activities.⁵¹ The state also, during this period tried to provide encouragement to the peasants to increase their yield. In an instance, the *amil* (state representative in *parganas*), reported to Mirza Raja Jaisingh that due to good rains he has asked the *patels* and the *raiyat* to bring maximum area under cultivation.⁵²

50. *Arzdasht, Sawan Sudi, 7, VS 1762/1705, JR; HS; RSAB*

51. Good rains fell on *Sawan Sudi* 3 and 4 in *Qasba Aamer* and so ploughing began. *Arzdasht, Sawan Sudi 4, VS 1749/1692, in Descriptive List...., VS 1744-79/1687-92, RSAB.*

Again, it was reported from *Qasba Aaveri* that rain measuring ten fingers fell on *Sawan Sudi* 11 and so 4-5 days ploughing was done. However, again there were no rains and so peasants were desirous of it for cultivation. *Arzdasht, Bhadva Vadi 8, VS 1774/1717, JR; HS; RSAB.*

52. *Arzdasht, Sawan Vadi 4, VS 1724/1667, JR; HS; RSAB. Also in 16% A.D. Shivdutta Dualla reported to Maharaja Bishansingh, that in villages of Jalalpur and Bhadkol, good rains had fallen on Asad Vadi 4, so he took up the task of providing all encouragement to the *Raiyat*. Arzdasht, Asad Vadi 8, VS 1747/1690, JR; HS; RSAB.*

Thus, if the problem of less rains could create anxiety of a situation of scarcity, good rains led to happiness and expectations of a good yield in the rural society.⁵³ Nor were these popular hopes. In 1690 A.D., it was reported by Surajram to Maharaja Bishansingh that due to good rains in all parganas of Jaipur Raja ploughing had been very nicely done, as a result of which all arrears of last years of both *kharif* and *rabi* were paid in that year.⁵⁴ Likewise, in a report of Damodar it was mentioned that due to good rains bajra had been extremely good; moth mung, til and rice had all been sown but in all the parganas where no rains had fallen seeds had become expensive and oxen of a smaller variety were available.⁵⁵ An Arzdasht was sent to Maharaja

53. In pargana Malpura and Nainveh it was reported, that due to good rains, Raiyat was happy and expecting a good yield. Arzdasht, Sawan Vadi 7, Bhadwa Vadi 2, VS 1742/1685, Descriptive List....., VS 1687-1743/1630-86 A.D., RSAB.

54. Arzdasht, Asad Sudi 2, VS 1747/1690 J.R., H.S. RSAB.

55. Arzdasht, Bhadva Vadi 11, VS 1743/1686, J.R., H.S. RSAB. Instances like these highlighting the effects of rains on cultivation abound in documents. In an instance an Arzdasht from village Saheli of Jaipur was sent to the Raja of Jaipur, informing him about Bajra, Makka, and other crops being sown, wherever it rained; while in absence of it, many parganas were becoming dry and even deserted. Thus assistance to the peasantry was a must. Arzdasht, Asad Sudi 7, VS 1753/1696, J.R., H.S. RSAB.

Ramsingh from Malarna, informing him that due to no rains it had become difficult for the raiyat to acquire seed and manure.⁵⁶

Not only were rains important to the agricultural economy of eastern Rajasthan for the kharif crop but also for tasks of future cultivation. It was noted by Purohit Harnam in 1686 A.D., that on Asad Sudi 1 some rain had fallen in the parganas but only for cultivation and it was only six days later that rains necessary to fill up the ponds fell. The details of water, after the rains in each pond were stated as, Sahda, 7 1/2 gaz, Bhagwat sagar 8 1/2 gaz, Bandh malsagar 3 3/4 gaz and Kundolav 1 3/4 gaz.⁵⁷ Similarly, it was reported from gasba Aamer in 1718 A.D., that only when it had rained continuously for fifteen days in July, thus filling up all the ponds of the gasba, did the Raiyat who had deserted the village earlier, felt hopeful to come back and resume cultivation.⁵⁸

56. Arzdasht, Asad Vadi 14, VS 1743/1686, Descriptive List....., VS 1687-1743/1630-1686, RSAB.

57. Arzdasht, Asad Sudi 9, VS 1747/1690, J.R; H.S; RSAB.

58. Arzdasht, Sawan Sudi 5, VS 1775/1718 A.D., J.R., H.S., RSAB.

The winter crops of wheat, barley, tobacco, indigo were also dependent on rainfall in the appropriate months of November - December.⁵⁹ However, all these rabi crops require either constant irrigation or one of the best natural soils. Eastern Rajasthan has a diverse variety of alluvial soils, varying both in, texture, from clayey loam (*chiknot*), sandy loam (*matiyāt*), to sandy (*bhur*) and in tints, from pale brown, yellowish brown to dark brown.⁶⁰ Thus unlike western Rajasthan, the fertile soils and their variety made best of irrigation possible here.

It is true that loamy soil is less adapted to scantiness of local rainfall than the sandy soil. Since less moisture is required for the germination and growth of plants in sandy soil, a crop of some sort grows here in scanty rainfall also which in heavier soils remain unsown. This can be an advantage enjoyed by desert west over its

59. A popular saying best expresses this timely requirement of rains for the winter crop. According to it,
अगाहन बरसई हून, पुसाई दून,
माघ सवादी, फगुन घर सुन जाई ।
i.e. If it rained in Agāhan (Māngsir), the yield was exceptionally good, in Pos, it was one and quarter time, but if it rained in Falgun, houses had to bear loss. S.L. Srivastva, 'Folk Culture and Oral Tradition : A Comparative Study of Regions in Rajasthan and Eastern U.P.', N. Delhi,, 1974, p.230,

60. R.L. Singh, 'A Regional Geography, p.528.

eastern half. It is important however, to bear in mind that with a fair supply of moisture loamy soils produce crops far superior to those in the sandy soils, which can produce only the low value bajra and moth. Also, owing to the greater evaporation from light soils, frequent falls of rain are required to renew its supply of moisture than in the case of loamy ones. In the latter case, irrigation can bring the most advantageous results. An estimate puts the yield of unirrigated land as only one third of the irrigated area.⁶¹ The effect of irrigation can best be seen in an instance, whereby village Singrampur in pargana Chatsu, which had been deserted for hundred years was rehabilitated quickly and agricultural operations resumed with the help of migratory peasants, as soon as a non masonry (kaccha) well was constructed there in 1733 A.D.⁶²

To a great extent, the advantage of irrigation in the region was due to a fairly high water table, ranging from thirty to forty feet in the core area. Due to this easy access, devices like dhenkli (wooden scoop) and charas (large leather bag pulled by oxen) were used to draw well water. The well water itself had several variations, ranging

61. Famine Enquiries Commission, Rajputana, 1879, p.3.

62. Dilbagh Singh, 'State, Landlords and Peasants Manohar Publications, Delhi 1990, p.51.

from one having the best combination of alkalis and acids, to the *meetha* variety with little salts and from salty water (producing good results in favourable rains) to the oily (*telia*) and over salty soils (*bajar telia*).

How much of these sources were tapped to have a good irrigation network in different *parganas* is difficult to say. For, apart from local variations in soil fertility and water surface, other significant aspects like the resources of the area, the local initiative to develop these, and the overall state interest made a crucial difference. For example, till the time the Kacchwaha ruler of Amber (later Sawai Jaipur), was mainly an imperial *jagirdar* (broadly speaking till the end of seventeenth) century his short term interest in the *jagir* did not lead him to pursue any long term developmental policies. However, towards the beginning of the eighteenth century, after a continuous policy of expansion of his 'watan', one sees a marked change, in terms of relief provided to the peasantry, the development of irrigation facilities and so on.

What is of significance for us is that irrigation in our region not only made possible a greater yield from the same plot of land, it also led to an extension of the cultivated area. Whereas in western Rajasthan, only a very

limited region (in Bikaner, this being only one third of the total area) was under plough, here it varied between 30 to 80 percent of the total measured land in different parganas. In 1666, it was estimated as 60 percent in pargana Chatsu, 79 percent in pargana Malarna, and 53 percent in pargana Nanwai.⁶³

This facility thus resulted in the region having a multiple crop economy. As many as thirty-seven crops of *kharif* were grown in most areas, including not only bajra, jawar, moth, urad, mung but cotton, sugarcane, opium, tobacco, til and as many as 18 crops of *rabi* were sown, including barley, wheat, gram, oil seeds, opium etc.⁶⁴ By this approximation the total number of crops including both food and cash, cultivated within the year ranged from forty-five ^{to fifty-five}. However, the area devoted to each crop varied on pargana basis from cultivator to cultivator, keeping in mind his resource base i.e. area under plough, number of agricultural implements, nature of animal wealth and so on.

Particularly, in an agricultural economy it was the capital inputs in form of animal power which greatly altered

63. Dibagh Singh, 'State Landlords....', p.54.

64. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Rajputana, 1908, p.61.

the arability of land, as it was the drought power which was used to yoke the plough. The lack of bullocks is understood as one of the significant factors behind short term and long term migrations of the raiyat and a constant constraint on the expansion of cultivation. Even in a normal year, peasants who did not have a requisite number of ploughs and bullocks to carry on cultivation on their own, constituted on an average 20 to 30 percent of the total cultivators. Thus, in a famine year the further loss of draft power of the peasantry due to livestock mortality, loss of fodder, reduced yields, and non conception must have aggravated the overall intensity and impact of crisis. Our documents constantly mention the peasants inability to cultivate in famine years due to the loss of their cattle and other assets.

The whole picture of the eco system and economy of East Rajasthan drawn by us may appear to be contradictory at a level. For, although we have argued for a developed economy based on fertile soils, irrigation facilities and multiple crops, we have emphasized on its rather more (in comparative terms with the west) sensitive relationship with the environment, resulting often in greater stress for the vulnerable sections.

The situation however is not contradictory in real terms. The very factor of environmental conditions favouring the growth of a developed agricultural economy here, made it much more vulnerable to climatic fluctuations and extremes. In context of a semi arid environment, where such uncertainties were a regular feature, agriculture, despite its significance and premium became a gamble, so that a single harvest failure could result in a famine. A chronological sequence of famines in the territories of Amber, in the period 1650-1770 shows numerous years of severe famines.⁶⁵ The number greatly increased in all the *parganas* under Jaipur Raja in the latter half of the eighteenth century, mainly due to the Maratha incursions here.⁶⁶

65. On the basis of study of *Chithis*, D. Singh and S.P. Gupta have mentioned the years 1660, 1663, 1665, 1687, 1692, 1694, 1695, 1707, 1712, 1713, 1717, 1718, 1731, 1737, all as years of famine or high prices. Dilbagh Singh and S.P. Gupta, *Famines in the Territories of Amber, (1660-1770)*, Rajasthan History Congress, 1975, pp. 52-56.

66. *Ibid*; In the latter half of the 18th century, 1755, 1757, 1758, 1760, 1761, 1762, 1763, 1765, 1770 A.D. are all mentioned as years of famine. The famine of 1760 particularly, affected all the *parganas* of Jaipur, Khorī, Gazi Ka Thana, Niwai, Narnaul, Chatsu, Tonk, Toda Bhim, Dausa, Pinayan, Pahari, Fagi, Bahatri, Malpura, Malarna, Mauzabad, Ramgarh, Lalsot, Sherpur etc.

The impact of these famines on the raiyat would have been greater here due to his more exploitative relationship with the dominant groups. Since pursuance of agriculture demanded possession of some capital inputs, the raiyat's dependence on agencies like money lender would have been greater even in normal years. Years of famines would thus have increased this indebtedness and impoverishment.

Not just famine impact but even famine response broadly differed in different regions. As argued earlier, unlike the western peasant pastoralist who could migrate easily with his herds at the initial stages of famine, the peasant agriculturist here, in times of scarcities and famines had mostly to try out other survival strategies. Decision to leave his plot of land when it came often was not an easy one. However, we will have to here distinguish land owing cultivators from migrant cultivators with often no assets of their own. The nuances of these various responses of different peasant groups will be seen in the later chapter.

Here then we have worked out a very broad generalisation. Certainly, the argument does not mean just this to be the case in both the areas within our region. There would have been delayed migrations even in the west and cases of the pastoralist with no fodder left facing

acute crisis. Conversely, in eastern Rajasthan we have peasants even with their own plots of land migrating at the very apprehension of a scarcity, in most cases with their cattle⁶⁷; thus escaping from the famine zone and also from the clutches of the village bohra. Without eliminating these individual decisions, at a broader level we can argue for a strong relationship between the nature of climate and changed and different famine impact and response in the two ecological zones of our region. From here the research has to move forward, so as to understand the interaction between environment and man, i.e. between geography and history.

II

This section, does not claim to raise any new arguments and conclusions on our problem of study. It is a very simple, to some extent a supplementary effort to highlight the significance of studying the local literary local sources for understanding the various 'popular' dimensions

67. In 1696 A.D. Girdhar Das Manrup, (the pargana official) informed Maharaja Bishansingh, that 1694 was a famine year, when a large number of peasants died and most of them migrated. Since, the current year was also suffering due to an acute scarcity of rains, the rayah has taken it for granted, that this year is also a famine year and thus, have started deserting the village and leaving the fields uncultivated. D.Singh and S.P. Gupta, 'Famine in

of the study of a socio-economic problem like famine. Official records and village documents, which are highly informative on all aspects of nature of administration, crop yields, revenue proceeds etc., are almost silent on aspects as peasant's perceptions, beliefs and so on.

Since, as argued, famine in medieval period was a recurring phenomenon, a problem greatly of climatic fluctuations, the apprehensions that this caused in the peasant mind, manner in which it was registered in peasant consciousness, the form in which it led him to to orient his routined activities are all questions which have to be looked into to understand the cultural context of famine. Going further, it involves a study of the peasant's dietary patterns, his mode of living, his world of recreation, fairs, festivals, even his language, as reflecting and being influenced by these periods of stress and crisis.

A study of folk literature, folk tales, myths, popular sayings is a significant step in this direction. Since, these sources are in most cases silent on the question of time, the methodological problem of using them as sources of history certainly arises. Also, most often they are more imaginary than real. Despite these problems, the oral sources cannot be dismissed off as mere fiction, **F**or, often

the basis of these modes of expression were the societal problems, local setting and values. Dr. Dev Kothari has emphasized the use of 'Oral History' of this kind, particularly in context of Rajasthan where a significant number of Bat Sahitya, Lok Geet, Khyats etc. exist⁶⁸. A tabulation of some important Rajasthani folk tales by Dr. Krishna Bihari Sahel, shows their lack of historicity in the most cases. Even where some historicity does exist, as in the tales of Pabuji, Gogaji, it has been lost, as argued, due to the manner of their singing by Bhopas and Bhats.⁶⁹ However, despite this a study of each tale shows the construction to be valid within the region only; since in most cases, these tales are weaved around the cherished values of brave men fighting for a just cause, keeping their word to the last and often sacrificing their lives to achieve this aim.

In our region, where climate often posed problems, the construct of a popular hero (venerated because he relieved

68. Dev Kothari, *Maukhik Itihās Kā Mahatva*, Shodh Patrika, April-June 1990, Part 2.

69. He has taken 15 popular tales for analysis, of which only Bagdavat and Gaila Lang are considered historical; 5, in Pabuji, Gogaji, Tejaji Dungji Jwarji and Dhola Maru are seen as both historical and imaginary; while 8 others i.e. of Jalal Bubna, Nagji-Nagwanti, Saurthi, Saini Beejanand, Mata Gujri, Nihalde Sultan, Gopichand Bharthari, are seen as works of pure imagination, K.B. Sahel, *Rajasthani Lok Gāthāon Kē Sandarbe Mein Nihalde Sultān - Ek Mulyānkan*.

the woes of all the vulnerable) is quite understandable. Pabuji, Gogaji, Tejaji, Mandla ji were all such popular heroes providing justice and protection to the weak. Since it was the animal wealth, chiefly cattle, on which maximum premium was placed here (particularly in the western half of Rajasthan), all these heroes really emerged as cattle protectors. Pabuji, the Rathor chief of thirteenth century is venerated in popular memory as the protector of cows, particularly in the desert areas of Jaisalmer and Shekhawati.⁷⁰ Likewise in the region of Jalor, Mandla Kanji emerges as the representative defender of cows and buffaloes.⁷¹ In Marwar and other areas of Rajasthan (even Haryana and Gujarat), the cult of Gogaji Chauhan, popularly

70. The legend goes that he obtained his mare from a woman (Devi Charni), on the promise that he would protect her cows when attacked. He thus, left his nuptial fire to save them in a battle that ensued and attained martyrdom. L.K. Chundawat, Bagrāvat Lōkgāthā : Itēhās Kē Jharōkhe (Hindi) in J. Handoo ed., Forklore of Rājāsthān, Mysore, 1983, pp. 78-79. Also, Jagmal Singh, Rajasthani Aiv Gujrati Lokgeeton ka Tulnātmak Adhyayan', Garhmukteshwar, 1986, pp. 166-173.

71. The story goes that an appeal was made to him to defend the cows of village Khandep from the attack of Meenas while he was getting ready for his marriage. He thus, sacrificed his life in the process. Sagat Singh, Rājāsthān Ra Jālor Jīla Ro, Aik Lokpriya Geet - Mandlā Kānji, Rajasthan Bharti, Part 10, Vol. 4, pp. 95-101.

known as 'Jāhir Pir' (who is said to have died while defending his cows and land) is popular. We are told that on the first day of ploughing, a 'Rakhi' of his name called the 'Goga Rakhi', is tied on both the plough and the cultivator, in the popular belief that he is the protector of both the peasant and his plough (Hālī Bāldā Gogo Rakh - Wālo)⁷² Tejaji of Nagore region (Marwar) is also worshipped as a defender of men and cattle from snakes and a big fair consisting of Jats, Malis Rebaris, Banjaras, Gujars and Ahir communities (basically all pastoral in nature) is held in his honour in Parbatsar every year in August-September.⁷³

A somewhat different value is expressed in the popularisation of the song of Dungji Jwar Ji who, greatly disturbed by the unequal stratified society, becomes a bandit with the avowed purpose of appropriating wealth from the rich and distributing it amongst the poor.⁷⁴ One can

72. In Marwar, in every village under the khejra tree, a sacred slab called 'Goga Ka Than', with the figure of a serpent is placed. As a popular saying puts it,
गांव गांव गोमोजी ने गांव गांव सेजड़ी ।

Manohar Sharma, 'Rajasthani Lokgeeton Mein Gogaji Chauhan, Maru Bharti, Part 4. pp. 14-22.

73. U.B. Mathur, 'Folkways of Rajasthan', Jaipur. 1986, pp. 88-89.

74. A.C. Sharma, 'Dungji Jwarji Ro Geet', Maru Bharti, Feb. 1958, Part 1, pp. 62-70.

thus see these songs and tales as reflecting popular notions of social justice and legitimacy.

Probably their origin would have taken place in a period of weak state apparatus, for, the relevance of local heroes real or imaginary, looses considerably in times when a strong state takes upon itself the task of providing protection. Our evidence suggests some of these tales of Bagdavat, Pabuji, to have been created during thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when centralized states had not yet emerged. However, the popular acceptance of these and the process of social transmission was to a great extent a result of their being set in the local physical milieu.

The regional elements are also significant in the folk tale of Dholā-Māru (of about fifteenth century), which is purely a love episode of Māru, the princess of Pugal (Bikaner) and Dhōlā, the prince of Malwa. The second wife of the prince, Malwāni, who is also from Malwa, brings out in a few beautiful couplets her disdain of the desert land of Maru, where no food or water is available and inhabitants have to undergo the hardships of frequent scarcities and

famines⁷⁵. A few of these couplets also highlight the

75. Some of these Dohas of Malwāni are as follows:

- (a) बालउं बाबा, देसइउ पाणी जिहों कुवाहं
आधीरात कुहक्कड़ा, ज्यउं माणासां मुवाहं ।

I would burn such a land, where to draw water from the deep wells, people start calling from mid-night as if somebody is dead.

- (b) बाबा न देस मारुवां वा कूंआरि रहेसि,
हाये कचोलउ सिरि , घडउ, सीचंति या मरोसि ।

I would never go to Maru country, even though I remain unmarried, for to get water there, I would have to keep a pot on my head and a vessel in my hand, and the laborious task of drawing water will surely make me die.

- (c) मारु थोकई देसइइ फक न भाजइ रिड्ड,
उचालउ के अकसरणउ, कई फकउ, कई तिड्ड ।

O Maru, your area is never free of troubles. Sometimes, due to famine one has to move out; at other times has to fast because of the failure of rains, and on still other occasions, the locusts destroy the crop.

- (d) जिण भुइ फनग पोयणा, कयर कटौला रूस ,
आके, फेगे, छांहडो, छूर्छां भाजई भूस ।

Maru, your area is such, where only snakes, 'Kair' and 'Karala' glass is found, where one finds shade only under the bushes of 'Aak' and 'Phog', and where one has to satisfy one's hunger by eating only 'Chhunch' (seed of the bharut grass, found in the deserts).

M.S. Gehlot, 'Dhola Maru Ra Duha' Jodhpur, 1985, pp. 176-78. Also, M.S. Mathur, 'Dhola Maru Ra Duha Mein Lok Tatva', Shodh Patrika, Vol II, pp. 33-39.

traumas of a young bride in the harsh environment of the region. In our first section we have mentioned how many local sayings bring out the problems of limited food (of only moth and bajra), of scarce water resources, of constant threat of famines in the desert region. The study of these anxieties which existed in popular mind and which to some extent were conveyed through these sayings is thus a significant aspect of the study of our problem.

If the environmental constraints were so clearly observed and commented on, the question that arises is, did the popular mind establish a linkage between these and the phenomenon of famine? ie did he perceive any relationship between famine and climate.

Study of local proverbs, popular sayings, greatly enriches us on problems as these. To Archer Taylor, the observations made in these proverbs were readily apparent and had very little value in the meteorologist's eyes.⁷⁶ However, David Arnold's analysis of these sayings for the Madras famine of 1876-78 shows how these vernacular prognostics and proverbs give abundant expression to the peasants anxieties about the season and crop prospects,

76. A. Taylor, 'The Proverb and an Index to the Proverb'. Pennsylvania Folklore Associates, 1962, p. 113.

helping them further to shape their responses.⁷⁷ For Rajasthan, we have numerous sayings where colour of the sky, direction of the wind, nature of lightening, activities of insects, birds and animals are variously interpreted as indicators of impending famine. For example, it is said, that if on Asad Vadi 5, there were no clouds or lightening, it was time for the peasants to sell their oxen and carts and not to cultivate at all, since it was to be a famine year.⁷⁸ The nature of winds in the crucial months of June, July, August was also the concern of the peasant mind. Thus it is said, that 'if in the months of Sawan Suryo blows (the north western wind bringing rains from Punjab to Rajasthan); in Bhadon Pirva (the eastern wind bringing rain from Bay of Bengal); in Asoja the Pachhava (the western wind) the peasant brings home carts full of grain.⁷⁹ Conversely, it is said that 'if Pachhavi (the eastern wind, called Naladakan, in local parlance) blows in the month of Sawan, the peasant will have to sell his oxen and there would be no cultivation.⁸⁰

77. David Arnold, 'Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action', Madras 1876-81 in R. Guha ed., Subalten Studies III, Delhi, 1984, pp.62-115.

78. धुर असाढ़ की पंचमी, बादल होय न बीज,
बैचो गाड़ी बलदिया, निफजे कोई न चीज।

P. Solanki, 'Rajasthan Kisan Ka Varshavigyan', Shodh Patrika, Sep-Dec. 1956, pp. 110-132.

79. सावण में तो सूरयो चले, भादूड़े पिरवाई,
आसोजा पिछवा चले, भर-भर गाड़ा ल्याई।

Bhagwandas Sharma, 'Rajasthan Mein Bahne Wali Hawain', Maru Bharti, Jan. 1964, Part 4, pp.80-83.

80. नालाडाकण बलद बिकावण,
मत चले तू आवे सावण।

Ibid., p. 81.

Many sayings establish a co-relation between the growth of plants and the subsequent crisis. It is said for instance, that 'if the fruits of the Neem tree dry on the tree itself and do not fall down, not a single grain grows and it is a famine year'⁸¹ In western Rajasthan, it is common to see the abundant growth of kair fruit as indicating an impending famine, while growth of ber fruit signifies a good year⁸². Interestingly, the activities of birds and other animals like jackal (in his case, the nature of the howl and the direction from which it comes) are also intently observed by the rain dependent peasant. It is thus believed that when the sparrow takes bath in dust, the rain comes and when in water, the rain goes.⁸³

All these sayings which to us may appear as superstitious beliefs, represented the web of meanings and values which the peasant attached to different phenomenon of nature. Their constant refrence in the literature indicates not merely their popularity but the significance that was attached to them in popular mind, in terms of their own

81. निम्बोली सुखे नीम पर पड़े न नीचे आय,
अन्न निम्बे नहिं एक कण, काल पड़ेलौ आय।

G.D. Sharma, 'Prakriti Se Varsha Gyan Ki Bangi',
Rajasthan Bharti, June 1959, Part 3-4, p. 59.

82. काले केरड़ा नै सुगाले बोर।
Ibid., p.61.

83. चिड़डी नहाय धूल में तो पाणी आवाय,
जल में नहावे चिड़कली तो पाणी जावाय।
S.L. Srivastva, Folk Culture.....p. 238.

perceptions of weather and climate and their responses to it. They thus formed a part of his local culture. And famine which in its holistic perspective needs to integrate all the socio-cultural parameters can only ill afford to dismiss or negate the significance of these.

It may be however, added that we have only introduced the significance of these oral sources for our study. A range of deeper questions needs to be posed to them if the meaning and implication of crisis like famine, for the weak and vulnerable, is to be understood.

**FAMINE : LAND CONTROL, AUTHORITY
SYSTEMS AND POWER STRUCTURE
IN THE RURAL SOCIETY**

CHAPTER II

FAMINE : SOCIAL STRUCTURE, LAND CONTROL AND AUTHORITY SYSTEMS

A study of famine brings us immediately to the question of authority systems, to power control mechanisms and resource base of the various segments of rural society. For, famine is as much a social problem as a phenomenon related to climate and weather, as much a problem of social distribution of available food, as a mere drought induced scarcity. This understanding is crucial to realise that though set in motion by some physical phenomenon as flood or drought, the crisis could be perpetuated and extended spatially and temporarily by the dominant groups, who used their capital and power positions to exploit the vulnerable sections; at times creating artificial scarcities, at others aggravating the existing ones. Also, the stratifications that existed in the rural society changed the meaning and implication of famine for each social group. While for the privileged strata it often signified an opportunity for an expansion of their economic base, for the smaller peasants, often without sufficient resources even in normal years, it signified indebtedness and impoverishment. Thus, the same 'crisis' set the process of entrenchment of power position

of various superior sections and ruination of the already vulnerable ones; increasing thereby the earlier hierarchies and gaps. This understanding of selective and discriminatory impact of famine is adequately brought out in the modern literature. In his analysis of the problem in peasant societies David Arnold, saw famine only 'as an intensifier, its irony being', as he said, 'that it establishes even more emphatically the peasant's subordination to the moneylender, trader and landlord'¹, Amartya Sen's 'Crisis of entitlements'² and M. Alamgir's typology of a 'Class famine'³ are two different expressions conveying the same meaning. The evidence in our *Chithis*, 'Arzdashts' and other documents also reveal an inverse

1. David Arnold, Famine : Social Crisis.....

2. Entitlements, are defined as an 'individual's ability to command food. What is significant about entitlements as Sen sees it is, that they vary according to an individual's position, within a wider system of production, exchange, control and distribution. Thus the burden of hunger and deprivation is never evenly placed. Amartya Sen, 'Poverty and Famines..... pp.1-8.

3. He defines 'class famine' as one where only specific groups/classes of people are affected without any reference to the geographic area of concentration. The burden of food grain intake deficiency per capita and excess mortality, falls primarily on the weaker sections of the population with little staying power. M. Alamgir, Famine in South Asia....., p. 14.

relationship existing between the extent to which the different classes suffered and their position in the socio-economic set up.

Here thus, briefly we have discussed the social milieu of rural society of medieval Rajasthan. The focus is on the unequal social structure, which cushioned the power groups even in adverse years, while exposing the weak. The strains in the social fabric, which thus existed even in normal years, but got aggravated in times of famine have also been analysed. Since no particular famine has been studied, we have limited ourselves to making certain broad observations. It must however be added that much of what is being discussed here has already been analysed in various works on agrarian history of medieval India, and on our region of Rajasthan. What follows thus, is more of a reassessment of these various aspects for a study of our problem.

The power groups in the rural society owed their status partly to the early conquests made by them in the area under control and partly to their position in the administrative apparatus. In Rajasthan, the superior rural class of *bhomyas*, standing over and above the peasantry and resembling the Mughal *Zamindars* in all essential

particulars, included amongst them both these categories.⁴ Our evidence suggests their 'bhomichara' right to be either a result of their being the descendants of the early conquerors (in this case they held villages on basis of their caste and class affiliations with the ruling houses of the Kachhwahas in Amber, (later Sawai Jaipur) Rathor Rajputs in Marwar) and Bikaner or a creation in recognition of some meritorious services, rendered by the grantee to the state.⁵ However, as was the case in the Mughal empire, the areas under *bhomia* domination here (known as Thakurai or Basi villages in Marwar⁶) were interspersed with the 'peasant held' or 'raiyati villages'. However, throughout our period of study, the *bhomias* tried to annex the *raiyati* villages into their *bhom*. For example in 1693 Roop Singh Kilanot, considerably expanded his ancestral *bhom* in village Bhanpur of Toda Bhim by annexing some of the *raiyati* villages of Tappa Rini of Bahatri that were contiguous to his *bhom*.⁷

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4. Irfan Habib, 'The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707', Bombay, 1963, p.41.
 5. In Marwar, the two types of villages have been designated as 'Bhomichara Ri Gaon' and 'Bhomi'. G.D. Sharma, 'Nature of Bhom Rights 17th Century in Marwar, IHC, 35th session, p. 194 during.
 6. Muhnot Nainsi, Vigat, Vol. I, pp. 410-12, 501-5.
 7. R.P. Rana, 'A Dominant Class In Upheavel: The Zamindars Of A North Indian Region in the late 17th and early 18th century IESHR, 24, 4, (1987), p. 398.

This ongoing process is significant for us to understand because in the villages under their control the *bhomias* as a hereditary superior class, enjoyed a lot of power and pre-requisites.

On their personal lands, they were assessed at considerably lower rates of revenue in comparison to the lands of the ordinary cultivators. The evidence suggests that their rate of land revenue was even lesser than other members of the rural aristocracy (i.e. the *patel*, *patwari*, *Chaudhari*, *Qanungo*).⁸ They were also exempted from the payment of *malba* and many other cesses on the lands cultivated by them. This factor alone made their relationship with the peasantry, highly unequal and strained. Particularly as we will see, when in the famine years it became increasingly difficult for the peasants to bear the heavy burden of taxation, complaints were lodged for a more equitable tax distribution. The *bhomias* also enjoyed a share in the surplus produce of the peasants. Though the percentage of the *bhom* cess varied in different

8. In pargana Antela of Eastern Rajasthan, the rate of revenue paid by the *bhomia* was 20 per cent of the total produce while other privileged sections paid at the rate of 33 per cent. D.Singh; State Landlords.....', p.44.

parganas in eastern Rajasthan the less ranged between 2 and 3 percent of the actual produce in many parganas.⁹ There were also a number of other levies, often exorbitant, which were imposed by them on the peasants on occasions of births, marriages and other festivities.¹⁰ Though these were not uniform and differed from region to region and pargana to pargana, cumulatively they added to the peasant's economic burden. Moreover, the *bhomias* also had a customary right to lay claim to various kinds of free service from both the peasant and the non-peasant castes. Though it was mainly the menial castes—the *Kamils* who were exploited on this pretext, some of the peasant raiyats were also required to render 'Begar-kotri-ki' on special occasions such as harvesting

9. R. P. Rana, 'A Dominant Class In Upheavel.....', p.396.

10. In Eastern Rajasthan, these included prerequisites such as *kansa* (four tanka), *Vaqdum* (one rupee), *dhol* (tax on drum beating), *Kotri-bhomi-ki* (tax from traders). In Bikaner, the *Chaudhuris* collected, marriage cess like *Nauta*, *Dhol Guwad* from the peasants. In Marwar, these levies, called *lag bab*, had wide range. We are told that the *bhumia* of *Santhana* realized one rupee per *bera* (a shallow well) and 5 seers per mound (ie twelve and a half of the total produce) as '*ghughari*, a *lag bab* imposed by the *bhomia* for his own profit. See B.L. Bhadani, 'The Allodial Proprietors,' — The *Bhomias* of Marwar, *IHR*, July 1979-Jan. 1980, Vol VI, No. 1-2, pp. 141-53.

season, at the time of marriage in *bhomia's* house, or at time of arrival of some guest.¹¹

Even in times of famine, such demands, it seems were continuously placed. A letter of Girdhar Das Manrup informed Maharaja Bishan Singh, that there was a famine (*kahat*) in 1694 in *pargana Niwai*, due to which peasants had migrated. Every attempt was being made to bring the *raiyyat* back to cultivation, but the *bhomias* continued to oppress them in the villages.¹² In the eighteenth century, when the number of famines greatly increased, atleast in Eastern Rajasthan, the exploitation of the peasantry at the hands of the *bhomias* (who in context of the weak imperial control were becoming powerful) also increased. The evidence suggests, that in contravention of the customary norms they compelled the *raiyyat* to render '*begar*' for purposes not sanctioned, carried on different kinds of harassments like seizing of peasant ploughs and bullocks and demanding additional perquisites from him.¹³ Thus, coupled with problems of

11. Harbans Mukhia. 'Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans and Menials in 18th Century Rajasthan, IESHR, Vol XIV, No.2.
12. The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan, S. P. Gupta, (1650-1750), Delhi, 1986, p. 139.
13. Dilbagh Singh, State, Landlords..... p.46-47.

scarcity and famine, it was harassment and oppression like this which caused the frequent peasant migrations and made the famine impact for him so severe.

The constant reference to 'peasant' by no means signifies a homogeneous class of cultivators. It has already been some time since Irfan Habib established the case of a socially and economically stratified peasantry in medieval India. 'On one hand', as he said, 'were the big peasants or headmen (*muqadams*) who organised '*khudkashta*' (cultivation under their own management) on the other, the indigent small peasants (the *reza-riaya*), many of whom according to a '*farman*' of Aurangzeb, were wholly in debt for their subsistence as well as for seed and cattle.¹⁴

The evidence from Rajasthan substantiates this general understanding of medieval Indian rural society. For Eastern Rajasthan, our literature¹⁵ shows the cultivating class the '*halzotas*' to be divided into various sections on basis of their occupation, their caste status and their relationship with the village.

14. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Irfan Habib ed., Cambridge Economic History of India, Orient Longman, Cambridge University Press, 1989, Vol.I. p.221.

15. Dilbagh Singh, 'Caste and Structure of Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century,' IHR, Vol 2, 1975. Also, S.P.Gupta, The Agrarian System'

The *riyayatis* who constituted the privileged members of the village society, either belonged to the upper castes of Brahmins, Rajputs and Mahajans (of the Vaish caste) or they were the customary holders of superior rights, the *patels*, *ganungos*, *zamindars* and *chaudharies*, incorporated into the revenue collecting machinery. What was essentially a characteristic of these groups was their use of personal ploughs (*ghar ka hal*) and bullocks for tilling their land. They often had sufficient capital inputs to hire out to the needy cultivators particularly, in times of crisis.

The middle and lower caste peasant groups, mainly the Jats, Malis, Ahirs, Gujars, Meenas etc. formed the unprivileged section of the cultivating class, called the *raiayatis*. Even in normal years, they were dependent on their superiors for agricultural loans and so years of famine were years of 'real crisis' for them. Despite a favourable land man ratio in medieval India, many of these *raiayatis/paltis* had no land of their own. (It was, one may say, a most visible manifestation of the operation of caste system, for it was the avowed policy of the rich *riyayatis* who had surplus land and capital, to use their socio-economic power in the rural society to keep the *raiayatis* poor and dependent, so that their labour could be profitably utilised

by them. In years of famine and scarcity this tendency often gained alarming proportions, for the land mortgaged by the *raiya*s in these years was often outrightly acquired by the dominant groups, thus perpetuating their indebtedness and landlessness.¹⁶ In the year 1763 in Qasba Chatsu, a *riyayati* (*mahajan*) purchased 50 percent of the cultivated fields, (175 out of 350) belonging to the *raiya*s at the time of scarcity and famine, thus reducing the independent land owning peasants to the position of share croppers (*sanjhadars*), agricultural labourers, (*majurs*) and tenants.¹⁷ The growing unequal relationship that this phenomenon perpetuated and the new agrarian relationships that developed, is a matter which has to be pursued in more detail.

Official agrarian policy also increased this socio-economic stratification within the village, by making the the rich richer and the poor poorer through a system of discriminatory taxation. We have already seen how the *bhomyas* were assessed at concessional rates. Even amongst the cultivators, the superior sections including mainly the -----

16. D. Singh, 'Rural Indebtedness in Eastern Rajasthan During the 18th century, PRHC, Vol. 7, 1974.
17. D. Singh, 'Tenants, Sharecroppers and Agricultural Labourers in 18th Century Eastern Rajasthan, Studies in History, Vol. I, No. 1, (1979), p.41.

high caste peasants obtained concession in the revenue rates (here again caste reinforced stratification). Thus, two separate 'Dasturs' (schedules of land revenue rates) *riyayati* and *raiyati* were applied to the cultivators, while computing the state land revenue demand. For the ordinary cultivators the incidence was generally one half of the produce, in respect of all crops except wheat and bajra, where it was three fifths. For favoured revenue payers however, such as the Brahmins, Mahajans, Patels, the land revenue demand ranged from one fourth to four fifths.¹⁸ For taxes other than land revenue (*maḷ*) also this variation existed. For example, for cattle tax (*gāusumarī*), which was a part of miscellaneous cesses (*sāir-o-jihāt*) rupee one per animal was collected from the cultivator, while the Rajputs, Mahajans, Brahmins and Charanas were exempted.¹⁹ In this manner, apart from paying half of the produce as land revenue for most of the crops, the ordinary cultivators had to pay roughly a tenth of the produce directly or indirectly by way of various taxes and kind.

18. S.P. Gupta, The Agrarian System..... p.123.

19. S.P. Gupta, 'New Evidence on Agrarian and Rural Taxation in Eastern Rajasthan in the 17th-18th Century, IHC, 36th session, 1975, p. 236.

Nor was this specific to Eastern Rajasthan. The evidence from both Marwar and Bikaner suggests low payment of land revenue by classes most capable to take up the burden and tax being heaviest on the hard pressed lower peasantry. A study of Muhnot Nainsi's *Vigat* reveals, that broadly speaking state share of *bhog* (synonymous to *mal*) varied from 25 percent to 50 percent of the produce.²⁰ The ordinary cultivators under crop sharing (*batai*), paid 50 percent of gross produce of cereal crops from *kharif*, while for the *rabi*, the rate paid was 40 percent on land where water was stored during rainy season and 33 percent on irrigated land of cereal crops.²¹ Superior castes had however a concessional '*dastur*'. The details of this are brought out in the figures for Pargana Pokaran. Due to the less yield output here, the cultivator paid *bhog* at the low rate of 22.5 to 25 percent of the produce, while *Banias* and *Mahajans* paid at the rate of 20 to 25 percent. For the *Rajputs* however, a separate *dastur* was made according to which, they paid a token sum of 3 Rs. and 3.50 on each hal

20. Muhnot Nainsi, *Vigat*, II, pp. 89-96.

21. G. D. Sharma, 'State Land Revenue Demand in Marwar During the 17th Century, PRHC, Pali session, 1974, Vol 7, pp. 69-73.

(a hal comprising fifty *bighas* of land.²² Even for the expenses incurred in the collection of *bhog* the '*Kharch bhog*', the ordinary cultivators paid 18.75 percent of *bhog*, *Mahajans* and *Banias* 15.62 percent and since no mention is made of the amount paid by the Rajputs, it has been taken to understand their exemption from the *jihat* tax.²³

In terms of social differentiation based on caste and differential rate of tax payments, the case of 17th and 18th century Bikaner was no different. As elsewhere, here the village society was dominated by the *Chaudharis*, who were the most privileged group in the rural society, enjoying special rights on '*Parat*' and '*Ajoti*' (grazing) lands. Like the *riyayatis*, they were not only assessed at concessional rates, exempted from cesses as *malba*, but even had the special right to collect *malba* from the other cultivators.²⁴ Other concessionaries included the Brahmins, Rajputs, *Sahukars*, *Patwaris*, *Qanungos* and even a section of *Asamis*. Referred to as *Pasayati* in the documents, the latter were often the '*khudkashta*' peasantry cultivating their own land while hiring out the surplus for *Mukata* (*ijara* of Mughal

22. G.D. Sharma, 'Politics and Administration in the State of Marwar (1638-1749)', Ph.D Thesis, JNU, 1974.

23. G. D. Sharma, 'State Land Revenue Demand....', p. 70.

24. *Kagda Bahi*, No.3, VS 1827/1770 A.D. Bikaner Records, RSAB.

system) and *malba* to other cultivators.²⁵ These were to be distinguished from the lower caste peasants the *Jats*, *Malis*, *Bishnois* who though had little capital resources of land and implements, had to bear the burden of all the taxes of *Bhog (mal)* *Rokad rakam* (additional charges) ,including mainly taxes on house (*dhuwan*) residence, (*deshprath*), festivals (*Mela Padkhati*) and a large number of fodder taxes (*korad, bhuraj ghascharai, sehat*) and other taxes (*Beeja Hasil*, usually 5 percent of Hasil). The *Pasayatis* and other privileged castes and classes were often exempted from most of these taxes, paying a lumpsum amount instead.²⁶

Certainly, in any determination of the tax incidence on various sections the official policy was also guided by their economic position, nature of crops sown by them, kind of land under their cultivation etc, yet as was the case in the Mughal system, the state dependence on the support of the *zamindars* and other dominant rural groups for politico-administrative reasons was so essential that it often had to respect the economic position and caste status of these sections. This structural necessity is crucial to understand

25. G.S.L. Devra, *Rajasthan Ki Prashnik Vyavastha 1574-1818 A.D*, Dharti Prakashan, Bikaner, 1981, pp. 218-19.

26. G.S.L. Devra, *Rajasthan Ki.....*, p. 226.

the nature of state ideology that resulted, ideology which made it difficult for it even in crisis years, to intervene in any major way on behalf of the lower and indigent peasant groups. Thus for the peasant, in the long term, bottlenecks resulting from an unequal social structure were the most important factors determining the impact of famine on him.

It can be argued that in the medieval system there was also an opportunity for the lower peasant groups often without capital inputs, to enjoy the privilege of concessional rates, by bringing uncultivated waste land under cultivation. Thus, in famine years they could move from the affected areas to the virgin lands and be assured of state encouragement and protection. For Eastern Rajasthan, it was mainly the *pahis* who were the outside cultivators (not belonging to the village where they carried on cultivation) and some sections of *raiya*s who constituted the section of colonising peasants.²⁷ However, it is important to bear in mind that even when granted concessions, the rights and economic conditions of these classes depended on such concrete aspects as availability of

27. Satish Chandra, 'Some Aspects of Indian Village Society in Northern India During the 18th Century-The Position and Role of Khudkashta and Pahikashta, IHR, 1974, Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 51-64.

cultivable waste land, of land money ratio in the particular village and the nature of implements they owned. Also unlike the superior sections who enjoyed the concessions permanently, they were only allowed to pay a lower amount for short term, often ranging from three to four years; after which the normal rate was demanded of them.²⁸

The extent of social gap that resulted from this customary and officially induced stratification between different peasant groups is clearly brought out in the size of their respective holdings, the numbers of crops sown by individual peasants and the cattle possessed by them. In an instance from Eastern Rajasthan, 16 of the 36 cultivators were cultivating only 1 crop, 11 cultivators cultivated 2 to 4 crops and thus formed the middle strata of peasantry; while 9 cultivators of the top stratum, which included 2 *patels* cultivated each more than 5 crops including the high value cotton.²⁹ In Mauzabad, the richer peasants owned upto 9 bullocks each, the poor one on two bullocks, the *patels* were the most liberally supplied than any other caste.³⁰

28. Dilbagh Singh, State Landlords....., p. 22.

29. S.P. Gupta, 'Khasra Documents in Rajasthan' in 'Medieval India- A Miscellany, Vol, 4, ed., Irfan Habib, Bombay, 1977, pp. 168-178.

30. S.P. Gupta, Agrarian System..., p. 131-133.

In Marwar, the existing socio-economic disparities are expressively brought out in a popular saying, 'Marwar ke Dhai Ghar', whereby the first house constituted of the Diwans of Bilada (Tehsil in Jodhpur) the second of the Seths of Riyan village in Bilada Tehsil and in the rest half house existed the entire Marwar.³¹

31. Shiv Singh Choyal, 'Marwar Ke Dhai Ghar' Maru Bharti, July 1961, Vol 2. There is an interesting story behind this popular saying. According to it, as per the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb, Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Marwar, had to go to Kabul on Asoj Sudi 2, 1677 A.D. Rajsingh, the Diwan of Bilada, also expressed his desire to accompany the Raja and to pay all expenses of the journey from Jodhpur to Jamrud. On the Raja's agreement, the Seervi Diwan, Rajsingh sent a parwana to all the Seervees of Marwar, to send a cart of grain each. So many carts of wheat were send in this manner to Kabul, that the Diwan was permanently engaged by the Maharaja in his service, and he continued to help the Raja with lakhs of rupees whenever the need arose. Keeping in mind his never ending Wealth and services, Jaswant Singh called the Thikana of Servees as one full 'Ghar' of Marwar. Similarly it is said, that being once in urgent requirement of money, the Raja approached the Seths of Riyan, who were known for their wealth. So much of money of one year was thus arranged by the Seths that, it is believed from Riyan to Jodhpur there were heaps and piles of it. The Maharaja, thus accepted that even the 'Seths' had one full Ghar in Marwar. The population which resided in the rest of Marwar was comparatively speaking, so poor that their house was only in the remaining half house of Marwar.

A verse in Marwari literature also expresses the same story 'Aik Ghar, Riyan Shah Ro, Duje Mein Deewan, Aadhe Mein Murdhar Base, (Shree) Jaswant Mukh Farman'. The historicity of the story to some extent, is indicated by the fact, that in the old Bahiyats of Diwan of Bilada the entire expenditure of Maharaja Jaswant Singh's journey from Jodhpur to Kabul, and till thana of Jamrud is given. Also, as said in Riyan, the Haweli of the Seths still exists.

The growth of the money economy in seventeenth - eighteenth centuries further perpetuated these socio-economic hierarchies. It was the Mughal policy in the period to promote cash nexus by assessing and realising the land revenue mainly in cash. Thus, *zabti* as a method of land revenue assessment was increasingly adopted, at least for cash crops like cotton, sugarcane etc., throughout the imperial territories.³² In Rajasthan however, the agro-climatic factors, conditions and techniques of agricultural production allowed for the dominance of *batai* system (crop sharing) whereby a physical division of the grain was done between the state and the peasant. The risk of harvest fluctuations which was the main problem in the region was thus shared between the state and the peasant in proportion to their respective shares in the output. However from the 17th century, payment in cash emerged as an important mode of revenue appropriation in all the *parganas*. The evidence

32. Satish Chandra, 'Some Aspects of the Growth of Money Economy in India during the 17th Century; IESHR, Vol.3, No. 4, 1966; Ziauddin Barni, sees the cash nexus in medieval India as already established by early 14th century. 'Peasants,' as he said, 'under Alauddin, sold grains to merchants at fixed prices to pay the revenue in cash'. Ziauddin Barni, 'Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi' ed., S.A. Khan, W.N. Lees and Kabiruddin, Calcutta, 1860-62, pp. 304-5, 307.

from *parganas* of Amber, Bahatri, Chatsu, Dausa, Lalsot, Malarna, in Eastern Rajasthan though highlights the dominance of revenue payment in kind under the *batai jinsi* system also shows the growing significance of payment in cash. In Lalsot for example, *Zabti* predominated.³³ Even in Marwar, as our evidence from *parganas* Merta, Jaitaran and Sojat shows, under Jaswant Singh (1638-1678 A.D), though in general *batai* remained in practice for cereal crops, its area was extended and apart from cash crops it was enforced for wheat also in some of the places.³⁴ Official Policy in both east and west Rajasthan further encouraged cash crop cultivation in this period by assessing them at lower revenue rates.³⁵

The involvement of peasants in a market economy is a critical factor in shaping their responses to immediate food shortage and in their structural long term vulnerability

33. S.P. Gupta, The Agrarian System....., pp. 92-99.

34. G. D. Sharma, 'State Land Revenue Demand.....' p. 71.

35. A comparative study of *dastur ul amals* of both food and cash crops in 'Ain-i-Akbari' with the 17th-18th century figures of these, has led S.P. Gupta, to argue for considerable increase in the *dasturs* of food crops, like kodon and mother in 17th-18th centuries with a simultaneous decline in cash crop rates & indigo and cotton. 'New Evidence on Agrarian Taxation.....' pp. 233.34.

famine. And, since peasants' relationship with the market was considerably dependent on the mode of his revenue payment these details become important to a famine study. Under the *batai* system the peasant, who paid his revenue to the state in kind had very little to do with the actual market fluctuations. It has been consistently argued, that even though in this system the demand was fixed in kind, the peasant had nevertheless to get it commuted in cash.³⁶ However, a recent work suggests that it was not the peasant but the state officials themselves who collected the grain from the peasant and sold it the market at the daily bazar prices.³⁷ Thus under the system, if on one hand, the peasant could not derive any advantage in the favourable years from an increase in the market price (not due to shortfall in harvest) on the other, he was also not exposed in any major way to the arbitrary and fluctuating nature of prices in years of scarcity and famine.

The *Zabti* system, by drawing the lowest of the peasants to the market, reversed this process. In normal years high food prices (not a result of crop failure) over a long term,

36. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Irfan Habib ed., CEHI, p.239.

37. Madhvi Bajekal, 'The State and Rural Grain Market in 18th century Eastern Rajasthan, IESHR, 25, 4, (1988). pp. 443-73.

could prove actually beneficial to the peasants and to the agricultural sector. The evidence from Eastern Rajasthan in the period 1650-1750 shows the *raiyyat* actually benefitting from the price rise in the market and thus shifting more to *rabi* crops and significantly to cash crops within the *kharif* (ie. to sugarcane, cotton, maize, chola, Kodon)³⁸. However, this benefit accrued more to the superior sections (the *riyayatis*), who had far greater capital inputs, manpower, irrigation facilities and who thus were the main groups marketing these high value crops. Also, since these groups had sufficient resources, they could sell the produce at the opportune time of favourable prices. For the ordinary cultivator the urgent need for cash to pay the revenue demand led him even in normal years to sell cheap at post harvest low prices and buy dear for their own consumption needs. Many of the *raiyyatis* were not even able to reach the open market and were forced to sell grain either to their creditors or merchants at contracted rates. Years of famine, which were also mostly the years of high prices (in this case due to an obvious harvest failure and food shortage), thus affected the *raiyyat* severely in this system. The year 1712 for example was a year of severe famine and high prices

38. S.P. Gupta, The Agrarian System, pp. 38-73.

of food grains in the *parganas* of Amber, Bahatri, Chatsu, Dausa, Lalsot, Malarna. Its critical impact on the *raiyyat* is thus clearly brought out in the documents of the period.³⁹

The same process which led to the increasing penetration of the money economy and of the growth of commodity production in the rural society also intensified the peasant indebtedness. For, the emergence of *banias* (grain dealers) and *mahajans* (professional moneylenders), was the logical outcome of the establishment of *mandis* (collecting centres of grain) and *gasbas* (small townships). Increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these classes on the basis of their money power established their stronghold over the rural society, so much so, that even the rural dignitaries, the *bhomias*, *jagirdars* and even the state depended on them for monetary support. However, it was mainly the peasant, the *raiyyatis* and *pahis*, who became increasingly dependent on these mercantile classes for their agricultural and consumption loans. In many cases the peasant indebtedness was found to be collective and ryots of an entire village borrowed money from the *bohra* to purchase

39. S.P. Gupta and D., Singh, 'Famine in the Territories of Amber (1660-1760)', p.53.

seeds, manure, ploughs and bullocks to carry on cultivation.⁴⁰ ✓

For the rural society so structured, the understanding and impact of a crisis as famine was differential for different groups. The evidence suggests that for the vulnerable sections the language of panic and anxiety (which situations of scarcity and famine create) was not limited merely to problems created by the natural phenomena, but coupled with this there was also an element of apprehension amongst them of the exploitation and harassment that could be perpetuated by the power groups in these years.⁴¹

This could be carried on by superior peasant groups and also by other constituents of the rural society -the *bhomias*, *jagirdars* and by the state officials in Khalsa areas. Nor was this a famine specific process. Even in normal years intra peasant and inter class antagonisms

40. D. Singh , Rural Indebtness, p. 83.

41. A mild example of this is the report sent to Jaisingh II of Amber, whereby he was informed that due to no rains, the peasantry was fearing an increase in the prices of food grains by the *Mahajans*. *Arzdasht, Sawan Vadi 6, VS 1774/1719 A.D, J.R; H.S; RSAB.*

between peasants and zamindars, zamindars and jagirdars, peasants and jagirdars, over their respective agrarian rights, customary positions and share of surplus existed, though at subterranean levels. The official documents of the Mughal empire bring out several such complaints whereby the great men (*kalantaran*) and the headmen (*Muqaddams*) shifted the revenue due on their lands on the shoulders of small peasants (*reza riaya*) thus leading to social tensions.⁴² Peasant complaints against these violations, which were often a part of their protest, are frequently mentioned in the documents of our region. (their details follow in our chapter on peasant responses). However an event like famine, which was ultimately a divisive phenomenon, brought out all these existing conflicts, hierarchies and contradictions.

Before one comes to the overt manifestation of these rural tensions and conflicts, it is important for us to bear in mind that the relationship between the various sections in the rural society was not only a negative one of clash and competition. For, there was an equally strong congruence of interests, elements of cooperation, where different groups found it necessary for their very existence and

42. Irfan Habib, 'Peasant in Indian History', PIHC 1982, p. 39.

maintenance of positions to collaborate with each other; a situation that can be labelled as one of 'cooperative conflict'.⁴³

We have already seen, how the lower peasant groups who were the main tax paying and cultivating classes were the ones on whom lay the onus of maintaining the entire state structure. The luxurious standards maintained by the royal family and their nobles, the salaries of various administrative officials, the concessions enjoyed by the Zamindars and the dominant rural groups, all accrued from the surplus appropriated from them. Equally important for the superior sections was the labour power of these peasant and other artisan groups. Social factors did not allow many caste groups to themselves plough the land. Also since both capital inputs and large proportions of land were sufficiently available with them, manpower often became their constant requirement. Many *raiya*tis, *pahis kamils* were thus made to work as parttime agricultural labourers on the holdings of these *zamindars*, *patels*, *chaudharies*.

43. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, Hunger and Public Action, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 49. 'Cooperative Conflict' is here defined as, 'presence of strong elements of conflict, embeded in a situation where there are mutual gains to be made by co-operation.'

Even for the small peasant and artisan groups and for the growth of the village economy, the existence of these superior groups was indispensable. The *patels*, *chaudharies*, *patwaris*, in their capacity as revenue officials often gave inducements to bring new areas under cultivation and to rehabilitate the old deserted ones. They provided the needy peasantry with resources to undertake cultivation and also stood surety for their *tagai* loans.⁴⁴ In Bikaner, the *chaudharies* were particularly the main link between the administration and the *raiyat*. Every newly settled village necessarily had a *chaudhari* appointed.⁴⁵ Also as representatives of the village society, these dominant peasants and zamindars saw to the continuance of village customs, reporting any violation or excess extraction to the state officials and the *panchas* of the village. We have several instances of the *bhomias* acting together with the *raiyat* against the tyranny of the state officials, the *jagirdars* etc.⁴⁶ Moreover, they along with the other superior groups enabled the needy peasantry to earn a living

44. *Chithi to Amil Pargana Dausa, Asoj Sudi 3, VS 1816/1759, D.D.H., J.R., RSAB.*

45. *Kagda Bahi, No. 3, VS 1816/1759, Bikaner Records RSAB.*

46. *Chithi to Amil Pargana Sawai Jaipur, Bhadava Vadi, VS 1826/1769, D.D.R J.H.*

by working on their personal (gharuhala) lands. Even the mahajans and bohras with their frequent loans constantly helped the peasantry.

This phenomenon of mutual dependence has led historians to draw a picture of an idyllic relationship between the peasants and his superiors which survived even in famine years. For example B.M. Bhatia, while making a comparison of the phenomenon of famine in the medieval period with that under the British, claimed that in precolonial times, caste ties and Hindu joint family system saved the poor from absolute want. 'India', as he said 'had no poor law because the need for one under the medieval system of social organisation was never felt'. Further, 'in the corporate and communal form of social political organisation here, moneylender was only an ally of the proprietary body and not an exploiting agent'. This analysis thus led him to believe that in pre - nineteenth century famines, all classes suffered alike at least initially and no direct relationship existed between economic condition of the people and their vulnerability to famine.⁴⁷

47. B.M. Bhatia, Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India 1860-1965, Bombay, 1967, p.

Such an understanding though based on erroneous conclusions, nevertheless raises a lot of questions about the nature of rural society in our period. For example were clan and caste heads, landlords and rich peasants really willing to come to the rescue of their poor clansmen and needy peasants in years of stress. Did the ideas of 'shared poverty' and 'mutual assistance' based on notions of 'moral economy',⁴⁸ really affect a redistribution of resources from the dominant to the destitute?

Our evidence warrants against any such conclusions. It seems that though in the initial stages, required assistance was provided by the dominant groups to their needy caste peasants and other indigent sections, with the progression of famine situations, this help was in most cases not forthcoming. Moreover, since the relationship between the two was based on asymmetrical power relations, any such assistance further entrenched the privileged socio-economic positions of the rural aristocracy, thus giving a further impetus to the ongoing processes of peasant subordination and exploitation.

48. James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Resistance in South East Asia, New Haven, 1976.

In numerous cases, the contradictory relationship was manifested also in the dominant groups furthering their own ends even in years of famine. Thus in an arzdasht, Ruparam complained to Jaisingh II how due to famine, the people were in trouble, yet the patel (the custodian of peasant interests) had been postponing the grant of relief, due to which the peasant misery had increased.⁴⁹

In another instance the jagirdar complained that due to the excess demand of 'malba kharch' by the patels from the raiyatis the village was unable to prosper⁵⁰. We have mentioned earlier how increasingly in the eighteenth century with imperial centre becoming weak the *bhomias* also became increasingly defiant, and placed many exorbitant illegal levies and demands on the peasantry even in years of famine. The evidence of villages getting depopulated due to their exploitation constantly occurs.⁵¹

The *mahajans* who otherwise played the most crucial role in continuation of the cultivation process in the village

49. Arzdasht, Migsar Sudi 3, VS 1774/1717, Descriptive List..., VS 1762-1775/1705-1717 A.D. RSAB.

50. Chithi to Amil Pargana Sawai Jaipur, Kartik Vadi 3, VS 1799/1742, D.D.H., Jaipur, Records, RSAB.

51. Chithi to Amil Pargana Mauzabad, Pos Vadi 7, VS 1827/1770, D.D.H, J.R, RSAB.

also added to the peasant problems in famine years by charging high rates of interest on the loans (ranging from 10 percent to 25 percent). Often the interest was so high as to exceed the principal due to which the peasant who borrowed once was often caught in the debt trap and even had to give up cultivation altogether.⁵²

Equally significant is the role of these moneylending and trading groups in affecting food prices. Sharp increases in food prices are a common, though not universal feature of all famines.⁵³ Yet apart from the spatial and

52. D. Singh 'Role of Mahajans in the Rural Economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century, *Social Scientist*, May 1974, p.24.
53. The evidence from all medieval famines highlights this aspect. During the 1556 famine in Delhi and Agra, the prices rose so high that according to Abul Fazl, for his family of seventy persons, only one seer of grain could be acquired. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng trans, by Jaret and Sarkar, Vol. III p. 489. For the same famine, Badani who was an eye witness says 'jowar' was sold at 22 tankas a seer and was not available even at the price. *Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*, Eng trans by Ranking Lowe and Haig, Vol. I, pp. 549-50. In 1630 famine in Gujrat, Thomas Rastell, the President of East India Company, wrote of how no grain were to be had there, even for payment of seven times the former price, William Foster ed., English Facotories in India, 1630-33, pp. 122-123. De graf, who visited Patna during the 1670-71 famine, says of how only six seers of rice could be obtained for half a rix dollar, whereas in the pre-famine days, the same amount could buy sixty to seventy pounds of rice. DeGraf, Voyages, p. 67. Quoted in John Marshall's Notes and Observations in Bengal (1668-72), p. 155.

temporal affect of the crisis, this was also due to the intermediacy and profit making activities of traders and merchants. There are instances when the available food was prevented from reaching the needy rural sections due to the hoarding carried on by these groups. In an *arzdasht* of Kishoridas to Maharaja Bishansingh, it was reported that because of the dealings of Mahajans within themselves in Aamer, amount of grains in the market had become very less. Moreover, the *mahajans* also brought all grains from the traders coming from outside and were willing to sell it to the needy populace, only at their own rates . Thus the existing famine situation had been further aggravated.⁵⁴ Instances like these, while throwing light on the numerous variables which complicated the problem of famine, also highlight the dual relationship of 'compromise and conflict' between the peasants and his superiors, which we have mentioned earlier.

Famine at least in its advanced stages, accentuated the 'clash' rather than the 'cooperation' aspect of this relationship. The agricultural economy of eastern Rajasthan brings out several aspects of this rural conflict. Sources used by us, the *chithis* and *arzdashts* are in fact replete

54. *Arzdasht, Asoj vadi 12, VS 1751/1694, J.R., H.S., RSAB.*

with instances of increasing exploitation of the *raiyyat* by the *mahajans*, *Bhomias*, *patels*, *jagirdars* and other members of rural aristocracy in years of scarcity and famine. The comparative silence of sources in western Rajasthan on issues as these, is understandable. The mobility of the peasant pastoralist here became particularly advantageous in crisis years for, it often led him to desert the famine affected area and thus save himself from being subjected to any pressures of the dominant social groups. The peasant, practising full time agriculture on the other hand had a commitment to his land which often limited his adaptability in a crisis. Thus he was much more obliged to accept external authority, exploitation and control. The conflicts that thus got aggravated in famine years, were a manifestation of the peasant conformity and subordination to these forms of domination in normal years.

A trend which became pronounced in these 'crisis' years was the inter class transfer of assets, land and also agricultural implements from the cultivating classes to the *bhomias*, *mahajans* and other superior peasant groups. Our evidence from eastern Rajasthan shows how taking advantage of the weak condition of the peasants during these years it was a deliberate policy of these richer sections particularly the *mahajans*, to provide loans to peasants

only by either mortgaging their lands, or purchasing it directly and allowing them to work on their lost/mortgaged land in the capacity of tenants and sharecroppers.⁵⁵ Thus, while the best of agricultural land passed into the hands of the already resourceful groups cultivations were reduced to the position of agricultural labourers.

Even in normal years, there was an ongoing process on the part of the riyayatis to appropriate large fields of raiyati lands. Since the riyayatis were concessional tax payers, an attempt was made on their part to declare even the appropriated holding as their gharuhala, to be charged at low rates; while letting the erstwhile maliks to continue cultivation as tenants, paying revenue at the normal rates.⁵⁶ Though the peasants petitioned and complained against it and state directives prohibited such a practice (since it also entailed loss of revenue to the state), it seems that with the famines becoming more

55. D. Singh, 'Tenants, Sharecroppers.....'.

56. An estimate of the profit earned thereby is brought out in an instance in paragana Chatsu, whereby the raiyatis who lost their fields to the riyayatis were permitted to carry on cultivation, as tenants at the rate of 3% per bigha while they themselves paid only Rs. 1.50 per bigha to the state, on the pretext of the land being their gharuhala (personal land). See, D. Singh, State Landlords, pp. 18-20.

frequent in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the process only gained a further momentum.

A further manifestation of the rural conflict and state inability to solve the crisis (as brought out in our sources mainly from eastern Rajasthan), was the payment of *malba* cess. Partial or complete exemption from the payment of this cess was a caste concession granted to the *riyayatis*.⁵⁷ The 18th century documents bring out a number of complaints by these sections that despite their customary exemption from the tax the *patels* demanded its payment from them.⁵⁸ More significant are the joint petitions sent invariably by the *patels* and *raiayatis*, complaining that even though the superior sections commanded large resources, their unwillingness to contribute to the *malba* fund made the burden fall entirely on the few *raiayati* lands.⁵⁹ In a period of increasing famine and land

57. Chithi to Amil pargana Lalsot, Vaisakh Vadi 1, VS 1823/1766. Also, D. Singh, 'Caste and Structure. p.302.

58. Chithi, to Amil pargana Phagi, Sawan Sudi 6, VS 1801/1744; pargana Phagi, Vaisakh Vadi 4, VS 1804/1747; pargana Malpura, Vaisakh Vadi 10, VS 1820/1763 A.D. D.D.H, J.R, RSAB.

59. Madhvi Bajekal, 'Rural Disputes in Eastern Rajasthan in the 18th Century. (M.Phil Dissertation), JNU, N. Delhi, 1980.

mortgages what this could entail for the raiyats is brought out in an instance from Qasba Phagi, where the paltis is complained that the 'malba kharach' which was earlier levied on 700 ploughs owed by them, was now levied on approximately 28 ploughs left with them after the famine, due to which their burden had really increased.⁶⁰ The official authorities aware of this process getting accentuated in famine years, often instructed the superior sections to make full payment of 'malba dues' (at the same rate as paid by the raiyatis), on all land in excess of their original gharuhala.⁶¹ Yet, the constant peasant complaints show that the practice often continued throughout our period.

An increasing development of certain practices in this period also led to an entrenchment of power positions of the dominant groups (mainly, the moneyed section), and gave further impetus to these encroachments. For example the practice of revenue farming or ijara was greatly encouraged by the state to solve its growing financial and political

60. D. Singh, State Landlords....., p. 29.

61. Chitthi to Amil Pargana Phagi, Chaitra Sudi 2, VS 1817/1761; Pargana Gazi Ka Thana, Chaitra Vadi 7, VS 1826/ 1769; Pargana Phagi, Asadh Vadi 11, VS 1808/1751 A.D, D.D.H, RSAB.

problems (in content of the Maratha and other inter state incursions). In eastern Rajasthan, the offices of *patel*, *patwari*, *Chaudhari*, were increasingly purchased by the *Mahajans*.⁶² In Marwar, not only the right to collect land revenue but also the commercial taxes like *Sair Rahdari*, minting were given on *ijara* to the *mahajans*, creating problem for both the peasants and the commercial classes⁶³ In Bikaner, in the seventeenth and major part of the eighteenth century, the main system of agrarian revenue collection was of '*Huwala Saunpa*' whereby the *huwaldar* appointed in *cheeras* and *parganas* (also in *Mandis* and *thanas*) collected various taxes on behalf of the state. A major flaw in the system was that the *jamabandi* (land revenue assessment) was earlier fixed. Thus the *huwaldar* irrespective of the peasant's condition insisted on full realization of revenue even when he was affected by natural calamities.⁶⁴ Relief was forthcoming only when a request was made by the *Asamis* on their own, or through their representatives - the *Chaudhries*.⁶⁵ In later years of the

62. D. Singh, '*Role of Mahajans.....*' pp. 223-232.

63. G. D. Sharma, '*Vyaparis and Mahajans in Western Rajasthan During the 18th century*, PIHC, 41st Session, pp. 377-385.

64. G. S. Devra, '*Rajasthan Ki.....*', pp. 136-146.

65. *Ibid.*, p.138.

eighteenth century, with increased outside invasions and also internal revolts, the fields were left deserted by the peasants thus causing the breakdown of the system⁶⁶. Thus even here, the state to tide its politico economic problems encouraged the *ijara* practice, whereby dominant peasants and the rich mercantile classes, were given the Mukata of Jakat and other agrarian taxes .⁶⁷ However, instead of correcting the faults of the earlier system, this only institutionalised the peasant exploitation.⁶⁸

This, then clearly reveals the inability of the state to overcome its own political, financial and administrative problems without the cooperation of the rural elite. So structured was the dominance of these groups that even in years of famine, the state (which otherwise provided tax remissions, loans etc.) could not ensure the peasant any relief in real terms from the undue exactions and harassment of the dominant groups. The system of elaborate checks and balances, which has been regarded as a characteristic feature of the medieval state structure and

66. Faigan, Settlement Report of Bikaner, p. 17, Powlett, Gazetteer Bikaner, p. 102.

67. *Kagda Bahi*, No 2, VS 1820/1763; No 12, VS 1859/1802 Bikaner Records. RSAB. Also, G.S.L. Devra, *Bikaner Rajya Ki Mukata Pranali*, R.H.C., Beawar, 1973.

68. Faigan, Settlement Report....., p. 14, *Kagda Bahi* No. 21, VS 1872/1815 A.D. Bikaner Records, RSAB.

of the regional states patterned on it could never be sufficient enough to prevent the practice of continuous encroachments on the peasant's person and means of production by his superiors. Thus for the raiyat, with his burden of heavy taxes and cesses, his lack of purchasing power and his inability to break the caste bottlenecks, famine was also a 'social,' in addition to being a natural crisis. A part of the story of annual shortages between exhaustion of previous harvest and ripening of new ones and also an explanation of the transformations of shortage into famine, did lie in the institutionalised pattern of human relationships, which we have called the 'social structure'.

It needs to be however mentioned that the picture of peasant impoverishment sketched by us does not by any means indicate that there was no overall agrarian growth throughout our period. As said earlier, the evidence from eastern Rajasthan, suggests that the agrarian economy in the period 1650-1750, did register a degree of advance both in terms of agricultural production as well as an upward price mobility. Thus, the rabi crops requiring a considerable scale of investment were grown more than the *kharif* crops and preference of the cultivators to pay the revenue in cash by shifting to *zabti* crops (the revenue from which was

collected in cash) indicated a benefit from the price rise⁶⁹
It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century,
that both agricultural production and prices declined,
adversely affecting the cultivation of cash crops⁷⁰

Similarly the evidence from Bikaner indicates that
between 1669 and 1693 A.D. the agricultural production
increased by about 50.29% due to which the collection of
land revenue (*Bhog*) increased by about 45.77 percent.
Between 1697 and 1794 A.D. also, the total *Hasil* registered
an increase of about 64 percent⁷¹. This was mainly due to an
expansion of agricultural land, increased rate of taxation
etc.

These figures should however not be taken at their face
value. In the former case (that of east Rajasthan), though
price rise and growth of cash crops does suggest an
availability of additional investible surplus in the rural
society and evidence of agrarian expansion, it does not

69. S. P. Gupta, Agrarian System....., pp. 38-73.

70. D. Singh, State Landlords,' pp. 51-85.

71. G. S. L. Devra, Rajasthan Ki.....,' p. 170.

clarify, to what extent the benefit of this increase filtered down ^{to} the lower peasants who often with one bullock and dwarf holdings, constituted the majority. Whether this also enabled them to establish a favourable relationship with the market, is thus the important question.

Our evidence from Bikaner for an increase in collection of Hasil also in no way counters the existence of peasant impoverishment. For this increase, which was mainly due to an increase in taxes during Maharaja Gaj Singh's (1746-1787 A.D.) and Maharaja Surat Singh's (1787-1828 A.D.) reign, finally proved counter productive, when it led to peasants already burdened refusing to comply and thus migrating.⁷²

Thus, in any analysis of the socio-economic structure the most important question is, whether the capital resources are dispersed among all sections of the rural population or they are concentrated only in the hands of the upper strata. For, in the ultimate context it is not the resources existing in the society but their distribution that is crucial. An analysis of our region has highlighted the extreme inequalities in this regard. A famine study has thus to necessarily consider all these social gaps.

72. G. S. L. Devra, *Rajasthan*..... pp. 202-209.

**FAMINE : RESPONSE AND REACTIONS IN
THE RURAL SOCIETY**

CHAPTER III

FAMINE : RESPONSE AND REACTIONS IN THE RURAL SOCIETY

Our discussion in the preceding chapters has highlighted the peasant's (raiyat's) subjection to his natural and social milieu. Since famine, which was a product of these constraints, signified 'a prolonged food grain intake deficiency'¹, it crucially affected the peasant's capacity to produce. The phrase which often occurs in our documents is 'majoori kariwa ke takat nahi'.² The peasant however, did not merely remain at the receiving end of these pressures. The evidence from our region and medieval India in general, throws light on numerous strategies adopted by him to survive and alter the meaning and implication of the 'crisis', both in the short and long run. The study of these responses is interesting and also important to counter the conventional view of an inactive peasant functioning and subsisting only with the support of an external aid. It is true, that the recovery of his subsistence base led the peasant to rely crucially on

1. M. Alamgir, Famine in South...p.6.
2. Chithi to Amil Pargana Phagi, Pos Sudi 7, VS 1799/1742, JR; DDH; RSAV.

agencies like the moneylender and the state.³ Particularly in the desert west, the marginal resources and frequent famines made active state involvement a must in the process of settlement. However, the state relief often did not come immediately or voluntarily. Despite realising its long term interests of maintaining the tax paying cultivator, the ruling class often intervened at a far later stage when the crisis situation could no longer be averted. And even here, the various peasant pressures applied on state machinery did play a crucial role. Moreover, the ruling authorities often failed to grapple with the cumulative effect of famine. The peasant had thus to work out his own, individual or village level, responses to moderate its severe impact. The nature and range of these strategies however, was considerably conditioned by the peasant's relationship with his environment and his place in the socio economic set up.

In an earlier chapter, we have discussed the two ecological niches of west and east Rajasthan as encouraging the two dominant activities of pastoralism and agriculture.

3. An Arzdasht reported to Maharaja Ram Singh, that there were no rains and thus no seed and manure in pargana Malarna. The peasants felt that only when seed and manure was provided by the state, could cultivation be possible; otherwise nothing could be sown. Asoj Vadi 14, VS 1743/1687 A.D., JR; HS; RSAB.

Certainly, these were not 'pure types,' since unlike a nomad pastoralist, the pastoralist of the desert west was also a peasant engaged in agriculture and dependent on the crop of *kharif* for his annual food supply (in this capacity he was more of a semi sedentary nomad). Likewise pastoral elements were more or less developed in the agrarian east. However, the dominance of one or the other economic activities in the two regions did result to some extent in a differential famine impact and response in both.

The most crucial factor behind this variation was the phenomenon of 'spatial mobility' associated with pastoral activities. Since indulgence in pastoralism was mainly a function of marginal niches, mobility became a precondition for its exploitation. This mobility and a relatively low land/main ratio in these areas, thus became the greatest asset in years of drought and scarcity. For, as soon as pastures dried up in one locality, an immediate movement to areas where the grass was still green followed. Also herds were often split up into smaller groups so as to disperse the animals over a wider grazing area. Thus the marginal environments unsuited for activities like agriculture could often be favourably exploited. Moreover, since the environmental exploitation was not static and fluctuated

immensely in quality over time and space, the pastoralist was able to establish a stable base for subsistence despite vicissitudes of nature.

Certainly, the constraints of the adaptability of different animals to different regions existed and was often transferred to their human caretakers, so that maintaining a balance between pastures, animal population and human population was a difficulty. Yet, by constantly changing the herding strategy, in terms of the numbers and species of animals reared and combinations of animals in different locations, this could be overcome. Although all animals employed by these groups were energy converters, making the marginal area productive to humans, some really adapted better. For instance, the capacity of the camel to withstand shortage and irregularity of water supply (which was the most crucial conditioning factor here) for a number of days (without having an effect on lactation), was specially crucial. Its long gestation period however, made it more useful for milk, while the fairly rapid built up of herds, which the short gestation period of sheep and goats allowed made them indispensable as animals of slaughter, valued for both meat and wool.

Our evidence from western Rajasthan, shows how sheep

rearing and wool manufacture were particularly developed in both, western Bikaner and in parganas like Merta and Jalor of Jodhpur. Pargana Jalor also specialised in camel breeding.⁴ In all the principal fairs held in both these regions annually⁵, a number of cattle heads, cows, bullocks, sheep, camels and their products were sold for foodgrains. Thus in years of famine and scarcity, the range of options open to communities here was far wider than to the peasant, solely reliant on the stable growth of his annual crops and subject to a much more rigorous politico-economic control of his superiors. This consideration apart, there was a parity in famine responses in both the regions, in terms of being forced to take recourse to 'famine foods', to sale of one's kith and kin, to making appeals and petitions to the ruling authorities for relief, to migrate to fertile areas, etc.

I

In the popular mind, famine like any other natural calamity was first and foremost a problem of divine wrath.

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4. B.L.Bhadani.....'Satyavahin Shatabdi Mein Marwar Ki.....', pp.32-41.
 5. This included in Marwar, fairs at Parbatsar in August-September, at Tilwani near Balotra in March-April; while in Bikaner at Gogano in Nohar in August-September, Kolait in October-November, and at the capital itself in February, Rajputana Gazetteer Vol. III A, pp.107, 346.

In its initial stages thus, famine often led to an intensification of rites, rituals and prayers to appease the supernatural agency. Popular beliefs as these however have been dubbed as superstitious. It is believed that the early modern peasant was a prisoner of his natural environment, which he could not rationally comprehend. His ignorance of natural processes governing the climate, production of crops, and technical inadequacy made his culture a system of survival, a desperate search for security amidst environment stress. Rites and rituals were thus substitutes for technological development.⁶ Thus Braudel, while highlighting the structural coercions of early modern material life, mentioned of not only hostile climate, defficient agriculture, cumbersome technology and biological opression, but also mental frameworks as prisons of longue dure.⁷ Similarly Lucien Febvre in his sketch of the programme for a study of the past societies, wrote that we should form a precise picture of their conceptual and technical shortcomings at a given moment, which necessarily distorted

6. Stuart Clark, 'French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture'. Past and Present, Number 100, pp. 69-71.

7. Braudel, 'Civilisation and Capitalism....', Vol. I, pp. 45-50.

a given social group's image of world life and religion and politics.⁸

It is however a methodological error to argue in terms of peasant's mistaken and distorted perceptions. For, to understand structures of past actions and beliefs in present day terms of technological development is a positivist and teleological exercise. Though it is not easy for us to ascertain the means-end relationship the agents thought that obtained in rituals, what is important for our purpose is, that they were practised in context of coherent assumptions about agency and causation and in expectation of a real not spurious efficacy. E. P. Thompson's attack on 'spasmodic view of popular history' (where common people as historical agents responded only to economic stimuli), particularly brings this out. "It is essential", as he says, "to give attention to the participant's view of human behaviour and to understand the logical structures which underlie primitive or pre industrial belief systems".⁹ In this context the fact that people believed that wrath of gods and goddesses

8. Peter Burke ed., A New Kind of History from the Writings of Lucien Febvre, London, 1973, pp.1-11.

9. E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Past and Present, So , pp.76-136.

explained greatly the occurrence of a natural disaster. Moreover, it is also understandable in the medieval belief system of faith and religion.

A. Mackay in fact, sees famine and feasts as opposite sides of the same coin for, if plagues and famines confirmed that unrepentant and stubborn sinners were being punished by God, voluntary abstinence and confession expiated sins and averted divine wrath. His study of medieval Castile shows, how 'rogativas' or prayers processions were organised to bring drought to an end, the vocabulary used being specific, 'a procession to pray to God for rain'.¹⁰

Nor is this evidence limited to famines in medieval Europe. The literature of medieval India is also full of details of such rituals¹¹. ~~How~~ in case of failure of rains or famines and earthquake, a special prayer, 'Namaz-i-Istisq' was ^{often} offered by affected populace led by pious men and

10. Angus Mackay, 'Climate and Popular Unrest in Late Medieval Castile' in Wigley, Ingram and Farmer, ed., Climate and History, Cambridge, 1981, pp.363-365.

11. Timur in his Memoirs, speaks of Indian Jats using incantations to produce rain. Babur, speaks of his early friend, Khwajka Mulai, who was acquainted with Yadagari, i.e. art of bringing rain by incantations. Babar Nama, Eng. trans., S.A.Beveridge, London 1921, (Photo - offset edition, Delhi, 1970), pp.27,67.

priests of the locality.¹² During Mir Jumla's expedition to Sahasram, the trouble caused due to excess rains led the Muslims to give call for prayers and Hindus to recite the names of their creator, due to which it was said hails and rain diminished.¹³

From our area in eastern Rajasthan we have the evidence of officials, namely the *diwans* organising prayers and charitable endeavours on popular behalf during times of scarcity. Thus, in Amavasya of Sawan when no rains fell for cultivation, prayers were offered to Lord Shiva (Mahadev) and Brahmins were provided food, due to which it was reported, there were good rains, ponds were full, seeds were sown and ploughing was done.¹⁴ In 1717 A.D, Rupchand

12. Thus when on 27th June in the year 1720, a severe earthquake occurred in Shahajahanabad, His Majesty, it is reported issued orders that, 'Qazis, Muftis and Muhtasibs (Censors of Morals), Sadr-us-Sudur (Lord Chancellor, Chief justice) and other pious men, assemble in Jama Masjid and offer prayers for safety' Shiv Das Lakhnavi, Shahnama Munawwar Kalam, Eng.trans., S.H.Askari, Patna, 1980, p.140.

13. Ibid. p.9. Similarly, we are told, that in 1691 A.D. when water of river Bhima, near which Aurangzeb's camp was pitched, rose very high and overflowed its banks, Aurangzeb wrote out prayers and ordered them to be thrown into the river, for purpose of causing it to subside. Khafi Khan, Muntkhakals ul Lubab, Vol.II, Eng. trans. in Elliot and Dowson History of India as told by its own Historions, London 1867-77, reprint, Allahabad, 1972, Vol.VI, p.540

14. Arzdasht, Sawan Sudi 7, VS 1707/1650, Descriptive List....., VS 1687-1743/1630-86, RSAB.

Agarchand informed Jaisingh II of the diwan Jagram arranging for 'Mahadev Pooja' and a 'Brahmabhoj' (of Brahmins of the entire *gasba*) in which he spent one hundred and fifty five rupees. Since these prayers were performed on *Sawan Vadi 10*, it was held that there were good rains on *Sawan Vadi 12* in all the *parganas*.¹⁵ Details of the same event have also been reported by Himmatram, who informed the Maharaja that because of no rains, grains became expensive. Thus on popular demand, four hundred Brahmins were provided food. Also the *qazi* of the *parganas*, the *diwan* and state soldiers performed 'Namaz' and because of it, it rained on *Sawan Vadi 12* and *13* and grains became less expensive by a rupee.¹⁶

Certainly, these prayers and ceremonies performed by the official class reflected greatly the will and belief of the village folks who believed in the efficacy of these rituals. The very fact that such rites were indulged in the *parganas*, *gasbas* and villages of the problem zone and food was offered to the Hindu priestly class and prayers to the

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15. Arzdasht, *Sawan Sudi 7*, VS 1774/1717, Descriptive List.....,VS 1762-1775/1705-18 A.D RSAB.
16. Arzdasht, *Sawan Sudi 6*, Vs 1774/1717 A.D., Descriptive List..... VS 1762-1775/1705-18 A.D., RSAB.

'diety of destruction, indicates that they were more often popular expressions rather than official actions. William Crooke has brought out several of these rain making rites, some exclusively concerning women, all over northern India.¹⁷ Peasant belief in these rituals is also important to understand the nature of popular protest in medieval Indian context. For, the peasant accustomed to seeing the causation of famine in religious terms, at least in the initial stages, did not take to immediately attacking his social superiors. However, the contextuality of the power positions in famine situations did become obvious to the peasant mind, though often at a later stage. In our documents, we thus find examples where excess demands by the *bhomyas* or other dominant rural groups were complained of and even resisted by the peasants.

What is important here is that interpreting the immediate cause of drought and famine in terms of religion enabled the peasants, as David Arnold argues, to give disaster a meaning intelligible to themselves, while also

17. He particularly mentions accounts of women during the Gorakhpur famine in 1873-74, going about with a plough by night, stripping themselves naked and dragging the ploughs over the fields as an invocation of rain God. William Crooke, Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India, Delhi (Third Reprint), 1968, Vol. I, 1895 pp. 1-82.

enabling them to believe that by performance of certain rites in a particular mode they could seek to end their affliction.¹⁸ In other words, it led them to believe that they were not wholly incapable of altering the course of their destiny.

It is not far from here to see the peasants and folks involving themselves in similar rites to ward off diseases. Famine, by creating malnutrition and a situation of starvation can make the susceptibility to disease stronger. Also, famine induced migrations lead to the spread of contagious diseases. Whether these links were understood by peasants or not does not become clear from our literature. What comes out is that like famine, disease was also seen as an infliction of the anger of dieties. Various ceremonial observances, known as 'disease driving expedients' (*Rog khedra*) were thus indulged in. The goddess of disease par excellence here, was Sitala Mata; it being held that all ailments (like small pox) were revelations of the wrath of this goddess. Prayers were thus offered in the annual fairs (March - April), held for the goddess at Bilali in Alwar district and near Chaksu of Jaipur district.¹⁹

18. David Arnold, 'Famine in Peasant Consciousness....', pp.71-72.

19. W.Crooke, Popular Religion....., Vol. I, p.126.

Instances of observance of such rites can be multiplied. For the present it would be sufficient to say that a study of disasters such as famines which activate discussion of a culture's values and beliefs, has to incorporate into its framework all these rites and rituals. In the peasant mind they did form a significant survival strategy; howsoever limited, irrational and illegitimate they might appear to us.

Famine hit the material base of the peasant most crucially. With the onset of every scarcity situation, due to drought or infliction of crops, the standing crops withered, scarcity of fodder made cattle maintenance difficult, no water was left in the ponds and wells for irrigation,²⁰ seeds and manure became expensive and no ploughing could be done.²¹ This was particularly the case in -----

20. In the famine year of 1764 A.D., in village Sargiyo in the patta of Rao Than Singh Sardar Singhot, scarcity of water was so acute that the state revenue which was one third, had to be reduced to one sixth.

सरगीयो रा कुवां रा पानी इक्कीस से जातो रेयो,
गांव रा लोगां रो तीजो हिस्सो थो, हिस्सो छठो कर दियो

*Sanad Parwana Bahi, Miti Fagun Vadi 10, VS 1843/1786,
Jodhpur Records, RSAB.*

21. The Patels of Qasba Toda Bhim, Mauza Sikrai, informed Maharaja Bishansingh of problems accruing to peasants due to famine. Since many of them did not even have seeds and khad, they had given up cultivation altogether, *Arzdasht, Bhadva Vadi, Vol.II, VS 1753/1696 A.D., J.R; H.S; RSAB.*



the agrarian economy of eastern Rajasthan in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Thus, the 1760 famine had such an impact in most of the *parganas* of Jaipur Raja that cultivation could not fully recover even till 1763. The *raiya* had to sell their lands, wells, and leave their fields uncultivated. In Qasba Pahari where the number of ploughs belonging to the *raiya* was 300 prior to the year 1760, it fell to 28 after the famine²².

As famine was such an indisputable fact in the peasant's life, it had several connotations for him, which find ample reflection in the peasant lore. We have already seen how various phenomena of weather were observed and commented upon in the popular sayings. As attempt was often made in these sayings to establish a link between the changing weather forms and the nature of the impending scarcity. Their study thus shows, how for a peasant, famine signified no cultivation,^{23 a} selling of his oxen carts,^b abandoning the fields and moving to famine free areas,^c consuming the seeds^d and even human flesh^e and also selling

22. Dilbagh Singh, State Landlords, p.29.

his children.^f Since however, these couplets are very

23. a

आसाढ़ वद पंचमी, नहि बादल नाहे बीज,
करसां करसण मत करो, धरण न नाखो बीज ।

If on *Asadh Vadi 5*, there are no clouds and lightening, peasants, do not indulge in cultivation or sowing of seeds (as it would be a famine year).

b. धुर आसाढ़ की पंचमी, बादल होय न बीज,
बेचो गाड़ी बलदिया, निपजे कोई न चीज ।

If on *Asadh vadi 5*, there are no clouds and lightening, peasants, sell your carts and oxen as nothing would be grown.

c. सावण फेती पंचमी, मेह न माड़े आज,
पीव पधारे मालवे, हूं जाऊं मौसाल ।

If no rains fall on *Sawan Vadi 5*, dear husband, you'll have to go to Malwa, me to my home.

d. आसाढ़े सुदी नवमी, नै बादलना बीज,
हल फेड़ो, झ्यन करो बैठो चाबो बीज ।

If on *Asadh Sudi 9*, there are no clouds and no lightening, it is time to burn the plough and eat the seeds, as it would be a famine.

e. सावण फेती पंचमी जो बाजे घण बाव
काल पड़े चहुं देस में, मिनस मिनस नै खाव ।

On *Sawan Vadi 5*, if strong winds blow, there will be a famine all over and man will eat man .

f. सावण फेले पाख में जे तिथि उन्पी थाय,
कइयक कइयक देस में, टाबर बेचे माय ।

If any date is less in the first *Paksh* of *Sawan*, the famine would be such, that in some region, mother would sell her children.

P.Solanki, 'Rajasthani Kisan ka Varsha Vigyan.....'

general and predictive in nature, it is difficult to establish a correlation between the various famine responses suggested in them and the intensity of the actual crisis. Some of these suggest measures like burning the plough wood to overcome crisis, which is otherwise a social taboo in Rajasthan. Also some exaggeration is apparent in these sayings. For example, though cannibalism is hinted at, our evidence (mainly archival) does not document this.²⁴ However, we have enough information on each of the other famine responses sketched above. Consumption of seeds and other famine foods for instance was one of the most crucial survival strategies of the poor in any famine

24. The study of medieval famines however, throw ample light on this. Describing the 1556 famine in Agra and Delhi, Abul Fazl wrote, how, 'scarcity of food was so acute that men took to eating one another. Some would join together and carry off a solitary man and make him their food'. *Akbar Nama*, Eng.trans, H.Beveridge, Vol.II, Calcutta 1907-39, pp.56-57. Lahori's description of 1630-31 famine in Gujarat, more detailed on this aspect. As he said, 'Men devoured one another, and flesh of a son was preferred to his love. For a long time pounded bones of the dead were mixed with flour and sold'. Further he writes, 'Men lying in the streets, yet not dead were cut up by others; so that even in streets, men ran great danger of being murdered and eaten up. The situation was worse in villages of Saurashtra, where human flesh was sold in the open market' *Padshahnama*; quoted in Elliot and Dawson, *History of India*, Vol.I, p.24

crisis.²⁵ In west Rajasthan fodder grasses like *bharut*, *ganthil*, and trees like *phog*, *kair*, *khejra* found in the desert region were heavily relied on as foods by the poor cultivators, both in normal and increasingly so, in famine years.²⁶

Likewise, evidence is also forthcoming on an increasing recourse to slavery in periods of stress. Irfan Habib's analysis of agrarian conditions in medieval India, led him to agree for acute scarcity conditions often resulting in flooding of slave markets.²⁷ Moreland, however makes a

25. In discussing the 1556-1556, Delhi, Agra famine, I.Habib makes reference to common people living on the seeds of Egyptian thorn, wild dry grass and cowhides' Agrarian System, p.101. Commenting on 1661 famine in Mewar, James Tod writes, 'For want of water, the country was 'in despair and people mad with hunger. Things unknown as food were eaten. Trees were stripped off their barks to appease the cravings of hunger', Annals and Antiquities Vol.II, pp.454-55.
26. Faigan, 'Settlements Report, pp. 10-11.
27. Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System,....p.110 This understanding is supplemented by the evidence from several medieval famines. In 1595-98 when a severe famine occurred in Kashmir and Labore, Abul Fazl writes how 'hard necessity drove mothers to expose their children for sale in public places. Akbar Nama, Eng trans. H.Beveridge, Vol.I, p.625. In 1646, Punjab was affected by such a severe crisis that poor people to save themselves from starvation sold their children. The Emperor ShahJahan, issued orders, that such persons receive price of their children from government treasury' Lahori, Padshahnama, quoted in Elliot and Dawson History of India, Vol. VII.

distinction between voluntary enslavement arising out of scarcity and deaths and involuntary forms, entailing seizure and sale of individuals for non payment of state's revenue demands; the latter being an ongoing process all the time.²⁸ It is essential to however stress, as argued by Salim Kidwai, that both forms of slavery were results of economic pressures and operated substantially under compulsion.²⁹

For Rajasthan, Col. Tod saw , 'famine as the great cause of loss of liberty' children procured from the districts of Aligarh, Etawah, Mathura, Agra and Delhi in years of starvation, being resold at Hindaun which was a big centre of such trade. Similarly children were brought from Malwa through Kota, for sale in Panchpada in Marwar, which was also a great mart in slaves.³⁰ The women sold during these years as slaves became hereditary bonds women (*dasi*, *bandis*), and were often given in marriages of the princess, thus resulting in the famous 'Dawri System' of Rajasthan. As

28. Moreland, India at the Death of Akbar, 1920, p.92.

29. Salim Kidwai, 'Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestic: New Forms of Bondage in Medieval India', in Utsa Patnaik ed., 'Chains of Slavery and Bondage in India', Madras, 1985, p.8.

30. Tod, 'Annals and Antiquities Vol.I ed., William Crooke, p.207.

an offspring of a 'goli' or 'dasi' must be a slave, the whole problem was perpetuated and resulted in cases of slavery even when famine and scarcity years were over.

All these responses were initiated by the peasant at his individual level, though at various stages of crisis. However, despite cutting down on his diet, selling whatever little resources he possessed, even his own kith and kin in extreme cases, the peasant could often not tide over the impact of famine on his own. State help thus became a necessity and the peasant working out his individual responses simultaneously also applied pressure on the state for assistance.

II

Appeals and petitions were the most common mechanism, whereby the *raiyat* directed the state attention to its problems. Here the village and pargana level officials, the *patels*, *chaudhuries*, *huwaldars*, *amils* and *diwan* often came to the help of the *raiyat*. All these state representatives combined along with their revenue collection works, the duty of ensuring cultivation of all arable land, of looking into the agrarian problems as famines and facilitating all state

help to the needy during the crisis. Particularly interesting was the role of *patel*. We have seen, how in the stratified rural society, the *patel* was the dominant *khudkhasta* peasant organising cultivation with hired labour. Though the economic differentiation between him and the small peasant was considerable, the *patel* was the traditional representative of the village society, who often lodged complaints against any oppressive *pargana* officials, *zamindars* as well as *jagirdars* on behalf of the *raiyat*. In an instance from the year 1705, Purohit Harsaram reported to Maharaja Jaisingh II, that due to no rains in *pargana* of Aamer, the revenue collection had really fallen, particularly from '*juda*' (money from oxen ploughing). Thus, to appeal to the Maharaja to provide all relief to the *raiyat*, the *patels* collected in Niwai. However, when this was known to the *amil*, sensible men were sent by him to Niwai to reassure the *patels*, that matters would be looked into and to further direct them to return to their respective villages.³¹

In other cases, the *amil*, *diwan* and other officials directly brought to the notice of the state, the conditions

31. Arzdasht, Asadh Vadi 9, J.R; H.S; RSAB.

of the cultivators in various villages, gasbas and parganas. Their reporting often brings to us the nature of demands which the raiyat affected by scarcity conveyed to the ruling authorities. From simple consolation and reassurance they included demands like no harassment from any officials, active state help in terms of seeds, implements or cash, availability of loans through the *bohras*. State attention was also constantly directed to the immediate requirement of tax remissions, of need for irrigation facilities. Hoarding and artificial rise in prices created by certain sections of rural society were complained against while demand was made for grain and grass to be brought from surplus areas. So diverse was the range of these appeals and complaints, that we have treated them as constituting an important famine response of the raiyat. It is significant to mention here, that it was through these and other tactics like desertions of their fields that the peasant applied pressure on the state. The state incentives and relief measures were often a result of its apprehensions to prevent the ultimate step of peasant migrations.

Since in west Rajasthan migration often came earlier, the peasant did not rely much on state help, at least in the initial stages. However, the long term process of

rehabilitation of the deserted villages was an important state responsibility and thus the peasant demands were concentrated more on remissions of taxes, for one two and even three years. From the *parganas* in eastern Rajasthan however, our documents throw light on all the varied demands mentioned above.

In 1717 A.D., an arzdasht from Jaisinghpura reached Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh, that due to the army coming from Lahore and drought conditions prevailing no cultivation could take place there. Arrangements should be thus made for proper settlement of the village and taxes should be remitted. Moreover, it was mentioned that till now no state orders and instructions had come due to which the *raiyat* was becoming panicky. The appeal was thus sent as a reminder to the state authorities.³²

In another instance in 1718, it was reported from village *Saheli* in Jaipur that wherever rains had occurred, ploughing had begin; where there were no rains, it became sandy. The *raiyat* thus wanted all assurance, seed and manure from the state. It was also insisted that *bohras* and *thakurs*

32. Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 6, VS 1774/1717. JR; HS; RSAB.

be asked not to recover their loans from the peasantry.³³

Often in years of famine the peasants consumed their seeds. A request was thus made for seed loans.³⁴ Appeals were also made to the state in these years to take up the responsibility of executing wells. A letter of Rupchand Harram informed Maharaja Ram Singh, that due to the failure of *kharif* crop, there was a great need to construct new wells and give all forms of assurance to the *raiyat*.³⁵ From Jodhpur, a request was placed to the state to dig the wells deep since the failure of rains had dried all wells of the village.³⁶

At village level also the task of executing irrigation works was taken up. The *malba* fund, which was collected primarily from the *raiyati* peasants, was a part of the

33. Arzdashts Kartik Vadi 8, VS 1775/1718; J.R; H.S; RSAB.

34. Arzdashts, Kartik Sudi 13, VS 1743/1686, Badva Vadi 11, VS 1743/1686; Jeth Sudi 1, VS 1775/1718; Sawan Vadi 3, VS 1775/1718, JR; HS; RSASB.

35. An Arzdasht from Chatsu reported, that due to less rains, land had become very dry; immediate requirements of water were to be made if the *rabi* crop was to be saved, Bhadva Vadi 7, VS 1774/1717, J.R; H.S; RSAB.

36. Sanad Parwana Bahi, Kartik Vadi 3, VS 1843/1786 A.D.Jodhpur Records, RSAB.

financial pool of the village community. The patel, who was officially responsible for the extension of cultivable land and rehabilitation of the ruined villages, was authorised to use this fund for maintenance and repair of ponds and wells when the need arose.³⁷ Whether in famine years such works on any considerable scale were forthcoming or not and even if they were, to what extent were they able to benefit the raiyatis and other indigent sections of the rural society is difficult to say. In any case, at their individual level the raiyatis could not often take recourse to irrigation. The cost of a masonry well (rupees three hundred in pargana Sawai Jaipur in 1738³⁸) was too high for an ordinary cultivator. Even the statistics of Nainsi on irrigation network in Marwar bring out this factor.³⁹ The kaccha wells which seldom survived the monsoon and had to be often annually constructed were the only source of irrigation for the raiyat. Thus despite irrigation facilities existing in the region (in eastern Rajasthan), all the superior crops grown in the parganas, such as sugarcane, cotton, opium,

37. D.Singh, State Landlords..., p.177.

38. Ibid., p.52.

39. B.L.Bhadani, 'Well Irrigation.... In Merta out of 7,183 to 7,952 wells only 20 wells are classified as bricklined. p.59.

which demanded larger investment in terms of manpower and irrigation facilities, were in the hands of the richer sections of cultivators. How this increased the socio-economic differentiation in the rural society, we have already seen. It needs to be emphasized that factors like this crucially contributed to making the impact of any famine a severe one for the poor peasants.

In famine years, the agrarian dislocation made it extremely difficult for this section of the peasantry to shoulder the entire tax burden. Even in normal years, the demand placed on them was found to be heavy by the tax paying cultivators. Any excess claims were particularly contested. Thus in an instance from pargana Malarana in 1690 A.D., the patel and the raiyat brought to the notice of the ruling authorities that *hasil* should be collected only according to the produce.⁴⁰ Similarly, in opposition to the new taxes imposed during the period of regency of Jaswant Singh of Marwar (1638-78), in 1661 A.D. a delegation of peasants went to the Mughal court and protested against the excessive tax burden. Thus two taxes of *kanwari* and *Tagirat bal* were removed with the consent of the *Vakil* of

40. *Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 9, VS 1747/1690 A.D. JR; HS.; RSAB.*

Maharaja in the Mughal court. Also some cesses levied on khaliyan, known as 'khed kharach', were then discontinued.⁴¹

In years of famine the peasants thus constantly expressed their inability to pay the fixed amount of revenue (jama). In 1694, the balance in some parganas of Jaipur state went up to rupees 9200. However, it was reported that due to famine conditions there peasants would be unable to pay the amount.⁴² In western Rajasthan, with low productivity and coarse crops grown by the peasantry the problem became particularly acute. Bahis of each year abound with instances of balance (baqaya), which in most cases had to be written off. In Rao Bahvani Singh Muhokkam Singhot's village in Marwar, the balance of some years collected in 1786 had in fact to be returned when popular pressure increased against its collection. State instructions were thus given that tax be collected only when the next crop was grown.⁴³ In village Dadmi (in Marwar), in the patta of

41. G.D.Sharma, 'Politics and Administration of the State of Marwar', 1638-1749, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1974, p. 160.

42. Arzdasht, Bhadva Vadi 15, VS 1751/1694, Descriptive List....., VS 1750-1761/1693-1704, A.D.

43. Sanad Parwana Bahi, Asoj Vadi 5, VS 1843/1786, Jodhpur Records, RSAB.

Vijay Singhot, on demand of *rekh* money by the state in 1786 A.D., it was reported by the officials that due to the failure of *kharif* crops, the peasants had expressed their inability to pay any tax. Also they insisted for no harassment by any authorities.⁴⁴

How these peasant demands expressed through various officials exerted pressure on the state to abide by them is clearly brought out in another such case. Village Bandhudo was a deserted area, given in *patta* to Udai Singh Mansinghot, which was thus rehabilitated by him in 1772 A.D. However, it was again deserted and despite all encouragement to cultivation, not much of revenue could be collected. Irrespective of this, full demand of *rekh* was made by the ruling authorities. But when a complaint was lodged apprising the state of the weak condition of the village, the state had to postpone the collection of revenue till the area recovered.⁴⁵

44. *Sanad Parwana Bahi-Miti Pos Vadi 8, VS 1843/1786.*

45. Following is an extract of the village complaint,

हासल कुछ आवै नहि, ये हमार रेख रा पूरो रूप्यो मांगो हो....

The state response was thus,

झांसू रेख रो रूप्यो री सेचल,

मती कीजो...., कल लीजो।

Sanad Parwana Bahi, Magh Sudi 7, VS 1843/1786. Other instances of same nature also exist in the documents. Thus for example, from village Khudavo, it was petitioned that cultivation was less and people were unable to pay taxes (*Nadari*); the *Rekh* be thus remitted. The state, following the request, conceded the demand for the year. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Miti Pos Sudi 10, VS 1843/1786, Jodhpur Records; RSAB,*

Instances like these only multiply with a study of Bikaner Bahiyats. In a particular case, the *huwaldar* in 1786 A.D., lodged a complaint against the *jogpati*, who demanded the *bachh* tax despite famine conditions prevailing in the pargana. The state thus instructed the *jogpati* to return the amount if taken and suspend all collections till a better year.⁴⁶ Such was the frequency of famines here, particularly in its desert areas, that in no year was the peasant able to pay the complete *hasil*. For example, in 1783 A.D., village Sitasar was weak. Thus *dhuwan* (house tax) that was balance of the years 1781-1782 could not be collected at all and even in the year 1783, rupees 26.50 had to be remitted.⁴⁷ In the same year in village Khindasar, Cheera Magra, *jama* of *dhuwan* was rupees 80, out of which only rupees 22 was paid; *Chara sehat's jama* was rupees 6.00, of which only rupees 1.50 was collected & as *korad* (fodder) tax only rupees 1.75 reached the state while the *jama* was rupees 7.00; all this due to famine here.⁴⁸ It appears

46. *Kagda Bahi, Migsar'Sudi* 13, VS 1843/1786, Bikaner Records, RSAB.

47. *Kagda Bahi, Asoj Sudi* 8, VS 1840/1783 A.D., Bikaner Records, RSAB.

48. Similar conditions are described for numerous villages of Bikaner in 1783 A.D. which was a famine area. Thus *dhuwan* tax was only partially collected in most of them. In village Karansar, out of of Rs.38.00, as *jama* of *dhuwan* only Rs.8.00 were collected; in village Rajasar, the *jama* was Rs.24.00, only Rs.3.00 could be collected; in village Lunsar, the collection was Rs.3.00 in the *jama* of Rs.11.00; in Ratandesar Rs.11.00 in the *jama* of Rs.31.50; in Cheera Gusainsar, it was Rs.11.00 out of the *jama* of Rs.19.50; in village Rajahad, Rs.8.00 out of Rs.13.00. *Kagda Bahi, Kartik Vadi* 1, VS 1840/1783 A.D., BR, RSAB.

that by seeking partial or complete remissions, the raiyat tried to divest itself temporarily of the responsibility of paying taxes to the state and to concentrate on the productive task of recovering his material base. This cannot be treated as a survival strategy per se, yet it was certainly a negative kind of famine response of the raiyat, whereby it tried to come out of its trap of indebtedness and starvation by foregoing for some time full payment of taxes to the ruling authorities.

It is however, important to bear in mind that the medieval state which considered non payment of taxes by the peasantry a rebellion on their part in normal years, could not allow the peasantry an easy escape from shouldering the tax burden. Concessions no doubt, were a part of the agrarian policy of the medieval state in weak and famine prone areas, due to the long term consideration of preserving and extending cultivation. However, complete or even partial tax remissions were not easy to come. In western Rajasthan such remissions had to be granted either due to the fact that population had fallen due to desertion (this mainly affected the *dhuwan* tax in Bikaner), or the village had to be resettled (leading to remission of

residence tax of *deshprath* in Bikaner) and cultivation had to begin a new.⁴⁹

In other cases, as our evidence from the State of Jaipur shows, tax remissions were sought by the *raiyat* and heeded by the state authorities only in most acute

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49. From Cheera Jasraser, village Aasrasar, the Bhogta Rao Ajitsingh Amarsinghot sent an *arz* to the 'durbar in 1813 A.D. that in his area a severe famine had taken place and thus Rs.75.00 of taxes like *dhuwan*, *deshprath*, etc. be remitted,

म्हारे पट्टे रे गाँव रे नीरठ बीसताल पड़ग्यो।

पाणी गहरा हू गवो, गाँव री गुवाड़ी परा उठ गई,
राज्य रो रकमी म्हांसू समें नहिं,

अठे साल रा धुवां, देसप्रठ, मेले

पाड़खती रो रूपयो ७५ माफ कर दीजो ...

The state thus instructed the officials to collect taxes only when the area recovered., *Kagda Bahi*; *Asoj Vadi* 8, VS 1870/1813 A.D. Instances of such partial or complete remission abound here. Village *Khatiro* was deserted in 1762 A.D. and no cultivation could take place in 1763 A.D. Thus only 1/2 of *Halgat* (plough) tax was to be taken. *Kagda Bahi*, *Asoj Sudi* 5, VS 1820/1763; Village *Rajdesar* was found weak, with its peasants unable to pay taxes. The *patwari* was thus asked not to collect *dhuwan*, *deshprath* from the entire village. *Kagda Bahi*, *Asoj Vadi* 12, VS 1820/1763; Village *Sarune* was a deserted area, rehabilitated by *chaudhuris* *Kheeva* and *Kheta*. Thus, tax of *bachh* was half remitted for three years. *Kagda Bahi*, *Asoj Vadi* 11, Vs 1831/1774 A.D.; Village *Dhandusar* was deserted by all, the *raiyat*, *jogpatis*, *chaudhuris*, *Jats*, *Rajputs*. They were resettled and taxes of *dhuwan*, *Halgat*, *Rohi* (on wood), were all remitted. *Kagda Bahi* *Migsar Vadi* 12, VS 1820/1763 A.D., Bikaner Records; RSAB.

instances. In 1695 A.D., from *pargana* Chatsu Rupchand reported to Bishansingh, how because of famine the peasant mortality had been severe, most of the peasants had migrated; while those remaining were undergoing many problems of food and seed for cultivation. On their behalf, the *patels* thus requested remission of 'Lata kharach' (collection charges), so that the area could be inhabited again. The state here instructed the officials to further look into the matter.⁵⁰ In an instance, the *raiyat* of Parojpur went to the Delhi court to get the balance of a year remitted. The evidence available does not indicate whether the authorities consented to it or not.⁵¹

Similarly in 1717, an *arzdasht* was sent to Jai Singh II to appeal for remission of *Jaiya* tax, due to famine conditions prevailing in the *pargana*. The *amil*, Pancholi Biharidas specifically mentioned that due to their weak condition the people were hopeful for a concession, yet till now no state order had come.⁵²

50. *Arzdasht, Fagun Vadi 13, VS 1752/1695, J.R; H.S; RSAB.*

51. *Arzdasht, Asadh Sudi 2, VS 1769/1712, J.R; H.S; RSAB.*

52. *Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 6, VS 1774/1717 A.D. J.R; H.S; RSAB.*

These instances thus indicate that peasant appeals and demands, at least, for tax remission, were conceded by the state reluctantly and only when pressure on it became acute. The evidence from medieval Indian famines also supports our contention. During the Bijapur seizure of 1686 A.D, when severe drought conditions prevailed there, Emperor Aurangzeb was informed of how the people of Hyderabad on account of their poverty were unable to pay Jaziya and whenever asked for it, they ran away. It was only then, that the emperor ordered the suspension of Jazia of a year, cesses (mahsul sair etc.) and other forbidden levies (abwabs); while simultaneously insisting the peasants to remain in their villages and engage themselves in cultivation.⁵³

Our evidence suggests, that in every famine year the raiyat demanded such fresh state assurances and initiatives. From village Lalamdesar in Bikaner, completely deserted due to famine, a demand was made in 1783 that the jogpatis, huwaldars and moneylenders be instructed not to carry on any harassment (Adabi Khechal)⁵⁴. In village Shekhsar in the same year, the chaudhuris and raiyat who deserted due to famine and exploitation of the officials, agreed to come

53. Ishwar Das Nagori, *Futuh-at-i-Alamgiri*, trans. Tasneem Ahmad, Delhi 1978, p.184.

54. *Kagda Bahi, Magh Vadi 4, VS 1840/1783, BR; RSAB.*

back only when the state assured them of all help and care.⁵⁵ Similarly in every famine year in our area in eastern Rajasthan, an assurance (*dilasa*) on a new basis was sought by the *raiyat*.⁵⁶

These demands made by the peasantry show the premium that was attached to the state role in any famine situation in medieval India. Whether the ruling authorities fulfilled this role or not is a different question, to be tackled later. What is important to stress here is that in the peasant mind, directing state attention to its problems was a very crucial famine response, one that could significantly alter the meaning of crisis for him.

III

A problem that was constantly referred to the state particularly in famine years was the question of peasant's accessibility to the *bohra* (moneylender) and *mahajan* (grain dealer). As we have seen, dependence on rural credit was a crucial phenomenon in the peasant's cultivation process. The agricultural loans (both short and long term) advanced by

55. *Kagda Bahi, Asoj Vadi 8, VS 1840/1783, BR; RSAB.*

56. In an instance of failure of rains, the *raiyat* agreed to stay on in villages only with state assurance. *Kartik Vadi 13, VS 1742/1685. Descriptive Lists....., VS 1687-1743/1630-86 A.D.*

these mercantile groups constantly helped the raiyat to purchase agricultural equipments, to extend their holdings and thus to bring more and more fallow land under cultivation. The *bohra* of the village was in fact officially expected to supply ploughs, seeds, bullocks and manure to the raiyat at normal rates. The *tagavi* loans provided by him, either on behalf of the state or on his own established thus a close link between him and the peasantry.

In years of famine, this dependence greatly increased. Our evidence suggests that the absence or presence of the *bohra* often altered the implication of the crisis for the peasantry. Thus a good number of petitions sent to the state stressed on the need of his availability in the famine affected area. For example in 1686, a year of famine in several *parganas* in our area in east Rajasthan, the raiyat agreed to stay on in the villages only, when the state provided them an accessibility to a *bohra*.⁵⁷ Similarly, in an *arzdasht* of Kishordas to Maharaja Bishansingh in 1694, it was reported that due to no rains and no *bohra*, the peasants were in grave trouble and were thus migrating in great numbers. It was further notified that the *patel* and the

57. *Arzdasht, Asoj Sudi 9, VS 1743/1686. Descriptive Lists.....VS 1687-1743/1630-1686 A.D.*

raiyat of the village felt that the *rahdari* tax should be remitted, so that the traders were encouraged to bring grain in the region, thus reducing the grain scarcity.⁵⁸

It is important to mention here, that grain trade from surplus to deficit areas was an important aspect of rural society in the period. The seventeenth century monetisation and growing cash nexus (under *zabti* system) made even the small peasants dependent on the local market and the grain traders (*beoparis*), who carried on the intra local trade between different villages and *parganas*.

Eastern Rajasthan was particularly a food surplus region, exporting to deficit areas food crops as bajra, jawar, moth, urd as *kharif* crops and barley wheat and gram as *rabi* crops. Dilbagh Singh, has seen this phenomenon^{as} most prominent in the later half of the seventeenth century and first half of the eighteenth century; the Maratha raids and dislocation caused therein making it a difficult task in the second half of 18th century.⁵⁹ The peasantry in western Rajasthan, with scarcity of food crops was often dependent on this phenomenon of inter regional trade, whereby the salt of the desert areas was exchanged for the grain of the

58. Arzdasht, Asoj Sudi 2, VS 1751/1694 A.D., JR; HR ; RSAB.

59. D.Singh, State, Landlords....., p.92.

east.⁶⁰ State authorities also encouraged this trade and in fact issued instructions that movement of grain in different *parganas* should not be restricted.

Our documents suggest that in normal and more so in famine years, even the peasantry favoured the continuation of the rural trade. Certainly, the benefits from its continuation would have accrued more to the richer sections (within the peasantry), who had a favourable relationship with the market. Yet some degree of stability of the market and easy availability of grain dealers was also necessary for the small peasant groups. Thus in 1702 A.D., Purohit Harsaram reported to Jaisingh II, that due to no rains there had been less cultivation of grain and grass as a result of which almost no traders came in comparison to the year 1700. The *raiyat* was thus getting panicky.⁶¹ In another *arzdasht* of 1684 A.D., it was conveyed to Maharaja Ramsingh, that due to the grain prices being low this year there were no buyers. Thus it was demanded, that *mahajans* be

60. *Mardumshumari Raj Marwar*, 1891 A.D., Part III, pp.420-446. Here, Marwari merchants are mentioned as being the dominant traders. Particularly emphasized are the Loyana traders of Panchpadra, Mallani, Sanchor and other western *parganas* of Marwar. They as seen, took salt (mainly from Sambhar lake) to Malwa, Gujarat and Sind and brought back rice and grain on their camels.

61. *Arzdasht*, *Magh Vadi* 14, VS 1759/1702, JR; HS; RSAB.

immediately arranged.⁶² During the seventeenth - eighteenth centuries when the loot and plunder of the Jats, Rajawats and Narukkas severely affected the trading activity, constant appeals were sent to the state authorities to establish conditions of peace.⁶³

The significance attached to these mercantile activities does not imply that the peasant was not aware of the negative role played by the moneylending and trading classes, particularly so in years of famine. The documents throw light on a series of peasant complaints, whereby the peasant often expressed his discontentment with these groups and sought for state intervention.

In our chapter on social structure we have highlighted how the *mahajans* and traders accentuated the actual crisis by not releasing grain in the market or by increasing the prices of foodstuffs and other essential goods. A particular instance of the year 1694 A.D., whereby the *mahajans* of Aamer created an acute grain scarcity by carrying on all dealings amongst themselves and also buying up all the grain coming from outside, has also been cited. In this case, the *raiya*t complained that unless proper arrangements were made

62. Arzdasht, Chait Sudi 2, VS 1740/1684, J.R; H.S; RSAB.

63. Arzdasht, Pos Vadi 11, VS 1748/1691; Fagun Sudi 5, VS 1760/1703 A.D.; Migsar Vadi 8, VS 1747/1690 A.D.

and grain was sold to them at fixed prices, they would migrate. So much was the pressure from the rural society, that the state fixed the prices for bajra, moth, mung, wheat gram, jau and warned all the defaulting *mahajans* a beating of five korahs.⁶⁴ Instances like these indicate that peasant in many cases did resist the increasing irregularities that developed in famine years. Timely availability of loans was, as repeatedly said, crucial to the *raiyat* for his subsistence in famine years. However, the *bohras* and *mahajans* despite their profitable positions were often reluctant to provide this help mainly due to the insecurity of famine years which made the recovery of their loans uncertain. This difficulty in availability of rural credit was also strongly commented on by the peasants in his petitions and complaints to the state. Thus in 1686, when most of the *parganas* under the Jaipur Raja were facing a severe famine (it was reported that many *raiyat* lost their cattle and were dying due to starvation), an appeal was made to him that *bohras* be arranged and they be instructed to provide all help to the *raiyat*. It was specifically reported, that many *bohras* were creating problems by refusing to provide loans to all the affected cultivators. Thus, state should take upon itself the task of providing relief to those who were denied any help at the village

64. *Arzdasht, Asoj Vadi 12, VS 1751/1694, JR; HS; RSAB.*

level.⁶⁵

In another similar instance from Jodhpur, it was complained by Pattadar Rao Umer Singh that due to failure of rains no *kharif* cultivation had taken place, the peasants had mostly migrated; those left were facing many problems as Vyapari Rama Modi had stopped all supply of grain to them. Since no other *bohra* was willing to come there, immediate arrangements were required. Instructions were then issued by the state to Rama Modi to provide food according to one man's capacity to everybody.⁶⁶

Even when loans were granted, the *mahajans* often insisted for a its surety, (provided **by** *Patels etc*) charged high rates of interests (ranging from 10to 25 percent per annum) and often demanded its immediate payment.⁶⁷ In cases

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65. Arzdasht, Sawan Vadi 13, VS 1743/1686. JR; HS; RSAB. Instances of *bohras* refusing to provide loans abound. In an arzdasht of Kishordas to Maharaja Bishansingh it was reported how the *bohras* reluctance to provide loans was resulting in peasant migrations everyday. Asoj Sudi 2, VS 1751/1694; Kartik Vadi 13, VS 1743/1686; Bhadva Vadi 11, VS 1743/1686, JR; HS; RSAB.
 66. Sanad Parwana Bahi, Kartik Vadi 12, VS 1843/1786 A.D. Jodhpur Record; RSAB.
 67. A request of Jagirdar Pratap Singhot was made that his village in west Marwar had only one crop which also had failed in 1786. The state had though allowed only half the collection of *rekh*, the *mahajan* constantly demanded his money from the peasantry, due to which there was a lot of resentment among the villagers. Thus the *mahajan* be instructed by the State not to indulge in any harassment. Sanad Parwana Bahi, Miti Magh Vadi 6, VS 1843/1786.

of raiyat's incapability to do so, they often took possession of the land mortgaged by the peasant, thus making him landless. Thus, in an instance in pargana Mauzabad, persistent famine made it impossible for the raiyat to return a loan of grains to the *bohra*. The latter after compounding the interest, doubled the principal and extracted from the raiyatis a fresh bond, whereby they were forced to surrender their fields and wells to the *bohra*. These were then converted by him into his '*gharuhala*' (concessional area) and the erstwhile maliks were reduced to the status of tenants.⁶⁸

These land transfers, which were an ongoing process even in normal years and which got accentuated in years of famine, often left the resourceless peasant with no alternative but to migrate.

Thus, ironically speaking the very rural credit which came to the temporary and short term rescue of the peasant, caught him in the long term debt trap, often resulting in his giving up cultivation altogether.

IV

It has been some time already, since Marx's concept of self sufficient, closed village society in medieval India has

68. D.Singh, 'Role of Mahajans.,', p.24.

been challenged.⁶⁹ The notion of isolated village communities also breaks down, when one sees the spectre of peasant movements to village *parganas* and even regions which was a constant feature of medieval India. [Since many economic and ecological pressures were often behind this phenomena, one cannot indulge in a simplistic and direct corelation between famines, food shortages and migrations. We have seen, how even in many famine situations peasants in the east instead of taking immediate recourse to migrations found alternative strategies to subsist and carry on cultivation; while in desert west, in cases of depletion of local habitat, often annual migrations took place even in case of no famines.] Thus, it is essential to inquire what caused the peasant to leave his village and find settlement in other areas, which sections of the peasantry were involved in it, what was the nature and extent of this phenomena, i.e. was it collective or individual, long term or short term.

(The evidence from our area in eastern Rajasthan, brings out a section of peasantry mobile even in normal years. These were the *pahi*, as labelled in our documents. Often

69. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System.....pp.110-135. For more detailed reference his work, 'Classifying Pre colonial India' in Mukhia and Byres ed., Feudalism in Non-European Societies, Frank Cess, 1985, pp.44-53.

engaged in cultivation as tenants, (in villages other than their own) they were the non resident cultivators, with no proprietary right of selling and mortgaging the land they cultivated. Dilbagh Singh has highlighted another category of *pahis* who having their original villages far off, often shifted enbloc with their ploughs and bullocks, at times even taking up residence (*Chhaparbandi*) in the area where they cultivated.⁷⁰ Since they often left their ancestral home to take up cultivation in deserted or waste lands and also had agricultural capital, the state offered them economic concessions in terms of lower rates of tax payments for a long term.⁷¹ Thus, they often took to migration when harassed by superiors or faced with any economic problems. Particularly so, in years of famine, when the pargana authorities were specifically instructed to extend all patronage and assistance to them to bring more and more deserted areas under cultivation. Thus, in years of scarcity and famine they could often improve their position by emerging as independent cultivators. This however depended on other variables like availability of land, their capital inputs, duration of their stay, their caste etc.]

70. D.Singh, State, Landlords,, p.26.

71. Unlike the *pahis* without *chhaparbandi* who were offered concessions only for the current season, they were granted this facility for a period of three years.

It is difficult to distinguish in the documents, this group of migratory peasants from full fledged resident cultivators/*raiyatis*, a section of which was also induced by attractive terms offered by colonisers of new villages to become mobile. However, since the *raiyatis* were caste peasants having their own social status in the village community, migration for them often came in extreme cases of economic pressures or political disturbance.

(Years of famine, which as seen, were often years of crisis for them in so far as they were led to pawn most of their resources to the dominant groups, often forced this migration; although even here, the nature and extent of the crisis is significant. Though no sequential ordering of peasant's responses can be laid down, the evidence suggests that the *raiyatis* tried carrying on subsistence and cultivation till the time crisis could not be averted, working out alternative survival strategies at the individual and village level. Their commitment to and relationship with their land, difficulty in coming out of the debt trap were also factors which often prolonged their decision to desert their villages. Migration thus, ~~often~~ came as a deferred peasant response in the most advanced famine stages and even then, its extent was never as phenomenal (in terms of its frequency and number of people migrating), as in desert west.)

Despite these qualifications, as a survival strategy in famine years, even in eastern Rajasthan, migration from the famine affected areas did remain one of the most crucial peasant responses.⁷² The emigration was often to more prosperous areas. In a famine in 1665 A.D., the rayah migrated towards Burhanpur, Kali Bhet, and towards east Agra and Shri Mathuraji.⁷³ In 1760 A.D, when almost all parganas of east Rajasthan suffered from famine, rayah of pargana Lalsot migrated to Malwa.⁷⁴ In 1770 pargana Malarna is said to have been suffering from famine and scarcity which forced the peasants to migrate to Harauti.⁷⁵ Although it is difficult to quantify the number of migrants in every famine year, each famine often resulted in large scale depopulation of villages, either due to mortality or migrations.] The officials continuously reported the problems encountered by

 72. The fact of migration in all medieval famines also is well established. In 1573-74 Gujarat famine lasting for six months, rich and poor to save their lives, took refuge in safer zones. *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, Eng.trans. by B.De. Vol.I, Calcutta, 1927, p.365. In 1670-71, when Patna and its suburbs were desolated by a terrible famine, about one lakh and fifty thousand persons migrated to Dacca in search for food. J.N.Sarkar, 'Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India, p.252.

73. *Arzdasht, Miti Sudi 2, VS 1722/1665, Descriptive Lists....., VS 1687-1743/1630-1686.*

74. S.P.Gupta & D.Singh 'Famine in the Territories...., pp.52-55.

75. Ibid.,

them in resettlement of deserted village. (In pargana Bahatri in 1697 A.D., due to famine and oppression of *amil*s, 62 villages were reported to have become desolate (*ujar*); as due to troubled conditions people left the area. We are further told that *amin* Kunwarpal, *chaudhuri* Kushalsingh, Gumashta (agent) of *amil*, the *waqai nawis* were all instructed to resettle the area and it was only with great efforts and assurance of all material help that they succeeded in bringing the deserted inhabitants back.⁷⁶) With famine becoming a prominent feature in eighteenth century, the process of *raiyyati* migrations became more intensified, leading to continuous desertion of the areas.

Not all these migrations were due to the scarcity of available food. Food shortages did exist, but problem of access to available food, i.e. problem of distribution was also significant in inducing the *raiyyat* to migrate. For example in 1705 A.D., it was reported that the hoarding of grain by *mahajans* of Sawai Jaipur and its sale at arbitrary rates had caused the grain prices to double the original.

76. Arzdasht, Asadh Sudi 1, VS 1754/1697, JR; HS; RSAB. Several instances like these exist in the sources. For example, in another case from pargana Bahatri, it was reported that acute famine conditions had resulted in severe misery for the *raiyyats*; the area had also become *ujar*; and the *chaudhuris* and *ganungos* were trying their best to provide all assurance and relief to people to come back. Arzdasht, Sawan Sudi 3, VS 1741/1684, JR; HS; RSAB.

The raiyat unable to purchase grain at such dear rates was thus migrating.⁷⁷

(Migrations were also the result of peasant anxiety to save his cattle power in years of famine from any large scale mortality.) Since land was abundantly available it was the possession of cattle, as already stressed, which was the crucial pre requisite for the process of cultivation. (Peasants who lost their cattle, often being incapable to buy them again, sank to the status of wage labourers. The documents bring out several cases of peasants migrating with their animals, even in cases when simple scarcity was being experienced. Thus it was brought to the notice of Maharaja Jaisingh II in 1705 A.D., that a number of raiyats were leaving the parganas with their animal wealth on an apprehension of famine conditions. Specific instructions were thus issued to provide all assurance to them to stay back.⁷⁸) N.S. Jodha's empirical study of famines in Jodhpur, has shown how the peasant was often desirous of saving his production base, thus preferring mortgage of his assets rather than their sale and outmigrating with the animals rather than selling them to maintain current consumption.⁷⁹

77. Arzdasht, Asoj Vadi 1, VS 1762/1705 A.D. JR; HS; RSAB.

78. Arzdasht, Asoj Sudi 2, VS, 1762/1705, Descriptive List.....', VS 1761-1775/1705-1718 A.D.

79. N.S.Jodha, 'Famine and Famine Policies: Some Empirical Evidence from Jodhpur', EPW, X, 1975.

(Indeed preservation of the cattle power was the most operative factor in explaining the migratory characteristics of the peasants in western Rajasthan. Since cattle maintenance and indulgence in other pastoral activities constituted a significant component of the peasant's economic activities, recourse was even taken to annual migrations.] Though numerous grazing grounds and excellent fodder⁸⁰ was available in many areas here, yet some amount of rains was a must for the grasses to grow. However, as we have seen the erratic rainfall often caused the grasses to wither up. Thus the limited carrying capacity of the areas to facilitate cattle grazing over an extended period of time resulted in peasants often moving out annually during the drier periods.

The problem was particularly acute in desert areas like Mallani, Phalaudi, Jalor in Marwar and the north western Cheeras of Shekshar, Gusainsar Jasrasar, Magra, Pugal etc. in Bikaner. What water scarcity could actually imply can be seen from the details of a famine in 1868-69, which hit the desert regions most. In Marwar, while wheat was being sold at six seers per rupee, even grass was priced

80. Qasbas of Sojat, Siwana, Merta, Phalaudi in Marwar all had big grazing grounds. Parganas Sojat and Jaitaran due to the proximity of rivers produced two to three hundred carts of fodder. B.L. Bhadani, 'Satrahvin Shatabdi Mein Marwar.....', pp.32-41.

at five and a half seers per rupee. Water became so acute that some poorer sections, earned a livelihood by selling it for one and a half to two and a half annas for an earthen pot. The scarcity of fodder and water led to it is estimated 75 percent of cattle mortality or sale.⁸¹ In Bikaner in this famine the state lost permanently either due to mortality or migration one third of its population and nine tenths of its cattle. In a village in west, only two hundred cattle remained out of the herd of 4,300 alive before the famine.⁸² Keeping in mind this enormity of loss and the fact that almost every poor man here was a cattle owner, one can understand why extensive migration at the earliest stage of scarcity and famine formed the most significant survival strategies.

Since however the cattle herder was also a peasant, the nature of his migration is important i.e was it that the entire community abandoned its settlements and entered into nomadic pastoralism on a full scale, albeit a short term basis, or was it that there was a division, in which the majority of adult men, male youths and some young women moved out with the main herds (consisting of oxen, bulls

81. Rajputana Gazetteer, Vol.III A, p.125. It is mentioned here, that owing to the non-availability of cattle, small ploughs called 'Hatholia' were made and men yoked themselves in place of oxen, while women dropped in the seed.'

82. Rajputana Gazeteer, Vol.III-A, p.355.

cows), while the old members with the children stayed behind with the milch herd (including mainly goats and milch cows and even sheep)?

Unfortunately the sources studied are silent on these important issues. The fact of migrations, particularly in famine years, is nevertheless established. In village Ranasar of Bikaner, due to famine in 1763 A.D. the *raiyat*, *chaudhuris*, *jogpatis* all migrated and settled in another village. They were then called back, it being otherwise instructed that action would be taken against them.⁸³ In the same year in village Magra of Cheera Khari Patti, there was some disease and infection due to which all *raiyat* left the village. The *huwaldar* was asked to bring them back and not to collect half of *dhuwan* and *deshprath* tax.⁸⁴ In 1783, village Lunkansar was totally deserted because of famine and not only *raiyat* but also the *mahajans* and *chaudhuri s* left the area. In this case again the *huwaldar* Rampuria Maharam was asked to rehabilitate the area by giving all assurance to people, that they would not be harassed and full attention would be given to them.⁸⁵

83. *Kagda Bahi, Miti Jeth Sudi 8, VS 1820/1763. BR; RSAB.*

84. *Kagda Bahi, Jeth Sudi 11, VS 1820/1763, BR; RSAB.*

85. *Kagda Bahi, Kartik Vadi 3, VS 1840/1783; BR; RSAB.*

Nor are such instances limited to Bikaner. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Marwar also, detailed evidence exists on the continuous process of peasant migrations. In 1786. the pastoralists, cultivators and Halis of villages Khejadli, Rudu, Chandilau, Devatro, Gurjarivas who were all deserting their villages due to conditions of famine were asked to stay back as their interests would be taken care of.⁸⁶ Similarly in 1764 A.D., village Laliya, pargana Narnaut, was left desolate (Viran) by raiyat. Thus, when given in patta to Muhakkam Singhot, he was asked to encourage all settlement without any tax payments.⁸⁷ It is not clear to us whether these were generally short term migrations or did they span over a longer period. Some instances show even latter to have been the case. Thus village Karmosariyo was deserted for three years and when resettled, the state had to remit all arrears and rekh of that year.⁸⁸ Similarly, from village Bhadasar in Bikaner the raiyat had been staying out for many years, (having left initially in times of famine) and to encourage them to come back, half of Bhach tax had to be remitted for two years.⁸⁹

86. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Migsar Vadi 5, VS 1843/1786, Jodhpur Records, RSAB.*

87. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Megh Vadi 9, VS 1821/1764: Jodhpur Records.*

88. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Baisakh Vadi, Vs 1843/1786.*

89. *Kagda Bahi, Jeth Sudi 11, VS 1820/1763 A.D., BR; RSAB.*

(These illustrations bring out two significant factors, firstly, the undisputed fact of increased migrations during famine years. Commenting on this crucial implication of famine, in context of medieval India, Irfan Habib, wrote how 'famine introduced into the stolid isolation of agricultural production a terrible element of fluidity and confusion. If there had been nothing else, this alone would have sufficed to explain the migratory characteristics of Indian peasantry'.⁹⁰)

(Secondly, since each case of desertion of village was followed by state instructions about its immediate settlement, it also highlights how crucially the peasant mobility went against the interests of the state. Some cases expressed this most clearly. For example, in village Kalavas and Bairangdesar, the *raiya* and *chaudhuris* were asked specifically to stay in the village as their migration was greatly disadvantageous. The state further took upon itself the payments of 'Bhom' and 'Hasil Khalsa Ki' for the entire village.⁹¹ In pargana Bahatri in 1684, during a severe famine the *raiya* was asked not to abandon cultivation and to facilitate the peasants' stay, the state took up the task of

90. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System..., p. 110.

91. *Kagda Bahi*, Asoj Vadi 8, VS 1840/1783 A.D., BR; RSAB.

executing 400 new wells and also remitted Saruno tax on grain.⁹²)

(The fact that the *raiya*t understood this state interest and often utilised its mobility to draw state attention to its problems or to get timely economic incentives, is also brought out in our documents. For example, in *pargana* Malarna the *diwan* took notice of the *amil* report, that *rayatis* have lost their ballads (oxen) and mortgaged their seeds and lands and were threatening to migrate, if the situation was allowed to continue. Thus immediate instructions were given by the state to provide all help to them.⁹³)

(Here then, migration emerges as a symbolic action on part of the peasants, aimed at drawing state attention to the alleviation of their subsistence crisis. It was what Habib says, 'the peasant's answer to famine and man's oppression.'⁹⁴ And actually speaking, migration as a mechanism of 'avoidance protest' was the most expressive action in cases of peasant exploitation.) (We have seen, how the illegal cesses demanded by the *bhomias* were often a

92. Arzdasht, *Sawan Vadi* 3, VS 1741/1684 Descriptive List....., VS 1687-1743/1630-1686.

93. Chithi to *Amil Pargana Malarna*, *Sawan Vadi* 11, VS 1774/1717 A.D., JR; DDH; RSAB.

94. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System...., p.

cause of peasant desertions. In an instance, the patel, patwari and raiyat of village Mada, pargana Malpura reported that they deserted their village due to conflict with the jagirdar who confiscated their property.⁹⁵ In another case, the peasants agreed to settle in the village only when state took up the responsibility that no moneylender would try to recover his debts in the current year, as the peasants were unable to pay them.⁹⁶ The introduction of new taxes in the reigns of Gzasingh and Surat Singh in Bikaner resulted in raiyats taking to wholesale migration.⁹⁷ Tod has commented on the fact of villages here becoming increasingly deserted in the latter half of 18th century.⁹⁸

Thus in all these cases, migration was, if not an open defiance, a coded action on part of the peasantry, at times to seek state assistance, at others to resist the violation of customary norms by the state representatives or the superior groups.)

95. *Chithi, Baisakh Sudi 6, VS 1801/1744. JR; DDH; RSAB.*

96. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Asoj Vadi 13, VS 1843/1786.*

97. These taxes have been enumerated as, Ghora Rekh (a military tax from Pattaders), Kiyadi *bachh* (on door of every house), Rukhwali *bachh* (protection tax). The rate of Rukhwali *bachh* was increased from rupees two to ten. Even the rate of Hasil was increased from one rupee per plough to three rupee per plough. G.S.L. Devra, *Rajasthan Ki.....*, pp.209-210.

98. Tod, *Annals.*, Vol.II, pp.82-83.

The question certainly arises, were there no open and active modes of rural protest in famine years? Did not the *raiyyat* and the indigent peasantry, seek a redressal of their grievances by protesting against the state authority or the intermediary dominant sections of rural society? Is there no evidence of grain rioting, which has been treated for quite some time now as the inevitable companion of bad harvests, dearth and high prices? Was there no attempt by the lower sections of the rural society, to insist on the state a fair marketing and sale of food in the village *mandis*, *qasbas* and local markets, so that neither food availability nor its accessibility was a problem? These are all fundamental questions which bring into focus the popular perceptions of what was legitimate and illegitimate, right and wrong on part of their superiors and ruling authorities in years of scarcity and famine.

Since our limited study of sources have not allowed us to touch these issues we will only make some observations here.

It has been quite some time since studies of Hobsbawm⁹⁹,

99. E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, Manchester University Press, 1959.

Rude¹⁰⁰ and Thompson¹⁰¹ established riots as ritualised forms of protest in which the populace acted in accordance with a coherent set of beliefs and values. Particularly, the notion of moral economy of Thompson, developed the concept of food or price riot as a popular act of justice, legitimized by assumptions of moral economy, which taught the poor the immorality of any unfair method of forcing up the price of provisions by profiteering upon the necessities of people. This thus led the urban dweller of England and France to continuously protest against the intrusion of commercial capitalist in their traditional values related to food.¹⁰²

Whether the moral economy of poor in medieval India led them to behave similarly in situations of dearth and scarcity is difficult to say. Since our study does not pertain to urban history, we cannot comment on the reactions of the urban poor in these years. The sources seen on rural society also do not bring out any well established case of food rioting. To some extent the very nature of the sources

100. G.Rude, The Crowd in History : A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, New York, 1964, pp.47-65.

101. E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, London, Penguin, 1968.

102. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd In the Eighteenth Century', Past and Present, 1971, pp.76-136.

in being official records explains this silence. This does not however imply that the raiyat did not express his dissent over any illegal exactions in years of stress and crisis. As we have seen, speculative activities and non customary demands were often questioned by him. The state was also asked to prevent hoarding and artificial price rise in the market. Some stray evidence of raiyat taking direct recourse to looting the moneylender's and state's grain stores, also occur.¹⁰³ Interestingly, the official records reporting good rains and beginning of cultivation, often report all peace and stability in the villages and parganas. This indicates that the state was not altogether unaware of the discontent that could be expressed in years when crops failed, particularly, if they were coupled with any artificial scarcity.¹⁰⁴

It is however important to bear in mind, as Thompson argued, that the popular expectations expressed in riots developed pari passu with recollections of past benefits (in terms of state's involvement in distribution of food stuffs on occasion of high prices and scarcity).¹⁰⁵ In this

103. Chithi to Amil Pargana Chatsu, Kartik Sudi 4, VS 1788/1731; Pargana Lalsot, Migsar Vadi 8, VS 1794/1773) JR; DDH. RSAB.

104. Arzdashts, Ashwin Vadi 1, VS 1698/1641; Asadh Vadi 3, VS 1742/1685; Sawan Vadi 7, VS 1762/1705. JR; HS; RSAB.

105. Thompson, Moral Economy....,

context, there is much truth in Paul Greenough's contention, that in medieval India, unlike Europe or China, expectations from the state were more limited. The rulers who allowed for rent remissions and even advances to cultivators during times of crop failure had neither the market intellegensia, the storage facilities nor the influence over interprovincial transport.¹⁰⁶ It is thus believed, that apart from forcing down prices in capital cities and obliging urban traders to open their stocks during famines, the state officials gave little thought to ensuring food availability and price stability throughout the realm.¹⁰⁷ Madhvi Bajekal's analysis of State's (state of Jaipur in eastern Rajasthan) participation in the local market, although brings out a greater state involvement in terms of selling its own grain at market prices; also supports the contention of absence of any fair price, existing throughout the territories.¹⁰⁸

106. Paul Greenough, 'Comments from a South Asian Perspective: A Symposium on Food, Famine and Chinese State', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XII, No.4, 1982, p.794.

107. David Curley, 'Fair grain Markets and Muchal Famine Policy in Late Eighteenth Century Bengal', *Calcutta, Historical Journal*, 2, 1977, pp.1-26.

108. M. Bajekal, 'The State and Rural Grain Market in Eighteenth Century Eastern Rajasthan', *IESHR*, 25,4, (1988), pp.443-473.

Thus, it seems that in popular perceptions in medieval India, the state which could be petitioned for loans and remissions, could not be asked to guarantee any fair sale and marketing of food on any considerable scale. The food riot, which was a symbol of this expression, was thus absent as a uniform phenomenon until late nineteenth century, when economic changes led mainly the urban dweller to contest for food. In the medieval rural society, famine with its consequences of mass emigration, depopulation of villages and agricultural dislocation thus continued to create subsistence distress, expressed by the affected, albeit in more indirect and less violent forms.

**FAMINE : STATE IDEOLOGY AND
PRACTISE OF RELIEF MECHANISM**

CHAPTER IV

FAMINE: STATE IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF RELIEF MECHANISMS

The question of ideology and practice of state relief is crucial to any famine study. For, while state policies can play a negative role in perpetrating the whole phenomena, their timely intervention in making relief provisions can significantly moderate the famine impact. This is more so in modern societies, where the developed market and modernised transport and communication systems crucially assist the state in acting in either capacity. Thus in colonial India, with an ideological shift in the British policy from *laissez faire* (or free trade forbidding any direct interference by the state in providing relief) of the first half of 19th century to an active, interventionist and responsible government role in food crisis in the latter half, the severity and impact of famines was also considerably minimised¹. Even the 'conquest of famines', associated with the early 20th century was a result of liberal social policies harnessing the modern techniques.

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1. L. Brennan, 'The Development of Indian Famine Codes: Personalities, Policies and Politics' in Curry, B. and Hugo. G.ed., Famine as a Geographical Phenomenon, 1984, Holland. Also, Ira Llein, 'When the rains failed: famine relief and mortality in British India', IESHR, 21, 2(1984).

The pre modern societies, had however a limited capacity to make relief provisions. The primary bottleneck here was of lack of developed technological means of facilitating grain distribution over long distances. In medieval India, since overland transport by pack animals was the chief mechanism to carry grain in times of severe droughts the non-availability of water and fodder and the ensuing cattle mortality, made land transport a difficult and costly affair. The problem of providing supply of foodgrains even in an area covering hundred miles,² meant thus a rather immobile food supply situation, whereby intense localised scarcities existed along with gluts in the nearby areas. The problem became more acute in cases of natural calamities prevailing simultaneously in more than one province. Thus in the severe 1630-31 Gujarat famine, which affected greatly Sind and also the East Coast (from where grain was usually procured), not much relief could be organised. And even though surplus grains existed in north in the neighbouring Suba of Malwa, no supply could be directed to the famine affected areas³.)

(Temporal limitations as these however, do not indicate that the state ideology, the timing of its relief, and the -----

2. Z.Faruki, Aurangzeb And His Times, Delhi p.512.

3. Moreland, From Akbar....., pp. 213-214.

extent of its intervention did not affect the nature and implication of famine. Considerable premium was in fact placed on the capacity and responsibility of the state to provide relief.) The picture of an ideal and just monarch sketched by Abul Fazl highlighted his charitable pursuits, exacting not more than what was necessary and possible from the *riayah* in normal years, while being fully responsible to the grievances of people in times of exigencies⁴. Nor was this a belief a medieval trait. Kautilya's good king was one, who took active measures in famine periods to relieve the popular distress by distributing materials for production and consumption, by starting construction of public works, allowing the people to migrate to areas of plenty and extracting wealth and surplus food from the richer sections to be distributed amongst the poor⁵.

Within our region, the state was often reminded of its moral duty to maintain the faith of the cultivating classes in the government. Appeals and petitions were, as we have seen, constantly sent; at times in the form of reminders, at others in the nature of complaints to come to the immediate

4. Abul Fazl, *Ain i Akbari*, Vol.II, Eng.trans. Jarett and Sarkar, p.58.

5. Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, Eng. trans. R.Ramashastry, pp.116-117.

rescue of the raiyat. Thus in an instance in 1742 A.D. when due to Maratha incursions, the peasants were unable to pay land revenue to the state the Amber Diwan informed the Jaipur Raja, that the popular faith in the state had led them to ask for revenue remissions and this had to be conceded if the state interest had to be preserved⁶.)

(It seems that in cases where state took up the desired relief actions, it was more in response to this popular pressure (exercised on it through various peasant demands, refusal to comply with customary tax payments and migrations), rather than a paternalistic understanding of its role.)

(Since the very basis of medieval state structure was the surplus appropriated ^{from the} peasant, even in normal years the ruling authorities were engaged in providing assistance to the Raiyat in developing agriculture and extending the area under cultivation. Thus for example, the various methods of revenue assessment prevalent in the imperial territories and in the various regions took into consideration the peasant's material condition. In *batai* and *kankut* the state share rose and fell with the amount of yield obtained in the year concerned. Under *zabti*, the allowance was made by excluding

6. Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 2, VS 1799/1742, JR; HS;RSAB.

from assessment the area designated nabud (cropless), which could not exceed 12 per cent of the sown area. Also, lower revenue rates were charged on the cultivation of waste land; the rate increasing only gradually till the fifth year, when full rates were realised⁷.

(Even the Pargana and village level revenue officials, the diwan, amils, known as (hakim in Marwar and huwalder in Bikaner) patels, chaudhuri were specifically instructed to work for the increase of the agricultural produce and the continuous settlement of the area. It was a state policy not to leave any land 'parat' (waste) and assignments of these lands were continuously made. In 1664, for example twenty-two Rajput sawars were assigned the 'parat' land in pargana Malpura⁸. In 1666 pargana Lalsot, mauza Bilon, the Meenas were given all facilities including ploughs to cultivate the waste land⁹. Similarly in 1687 in mauza Kolahad, tappa Dhodi, the coloniser Mayaram Brahman was encouraged to create a new settlement on the 'parat' land¹⁰.

7. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System..., pp.249-50.

8. Arzdasht, Asad Sudi 2, VS 1721/1664, Descriptive List...Vs 1687-1743/1630-1686.

9. Arzdasht, Vaisakh Sudi 8, VS 1723/1666, J.R.; H.S.; RSAB.

10. Arzdasht, Faigun Sudi 12, VS 1743/1687, Descriptive List....., VS 1743-1747/1687-1692.

In cases, where land was deliberately left uncultivated by the peasants or other rural sections, the state often confiscated their land. Thus in an instance from pargana Tonk in 1739. A.D. the *jagirdar* complained to the state that the *patel* in conflict with him did not allow the *rai-yatis* to cultivate his land and left his own land fallow for the purpose of grazing. The state thus admonished the *patel*, instructing him to ensure that the arable land was fully cultivated, failing which he would be liable to pay the revenue dues for the uncultivated land¹¹.)

In western Rajasthan the percentage of agricultural land was in any case low. Though more than fifty percent of the land could be cultivated in Bikaner, even in the nineteenth century the land under plough was less than one-third¹², a result of lack of adequate population in the desert area. Thus even in normal years, state provided inducements to various groups and communities to encourage settlement. This mainly took the form of remission of certain important agricultural and fodder taxes. For example in village Godavro, in pargana Merta all those indulging in

11. Chithi to Amil pargana Tonk, Pos Vadi 9, VS 1796/1739; pargana Sawai Jaipur, Jesht Sudi 7, VS 1800/1743.

12. Faigan, Settlement Report....., pp.6-7.

cultivation were allowed to pay only half of *hasil* for two years¹³. Likewise from village Parwa, when settled in 1763 *korad*, *bhuraj jakhiro* were to be taken at only half the normal rate for one year from all the inhabitants¹⁴. Grants or concessions as these thus increased all the more in years of famine.

(Short term assistance was also forthcoming to the peasants from within the village community. However, resources within the rural society were often not adequate to take up major relief works in years of severe hardship and famine. In these periods state involvement in the entire process of rehabilitation often became a necessity.) We have seen how state authority was constantly invoked to act on behalf of the vulnerable. Often these demands, based as they were on the notion of legitimacy of state interference, further buttressed the power structure. For by promoting the idea of the state as protector and provider of food in years of scarcity this enhanced state authority over its subjects. As David Arnold says, 'it balanced coercion, always a problematic instrument of state power over the long term and especially in the weakly articulated

13. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Asoj Vadi 2, VS 1843/1786, Jodhpur Records, RSAB.*

14. *Kagda Bahi No.2, Asoj Sudi 11, VS 1820/1763 A.D. BR, RSAB.*

political systems of pre-modern era, with a willing (or at least sullen) submission to the hegemony of the monarch and the ruling classes¹⁵.

(State assistance was most forthcoming in the form of loans, 'the taqavi' (or 'strength giving') to the peasants. Abul Fazl states, that the 'amalguzar' should assist the empty handed peasants by advancing them loans ¹⁶. In the long run, these loans facilitated the purchase of seeds and bullocks by the peasants and also improvement of agricultural land by digging of wells, acquiring manure etc.) In our region, we have seen how the peasantry mainly the raiyat, looked to the support of both the state and the mahajans for these agricultural and consumption loans in normal and more so in famine years. (The state arranged for them either through its own resources or by taking recourse to the bohras¹⁷. A letter of Sheo Singh to Jaisingh II in

15. D. Arnold, Famine: Social Crisis....., p.100.

16. Abul Fazl, Ain i Akbari Vol.I, Eng.trans by Jarett & Sarkar, p.285.

17. Since most of the parganas under Jaipur Raja were suffering from famine conditions in the year 1686, the state arranged loans of seeds and manure to the raiyat with the help of the bohras. Arzdasht, Bhadva Vadi II, 1743/1686. In pargana Aaveri due to famine, raiyat was provided taqavi by the state. Arzdasht, Sawan Vadi 13, 1743/1686. J.R.; H.S.; RSAB.

1703 A.D. placed the state debt to *bohras* as being rupees 60,000.¹⁸ In some cases the relief responsibility, in years of famine, was divided equally between the state and the *bohras*¹⁹. In cases, where despite the existence of *bohras* and *mahajans* they were reluctant to provide relief the state often mediated to provide this assistance.²⁰ It seems that the state also recorded the names of the *bohras* so that a check might be maintained on their operations especially in times of crop failures.²¹)

(A study of famines in medieval India, also highlights the frequent grants of loans to the needy. During the 1326-27 and 1335-36 famines, Muhammad bin Tughlaq advanced loans to the peasants, sank wells, distributed cooked food and also established an agricultural farm near Delhi to bring uncultivated land under plough²². Akbar, considered the most solicitous of the welfare of his people by the author of *Ain*, established grain godowns in every part of Gujarat,

18. Arzdasht, *Asad Vadi* 8, VS 1760/1703, JR; HS; RSAB.

19. Arzdasht, *Sawan Vadi*, 14, VS 1743/1686, JR; HS; RSAB.

20. Arzdasht, *Asoj Vadi* 12, VS 1751/1694. Descriptive List..., VS 1750-1761/1693-1704 A.D.

21. S.P.Gupta, Agrarian System....., p.142.

22. Ziauddin Barni, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, ed. by S.A. Khan, Calcutta, 1862, pp.208-10.

so as enable the poor to purchase cheap grains and also made seed grains available to the poor cultivators during the 1574-75 famine²³. Likewise, during the 1583 Kashmir famine free kitchens were opened outside the capital; one supplying food to the Hindus, called Dharmapura, the second to the Muslims, called Khairpura, and the third to the Jogis, called Jogipura²⁴. Also large sums of money were often distributed in these famines.²⁵.

The crucial question for us however is, not whether such loans were provided or not, but at what stage of crisis were they forthcoming. Since the sources in west Rajasthan are broadly speaking silent on loan facility being sought by the peasants or provided by the state, it seems that this relief was not very significant here, not only because peasants took to early migrations but also because state help often come late, only when villages were already becoming deserted.

23. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol.II, Eng.trans.by Jarett, p.44.

24. Abul Fazl, '*Ain-i-Akbari* Vol.I, Eng. trans, by H.Blochmann, p.199-201.

25. During the 1630-32 Gujarat famine, 1641 Kashmir famine and 1646 Punjab famine, large sums were distributed by Shahhahan amongst the famine stricken population. Lahori, *Padshahnama*, quoted in Elliot and Dowson, History of India as told by its own Historians, vol. VII, p.24.

(Also significant for us to enquire is how were the loans made available to the peasantry, i.e. what was the criteria of their selection and distribution. Since the dominant men, the *chaudhuris* and *muqaddamas* (*patels*) would have here played an important part, a study of their role as distributing agencies becomes crucial as a variable affecting the relief. From the peasant's view point, in the long term, even the loan returning mechanism was crucial i.e. the period for which the sanction was made, whether it could be written off (in certain extreme instances) or not. At times the sheer pressure built up by the money lending groups created anxiety and misery for the peasant²⁶. Even the state borrowing money from them to provide loans, was often pressurised to return the sum as early as possible²⁷. In such cases, the state dependence on these dominant rural groups for financial assistance considerably limited its capacity to intervene in famine situations.)

26. In an *arzdasht* from village *Saheli*, Jaipur the state was requested to make provisions for seed and manure for the *raiyat*. Also since the *bohras* and *thakurs* were creating a lot of problem for the peasantry by insisting for an early recovery of their debts, it was demanded that they be instructed by the state not to indulge in any such harassment. *Arzdasht*, VS 1775/1718, JR; HS; RSAB.

27. *Arzdasht*, *Magh Vadi* 12, VS 1766/1709 A.D. Descriptive list....., Vs 1761-1775/1705-1718 A.D. RSAB.

Famines were also the periods when the usual revenue demand could not be borne by the lower peasants. Relief was thus sought in tax remissions. We have seen how the ruling authorities were requested and pressurised for these one yearly or two yearly concessions, keeping in mind the intensity of the crisis. (The pargana level officials also from time to time recommended the suspension of land revenue collection from the raiyats on account of their widespread scarcity. However, the evidence from eastern Rajasthan shows that such tax remissions were provided by the state only in extreme cases²⁸ For, the financial strain in years of famine on state resources did not make it possible for all such peasant demands to be conceded. Even when these suspensions were made, they were often of a very short period spanning only the immediate crisis. Moreover, the suspension of revenue demands rather than their total cancellation could mean that peasants recovery was all the more delayed by arrears, debt repayments and fresh revenue

28. In pargana Bahatri, when due to a severe famine, people were migrating, an assurance was provided to them and Saruno tax on grain was remitted. Arzdasht, Sawan sudi 3 VS 1741/1684. 'Descriptive List...., VS 1687-1743/1630-1686. In another instance, it was particularly reported by Lalchand to Raja Bishansingh that the state measure to remit the *hasil* of village Sumari, Pargana Phagui, so as to encourage famine affected raiyat to resettle and resume cultivation, was received with great happiness by all the villagers. Arzdasht, Asoj Sudi 15, VS 1756/1699, JR; HS; RSAB.

demands. For, at times repayments fell due a season or two after the famine and even before the cultivator had fully recovered. In such cases a fresh round of indebtedness and land sales/mortgages was the result. Caught in this cycle it seems that the real recovery of the vulnerable could never actually materialise for a long period.)

To some extent the evidence (from western Rajasthan presents a somewhat different picture. Here, to counter the continuous problems created by natural calamities, the state constantly gave remissions of the important taxes to the peasantry, so much so, that remissions formed a significant part of state policy²⁹.) Since in years of famines the practice of giving such concessions increased greatly, each documents gives details of such relief provisions³⁰. It

29. For example, in village Bhaggu of Charans the charai tax was remitted, so as to encourage pastoral activities. Sanad Parwana Bahi, Bhadva Sudi 10, VS 1821/1764. In another instance, Jogpati Radhakishan of Sojat was asked to settle in village Sujrasar, where he was to be then remitted of all takes on cultivation. It was also asked that he settle mahajans and traders in the area, who would be then granted half remission in hasil. Sanad Parwana Bahi, Kartik Sudi 9, Vs 1843/1786. In village Rajaldesar, the huwaldar was instruted that, whosoever did cultivation on state's land would be provided free food. Kagda Bahi, Bhadva Vadi 11, VS 1840/ 1783, BR; JR; RSAB.

30. Thus, village Jaitasar was week (Neeblo) in the year 1763 A.D. due to less rains and hasil was remitted. Kagda Bahi, Asoj Sudi VS 1820/1763 A.D., BR; HR; RSAB. Village Pabusar was suffering from famine due to which deshprath and habub tax were totally remitted. Kagda Bahi, Migsar Vadi I, VS 1820/1763 A.D.

(seems that in many cases the state used them as inducements to prevent people from migrating³¹). In cases where the inhabitants had already deserted they were encouraged to come back with an assurance of remission of certain specified taxes. This could be given at both, an individual level to the *mahajans* or the *chaudhuris* who initiated the process of settlement or at the village and *pargana* (*cheera*) level, whereby the entire resident population in case newly settled was granted the remission.³² It has been suggested that in Bikaner taxes were remitted on various occasions ranging from the area becoming economically weak, (Neeblo)

31. As most of the inhabitants of village Kalu were migrating, they were asked by the state to continue staying, on promise of remission of their *Bachh* and *hasil*. *Kagda Bahi, Jeth Vadi 11, VS 1820/1763 A.D.* Similarly, in village Baladesar the *Jogpati* was asked to prevent all people from migrating and also encourage new ones to settle there, in lieu of which *Bachh* tax was to be taken at half the rate. *Kagda Bahi, Jeth Vadi 12 VS 1820/1763 AD.*
32. The *Asamis* of *Nauhar* had migrated to other area. They were asked to resettle in their own village for which it was declared, no demands of any *hasil* would be made from them for twelve months. *Kagda Bahi, Fagun Sudi 3, VS 1831/1774 A.D.* From village *Banero, chaudhuri Sarwan, Pema, Harraj*, who all went to *Jodhpur* were informed that if they came back, *Bachh* would be collected at only half the rate and in *hasil* on every plough, Rs. 1.00 would be remitted for three years. *Kagda Bahi, Sawan Vadi 14, VS 1821/1764 A.D.* In village *Bhadasar*, a deserted area resettled by *chaudhuris Parma, Govardhan, Pithori* the *Badi Bachh* tax was to be taken at half the rate. *Kagda Bahi, Jeth Sudi 11, VS 1820/1763 A.D.*

to its becoming dry (*sukha*), desolate (*sunā*), in times of famines, epidemics, political disturbances and so on³³. Thus often the *J'amabandi* (revenue assessment) relaxed rates for various taxes, postponing normal collection till the recovery of the area. For instance in village Khadwe, which in 1763 was economically weak (due to bad harvest), instead of the usual *Jama* (of taxes like *dhuwan*, *deshprath*, *Mela Padkhati*) of Rs.56.50, the collection till the improvement of the area was fixed at Rs.51.75³⁴. In Cheera Magra, village Kharo, which was suffering from famine in 1783 A.D, the *huwaldar* was asked to leave Rs.7.00 in the *jama* of *dhuwan* which was Rs.27.50³⁵. In village Gegasar, korad, *bhuraj*, *jakhiro*, *ghascharai* were all to be collected at only

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33. G.S.L. Devra, 'Bikaner Ki Madhyakaleen Vyavastha Mein Sahayata Va Nistar Ka Pratiroop', PRHC, Pali Session, 1974, pp.47-53.
34. *Kagda Bahi*, *Asad Vadi 7*, VS 1820/1763 A.D. We have similar details for a lot of villages in the same year. For village Dhaneru and Karampur, (dated *Asad Vadi 10*); Cheera Rini, village Magedi (*Asad Vadi 11*); village Ratandesar (*Asad vadi 12*); village Mahendrawas (*Asad Sudi 13*); village Ratangarh (*Asad Sudi 14*); village Beenadesar (*Mah Sudi 12*); village Soniyar (*Mah Sudi 13*).
35. *Kagda Bahi*, *Kartik Vadi 10*, VS 1840/1783 A.D. Similarly in cheera Shekhsar, village Hammirvas the total *jama* of *dhuwan* was Rs. 18.00 in which Rs. 4.00 were remitted and in village Pandusar it was Rs. 12.00, out which Rs. 5.00 were remitted. This due to drought (*sukha*) and famine. *Kagda Bahi*, *Migsar Sudi 10*, VS 1840/1783 A.D.

half the original rate due to disease and infection³⁶. Similarly in village Sadhro, Khajanchi Multan the Jogpati, was instructed to leave Rs.10.00 in Halgat tax the jama of which was Rs.61.00 and Rs.2.00 in jama of korad and Chara, which was Rs.13.00³⁷. Despite a limited study of the Bikaner and Jodhpur Bahis, we have been able to find numerous such instances where the concessions were granted often for a long duration. How and to what extent did this help the peasantry to counter the famine impact is difficult to say, mainly because the absence of data on aspects like famine induced mortality (of both human and animal population) is still unavailable to us. It seems however, that despite not being of much help to the peasant who mainly migrated in the initial stages, in the long term process of rehabilitation and resettlement this form of relief did play a significant role.

Since in famine years availability of food often falls short of the popular demands, the intensity and spread of the 'crisis' can be considerably moderated if food grains and other required articles like fodder are brought to the famine affected areas and the existing supply is regulated.

36. *Kagda Bahi, Kartik Vadi 4, VS 1831/1774 A.D.*

37. *Kagda Bahi, Kartik Vadi 13, VS 1840/1783 A.D.*

Thus in 1494 A.D, when there was a severe famine in Baghelkhand area, an attempt was made by Sikandar Lodi to moderate its impact by abolishing Zakat on food grains and by facilitating supply of grains at cheap rates³⁸. Similarly in 1659-61, during an acute famine in Sindh and Gujarat, taxes like *Rahdari* and *Pandari* on transport of grains were remitted by Aurangzeb. Grain was also purchased from the surplus provinces and sold at cheap rates in the affected areas³⁹.

The evidence from our region (particularly western Rajasthan) shows that often even in normal years the various transit and sales taxes levied under the name of *sair-dan*, *mapa* and *rahdari*, were remitted by the state as part of its trade facilities to merchants. Thus it was directed to give one fourth remission in transit dues to *Vyaparis*, trading in food grains between Pali, Sanchor and Gujarat⁴⁰.

38. Badauni, *Muntakhab - ut - Tawarikh*, Eng. trans by Ranking, p. 377.

39. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, Eng. trans. by J.N. Sarkar, p.316.

40. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Magh Vadi 4, VS 1821/1764*. Also in *parganas* of Didwana, many villages had one fourth remission of *Sair* and *Rahdari* for all traders. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Migsar Vadi 13, VS 1843/1786 A.D.* In another case, it was declared that Jats and others who brought fodder for bullocks from towns to villages of Sihnod and Baran would be remitted *hasil*. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Magh Vadi 11, VS 1821/1764 A.D.*

Traders between Bikaner and Jodhpur were also given a special concession of remission of two aanas in *sair-rahdari* on every rupee⁴¹. However, it has been argued that such facilities were extended by state authorities only to those well established traders and merchants who were relied on for their financial support to the state⁴². Also, under the *batai* system, these groups were needed to buy the state share of grain⁴³. In some cases the state encouraged the permanent settlement of the merchants, so that its grain could be easily sold.

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41. *Sanad Parwana Bahi, Magh Vadi 11, VS 1821/1764, Migsar Sudi 9, VS 1821/1764 A.D., Jodhpur Records, RSAB.*
42. G.D. Sharma, 'Vyaparis and Mahajans in Western Rajasthan during the eighteenth century', p.378.
43. This is brought out in various instances. In an *Arzdasht*, Manrup informed Raja Ramsingh that due to absence of traders state grain was lying unsold in *mauzaChalees*, resulting in great loss to the state revenues. It was thus requested that traders from Alwar, Khohri and Mewat be encouraged to come there and for settlement they be provided houses in the Hat (market), *Arzdasht, Asad Vadi 8, VS 1744/1687, J.R.; H.S; RSAB.* In another instance the Raja informed that a new mandi was being set up in *Qasba Malarna* and to facilitate grain transaction *Vyaparis* of *Bhogotgarh, Serpur* were being invited there. *Arzdasht, Kartik Sudi 13, VS 1744/1687, J.R.; H.S; RSAB.* Similarly, *Rathor Amar Singh* and other *Mahajans* were assured of concessions if they settled down and started business in *Marwar*. G.D. Sharma, 'Vayaparis and Mahajans ... p.318.

(In years of famine the significance of these groups in carrying inter regional and intra local trade must have considerably increased. Interestingly the tax paid by *Sahukars*, called the '*Sahukar bachh*' in Bikaner, had to be frequently remitted in these years, as to escape its payment these classes, we are told often sought refuge in the temple of *Karniji*, the goddess of the royal family.] Also to facilitate grain supply only Rs.11.00 were charged on each camel carrying grain⁴⁴.

(Certainly measures like these helped to improve the supply situation in the famine affected zones.] However, the question whether such grain supply was able to meet the demand adequately, remains. The land transport, as commented, operated here as the chief bottleneck making food transport over long distance on any considerable scale difficult. The insecurity of land transport in periods of scarcities acted as another handicap. Thus in the latter half of eighteenth century in ^{eastern Rajasthan} in most of the *parganas* under study, frequent famines and migrations led to a fall in the local demand of foodstuffs. Despite however a relative glut in the local markets the state could not export the grain to deficit areas, as both famines and Maratha raids made the

44. Devra, '*Bikaner Ki Arthik*

trade routes highly insecure⁴⁵.

Moreover, the spatial asymmetry of crisis (itself a result of limitations of transport) often caused the traders and grain dealers to sell the limited local and imported supply at arbitrary rates. Peasant complaints in this regard we have already highlighted. The state with its close association with the local market often tried to prevent such irregularities. Instructions were thus given to the panch *mahajans*, probably the corporate organisation of traders, to regulate prices at the appropriate level⁴⁶. The *amils* also constantly directed the *mahajans* to sell grain at the normal rates. In one case physical punishment was prescribed for traders who sold grain at their own prices⁴⁷. In another, a fine was imposed on traders indulging in speculative holding⁴⁸.

However, despite these endeavours, it seems that the state's role in interfering in the market and ensuring a fair supply to all the affected sections at fixed price was

45. D.Singh, "State Landlords...", p. 92.

46. S.P. Gupta, "Agrarian System....."

47. Arzdasht, Asoj Sudi 2, VS 1751/1694, Descriptive list....., VS 1750-61/1693-1704 A.D., RSAB.

48. Chithi to Narayandas Kirparam, Maghshri Sudi 9 VS 1784/1727.

a limited one. As observed earlier, this was mainly operative in the urban centres and not throughout the realm. This urban bias, to some extent, was a result of the greater severity of famine impact here (due to the near total dependence of the urban centres on the countryside for their food supplies). However, the fact that the entire state apparatus, the dominant nobles and *zamindars* were all urban based also helped in governing the state policy. For the *raiyyats*, agricultural labourers, *kamils* and other menial and vulnerable groups, often unable to buy the high priced grains from the market, famine thus remained a 'subsistence crisis' and a 'crisis of mortality'.

[Some efforts were also made by the state to store up grains in years of abundance so as to be distributed in periods of scarcity.] Amongst the medieval Indian rulers we have the example of Alauddin storing up large quantities of grain in the state granaries as a part of his economic measures⁴⁹. Similarly during the 1574-75 Gujarat famine, Akbar established grain godowns at every place maintained by the *Dahsari* tax⁵⁰. However, the technical problem of storing grain over a long term restricted this effort. We

49. Ziauddin Barni, *Tarikh-i-Feroz Shahi*, ed., by S.A. Khan, pp.208-10.

50. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol.I, Eng. trans. by H.Blochmann, pp.199-210.

have the evidence of surplus state grain stored in the village (*kothars*) and state granaries (*awar*) often rotting after a period of three years or so.⁵¹ (It was thus the state policy to immediately dispose of this grain by either distributing it to the needy peasants as *taqavi* (to be recovered at the time of the next harvest), or by arranging for its sale to the banias or grain dealers⁵².) (We are told, that even in years of an abundant *kharif*, the peasant in west Rajasthan, due to lack of any adequate means to store grains, often left them in the open fields to be eaten up by the cattle⁵³.) Factors as these also become important in an analysis of vulnerability of peasants in famines and state's limited capacity to respond to them.

In the long term the effect and implication of famine can be crucially moderated by developing the means of irrigation. The idea that administration itself should

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51. *Arzdasht, Magh Sudi 3, VS 1701/1645, J.R.; H.S.; RSAB. Also, M. Bajekal, 'State and Rural Grain...', p.446.*
52. To facilitate grain sale many traders especially the ones coming from outside were given freight charges (*bhara*). At times, the state also advanced money to the traders to purchase grain. *Chithi to Amil Pargana Chatsu, Pos Vadi 11, VS 1783/1721.*
53. The only way to store up grains was to keep them in burnt earthen vessels, which had however to be brought from long distance, Rajputana Gazetteer, Vol. I, p.97.

undertake construction of irrigation works is expressed in the instructions given by medieval rulers to their revenue officials to repair bunds and wells, dig wells and execute canals. Nor was this a mere policy measure. For, we have the evidence of rulers like Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Akbar and Shahjahan initiating such measures⁵⁴.

Within our region, the study of desert west shows irrigation to be not of much help in altering the balance with the environment. Irrigation measures, in cases of distress, were nevertheless taken by the state. Our evidence from eastern Rajasthan suggests that the importance of irrigation (mainly wells), for expanding its revenue was fully realized by the state and loans were provided for their construction, more so in famine years. Thus in 1687 A.D. in pargana Bahatri, when a lot of villages became desolate (ujar) due to famine, the pargana official Bhavanidas reported to Raja Ramsingh, their endeavour to dig up 400 new wells in pargana Bahatri and also 150 in pargana phagui with

54. During the famine of 1362-66 in Punjab, canals were executed by Firoz Shah Tughlaq as part of his famine relief policy. Barni, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shah*, pp.567-71. Similarly Abul Fazl tells us that many wells were dug for the improvement of soil during Akbar's reign. The *faujdar* was, as he says, particularly instructed to pay due attention to the construction of reservoirs, wells and water courses. *Akbarnama* Vol.III, Eng. trans. by H.Beveridge, pp.308-09.

the help of *patels*⁵⁵. In another case of crop infection *raiya*t was assured of state help and new wells were dug⁵⁶. Similarly in an *arzdasht* to Raja Bishansingh, Kanwar Lal informed him that in 1699 A.D., around hundred villages had good rains due to which the *jawar* crop had been sown; however, wherever there were no rains the official were trying their best to sow the crop by making arrangements of irrigation through wells⁵⁷.

Evidence like this however exists mainly for late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when stable conditions made this a marked trait of state policy. Certainly, as a famine preventive measure this would have been beneficial to the cultivators. However, here again the question of these facilities being made available to the needy peasants, particularly in terms of increased demand for them in famine years, is crucial. The question that most significant is, how and to what extent did the dominance of rural aristocracy result in its control of water resources and how did this effect the distribution of its supply?.

55. *Arzdasht, Sawan Sudi 3, VS 1741/1687 J.R.; H.S.; RSAB.*

56. *Arzdasht Kartik Vadi 13, VS 1742/1685 J.R.; H.S.; RSAB.*

57. *Arzdasht, Asoj Sudi 2, VS 1756/1699, JR; HS; RSAB.*

Some reference is also given in our literature to state initiated public works, as an effort to create work conditions for those seeking livelihood. Thus, during the 1597 Kashmir famine, a strongly bastioned stone wall was built around the slope of Hariparbat hillock in Srinagar and a large number of men and women were employed as labourers. Married women, it is said, received six annas and unmarried ones four annas per day⁵⁸. However, as is evident, this was more of an urban phenomena, though it must have absorbed some migrants from the countryside. (It is believed that in Rajasthan a large number of forts, palaces temples were constructed during years of famines and droughts⁵⁹. The Rajsamand lake in Kankroli, Mewar is thus said to have been constructed in the famine year of 1661 A.D.. The outer wall of the city of Bikaner is also said to have been extended and reconstructed at the time of famine⁶⁰, though it is difficult to say whether this was purely a relief measure or had other politico-strategic reasons.)

58. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, Eng. trans, by H. Beveridge, Vol. III, pp.714-727.

59. G.N. Sharma, *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan*, Agra, 1968, pp.344-47.

60. B.M. Javalia, '*Rajasthan Ki Arthik Vyavastha*' Varda, (Journal), 1975, p.51.

(The study of these relief works initiated by the ruling authorities indicates that at various levels efforts were made to counter the impact of famine. Some of these were anticipatory measures, aimed at the long term development of irrigation, agricultural and trade networks while others were alleviatory, aimed at relieving the distress in the immediate context. However, the aim of both forms of relief was fundamentally to protect the cultivating capacity of the Peasant so that the continuous process of cultivation brought constant flows of revenue to the state. Thus at whatever stage actual relief was provided^{by} the state, the first step in any serious calamity was to provide full assurance to the peasant of all state consideration and help, so as to postpone the peasant decision to migrate. The fact that the raiyat placed considerable premium on even this form of state intervention is also adequately brought out in our sources⁶¹.)

(However, there were various limitations which operated in the actual relief which was forthcoming and to the

61. Arzdasht, Jeth Sudi 5, VS 1740/1683; Sawan Sudi 3, VS 1741/1684, Descriptive List....., VS 1687-1743/1630-1686. Also, Arzdashts, Jeth Sudi 1, VS 1762/1705; Asadh Vadi 9, VS 1762/1705; Kartik Sudi 15, VS 1774/1717, Descriptive List....., VS 1762-1775/1705-1717, A.D., RSAB.

extent it could relieve the lower peasant groups of the process of impoverishment and indebtedness that set in famine years. At times, even though a belief and an understanding existed on the part of the state to make all provisions for relief, it was not provided at a stage when scarcity could be prevented from being converted into a famine. Here the intermediacy of the officials becomes crucial. For, the state understanding of when to begin the relief tasks depended considerably on the reporting of the state officials *diwans, amils, patels, chaudhuris* in *parganas* and villages, their estimate of the extent of 'crisis', whether they termed it as 'scarcity' or 'famine', and following therein their recommendations to the ruling authorities about the nature of its intervention.

Though we have highlighted the positive role played by these officials in conveying the *raiyat's* complaints and demands to the ruling authorities, we also have evidence of their creating problems for the peasantry and other lower groups by charging undue exactions and spreading lawlessness and disorder⁶². Amongst those involved in making illegal

62. In an *arzdasht*, Kishordas informed Bishansingh that *Amils* of *parganas* Haripur and Malarna have not given the possession to the appointed *jagirdars* and had themselves taken the *zabti* and *batai* and that too in

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exactions on the raiyat and the artisans, the amils, kotwal, and faujdar formed the most significant sections.⁶³ In years of famines, the evidence suggests that on occasions relief was postponed by these and other dominant groups (like patels) even though it was urgently required⁶⁴. In an instance, it was reported that though the state had made arrangements for cash and seed loans for the raiyat, the amount did not reach them and was suspected to have been kept by the amil.⁶⁵ In some interesting cases from Jaipur, the ruling authorities themselves tried to draw advantage from the scarcity of grains in the famine year. Thus, in an instance state advanced grain in taqai (taqavi) to raiyat at

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excess. Migsar Vadi 5, VS 1743/1690, JR; HS. In another instance, Lalchand complained to Jaisingh II, that in Qasba Phagui at the time of batai of grains, Prahlad patel was taking the bajra from the peasants without considering the bazar rates and thus causing great problems to the raiyat. Migsar Vadi 3, VS 1759/1702, JR; HS; Similarly, Deepchand informed Raja Ramsingh that Nawab Inayat Kahn has reached Malpura and has told the Sahukars, that just as the Maharaja's men and officials have looted pargana Malpura, he would loot Phagui. Asad Sudi 7, VS 1744/1687, JR; HS; RSAB.

63. H. Mukhia, 'Illegal Extortions.....', pp.231-245.
64. Arzdasht, Migsar Sudi 3, VS 1744//1717 A.D. Descriptive List....., VS 1762-1775/1705-1717 A.D.
65. Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 9, VS 1746/1689, JR; HR; RSAB.

a time when prices were low. But when the prices rose, it gave instructions for the realisation of debt in grain and its sale at current high prices⁶⁶. In another case, when prices increased due to scarcity of rainfall state took advantage to sell off the old stock and gave instructions to hoard fresh grain⁶⁷.

This then suggests that any famine study has a number of complex variables. To establish a direct causal relationship between policy and practice is thus misdirected. Despite some efforts taken to ameliorate the crisis the medieval state often could not come out of its temporal and ideological limitations. We have earlier stressed the limitation of technology, of making available food supplies over long distances as the chief temporal bottleneck operating in medieval India and other pre modern societies. As far as the question of ideology goes, the most crucial aspect here was the class structure of medieval

66. *Chithi to Amil pargana, Jaipur, Jeth Vadi 5, VS 1784/1727, JR; DDH, RSAB.*

67. *Chithi from Diwan Naraindas to Vidyadar, Bhadva Vadi 3, VS 1783/1728. JR; DDH. Similar evidence is found from other medieval famines. The English traveller John Marshall, tells us how during the Bihar famine of 1670-71 the subedar, Ibrahim Khan had a good stock of rice at his disposal but he neither distributed this nor sold it at cheaper rates to the people; rather he amassed a fortune by selling it at high rates. John Marshall, Notes and Observations in Bengal (1668-72), p.150.*

state. The social set up and especially the agrarian relations that were worked out, made the *zamindars* and the dominant land owning castes in the village the most significant force in the state structure (this is apart from the *jagirdars* who represented the central authority). So significant was the state dependence on this rural aristocracy, for maintaining links with the peasants, facilitating collection of revenue and discharging other administrative functions, that the exploitation perpetuated by these classes of the lower peasants and artisan groups within the rural society could never be significantly checked.) Thus for example, though evidence existed on their deliberately, preventing landless peasants with small holdings to become landowners and extend their cultivable land, the ruling authorities could never alter or check this process on any considerable scale. Likewise, in years of famine the encroachments on land and person of the vulnerable also greatly went uncontrolled. Though some relief to the needy peasants was provided in these years, since the overall exploitative structure remained unchanged and even further got strengthened, the affected peasants could never 'recover' from the crisis of famine. A bad year could have been overcome, but the societal constraints were too structured for any 'relief' to have improved their lot

in any 'real' sense.

Other than social, this class structure also had a financial limitation. The concessionary status of the dominant groups, making for differential tax payments, made the entire burden to fall on the weaker peasantry; thus making them the most vulnerable section along with the agricultural labourers and artisans groups in years of famine. Their inability to pay the complete revenue and the ruling class's total dependence on it (even for its ostentations living) significantly contributed to the 'financial crisis' of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century medieval state⁶⁸. Moreover, the strong dependence of the ruling class on *zamindars* throughout our period, made the latter particularly more assertive and led them to increasingly defy the central authority by not forwarding the state share of revenue, by expanding their social base and so on. In this context, it is important to remember that the rulers of Bikaner, Marwar and Amber were not only imperial *jagirdars* representing the Mughal rule in their territories but also autonomus chieftains having their 'watan' *zamindaris*. The period (beginning from late seventeenth century) increasingly saw their assertiveness

68. Satish Chandra, Medieval India: Society, The Jagirdari Crisis and the Village, pp. 61-75.

vis-a-vis both the central rule and also the other zamindars and jagirdars within their respective regions⁶⁹. Most symptomatic of this was the creation of the independent state of Sawai Jaipur under the Jaipur Raja, Mirza Raja Jai Singh in 1740's A.D.⁷⁰

Within their regional states however, these rulers perpetuated the imperial tradition of placing great reliance on the dominant zamindars (based on mainly caste affiliations with the ruling class) and khudkashta peasantry. Thus the eighteenth century (mainly its latter half) saw a replication of all the administrative and financial problems here. A study of jama and hasil figures of the state of Jaipur shows a great gap mainly in the form of baqaya (arrears)⁷¹. At times so acute was this problem that the balance had to be written off⁷² Similarly in the

69. Ibid, Also R.P. Rana, 'A dominant class in upheavel....', p. 395. For areas other than Rajasthan, Muzaffar Alam, 'Aspects of agrarian uprisings in North India in the early eighteenth century' in Thapar Romila and Sabhyasacchi B., ed. Situating Indian History, Delhi, 1985, p.146

70. S.P. Gupta, Agrarian System....., pp.1-38.

71. For instance, the payment of ghascharai tax of the year 1693 was baqaya till 1694. Even in 1694 A.D of the balance of Rs. 3864 and 3 annas, only Rs. 1339 was collected. Arzdasht, Asoj Vadi 6, VS 1751/1694. Descriptive List....., VS 1750-1761/1693-1704 A.D.

72. D. Singh, State Landlords....., p.117.

state of Bikaner in late seventeenth century (otherwise a period of political stability), a gap between state income and expense, was of Rs.27,800, as a solution to which increased taxation from the peasant was attempted⁷³.

Years of famine certainly increased this process of falling state income, mainly because of the continuous arrears⁷⁴ and also due to the demands made on it for providing relief works. Thus, the difficulty in sheer financial terms to manage both these aspects led to the relief provided, to be often limited and sporadic. Cumulatively then all these problems severely restricted the state's capacity to intervene in any major way in famine situations. Thus it is no surprise that there was no fixed procedure of famine relief, no well defined rules on any consistent level and no famine codes in the medieval period. Much then depended on the policy of the individual rulers.

73. Devra, 'Rajasthan Ki, pp. 201-08.

74. We have numerous instances of state income falling end of baqaya in famine years. Arzdashts, Sawan Suei 13, VS 1750/1693; Jeth Sudi 5, VS 1752/1695; Migsar Vadi 8, VS 1752/1695; Migsar Vadi 1, VS 1753/1696; Jeth Vadi 6, VS 1755/1698; JR; HS. Also in Bikaner, the year 1770 was a famine year. Thus the taxes could not be paid even for four years. For example, in village Dhakli, ghas charai of 1770 was paid in 1774, in village Sihlanu, the bachh tax of 1770 was paid in the year 1774 A.D., Kagda Bahi, Bhadva Vadi 2, VS 1831/1774 A.D.; Asadh Vadi 14, VS 1831/1774 A.D., BR, RSAB.

In this context each famine represented a situation of considerable mortality and dislocation. Unfortunately in the absence of any precise figures this cannot be computed. The fact that taxes could not be paid at their normal rates even ^{for} four to five years after the famine shows that rehabilitation often was a slow process. Though attempts at this level were often carried on by the ruling authorities⁷⁵ it is difficult for us at present, to work out whether the process of settlement throughout our period was able to balance the process of desertion. Since migration of the famine affected continued to be the feature of every medieval famine despite states inducements and assistance, the limitations of the state measures is well evident.

75. In Western Rajasthan this was an ongoing process. Our evidence from Eastern Rajasthan, shows how *pahis* were constantly encouraged to settle new areas. Thus in the territories of Amber Raja, in *mauza Bheevpur* which was desolate (*ujar*) for many years, in 1695 A.D 1611 *bighas* of new land was given and the area was thus settled on a new basis; its name being then changed to *mauza Hardhyanpur*. *Arzdasht, Chait Sudi 3, VS 1752/1695*. In 1694, Kusla informed Raja Bishansingh, that 14 new villages were being settled and many more new ones were being created. *Arzdasht Jeth Vadi 8, VS 1751/1694; J.R.; H.S.; RSAB*.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages we have attempted a socio-economic analysis of problem of famine in seventeenth eighteenth century rural society of Rajasthan. The complexity of the phenomena and the limited sources used have restricted us from making any major conclusions. Certain trends and lines of future research however emerge from this analysis. To begin with, the study highlights the frequency of the occurrence of the pheonomena in our period. Throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, even in a period of political stability and economic growth, therewere numerous years of severe famine in our region. The number, as argued, increased greatly in context of the political disturbances in the later half of the eighteenth century. Often the existant constraints and the bottlenecks of the period, in terms of undeveloped technology, market system and communication networks made the crisis not only a recurring one but also intense and localised in nature. To a great extent, drought was the most important causative factor associated with famine. This was true of medieval India in general but more so of our region, where semi arid and arid climatic conditions reduced all cultivation to fluctuations of nature. Broad variations

arising from the difference in the nature of the eco system however, did exist even in western and eastern Rajasthan, in the nature of dislocation caused by the aberrations, the resultant responses to it and the extent of the state intervention.

This variation then clearly establishes the significance of the study of environmental conditions of different regions and communities for an analysis of famine. However, along with a discussion of factors like temperature, rainfall, nature of soil, land use and irrigation affecting the societal conditions, what is more essential for such a study is to analyse the long term impact of climate and environmental changes. For example, it has been argued that behind the 1896-97 Nadia famine in Bengal, lay a series of ecological disasters including the drying up of some of the tributaries of Ganges and the debility of the population caused by repeated epidemics of cholera and malaria (the latter itself linked to stagnant water from atrophying rivers and railway embankments).¹ A study which brings out interlinkages like these can be most

1. Quoted in David Arnold, 'Famine: Vulnerability, Coping and Recovery' in Workshop on Famine in 18th and 19th Century India: SOAS, 29 September 1989.

fruitful in working out the dialectics between the various processes causing and affecting famine.

The relevance of any study on famine lies only when the 'subsistence crisis' is placed in a broader structural context. For, as shown, the answer to harvest failures taking the form of 'famine' only for some sections of society and the impact of food shortage (be it in terms of availability or distribution) being often non recoverable only for this limited strata, lies mainly in the unequal social structures and power relationships.

The fact of a stratified rural society based on an exploitative relationship between the dominant groups and the lower classes of peasants and artisans has been established even earlier. What our analysis has been able to document is, how these patterns of domination and subordination intervened as significant variables in changing the meaning and implication of famine for each group. Famine, as understood, was 'a crisis of subsistence' only for these vulnerable sections; often resourceless and dependent even in normal years on their superiors for capital inputs. The capacity of the socio-economic elite to

utilise the scarcity years for profiteering only shows this existing hiatus.

Nor was this social gap visible only in the inter class relationships in the rural society. What is most ironical was that the dominance of these groups was greatly respected even by the ruling authorities, who often through their own policies strengthened the existing stratifications. Despite all idyllic notions of a paternalist medieval state existing in our literature, there were crucial limitations in the state's intervening role in any subsistence crisis. More than the temporal problems, this included the failure on part of the state to effect any structural change so as to prevent the long term vulnerability of the peasants, artisans and other indigent classes. Thus years of famine, when burden of maintaining the state apparatus should have been equitably shared by the rural aristocracy, found the superior groups passing even their own responsibilities on the tax burdened peasants and this violation often going unchecked at the state level. Our contention is, that it was these non-customary demands and exactions and state's inability to check these that made the resultant crisis often long term. For, though loans, remissions and other facilities were made available by the state to the peasants

in the immediate context of distress, a gap often remained between the relief provided and the impact of famine. Our evidence shows that in famine years the raiyat was often reduced to the status of agricultural labourers, thus effecting a significant change in the agrarian relationships.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to document the actual extent of this 'subsistence crisis' in terms of the nature of mortality, i.e. how much was it a result of actual food shortages and how much due to infectious role of diseases in a situation of malnutrition, the number of villages that got deserted, the extent of agricultural dislocation in terms of the percentage of falling crop yields, the time taken by the raiyat in each famine year to come back to the normal. Since there were pargana and even village level variations in the nature of these, a more detailed study of sources is required before anything significant on this can be worked out.

Broadly speaking however, our sources suggest that in the rural society the adverse affects of famine and drought did not remain restricted to one season alone. Since the cost of agricultural operations escalated in the season following the drought, more ploughing and watering was

required and new wells had to be excavated if the situation had to be remedied. However for the indigent peasants, often indebted to the moneylenders in these years, this was a difficult task. In most cases, the land once abandoned could not be brought under cultivation for many years despite state inducements for resettlement. Particularly in desert areas of Bikaner and Marwar, where even in normal years the population density was low, despite state's willingness to remit the entire hasil, the task of rehabilitation became extremely difficult in famine years. Thus peasant indebtedness, mortality and migration remained the most essential characteristics of medieval famines.

The peasant it seems was not unaware of the implication of this crisis. Our sources both oral and archival, highlight his understanding of the various weather forms, the linkages between these and the nature of the coming scarcity and resulting apprehension and anxiety in his mind. Since the causative agency was often seen in supernatural terms, recourse to rituals to appease the dieties commonly followed. However, the role of social factors in accentuating the crisis was also not ignored, more so in the advanced stages of famine. This is clearly brought out in the peasant complaints against the harassments and exactions

of mahajans, bohras, the dominant riyayati cultivators and other superior rural groups. The inter class transfer of capital inputs - land, agricultural implements, wells etc. was particularly commented. In many such cases, state intervention was demanded by the raiyat under threat of migration. Thus, migration which was mainly a survival strategy to escape food scarcity and cattle mortality (more so in the desert west), also in cases became a pressure tactic applied on the ruling authorities; at times to prevent violation of customary norms, at others to get their demands fulfilled.

Though little is known about the selectivity of famine migrations, our limited evidence suggests the process to be sharper amongst those groups and sub-groups in the rural society who were most affected by the crisis. However, apart from the short term impact of enabling large number of people to survive the famine, we have not been to study the significant social consequences of this peasant mobility. The changing numerical caste and class composition of the village population effected in these years must have crucially altered the demographic distribution patterns. To thus meaningfully understand the problem, as pointed out by Hugo, various dimensions like the degree of permanency of

the move, the distance of the move, whether it involved a transfer between rural and urban areas, whether there was any significant change in the occupation of the mover and whether the move involved all or part of the basic family unit, have all to be studied.²

The last aspect is particularly crucial in understanding another significant social theme associated with the problem of famine; that of familial dislocation taking place in these years. Megan Vaughan's study of 1949 Malawi famine in Africa, highlights how in the collective memory of women, as reflected in their pounding songs, 1949 was remembered as the year of separation from their husbands; the migrating men often settling elsewhere and taking to marriage. The year was thus associated with many divorces and as proving the fragile nature of marriage ties.³ Greenough's study of 1943 Bengal famine has also demonstrated the importance of permanent and temporary separation of husbands and wives, rendered destitute by the

2. G. Hugo, 'The Demographic Impact of Famine' in Curry, B and Hugo, G. ed., *Famine as a Geographical Phenomenon*, Holland, 1984.

3. Megan Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in 20th Century Malawi*, Cambridge, 1987.

famine. This not only took the form, as he argued, of a man leaving his wife because he could no longer provide for her but also of men asking their wives to leave and seek subsistence elsewhere.⁴ At the crux of these, were often the social values attached to the consumption and distribution of food. Thus it becomes essential to examine the difference in dietary pattern of various social groups, i.e. which section ate what food over the long term and nature of change affected in these in the years of famine. This would then throw light on the existing social differentiation and the biases that often existed against the weaker sex. It would also link us up with other associated problems like the declining fertility in famine years. For, sterility was not merely a function of separation or stress of crisis but often a result of no energy and capacity on part of women to enter into sexual intercourse.

Since an answer to many of these social themes cannot be found with a study of only the archival records, a far more systematic and deeper study of literary sources is required for a socio-cultural analysis of famine.

4. Paul Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal : Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford, 1982.

To thus summarise, research on a socio-economic theme as famine has barely begun in medieval India. Like the modern famines, the famines in our period also had wide ranging implications and ramifications. Since the limited nature of our sources often prevent an understanding of its various nuances and complex variables, relatively speaking a detailed research of the problem is far more significant and difficult here. The preliminary nature of our study has not made it possible for us to make an in-depth study of all the famines in our period, so as to highlight the long term fluctuations and changes affected by them in the rural society. Only some years of scarcity and famine have been studied against the backdrop of otherwise normal years to make certain broad comments and observations. However, certain crucial aspects have been highlighted by us. For example, how the culture of peasant spoke of the pervasive reality of famine; how caste and economic ties altered the meaning and impact of the crisis for different groups of the rural society; how this affected a change in the inter and intra class rural relationships; how peasants through their own logic worked out strategies both passive and defiant; how dominance of the customary privileged groups in the rural society was upheld by the state even in famine years, despite transgression of authority by the former and how

this highlights the very ideological limitations of the medieval Indian state.

APPENDIX

FAMINE AND URBAN ECONOMY

The totality of phenomena of famine did not leave the urban sector unaffected. Each year of bad harvest, scarcity and famine in rural society affected far more severely the urban centres existing in almost an 'organic dependence' upon their countryside for inputs be it raw materials, labour or capital. The most obvious necessity, as one knows, for the sustenance of the non agricultural sector was a productive agriculture, capable of producing food supplies and industrial raw material over a significantly long period of time. In medieval India, the entire strata of ruling class with the emperor, *jagirdars*, *mansabdars* and dominant *zamindars*, resided in major towns and urban centres and subsisted on the surplus acquired from the countryside. It was precisely the drying up of this regular flow of surplus in times of wars, famines and epidemics which becomes crucial for the urban economy, threatening its very functioning.

This inter sectoral dependency becomes more clear when one appreciates the importance of price factor in a famine situation. The initial conditions of a famine, no doubt are created by a harvest failure. The subsequent misery however

depends on the movement of agricultural prices. The extent to which prices climb certainly depends on the temporal and spatial spread of such shortages but given the hike it exerts a grave influence on both agricultural and non agricultural population. Here it is important to realize that artisans, townsmen and even rural poor had to purchase their food from a specialized community of grain merchants, the 'Banjaras' of our period,¹ who often took advantage of the existing spatial asymmetry and thus aggravated the actual 'crisis'. Thus, despite the fact that no one to one relationship existed between food shortages and an increase in the prices of non agricultural commodities, the sensitivity of the overall economy to agricultural prices meant that its impact was not limited to the epicentre of famine, but had a spill over effect on the relatively unaffected urban areas and on commodities other than food crops. It should thus be significantly borne in mind that should a degree of scarcity raise the price of grain above

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1. Peter Mundy, the European traveller of seventeenth century, describes these Banjaras as 'merchants involved in buying grain where it is cheap to be had and carrying it to places where it is dearer and from thence again relading themselves with anything that yields benefits in other places'. 'The Travels of Peter Mundy (1608-47) II, ed., Sir Richard Temple, Haklyut Society Publication, pp. 95-96.

the average rate, it falls heavily on the manufacturer. For an exorbitant increase in the rates of necessities of life renders the ordinary allowance for his labour insufficient unless prices of his other commodities also increased. And if the latter was not the case, it involved not merely the dislocation of the artisanal production but also of total urban activity. Thus the crisis of famine, which resulted at times not more than in impoverishment and indebtedness of the peasant population, could result in complete elimination of both the artisan and the urban centre.

Here, we have attempted a very brief and elementary analysis of these complicating trends. Since the theme is not directly related to our work on the problems of famine in the rural society, only certain observations are made, on which future research may be pursued. The famines studied do not pertain to Rajasthan but include two famines of seventeenth century medieval India, ie, the 1630 famine of Gujarat and 1686 famine on the Coromondal. For our sources, only a study of some European Travellers Accounts and English Factory Records, Diaries and Consultation books kept by the English at their headquarters in Madras, is made. Their foreign or official nature certainly limits the analysis, yet their graphic details and richness on all matters pertaining to commercial/mercantile activities,

makes them particularly an important source material for the study of our problem.

The choice of the two famines of 1630 and 1686 is deliberate. The fact that both famines took place in seventeenth century in a period of hightened mercantile and commercial activity is significant. For the idea is to study the disruption caused by the disaster of famines in an otherwise dynamic period. Moreover, both the famines taken up are important as being different from other years of scarcity or short span dearths, in the sheer magnitude of change and crisis that they caused.

The English Records of the period are abound with details of how for example, the famine of 1638 was something extraordinary, long remembered as the 'Satyasio Kal', or the calamity of the Vikram Era.² Similarly struck by the 1686 famine the French traveller, Francois Martin wrote in October 1686 that 'there existed no famine to sequel this either in religious or profane tradition'.³ How does a famine become a part of the collective consciousness and

2. English Factories in India, (1630-33) ed., William Foster pp 45-46.

3. India in the 17th century : Memoirs of Francois Martin 1670-1694, Vol II, Part I, Trans. Lotika Vardarajan, Delhi, 1984, p. 1019.

what makes a particular famine a reference point for other events would involve a study of popular perceptions, yet to a great extent the question is related to the disruption and change brought by the famine itself.

Famine, as we have seen is, unlike dearths which represent a more continuous saga of scarcities, a one-off event of calamitous proportions when a 'subsistence and mortality crisis' become combined in a critical conjuncture. The evidence forthcoming from both our famines supports this understanding.

Writing in January 1631, from Swally harbour of Surat, the English officials reported to the Company 'a most mizereble mortality amongst the natives of this country',⁴ Even a Dutch Factor arriving at Swally in December 1631 could not find more than ten or eleven families alive, where earlier there were two hundred and sixty families and in the city of Surat there were hardly any living persons where earlier there were thousands.⁵ Peter Mundy, on his journey from Surat to Agra in 1630, found depopulated towns with dead bodies lying in the streets as far as Burhanpur (170

4. English Factories....., 1630-33, p 135.

5. Ibid., p. 180.

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KOS). It is interesting to know that the 'kafila' with which Mundy travelled from Surat, within ten days (having covered a distance of 75-80 KOS) increased from 150 to more than 1700 (with the proportionate increase in the number of carts from 15-20 to 250-300), who as Mundy says, 'to save their lives repaired to places of better relief'.⁶ (The travel routes of Mundy's journey from Surat to Agra in 1630 and back again to Gujarat in 1633, as shown in his 'Travels' is enclosed here)

Certainly, these vast multitudes who succumbed to death or deserted their villages and towns en masse were what Mundy calls the 'common or poorer sort,' mostly the men of occupational castes, the artisans and handicraftsmen.⁷ That this was indeed the case is also evident by the constant complaints of the English officials at Surat, of the country being deprived of the greater part of weavers, dyers and washers, either due to their death or dispersion into foreign parts; thus bringing the entire cloth industry to a standstill.⁸

Evidence of such kind only multiplies when we see the famine on the Coromondal. A general scarcity of food was

6. The Travels....., pp. 43-46.

7. Ibid, pp. 272-273.

8. English Factories.....1630-33, pp 145-146.

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felt in Golconda over an area which extended upto Aurangabad. In Golconda of October 1686, Martin saw the countryside littered with corpses and bones of those who had gone out to eat grass like animals but had died on the fields⁹. In Masaulipatnam, the mortality rate was so high that the Dutch had to employ fifteen to twenty men of the Pariah caste to clear the roads of dead bodies which got accumulated every day.¹⁰

There was a constant movement of people from north of Pondicherry to the south, towards Tanjore where food was in plenty. How great was the repercussion of this phenomenon of mortality and migration can be gauged from what Martin wrote in April 1688; 'settlements once containing 30 to 40,000 people, were now completely desolate. Before the famine 700 members of the bleachers caste were scattered about in Masaulipatnam and its surrounding villages, now only 2 remained; making it impossible for us to place any orders.'¹¹ It is evidence like this, which sharply brings into focus the nature and dimension of the famine crisis, the fact that

9. 'India in the 17th Century' p. 1019.

10. Ibid., p. 1061.

11. India in the 17th Century....., p. 1113.

depopulation and redistribution can be to an extent, which can lead to the decline of an established settlement.

The problem is certainly linked to the weak resource base, the vulnerability of the artisan and handicraftsmen (on account of their almost complete dependence on raw materials) to any such famine crisis. The fact that agricultural prices take a steep turn in years of crisis is also equally important. In December 1631, Thomas Rastell the President of East India company, wrote how no grain was to be had for man or beast even for payments of seven times the former price.¹² Arrangements were thus made to obtain grain and dates from Persian Gulf and food supplies even from Bantam and other distant places.¹³

How far was this price rise due to actual shortage, is difficult to say for, the problem of immediate transportation of grain to the affected areas provided full opportunities to the merchants and other intermediaries to engage in speculative activities; thus creating an artificial scarcity and price rise. Mundy noticed, how in the towns of Chopada and Navi (between Surat and Burhanpur)

12. English Factories,1630-33, pp 122-123.

13. Ibid., p. 145,178.

bazars were well furnished yet people were dying in the streets because of their inability to purchase food.¹⁴ The English officials at Surat also warned against the bania brokers and shroffs, who, 'being poor and beggarly fellows, have in short time raised themselves to great wealth and riches'.¹⁵ The fact of their accumulated wealth becomes clear when at the peak of the crisis Hari Vaishya, one of the most prominent merchants of Surat, could offer 7000 maunds of paddy to the English.¹⁶ In 1632, the English factor found wheat at Ahmedabad being sold at 4½ mahmudis or Rs 2/- the maund of 40 seer, while at Surat, 'it continued to sell at double the price, owing to the governor and one or two moneyed merchants engrossing the supply.¹⁷ The evidence is not limited to one famine alone, nor should it be treated in an episodic manner, for this appropriation was as much a part of each famine situation as the case of harvest failures and grain scarcity.

The 1686 famine is further revealing on this aspect. As in the earlier case, food was scarce and expensive, so that

14. The Travels pp. 48-49.

15. English Factories.....1630-33', pp. 20-21,

16. Ibid., p.62

17. Ibid., p. 209.

workers who had families to support could not get enough to eat and perform their occupational tasks.¹⁸ To procure and maintain grain at the port of Fort St. George (Madras), the English made certain certain interesting regulations. While all customs were removed, so as to encourage more and more merchants to get paddy and grain there, they were specifically instructed on pain of punishments, 'not to engross grain to themselves, more than what was required by buying it up in great quantities, to sell it out again to the poor at dear rates'. Also a ban was placed on the transport of grain from that area, upon forfeiture of double the value.¹⁹ These detailed restrictions, while throwing light on the extent of food shortage also suggest a wide prevalence of speculative activities. Variables as these, thus often intervened to make the nature and impact of crisis far more severe & complicated.

The change is best discernible by study of the artisanal and mercantile activities in the urban centres. If one reviews the pre famine urban scenario in Gujrat, one finds flourishing urban centres catering to foreign and

18. India in the 17th Century....., p. 1018.

19. Diary and Consultation Books, 1687 Records of Fort St. George, 2nd August, 1687. p.60. NML.



domestic demand and providing profitable and regular employment to craftsmen, spinners and weavers. Broach for example, was a rich, textile producing, dying and bleaching centre with its suburbs entirely inhabited by weavers. The foreign demand of the calicoes produced and bleached here was so great (rising from 14,000 in 1618 to 200,000 pieces in 1625) that Moreland has placed a rough estimate of profit of about three lakhs of rupees per year.²⁰ This must have had an appreciable impact on the material condition of the weavers.

Ahmedabad likewise, was another textile centre famed not only for its indigo but also silk and cotton manufactures. The specialised nature of the silk craft becomes evident when one realises that from imported raw material to final product, as many as eleven separate categories of workmen were involved.²¹ What is significant here is that much of the preliminary work like reeling and spinning was carried out in the adjacent villages. Even the cloth that was dyed in the city by the famous Sarkhej indigo was woven in the villages. This dependence and vulnerability

20. W.H. Moreland, 'From Akbar To Aurangzeb' Delhi, 1923, pp 96-97.

21. B.G. Gokhle, 'Surat in the Seventeenth Century' Bombay 1977, pp. 88.89.

of the artisanal production in famine years, increased all the more as the peasants in the countryside often found it profitable to shift to the cultivation of food crops rather than grow cotton or indulge in handicrafts production, thus increasing the price of not only raw materials supplied to the non-agricultural sector but even the price of the final product reaching the market. The English officials at these urban centres constantly complained of how with scarce materials and labour and food grains at famine rates manufacture had come to a standstill.²²

The supply situation was indeed seriously affected because of the wiping away of the weavers and craftsmen and depopulation of the towns.²³ The weavers at Broach and Baroda agreed to supply textiles, only when the English gave them one seer for every piece of textile brought by them. Even then, the English could not get more than two hundred pieces ie about ten Karachi every day.²⁴ Broach, which earlier supplied thirty, forty or fifty corges, after famine could provide only twenty to thirty; Surat none at all, and at Baroda, no English factory existed in the post

22. English Factories,.... p. 184.

23. English Factories.....(1634-36), pp. 54, 64, 114.

24. English Factories.....(1634-36), p.158.

famine period.²⁵ Similarly, at Ahmedabad it was said that its earlier yield of three thousand bayles indigo was now reduced to three hundred.²⁶ In 1630, due to the scarcity of labourers at Sarkhej, the indigo crop remained unharvested in the fields and even the offer of half the produce failed to lure people to bring it home.²⁷ By 1633, the yield had thus come to one-twentieth of the normal and 'nothing but old refuse was available in the market.'²⁸

Even in 1687, during the famine at the Coromondal coast, the French and the English constantly complained of the inability to procure quality goods at reasonable rates. The French at Pondicherry constantly used petitions, entreaties and threats to force their merchants to provide them the promised consignments of goods. While the merchants on their part, expressed their utter incapacity to procure the-famed Gingee cloth due to scarcity of goods and more so because of the lack of men who could take up the task of making and curing the cloth.²⁹ In July 1687 merchants had to

25. Ibid, pp. 160-162.

26. English Factories.....(1630-33), pp. 115-116.

27. Ibid,. pp. 193-194.

28. Ibid., pp. 220-22.

29. 'India in the 17th century p. 1023. He writes how despite being engaged in talks with the merchants for months, it was so difficult to appease them, how they constantly, as a body expressed their inability to meet the supply, how they were in fact persuaded by him on promise of certain remunerations, to go to the actual centres of production to pressure the weavers.

be detained inside the lodge by force for five or six days, to supply the commodities worth 400,000 livres on basis of the earlier agreement.³⁰ Similarly in January 1688, Sieur Montferre at Masaulitpatnam placed one of the leading merchants under detention and allowed him to leave only on the promise that merchandise worth 20,000 pagodas would be supplied.³¹

These examples, certainly reveal the gravity of the crisis caused by an extreme scarcity in the supply of goods and a consequent disruption of textile production. What it also highlights is an attempt by both buyers and sellers to contest their power positions so as to maximise their gains. It is important to realise here that in medieval India, as in other pre modern exchange economies, the buyer was rarely in actual contact with the producer. It was the merchant who acted as the capitalist, procuring manufactured goods from the artisans by a system of advance finance (putting out). This certainly gave the merchant a power position, which in times of crisis could come in clash with the interests of the buyers. In 1633, when the governor of Ahmedabad granted the monopoly of trade in indigo to

30. Ibid., p. 1067.

31. India in the 17th Century.....', p. 1087.

Manohardas, he raised the sale price of commodity to the traders and reduced the purchase price for the producers, thus harming the interests of both the trading and producing groups.³² Similarly, an attempt was made by the merchants in February 1687 to shift the balance in their favour, when on being remitted only 5000 pagodas for supplying the assigned consignment of cloth, (after paying double the normal wages to their workers) they protested as a body and agreed to provide in future only on the promise of 'more'.³³

The crisis in an urban economy is affected, not only when supplies fall short of demand, but when the existing limited supply also declines in standard and skill, so as to effect the sale of the merchandise itself. Our study of both these famines indicates precisely this to be the case. In 1632, as many as one thousand of the calicoes going to Bantam were unbleached because of workmen.³⁴ From the coast of Masaulipatnam, it was reported in 1633, that 'due to the continuous dearth since three years, the cloth of this part is growing very deceitful, as wanting in both lengths and breadths, which will be very prejudicial to profit.'³⁵

32. English Factories.....(1630-33), p. 324.

33. India in the 17th Century.....', p. 1039.

34. English Factories ... (1630-33), pp. 192-193.

35. Ibid., p. 79.

When the English came to know that the price of even the 'course calicoes' has risen by a mahmudi per piece in Broach, they were forced to suspend all investments till the market became more reasonable.³⁶

How this decline in techniques and skill could affect the market is instructively brought out in our evidence from the 1686 famine. We are told that despite all the force and persuasion applied on the merchants, the cloth received by the French in the period was often unbleached so much so that in April 1688 letters were received from Bengal, that due to the extreme defectiveness of cloth manufacture not a piece had been sold.³⁷

From the decline in the mercantile activity the decline of an urban centre was not far away, for, the very rationale of an urban centre is its economic activity, its fulfillment of a certain 'market principle and when that is lost, the town loses its momentum. Certainly political instability is also important in disrupting the rhythm of the economic activity. Ashin Das Gupta, while talking of decline of Surat in the 18th century, has attributed great

36. English Factories,....(1630-33), p. 114.

37. India in the 17th century....., p. 1116.

importance to the political uncertainty of the period.³⁸ In 1679, we have an instance when due to certain policies of local political authorities and Sultans of Golconda, the overseas demand for cloths shifted for some period from Masaulipatnam - the main port town to the producing areas further south. The neighbouring towns and rural weavers supplying the export trade through Masaulipatnam suffered great hardship and Streygham Master, then on a tour of south India, noticed signs of economic decay.³⁹ Despite these instances, one can say that political stability provides only the necessary context for the flourishing of the basic economic activity of the urban centre. The latter example in fact, clearly indicates that a particular policy could exert a certain degree of pressure on the existence of the urban centre only because it affected and disrupted its productive economic activity.

This disruption was affected ^{mainly} in years of wars, famines and epidemics. The urban centres, during the famines of 1630 and 1686 suffered so severely, due to the loss of their craftsmen and artisanal production, that at centres

38. Ashim Das Gupta, 'Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat century 1700-1750 Wiesbaden - 1979.

39. K.N. Chaudhari, 'Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean', Combridge 1983, pp. 206-207.

like Broach and Baroda, the English had to close their factories.⁴⁰ Particularly acute was the loss inflicted on the economy of Broach, where even as late as 1640's when the production of textiles picked up, the quality was so poor that the need of a permanent organisation was not felt.⁴¹ Ahmedabad was described by Mundy, as, 'half ruined and dispeopled by the famine'.⁴² Significantly, the non availability, inferior quality and high price of textiles in 1630, forced the Europeans to seek a market on the Coromondal coast and by 1638-39 it was the eastern coast which excelled Gujarat in respect of the sale of textiles.⁴³

These shifts from one urban centre to another, effected by redistribution of population and economic activity in times of famine explain only part of the problem. For, apart from what happened in these major urban centres; if one makes a chart of the smaller settlements, marts and towns which lost their supporting artisanal and other population and thus were ruined; one may be able to have a true' understanding of the nature of the famine crisis. On his way

40. English Factories(1634-36), pp. 79-80.

41. English Factories ... (1630-33), p. 75.

42. Travels ...P. 272.

43. Moreland, From Akbar to Aurangzeb, p. 131.

to Agra, from Surat till Burhanpur (a distance of 170 kos), Mundy, found as many as sixteen major towns (see on the map enclosed) but all with their surrounding countryside in a ruined state. Similarly on his return journey to Surat from Agra via Rajasthan, he could see mortality and depopulation of settlements as far as Garha (Marwar) and in Subah of Gujrat from Siddhpur onwards to Surat, he found all 19-20 towns in a ruined state, with almost no economic activity.⁴⁴ Certainly, this is a rough estimate but despite the limited information it is important, in so far as it highlights the nature of actual crisis, 'the crisis in the urban economy'; which was limited not simply to the fall in artisanal production or death and desertions of one particular community but loss of the economic base of an entire urban settlement, along with its surrounding countryside. Only when the totality of this change is realised, can one understand the meaning and implication of the phenomena of famine for the society and economy of a given region.

44. Travels....pp. 38-56, 236-72.

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- e. No.18, VS 1870/1813 A.D.

II. Jodhpur Records

Sanad Parwana Bahis

- a. VS 1821/1764 A.D.
- b. VS 1843/1786 A.D.

III. Jaipur Records

Arzdasths

1680 to 1720 A.D. particularly for the famine years 1684-86, 1690, 1696-97, 1704-05, 1712 and 1717 A.D.

Chithis

1730-1770 A.D. for Parganas Phagi, Amber, Lalsot, Dausa, Sawai Jaipur, Malarna, Mauzabad, Chatsu, Malpura, Gazi ka Thana.

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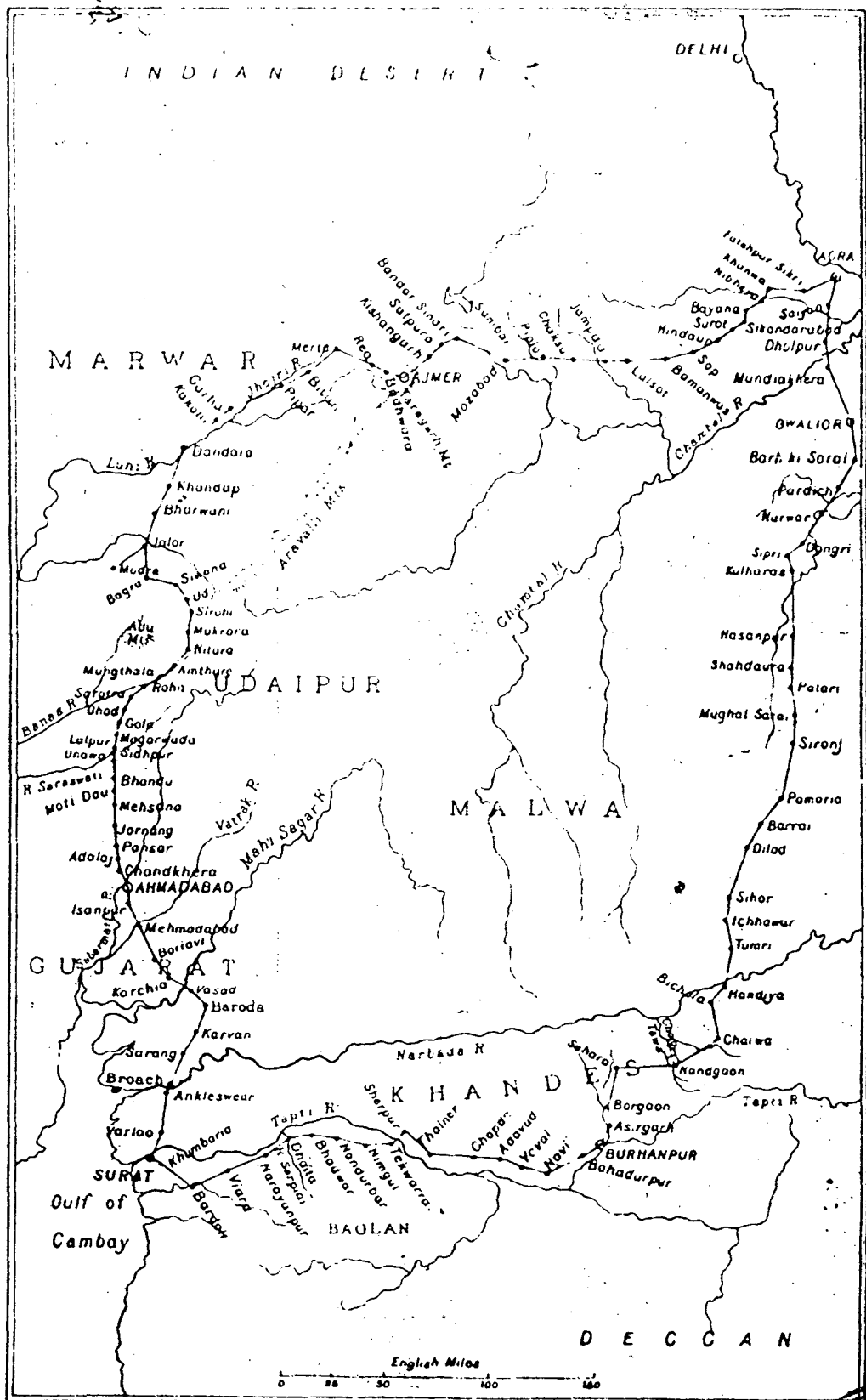
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MAPS



Mundy's Routes between Surat and Agra 1631 and 1633.

