War, Control and Fraud: Early Rationing Documents in Delhi

But the artifice of fiction did not necessarily lend falsity to an account; it might well bring verisimilitude or a moral truth. Nor did the shaping or embellishing of a history necessarily mean forgery...to look for the “fictive” aspects of a letter of remission would not by sixteenth century definition inevitably be a quest for fraud.

_Fiction in the Archives, Natalie Zemon Davis, 4_

This chapter is the first of four chapters that attempts a study of the social life of rationing documents in Delhi while treating welfare as a theme that was discursively constituted. This dissertation studies historically in the spatial context of Delhi, the varying forms and changing practices surrounding rationing and sometimes, other documents like census questionnaires and identity cards through the prisms of everyday affect and modalities of corruption. The dissertation argues that welfare was discursively constructed through narratives surrounding what the document should look like, who it should correspond to and what its functions should be — as these narratives were infinite, the rationing document was notoriously diverse. This chapter looks at early (wartime) regimes of rationing in Delhi and how they turned on varying official conceptions of documents as artifacts of economic, socio-cultural and political control. These official conceptions informed by the extraordinary demands of the war were closely contested by quotidian emotions such as grief, anxiety, compassion but also transactions of the everyday embodied in trade, commerce and the market. Applications for rationing documents such as permits and ration cards were often the site where encounters between the extraordinary and the everyday lingered. Continuous with the previous chapter, this chapter, drawing on archival sources will also demonstrate the ration card as shifting in shape and purpose, responding to imperatives of war and decolonization but propelled equally by archival logics¹ and perceptions relating to the document per se.

In the middle years of the Second World War, rationing officials of the Delhi

administration responded to an application for motor spirit\(^2\) with barely concealed impatience. The applicant in question, Sir Syed Sultan Ahmad, an official of good standing in the government asked for supplementary motor spirit coupons to compensate for those he had used up in ferrying the body of his private secretary from Delhi to Lucknow. Sultan Ahmad had hired a lorry to do the same. The Chief Commissioner, Askwith sanctioned the coupons but added caustically,

...you will allow me to say that I do not think that the use made of the coupons previously issued to you was justified. Every transport vehicle has its own allotment of motor spirit, and if a lorry was to be used at all for the journey to Lucknow, the owner should have been made to use his own coupons. But apart from the question of procedure, I do not think it is a reasonable proposition that in present conditions, motor spirit should be used for such a purpose. After all, there are burial grounds in Delhi and any of us who may happen to die during the war must surely be content to be buried here, even though our families may lie elsewhere. You may have been upset at the time, but I think you will agree with the consideration on principle.\(^3\)

Syed Sultan Ahmad's application for motor spirit was one among many representations that rationing officials were loath to indulge during the colonial war effort. This application, like many other applications for one or the other rationed commodity, appealed to the colonial official's conscience and his compassion, both of which were under great duress during the war. To the rationing official in wartime Delhi, Sultan Ahmad was not alone in experiencing an upheaval – he was only enacting the most basic emotions of the human condition, namely, grief, a personal emotion that he should have gauged carefully in the fraught and imposing context of the war. Whether the claim was for electricity, cement, motor spirit or tyres and tubes, all rationed commodities in Delhi during the war, the colonial rationing official steeled himself against the emotionally charged entreaties of the everyday implicit in the petition-like applications of native and European residents and visitors. At the same time, the British Indian state, keen to be

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\(^2\)Motor spirit is defined as “any liquid hydro-carbon or admixture of liquid hydrocarbon with any other liquid, having a flash point below 76° F and capable of providing motive power to any form of internal combustion engine.” This would include both petroleum and diesel. No. P.R. -8/41, The Motor Spirit Rationing Order, *The Gazette of India*, Extraordinary, 1941.

\(^3\)Chief Commissioner, Delhi to Sir Syed Sultan Ahmad. 28/2/42, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, Delhi State Archives, henceforth DSA.
responsive to its colonized population, not desiring them to starve, rebel or disrupt the war effort, sanctioned food and cloth to as wide a cross-section as possible.

Therefore, there were two classes of commodities: one class that was sanctioned universally in urban areas and the other class of commodities which was exclusive to a few groups and institutions. Commodities such as electricity and motor spirit were made exclusive (granted only to a few classes) for the same reasons that other supplies like wheat, rice, sugar and cloth were sanctioned across diverse classes, to “suck the country into the war effort”.⁴ Partly because industrial production remained low throughout the war but equally because imports were difficult to ship during the war and partly because India was “a major supply base” and finally because the Indian Army had to be fed and fed well at all costs, middle class consumption of commodities was sought to be scrupulously regulated, Kamtekar writes. The war in India could not be financed by loans from and taxes on the middle class or the affluent sections which remained unwilling to contribute to the military effort. It was the money-printing business unabated by industrial production that financed the war or it was, in the words of V.K.R.V.Rao, inflation that financed the war economy.⁵ Rationing was needed to regulate prices just as much as it was needed to assure a steady supply of resources for the Army. Kamtekar records that while agricultural production remained low despite the Grow More Food campaign, farmers in some parts of the colony like Punjab greatly benefited from war inflation, increased prices in food grains and the black market. The drastic price rises did not suit the Indian middle class or the poor who had to pay 300 per cent more than what they did before the war, to consume the same amount of foodgrains they did before the year, Kamtekar points out. Efforts to manage the circulation of commodities in Delhi which was a nerve-centre of war preparations and the diplomatic heart of India privy to the frequent comings and goings of colonial and embassy representatives were especially untiring.

⁴Indivar Kamtekar, “State and Class in India 1939-1945”, Past and Present 176, no.1, (2002): 190. Food rations had to be distributed available as widely as possible because a hungry population could violently disrupt war efforts. On the other hand, commodities like petroleum and electricity if they were used casually could result in dire shortages for war work.
⁵Kamtekar, 201
The rhetorical model of the application

Studying the forms of state power during the Second World War, Indivar Kamtekar writes, “States inaugurate wars and then try to make them the business of the peoples over whom they govern. Modern wars therefore test states, not just on the battle front, but also on the home front. War requires a state to make unusual demands on society and to extract greater resources than usual from it.”6 The Delhi government made the consumption of rationed commodities as much the business of its residents as it was for the colonial authorities in the province. Colonial authorities in Delhi had to bear in mind the rising appetites of soldiers while keeping in sight the low production of coal, the attendant clamour for petrol, the low agricultural productivity and the heavy use of Indian mill-made cloth for war purposes and the tendency to hoard all these commodities during the war.

Subsequently, the Delhi administration rationed various commodities, sorting out applications for these commodities into two classes: applications for indispensable commodities like food, cloth, sugar and kerosene resembled present day ration card application forms while applications for other commodities like motor spirit, electricity, tyres and tubes, reserved for certain elite or diplomatic classes and owners of public transport vehicles, took the form of lengthy petitions.7 Colonial authorities used applications to the latter set of identification/rationing documents as ordering devices to preserve Delhi’s supplies for the war, manage scarcity and curtail consumption. The Provincial Rationing Authority or the PRA who enjoyed wide-ranging powers, subject only to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, scrutinized applications for the second set of commodities (motor spirit, etc) with personal attention, reprimanding, condoning and admonishing even the few applicants he deigned to entertain. I would like to start by examining what may be termed “the rhetorical model of the application”8 in the context of the rationing of these commodities.

6Kamtekar, 189
7These petitions accompanied more routine application forms for the commodity in question.
8I am grateful to my supervisor, Ravi Sundaram for this construction.
Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis both comment on the “rhetorical dimension” of documents and texts where legal performances of speaking the truth invariably involve narrative skills of story-telling. In the words of Annelise Riles, it is possible to “treat realism as a rhetorical stance, a matter of presentation rather than simple fact”\(^9\). By dressing their confessions in rhetorical pleas, convicts in sixteenth century France rendered their letters of remission or letters seeking remission of their death sentences into “pardon tales”\(^10\). Natalie Zemon Davis who studies the letters of mostly the lower orders of France who were sentenced to death, explores narrative frames of truth-telling; in these letters, guilt or culpability was subservient to narratives of adultery and promiscuity, honour and pride, loyalty and devotion, festivals, rituals and religious faith. The event causing homicide was tethered to emotions socially and culturally derived such as the desire to avenge dishonor or the decision to suffer no more disgrace on the day of a festival. The applications for rationed commodities similarly invoked cultural and social affects of kinship through narrative devices such as rhetoric and story-telling. But these applications were not all personal – sometimes, even government functionaries and colonial representatives had to turn to written forms of oratory to justify their claims. Among other things, the rationalities of rule (civilizing rule, moral reform, imperial trade), personal accounts of conjugal or filial obligation, conceptions of what constituted ‘war priority’ work found expression in the rhetorical model of the application. Just as the letters of remission in Natalie Zemon Davis’ *Fiction in the Archives* implicitly acknowledged the sovereignty of the king in the sense that they all featured the convicts begging the King for mercy, the applications for motor spirit or electricity also upheld the sovereign authority of the colonial state in their exhortations for compassion or recognition of loyalty. I now study a few applications for rationed commodities such as motor spirit, electricity and tyres and tubes and the colonial responses to them against the backdrop of the war.

While food commodities were rationed in 1943, the rationing of fuel (mainly petroleum) or motor spirit preceded this with the passing of the Motor Spirit Rationing Order in the

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year 1941 which was to be effective throughout British India. This Order rendered any acquisition or purchase or sale of motor spirit without relevant documents like special receipts, a license or coupons (ordinary, special and supplementary) illegal and punishable by law. These documents varied depending on the class of vehicles they corresponded to. For instance, motor spirit that was essential for aircrafts, vehicles or machinery employed by the central government or a provincial government was authorized only against special receipts\(^\text{11}\). Another class of vehicles fell under the category of administrative purposes where vehicles used by the Central or a provincial government and local authorities could not draw petrol without applying for special coupons valid for three months. Strangely enough, ambulances, travelling dispensaries and school buses were also lumped together in this category. Stage carriages fell under a different nomenclature: owners of these vehicles had to fill out separate application forms to acquire petrol and to these, ordinary coupons which were valid usually for three months were issued. A form for ordinary coupons (though different) was also applicable for dealers or distributors engaged in the distribution and sale of motor vehicles. Meant as a concession for those who were already in possession of special or ordinary coupons but who needed more motor spirit to meet contingencies, supplementary coupons were issued, usually for a month – if the request was found to be \textit{bona fide} and if it was deserving of consideration on grounds of war priority or compassion.\(^\text{12}\) It was these supplementary coupons that invited desperate applications – the applicant either having exhausted his coupons or anticipating their exhaustion in view of upcoming contingencies requested the rationing authorities for supplementary coupons. Licenses were issued to those in need of motor spirit for none of the above-mentioned reasons and not covered by any of these classes of vehicle-owners.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{11}\) No. P.R.-8/41, Motor Spirit Rationing Order. \textit{Gazette of India}, Extraordinary, 1941, 3

\(^{12}\) Supplementary coupons were also made available to civil and military officers though such recipients of coupons were bound to submit reports of the number of units utilised and account for the remaining coupons. Motor Spirit Rationing Order, 11 (1), 11 (2).

\(^{13}\) Ibid, 6, 16(2). Those who flew aircrafts and required motor spirit to operate these were also issued licenses. These licenses had to be recognized by the Director of Civil Aviation or the Provincial Rationing Authority.
The Motor Spirit Order set the tone, in a manner of speaking, of the rationing scheme of the late colonial regime in India. The Order underlined the need to stay alert and be scrupulous in dispensing applications and urged rationing authorities to recognize claims only after exercising the greatest possible economy.\textsuperscript{14} States and provinces often vied with each other to draw up an impressive report card of savings in the consumption of motor spirit. Sorted into various zones, provinces and states had to submit quarterly reports showing the provincial or state quota and the actual consumption in gallons. The Delhi administration was especially infused with a visceral enthusiasm to justify but more often, reject every claim, petty and significant. Delhi authorities were highly sensitive to charges of immoderation and often protested against even the slightest imputation by producing lengthy explanations.\textsuperscript{15} One such explanation the rationing authorities gave was that Delhi bore the brunt of fuel consumption because of its liberal policy with respect to sales tax which it did not levy unlike neighbouring provinces like Punjab and United Provinces as a result of which many inter-state vehicles stopped at Delhi to buy petrol.\textsuperscript{16} The Provincial Rationing Authority (PRA) or the next in command, the Area Rationing Authority (ARA) granted every coupon after utmost vigilance, having cautioned the applicant against future extravagance or whim. Authorities also interrogated the applicant if he was applying for the basic minimum and if he had explored alternative avenues like the use of animal transport and the rearranging of routes to reduce consumption.\textsuperscript{17} In their modes of inquiry into each applicant's case, Delhi rationing authorities assumed that it was not possible to meet all applications even when

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 20 (4) and 25.
\textsuperscript{15} Given Delhi's excess consumption every quarter despite painstaking precautions, Delhi's Chief Commissioner invariably sought to justify this consumption. At other times, he deemed the figures showing excess consumption inflated – he cited reasons like increase in private cars, black marketing, the issue of petrol on coupons from other provinces and states, increase in allocations to contractors of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), the debiting to the Delhi province's account of petrol issued to aircrafts landing at places that fall outside Delhi's jurisdiction like Rohtak, etc. At other times, he pleaded the indulgence of the Centre on grounds of charcoal scarcity (charcoal being an alternative supply of motive power) and the introduction of new services. All these elaborate explanations were accompanied by a string of notes and demonstrations of prudent and timely savings through measures like the termination of supplies to depots and establishments, periodical revision of the coupon system, etc. 28/6/43-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner's Office, DSA, 1943.
\textsuperscript{16} 28/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner's Office, DSA, 1942.
\textsuperscript{17} Clause 21 (2) and Second Schedule, The Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Ibid.
the basic requirements of eligibility were in place. They also sternly reminded applicants that average or ordinary consumption in these circumstances was necessarily extravagant and luxurious. On some occasions, the rationing authorities made it clear that a native dignitary or even Indian royalty would not be bestowed with favour on a point of status alone. In fact, the PRA once expressed its inability to issue rations to visiting ruling princes who did not get coupons from their states. In addition, if the state was not officially listed as one with which Delhi could have a reciprocal arrangement of motor spirit, the rationing authorities were further disabled to indulge the royal dignitaries. If royal status was no ready reckoner for generosity in coupons, administrative rank did not cut much ice either. Such was the frenzy of securing motor spirit that even the application of the Chairman of the Foodgrains Policy Committee and one of the architects of the scheme of rationing in India, Sir Theodore Gregory was not favoured with eager acquiescence when he once made a request. On the question of civilian consumption of motor spirit, the position was vacillating between curbing and permitting it. Weighing prospects like the consequences of disallowing it entirely, the strain on motor spirit availability for military purposes, the Delhi administration decided that a complete freeze on the sale of petrol coupons for civil consumption should be avoided. This said, it was suspended completely in some areas for brief periods. Among the many factors preventing authorities from disallowing civilian claims entirely was the uneasy colonial admission that civilians comprised “the majority of taxpayers.”

\[18^{28/5/43-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1943. The ruling Princes of Nawanagar, Panna, Keonjar, Bawani, Datia and Mandi were listed for these purposes. However, motor spirit was sanctioned at times to these princes if only to avoid needless friction. The Jam Sahib of Nawangar was issued the rations he demanded even though there was no reciprocal arrangement. From the Chief Commissioner to the Secretary to the Crown Representative, 28/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1942.\]

\[19^{Delhi had the option of following the precedent of United Provinces (that received its supplies from Bombay) which completely froze civil traffic to preserve supplies for military demand. } \]

\[20^{28/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1942. A project of aerodrome construction was also constricting petrol supplies and civil offtake in Delhi.}\]

\[21^{Provincial Rationing Authority, Delhi to Controller of Rubber Manufactures, New Delhi. Letter No. 797/TR/44, 9/52/1944, Local Self-Government, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA. This term was invoked in the context of tyre rationing where the PRA contended that though it was only fair that taxpayers should get the permits they wished, even these applicants must be very sparingly entertained.}\]
The applications for motor spirit in the Delhi State Archives were multifarious including those from officials of the Delhi administration, ambassadors, consuls, visiting dignitaries and clerks, school principals, contractors and engineers and moving theatre owners. These applications included an application form for the commodity accompanied by a letter stating the case of the applicant (why he needed the commodity). This letter was often drafted by the applicant himself. Many of these representations featured the applicant deploy a fanciful turn of phrase or argue his case passionately yet cogently in requests accompanying their application forms. A British official, Sir Edward Buck requested supplementary coupons of motor spirit on the grounds that his wife was seriously unwell and he required motor spirit so that she could be driven from Delhi to Srinagar. When it was established that these trips were frequent, the Chief Commissioner was inclined to take an unsympathetic view. His office sent a letter stating that motor spirit was not usually supplied to anyone to travel using a private car to a hill station. He adds somewhat sardonically about people who expect such concessions, “If they cannot travel by what must be accepted in war time as the normal methods, they must establish themselves in one locality and avoid travelling.” The Chief Commissioner deigns to give Edward Buck the coupons he wants as Delhi was too hot for a sick person but forewarns him against expecting further such kindness and trips between Delhi and Kashmir by car. In a similar case where the patient was suffering from the tuberculosis of the spine and where the patient was desirous of moving from Simla to Delhi for medical treatment, the CC once again told off the applicant (the patient’s husband) against expecting such favours in future.

Some applications hinted that the colonial civilizing mission in India would be compromised unless demands of the kind the claimant made were met. For instance, a

I say himself because I did not come across any female applicants in the DSA files.

The American Commissioner and Chinese Commissioner were among those who applied for coupons. The latter’s application was viewed with a disapproving eye and the need for strict economy was impressed on him. 28/1/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1942.

24 28/5/43-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1943.

Ibid.

Ibid. The patient in question was the wife of one Dr. Khusro who needed coupons to travel from Simla to Delhi for medical treatment.
School Principal implored the issue of supplementary coupons for school buses to pick up children from across the province and warned that a refusal would cost the colonial rulers dearly in the fulfillment of the lofty ideal of the education of the European and the native subject. The Principal of New Delhi Church School and the Chaplain of New Delhi, J.D.Tytler writes,

During this past winter the number of children attending the school has increased considerably, due largely to the increased population of Delhi and New Delhi. Owing to the inadequacy of the ration allowed the school was forcibly closed one day last week because the supply of coupons had run out. The Authority, after repeated requests, verbal and otherwise, allowed a supplementary ration for this month, but his last letter makes it quite clear that he has no intention of raising our quota....Furthermore, I am at a loss to understand what would more greatly ‘constitute a just cause for any increase in the motor spirit ration sanctioned’ than ‘the fact that the number of children attending school’ has ‘increased considerably’. Many parents, through frequent transfers and other war-time conditions, have for some time found it most difficult to give their children adequate education, and it has been a real pleasure to me to be able to supply their need to some extent...Although the school has been open for only three years we presented five pupils last winter for the Cambridge Examinations, and will be presenting at least seven this year. I do not think it is asking too much that, in supplying an essential service for the next generation in this country, we should have at our disposal whatever facility is essential, including, for Delhi certainly, adequate transport27.

The tone of the application was at the same time practical, and demonstrative of the romance of the colonial project of education: the Principal made out the practical (an increase in school children) to be a case for imperial consideration. Neither the highest rationing authority, namely the Chief Commissioner nor the PRA was touched by the rhetoric contained in his application. They told off this and other Principals for taking in more children than they could handle, in terms of transport and for not being bold or original in exploring other avenues of transporting children.28

27 In his letter to the Chief Commissioner requesting supplementary coupons, Tytler took care to respond caustically to a letter by the PRA which stated that an increase in the number of children did not constitute “a just cause” for increase in supplementary coupons. Tytler to The Chief Commissioner, 28/1/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944
28 28/44-C and 28/1/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944. Rationing authorities also blamed the parents for putting their children and school managements to needless trouble by not
Applications citing 'dire need' on grounds of war work were somewhat different in tone and content from applications invoking the government's compassion in private matters. An applicant invoking 'dire need' in the context of war work suggested that the denial of coupons (to a group of individuals or an institution) could seriously compromise or slow down the war effort while an applicant citing personal need argued that his case was urgent even though it may impede the war endeavour. Applications in the former category gestured at the immense load of war work the applicants were labouring under, arguing that an official deprivation of motor spirit would constitute an egregious and grievous lapse in facilitating the quick completion of a war-related project. One application gestured at the loss that would be incurred by the government in not sanctioning electricity to an institution well known for its war efforts in educating government employees. This application written by the Honorary Secretary, Government of India Press Youngsters Institution in New Delhi reads,

This institution is finding great difficulties owing to not having electricity. The aims and objects of our Institution and the sphere of the usefulness of its activities are very well known to the Government. We would like to submit that this is a public institution run for the benefit and welfare of the employees of the Govt. of India Press. We are running an adult education Centre, a Library, reading room, stores, Civic Guards Club, National War Front, war efforts work, etc. all of which you will agree are of great service to the employees of the Govt. This institution is very well known for its war efforts….You will kindly see for your self that some of our activities e.g. Adult Education etc. will have to come down to a dead stop, if the use of electric light is denied to us 29.

Yet another application citing dire need was written by the Executive Engineer on behalf of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) requesting the Delhi Petrol Rationing Authority petrol coupons for transporting coal dust to brick kilns in connection with war work citing the limited time at hand to finish the project of construction, part of wartime building operations for officials in the Lodi Road neighbourhood. The PRA and the Chief Commissioner were skeptical of the claim owing to the seeming aversion of the CPWD to use animal-drawn transport or charcoal gas-run vehicles and the relative proximity of

29The Honorary Secretary, Government of India Press Youngsters Association to The Officer-in-Charge, Electricity, 69/4/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944.
the work site from the place of transportation. On the question of granting petrol rations to the North West Frontier Propaganda Van, rationing officials had to acquiesce and give in to demands owing to the Van’s role in the dissemination of war propaganda material in connection with the military campaign against Japan. These applications had at their heart the rhetoric of internal government; the language of legal authority in these ration applications was of one piece with the vocabulary of power comprised in colonial policies to ration India and control its economy to suit imperial purpose. These applications featured the colonial state directing its gaze inwards in order to reconcile superficially conflicting rationales of authority, namely, the rationales to save resources needed to conduct the war and to nourish men and machines required to conduct the war.

The rationing of electric supply followed a very similar pattern to the restriction of motor spirit where applications were addressed to the Chief Commissioner by government employees, firms, companies and native gentlemen who were desirous of temporary or permanent connections. Applications here were as sternly reviewed by the Electric Advisory Committee and the office of the Chief Commissioner as those for motor spirit. Often, in addition to citing the priority that had to be assigned to absolutely essential war work, rationing authorities often informed the claimant that his application could not be entertained because a certain power plant was under repair. Here too, applications were approved only when it was evident that all other courses of providing for cooling, lighting, etc had been exhausted. Just like certain applicants of motor spirit coupons representing institutions like schools made impassioned pleas that the colonial civilizing mission was at stake in their requests, here too, applicants

30 28/1/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944. The Chief Commissioner, Delhi to The Secretary to the Government of India. However, in this instance, the Delhi rationing authorities were forced to concede defeat as the Chief Engineer cites the terms of the contract by which the government was bound to supply petrol. Besides, it was established elsewhere that for a distance of six miles and more, animal-drawn transport cannot be used.
31 Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi to the Provincial Rationing Authority, Delhi. 28/1/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944.
32 The plant in question was usually the New Delhi Central Electric Power Authority’s Plant which often suffered repairs and disorders. 69/4/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944.
33 One such case was the Indian Press Youngsters Institution which ran an adult education centre, a library, reading room, etc., who were reprimanded for not having tried ice coolers that could have achieved the purpose. The Superintending Engineer, Delhi province to The Chief Commissioner, Delhi. Letter No. E. C/ 3 – 68, dated 29.4.1944.
requesting extended electric connections yoked their case to the reasons of empire which in this case was explained to be sanitary and medical improvement. The YMCA demanded a power connection for their refrigerator for cooling arrangements showing that they were entertaining service-men and that unless they provided for refrigeration, their institution and by implication, the empire will suffer the charge of poor colonial health standards.34 A moving theatre company requested electric supply for a prolonged period stating their contribution to the propaganda campaign against the Japanese invasion. Their application supported by the form and a recommendation demonstrating that their production and free shows of the anti-Japanese play named ‘Hindustani Sipahi-Japan ki bhool’ where donations went into the war fund entitled them, as powerful servants of the colonial state in wartime, to an extended power connection.35 Even as applications were approved, all permissions were qualified by a stipulation of the amount of electric supply allowed. Sometimes, this became the basis for sanctioning or denying a documentary request in the first place – where an application requested a connection of minimum load, it was granted if it was backed by a war-related representation.36

Requests invoking compassion as an emotion were made in connection with electricity applications too. The urgent tone of the relative of the dying or ailing invalid was prominently conspicuous in the representations accompanying these application forms too. While permanent connections were not allowed for domestic purposes by the Labour Department, applications were sought on the plea of compassion to allow for the comfort of a sick person. A government employee, Kishore Lal sought such a connection for his wife attaching a few reports and certificates attested by medical authorities bolstering his claim.37

34 Secretary, YMCA, New Delhi to Superintending Engineer, Central Public Works Department, New Delhi. And Superintending Engineer, Delhi Province to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 69/4/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944.
35 Proprietor, The Great Shahjahan Theatrical Company, Calcutta to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 69/4/44-C, Confidential, DSA, 1944. The Director of Public Relations seconds this application supporting their claim on free skits and plays and requests assistance for them on military grounds. The Company was denied the permission to have an extended connection with rationing authorities fearing the transformation of the interim favour into a standing arrangement.
36 An application for an electric connection for a tent in the compound of the Church of Redemption was granted owing to the negligible load in question, i.e., 0.36 kilowatts. The Chief Commissioner, Delhi to the Superintending Engineer, Delhi province.
37 From Kishore Lal to Superintending Engineer, PWD, Delhi province. This request for a residential
cases were regarded with a conciliatory eye. An application from R.R. Bhatia working for New India Colour Company implored authorities for a permanent connection on grounds of his wife’s deteriorating health was turned down.

Bhatia’s own compassion was mirrored in his plea for the officials’ solicitude. He wrote,

Your humble petitioner’s wife has been suffering from respiratory trouble for the last two or three years and at the special advice of the medical officers under whose treatment she has remained from time to time, your humble petitioner underwent a huge expense and built a house in Jawahar Nagar Subzimandi. … your humble petitioner has again got his wife examined by the Additional Civil Surgeon Delhi and he is again of the opinion that your humble petitioner’s wife should not live in a house lit with oil lamps as the fumes will be harmful. It should not be out of the place for your petitioner to mention here that he has undergone a very enormous expense to provide his wife with a suitable living abode and if she has to quit these premises for want of an electric connection, it will be almost impossible for your petitioner to find her suitable accommodation elsewhere, and the consequences must therefore be serious so far as her life is concerned.

Bhatia produced along with his application form and request a rash of medical certificates attested by the Civil Surgeon and Chief Medical Officer of the province showing his wife to suffer from kerosene fumes making thereby a case of electric lighting. While an extended connection was sanctioned “on compassionate grounds”, the Chief Commissioner categorically denied a permanent connection saying that this would open the door to an endless stream of petitioners.

A plea for compassion could not be an irrationally stated one. The famous scholar Martha Nussbaum, who states in her *Intelligence of Human Emotions* that emotions represented evaluative and ethical judgments would probably debunk the idea that a person invoking compassion or giving vent to feelings of rage was intrinsically being irrational. She connection seems to have been granted on the condition that consumption should not exceed 12 watts as seen from correspondence from Registrar to the Chief Commissioner to the Superintending Engineer, Delhi Province. 69/4/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1944.

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38 R.R.Bhatia, New India Colour Company, Delhi to Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 69/4/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid. It is noteworthy that this petition was made using the Company letterhead even though the request was for domestic, non-commercial purposes signifying the applicant’s recognition of the legal force of documentary conventions and by extension, his enhanced status on office paper.
would treat the applicant requesting electricity or motor spirit on grounds of compassion as making an ethical choice that resulted from the rational activity of weighing priorities (personal and impersonal) such as the health of one's own spouse, the colonial contribution to the war and the need to defeat the Allies. The request for an application on grounds of compassion was however a rational one not simply in content but in form too. In other words, the applicant apart from rationally weighing his choices sought to conform to rational-legal standards such as medical certificates, employment certificates and recommendation letters as he recognized the validity of his claim within the documents regime. A documents regime implies that state functions and bureaucratic transactions must be embedded in technologies of writing and be manifest as legitimate and legible sovereign force. Kishorelal and Bhatia recognized that behind the certificate or a representation of identity were pre-existing traditions of verifying claims through written evidence. In this tradition, the production of certain documents dispelled all official mistrust or suspicion about the validity, the authenticity or the truthful basis of a claim. While the medical certificate conformed to these rationales, it was a document unlike others. It enjoyed a referential significance that was tied to the opinion of an expert outside the realm of government. Though it was a piece of paper sealed and sanctioned by a medical expert outside the government, it was nevertheless recognized by the government. While its production within a bureaucratic context was part of procedure, its creation was not, as it was the product of networks of mutual understanding and trust between doctor and patient. The medical certificate was a document that settled identity, affirmed the plea of the patient, ascertained the fact of illness beyond reasonable doubt and gave a name to the medical condition and physical liability of the patient. It determined the cause of illness, corroborated the post-mortem and pitted the voice of the expert against lay opinion or the official voice in crucial criminal and legal suits. In determining eligibility and entitlement in official categories of compassion, the medical certificate stood out as an irrefutable document marking the body of the person for empowerment. The medical certificate may be exposed to skepticism about the veracity

41See Partha Chatterjee’s *A Princely Impostor* for more on the medical certificate as a truth claim.
of the referential claim implicit in the medical certificate. But in this context of wartime rationing, this document’s rationality and supreme claim to consideration was measured not against its claim to truthfulness but in terms of a superior rationality of state security and welfare of the “priority sections.” It would appear that the war superimposed on the bureaucratic frame an authority to deny and constrict – an authority not quite amenable to the normal peacetime considerations of objectivity and objective consideration.

**The everyday form of the wartime document**

Colonial rule during the war could not be insulated from the affairs of the everyday. Documentary procedure regulating everyday life operated side by side with rationing controls that controlled economic and social life during the war. The war simply recast colonial regulations that sought to discipline subjects in their everyday life into complying with legal procedure. The wartime legislation on motor spirit simply fashioned anew the relationship between everyday documentation and the legitimacy of the state. Motor spirit and tyre legislation ensured that the war was no exception to everyday practices of producing legal subjects. If anything, the scarcities and contingencies of the war that spawned panics of identity theft necessitated an extremely rigorous regime of scrutinizing, verifying claims in documents attesting eligibility. The Motor Spirit Rationing Order contained various clauses requiring elaborate proofs of the claimant's eligibility. For instance, a person applying for ‘ordinary’ coupons of motor spirit for a stage carriage had to produce a permit and in the case of a vehicle that was not a stage carriage, a certificate of registration, thereby establishing his legal credentials under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1939. The application form was *mala fide* until it bore information relating to the issue and date of registration of the vehicle. In the case of a motor boat, a certificate of survey under the Inland Steam Vessels Act, 1917 was in order. Besides procuring the documentary verification of his vehicle, the applicant was also required to satisfy the Delhi administration that he had paid all taxes due on the vehicle.

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42 See Form H and Form I appended to the Motor Spirit Rationing Order, *Gazette of India*.
43 10 (2), Motor Spirit Rationing Order, *Gazette of India*.
44 In some cases, a certificate of fitness of the vehicle was also demanded. Next in the order of scrutinizing
The war was a period of such prolific legislation that laws passed in the initial war-years formed a footnote in Orders and Acts passed later into the war. One may argue that measures regulating one aspect of everyday life in the early years of the war realized their potential in regulating another aspect of life in a later stage of the war. Identification practices in the Tyre Rationing Order, 1942 and the Tyre Rationing Order, 1944 drew on the documentary controls regulating transport contained in the Motor Vehicles Rules, 1939. The Tyre Rationing Order, 1944 classified applicants into fleet-owners or those owning a fleet of cars, stockists (those who stocked cars to deal in them) but also those persons owning vehicles for daily transport were required to submit returns in a form of declaration giving details of both the tyres they owned (in their motor vehicle) as well as their spares to Area Rationing authorities. Along with these returns, such applicants were also to produce their registration certificates so that authorities could make appropriate entries on these certificates stating the serial number assigned by the tyre manufacturer. Noting down these serial numbers meant the most laborious work for rationing staff as often the wheels had to be taken off the vehicles to examine the tyre number. Staff had to be trained to do this, paid additionally as removing and fitting each wheel needed 15 to 30 minutes. This perhaps is only one illustration among thousand others that speaks of the labour and time that documents appropriated. Often the time in preparing a document translated into a vicious circle of chasing commodities of the application of motor spirit were inquiries into the horse power, the description of the vehicle, the purpose for which motor spirit was sought and its average monthly consumption for the last twelve months. An application for a supplementary coupon was expected to be detailed in stating whether the vehicle was a motor cycle, motor car, motor cab, goods vehicle, tractor, contract carriage. This was owing to the eligibility of various classes of people for these coupons; administrative sections, defence forces, those providing public transport were all eligible for these coupons. Application for Supplementary coupons for all vehicles other than stage carriages, 28/2/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1942.

45Fleet-owners are defined in the Tyre Rationing Order to be persons owning or operating six or more transport vehicles excluding motor cabs. This definition, not surprisingly was unoriginal, being drawn from the Motor Vehicles Act, 1939. “Stockists” meant those other than fleet-owners who possess tyres or tubes acquired for purposes of trade or business and include a supplier and a dealer in motor vehicles. A supplier is a person engaged in the business of supplying tyres or tubes, whether new, old or retreaded and included a manufacturer or retreader who carries on such business. Tyre Rationing Order, 1944 2 (ii), (xv), (xvi) as obtained in 9(52)/1944, Local Self-Government, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

46The PRA, Delhi to Chief Commissioner, Delhi, Letter No. 296/TR/44, 9(52)/1944, Local Self-Government, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
consumption, representations, official statements, labour and ID paper.\textsuperscript{47} When a supplier or stockist, fleet-owner or anybody else applied for a permit to purchase, acquire or replace new, old or retreaded/retreadable\textsuperscript{48} tyres, he entered the bureaucratic maze of procedural detail, documentary checks and paper protocol.\textsuperscript{49} Tyre rationing involved lengthy reports sent from official to official; consolidated returns, for instance, were submitted by stockists to the Area Rationing Authority, from the Area Rationing Authority to the Provincial Rationing Authority, from the Provincial Rationing Authority to the Controller of Rubber. The claimant himself had to submit a lengthy application complete with all the columns that made him open to scrutiny on various fronts – whether his use for the vehicle was urgent (as cited in the essential purpose of the vehicle), his legal credentials (if he owned a document representing his identity), his adherence to legal channels of ownership (whether his vehicle was registered or not), his compliance to the current wartime regulations (whether he drew petrol rations through the right channels. He had to mention the basic and supplementary coupons he was drawing and he had to prove his status as a worthy applicant for a certain class of rations (by providing a statement of his profession, business, occupation and business address).\textsuperscript{50} If these were

\textsuperscript{47} Separate forms of declaration for fleet-owners and other owners of vehicles contained details like the name of the owner, address, total number of vehicles (if a fleet-owner), description of vehicles (whether passenger car, goods truck, passenger bus, motor cycle, etc) registered number of vehicle(s) and registration number of the vehicle, size of the tyres fitted to the vehicle including the spares and the manufacturer’s serial number(s) of the tyre(s). Other owners signalled those who used cars for daily transport.

\textsuperscript{48} A different application form was in order for acquiring or purchasing retreaded or used tyres. Retreading was defined in the Tyre Rationing Order as the process of renewing the entire tread of a used tyre by the addition to it of rubber or rubber compound and it included re-capping, re-soling, re-moulding and any other similar method of reconditioning. Tyre Rationing Order, 1944, 2 (xiv). Retreadable tyres were those that could be mended or retreaded and re-used.

\textsuperscript{49} A permit application had to list the number of tyres or tubes the applicant required, their size, the registration number of the vehicle for which new tyres are being sought and the date of validity of the permit. The applicant also had to cite the number of tyres including spares that were in usable condition along with those that he needed as well as the manufacturer’s serial number for all these tyres. 9(52)/1944, Local Self-Government, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

\textsuperscript{50} Form 5 of the Tyre Rationing Order, 1944 containing the application to the Area Rationing Authority for a Permit to purchase one or more tyres and/or tubes no longer serviceable. Separate applications had to be filled out for each vehicle for which tyres are sought. An applicant who desired a permit for a new tyre or tyres was required to surrender unserviceable tyre or tyres while those who applied for retreaded tyres had to forfeit retreadable tyres. Whatever the case, tyres had to be surrendered free of charge. The Controller of Rationing emphasized that new or retreadable tyres would not be supplied except against the surrender of unserviceable or used/retreadable tyres. In setting down this rule, rationing authorities were of the firm
details that at once corroborated the status of an applicant as a respectable law-abiding subject and responsible motor vehicle user in colonial Delhi, they also established his eligibility to receive tyres, a scarce commodity during the war. A hoarder or a tax evader, for instance, was neither a good colonial subject in normal conditions nor was he worthy of ration supplies during the war. Documents attested not simply to the identity of the holder, but also to his criteria of eligibility and his status as a citizen of colonial India. Ironically enough, an applicant found that in satisfying criteria establishing him as a respectable candidate for everyday consumption, he often convinced the rationing official that there was nothing special about his case that entitled him to supplementary coupons of petrol or tyre permits during the war.

**Marking commodities and persons**

The whole procedure also exemplified the minute marking of the commodity rationed where even something as unremarkable as a tyre could be linked to a person and a document. The person and the document a tyre corresponded to were to be specified. Each tyre was identified, (usable or retreadable) correlated to its owner, whether, a stockist, a supplier or a customer and marked within the document by its serial number. Legislation on commodity rationing during the war sought to identify in an exclusive sense, the person applying for a special or ordinary coupon or a tyre permit. Under the authority of the Motor Spirit conviction that all tyres were retreadable and re-usable. And barring a few heavy transport vehicle owners, every applicant should be able to surrender retreadable tyres; if he was not capable of doing this, his application for a permit opened the case for re-consideration of his registration. Was he worthy of owning a vehicle if he could not keep his tyres in good shape? An application thus rendered the owner vulnerable where he least suspected it. Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Supply Department to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi (among many other authorities of other provinces). 9(52)/1944, Local Self-Government, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

51 Precautions were to be taken to ensure that tyres were not issued to hoarders or those engaged in illegal trade. For instance, permits were to be issued only to those applicants whose vehicle tyres had visible serial numbers. Other measures against misuse of rations included the stipulation requiring applicants to use up their stock for retreadable or used tyres before they started selling new tyres. Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Supply to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi, 9(52)/1944, Local Self-Government, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

52 It was possible, after providing explanation and written representation, to transfer one’s ordinary coupons to another person. But this could be done only consequent to the change of ownership and registration of a vehicle. In unusual circumstances, even if motor spirit on a person’s coupon is used for a vehicle other than one’s own, the vehicle must fall under the same class as that of the coupon-holder. Nothing in the Order prevented the supply of motor spirit between dealers and suppliers or from one supplier to another, or from
Rationing Order, no coupon, receipt or otherwise was transferable from one claimant to another, though it was possible under what the Order deemed “reciprocal arrangements with Indian states” to take one’s license, coupon or receipt book to a location or province different from the one in which it was issued.\textsuperscript{53} Pending the approval of the Centre and provided the province of Delhi was confident of meeting the motor spirit requirements of its residents, it was free to recognize, in emergencies, the licenses, ordinary and supplementary coupons of residents from other provinces. It was forbidden to supply petrol except against the surrender of receipts or coupons detached from coupon or receipt books. This was to ensure that the claimant had not obtained these coupons or receipts in black or through fraudulent means.\textsuperscript{54} Markers such as the registration number and the description of the vehicle served as practices of sealing the document or of tightening the screws on impostors or frauds. In addition, documents also served to circumscribe the claim by stipulating the period for which coupons or licenses were valid and the amount of motor spirit authorized, thereby imposing a ceiling. When a person could no longer use a coupon or a license owing to some illegal act he had committed or because the book of coupons or receipts had expired or the purpose had exhausted itself, he was bound to surrender his unused documents to rationing authorities.\textsuperscript{55}

Though they were keen to mark commodities, officials faced confusion in several matters, i.e. whether to identify the commodity (the vehicle), the rationed item (motor spirit, tyre, etc.) or the document pertaining to a rationed item. Sometimes tyres and vehicles were marked and at other times, applications bearing tyre numbers were clipped, sealed and counterfoiled. Identification documents were not valid unless they bore the counter-signature of the appropriate authority like the Provincial Rationing Authority or the Director of Civil Aviation. Underlying these marking practices was an endeavour to fashion a discourse of legality where objects were made distinct through the knowledge (serial numbers, signatures, etc) inscribed in them and where objects and persons were correlated through a repetitive process of identification, verification and authentication.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid, 35
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 14 (a), (b), (c) and 18.
Things, in the modern imagination, if marked thus, securely fastened themselves to persons and functions and steadfastly spoke the truth about the legality of a transaction and the identity of those executing the transaction. The logic of minutely identifying a man through his “imperceptible and slightest” traces of “biological specificity” (fingerprints, scars, moles) was complemented by methods of inscribing within the document a trail of clues that enabled authorities to detect fraud and those committing it. All this gestured at the larger engagement of the state with definitions of the legal, how to produce them and how to socialize subjects into accepting and practising them. Such a discourse of legality through the identity of the marked object was both parasitic on and productive of phantasms of the fake document, the altered document and concepts of the authentic and the counterfeit. These concepts and these binaries of legal/illegal, authentic/counterfeit enacted through the marking of objects as well as persons were indispensable for the modern state to frame entitlements, set up the sovereign state as arbiter of the distribution of entitlements. Yet this sovereign authority enacted through marking practices collapsed again and again with officials themselves conspiring with criminal minds to obscure the differences between the counterfeit and the original, the legal and the informal. Let me illustrate this with a few examples.

**Battling the enemy from within: The discursive site of corruption**

Authorities blacklisted dealers and initiated criminal proceedings against a few who were reported to be culpable of malpractices or negligent deliveries of petrol. Among the cases that rationing but also police authorities hauled up for such action were the unlawful hoarding of petrol by lorry drivers, the sale of petrol on credit, i.e., without coupons, the illegal sale of petrol by oil company drivers to petrol depots, sale of petrol on dated coupons, etc. At other times, officials had to deal with complaints about the vehicle as causing petrol loss; the petrol tank in a vehicle was reported to be leaking causing the evaporation of petrol. Deeply concerned about the pores that had found their way into the delivery apparatus, the rationing authorities enlisted the help of the Police Department to bust the rackets of hoarding, black-

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57 Ibid, p.27
58 28/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA
selling and illegally acquiring petrol. Consequent to sweeping raids and rapid inspections, the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) reported the various inlets of fraud and illegality like leakage from vehicles employed on contract by military authorities. The SSP found the military authorities culpable for the rackets in motor spirit coupons either on the count of negligence or deliberate complicity. The SSP in his remarks on how to counter these leakages, suggested that the commodity (here, the vehicle) and the document both be marked and examined for marks. Motor spirit, he said, could be issued only after certificates of fitness, vehicle speedometers, tax coupons, driving licenses were duly examined. A private vehicle marked “on military duty” must not be taken at plate-value; its official status must be borne out by written representations that its driver carried. This representation must bear the signatures and the office stamp of the officer responsible for its use.

It is interesting that these corrective measures were fleshed out not simply with an eye on the offending customer or cardholder but also in view of the corrupt and erring official. Motor spirit applications were deliberately misused and negligently dealt with by clerks and higher-ups among rationing authorities – one such example involved the use of application forms by a clerk to siphon off motor spirit to a confederate who sold coupons in loose and in black. The fraud in question was not noted by his superior, Gurinder Singh of the Automobile Association of North India who pleaded innocence on grounds that he was weighed down by a heavy burden of handling thousands of applications. Colonial authorities recognized the site of corrupt practice to be inhabited by the delinquent cardholder, the wily middleman and the complicit government official. The document was a crucial line of defence against the colonial state's own emissaries.

59 Books were handed by the military authorities in bulk to contractors who used bullock carts to do most of their work, thereby overlooking or abetting the wasteful sale of petrol (saved by the contractors) which was often black marketed to petrol pumps. 28/5/42-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, D.O.No. 17364.
60 Ibid. Only after a vehicle had exhausted its measured mileage could the driver apply for fresh motor spirit coupons.
61 Ibid. The SSP also suggested that the 60 to 70 petrol pumps in Delhi be regularly visited and coupon books examined to see if they contained the vehicle's registration number. Ibid.
62 28/13/44-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
Conflicting rationalities of the 'colonial' in the everyday

So far this chapter tried to demonstrate how the colonial state used the (rationing) document or documentary forms of identification to meet the imperatives of a war within realms of everyday life (travel, daily comforts provided by electricity, etc.). Here, “everyday life” is to be read in the colonial context of everyday trade, commerce and market which were necessary to sustain the imperial edifice. But trade and commerce were also needed to sustain everyday public consumption. The war invoked a rationale of the extraordinary that permeated the colonial management of the everyday. Every application was scrutinized and every legal norm related to food or motor spirit consumption sanctioned or revised with a view to satisfy the ‘extraordinary’ demands of the war. However, the everyday and ‘the ordinary’ could not always be acquiescent to the ‘event’ of the war.63 Sometimes, the ‘everyday’ asserted itself in ways that could not be quelled by appeals to the ‘extraordinary’. The everyday functions of colonial rule such as managing the local economy and governing a population comprised of religious communities were things that could not be compromised even at the instance of the war. So, British authorities had to juggle conflicting rationalities of the 'colonial' posed by the everyday. These rationalities were in the nature of addressing socio-religious ferment and dissident activity, the demands of the local economy, generating resources, saving commodities and retaining public confidence at a time of war. This chapter will try to encapsulate the dilemmas posed by these conflicting rationalities manifest in the everyday through narratives of food and cloth rationing in Delhi. What the chapter would like to draw attention to, here, is the changing form of the rationing document to reconcile these conflicting rationales of colonial authority.

A predominant imperative of rationing was to keep the masses at least those in crucial urban centres, alive and away from dissidence and resistance that had its roots in hunger.64 And so the ration card for food and the permit for cloth made available a

63 Veena Das believed the event and the ordinary to be entangled in complex ways where everyday life and relationships were moulded by the event and where violence was always manifest in the “weave of life”. Veena Das, Life and Words, op.cit, 6-13.
64 Srimanjari, “Denial, dissent and hunger in war-time Bengal, 1942-44”, op.cit, 48, 60, Needless to say, this was not the only reason rationing was introduced.
specified quantity of each to various cross-sections. Food rationing was introduced in Delhi, interestingly, long after it was introduced in other places like Bombay and Calcutta on 29th May 1944 under the Delhi Rationing Order of the same year and much after other commodities were rationed in Delhi. The Rationing Department of Delhi came into existence at the same time in May 1944 and remained functional until March 1954. It covered the areas of the Delhi Municipality, the New Delhi Municipality, the Civil Station Notified Area, the Fort Notified Area, the jurisdiction of the Delhi Cantonment Board, the West Delhi Notified Area, the village sites of Shadipur and Khanpur as defined in the revenue records and the areas defined in the Chief Commissioner of Delhi’s Notification as extra Municipal Rationing Zone I, IIA and IIB. The food ration card, valid for 26 weeks was issued in Delhi to individuals entitling cardholders to rice, wheat and wheat products including atta, maida, rawa or sooji, sugar including khandisari sugar. Unlike other provinces or states that issued supplementary ration cards to manual and heavy manual workers, Delhi did not issue separate rationing documents for this class but left it to employers’ canteens to issue the same. (see previous chapter for heavy manual labourers’ cards) Supplementary rations were made available to employers who operated cooked food canteens for their labour. This labour, was strictly speaking, factory workers and those employed in essential services whose employees obtained

65Ibid and 15 (176)/54, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA. At the time of introducing rationing, the population of the rationed area in Delhi was 8 ½ lakhs. Needless to say, the department was wound up after the de-control of foodgrains once again in 1954. It was of course, necessary to have a semblance of the previous order of things to facilitate food distribution. Ration dealers under the previous system were issued imported wheat and could sell it to the public without any restrictions on consumption. It is unclear if they required proof of ration cards or not at this stage. The organization comprising three branches was headed by the Controller of Rationing. In the year 1954, the Organization consisted of the Accounts and Statistics branch that was in charge of Rationing and Civil supplies, the Administration branch and the Food and Distribution Branch under an Assistant Controller. Even after the DRO was wound up, certain controls remained in tact in order to prevent smuggling of foodgrains in and out of Delhi province and municipal authorities were required to enforce regulations on movement.

66Notification No. III97 – R, dated 14th September 1944. 14 (5)/1945, War and Civil Supply, DSA. Notification of the Chief Commissioner corresponding to the last area was No. 4039 – R dated the 15th May 1944.

67 14 (5)/1945, War and Civil Supply, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

68 Units in the ration card varied, depending on the commodity sought. For instance, 1 unit of cereal ration was worth 1 seer of maida, 1 seer and 14 ½ chattanks of atta, the quantity of other cereals in addition to the maida will be 15 chattanks per unit. 15 ½ chattanks of rice and 2 ½ chattanks of sugar were available for a unit of the ration card.
basic rations from their employer’s shop. Interestingly, Britain too had a very similar rationing scheme, as documented by a wartime publicity film, for employees in the metropolis where factory workers were entitled to canteen supplies. In Delhi, employers of industrial and other concerns were required to apply to the Controller of Rationing in order to obtain such supplementary rations for their employees. These employers were to furnish information about their workers and the canteen management was to make an application for a ration permit. These canteens run by permit could supply one meal a day – this arrangement by Delhi authorities was in lieu of the separate supplementary ration of the manual worker that other states and provinces issued (see previous chapter).

Unlike the other rationing documents (motor spirit coupons, tyre permits) that were available only for certain sections of government employees, visiting dignitaries, soldiers, etc. the cloth permit was issued to all heads of families entitling him and the rest of his family to varieties of cloth. The coupons attached to these cards could be used to obtain coarse, fine or processed cloth from authorized dealers against cancellation of a coupon or a portion of the coupon. For the purposes of rationing, fine cloth and cloth produced by the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Co. Ltd were subject to rationing. Here, I must, if only briefly, outline the Indian textile contribution to the war. Kamtekar informs us that India’s “chief industrial contribution” during the war was cotton textiles. He records that “India had supplied nearly four hundred million tailored items, twenty-five million pairs of shoes, thirty-seven thousand silk parachutes and four million cotton-made supply-dropping parachutes”. The war, Kamtekar adds, greatly benefited the Indian business class, especially in the textile sector: Indian cloth manufacturers received many orders

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69 Rationing in Britain, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9wNIJ78S2GY as accessed on January 4, 2012
70 14 (5)/1945, War and Civil Supply, DSA. The employer was to provide particulars such as the average number of workers, the nature of employment of the persons served from the canteen, the place of their employment, address of the canteen with rationing circle number, the proposed menu of the meal served, the authorisation number of the employer’s shop to which the canteen is attached and the quantities of the rationed commodities per week as initial allotment. The ration permit was to be marked with the employer’s shop number.
71 Chapter I, 1 (h), Delhi Cloth Rationing Order, 1945 as obtained in 113 (1945), Special Press Advisor, DSA.
72 Statistics relating to India’s War Effort as cited in Indivar Kamtekar, State and Class in India, op.cit, 195. Kamtekar also tells us that the production of mill-made cloth went up to 4.6 million yards which before the war was 4 million yards.
from the government “and the stocks were quickly sold”\textsuperscript{73}. The biography of Lala Shri Ram who ran the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Co. Ltd (DCM) recorded “an unprecedented boom” and “bumper profits” in documenting the high success of his business during the war.\textsuperscript{74} These descriptions would then beg the question, why was cloth rationed if the textile business was prospering so well during the war? It would appear that wide-spread hoarding and black marketing and the insatiable appetite of the war for textile resulted in the Indian government both promulgating the Textile Control Order in June 1943 prevailing on mills, wholesalers and retailers to declare their stocks, and imposing the rationing of cloth.\textsuperscript{75} Even after cloth rationing was imposed, debates persisted about the amount of a particular class of cloth (coarse, fine, and processed) that could be made available through the cloth permit. The Order stipulated that a permit-holder should not be allowed fine cloth more than one-third of the total ration allowed.\textsuperscript{76} Soon after cloth was rationed, some categories of cloth were exempted.\textsuperscript{77}

Under the Delhi Cloth Rationing Order, 1945, cloth was made available through a permit which was issued to an adult who was the head of the family for the rest of his members and when it was produced by the person to whom it was issued. Under cloth rationing in Delhi, each adult permit-holder registered in the name of the head of the family was entitled to 6 units each with one unit standing for a yard of cloth. This ceiling became a problem however when the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Co. was gutted with locally produced coarse cloth while the cloth imported from Bombay and Ahmedabad vanished

\textsuperscript{73} Kamtekar, 201.
\textsuperscript{74} Arun Joshi, \textit{Lala Shri Ram} as cited in Kamtekar, 203.
\textsuperscript{75} Kamtekar speaks of conditions resembling a cloth famine in the same year 1943. One of the reasons the Indian business class dealing in textile did so well during the war was the high prices at which they were able to sell cloth. “The prices of cloth reached levels more than five times the pre-war level before the government intervened to control them”, Kamtekar writes. Kamtekar, 203.
\textsuperscript{76} Chapter III, 18. The Cloth Rationing Order as obtained in 113 (1945), Special Press Advisor, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
\textsuperscript{77} Imported cloth, handloom cloth, handkerchiefs, dusters, napkins and other stitched articles not exceeding one yard, towels, furnishing fabrics, cloth containing less than 20 percent of cotton, hosiery and nets, fents not exceeding one yard and additionally, gauze cloth, bandage cloth, mill-made sheets, cotton blankets and jalli were attached to the Schedule of The Delhi Cloth Rationing Order that exempted them from rationing. The Schedule attached to The Delhi Cloth Rationing Order, 1945. 113 (1945), Special Press Advisor, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
from the market in no time. The document of the cloth permit suggested itself as an invaluable device to improve offtake of local rations and reign in imported supply. The cloth permit could be used to purchase the ration of local cloth that was increased from six to 12 yards of cloth: coarse cloth quota was increased from four to 10 units though fine cloth stayed at 2 units. It was not only bales of coarse cloth that gathered dust in cloth shops, fine and processed cloth of which there was a spate also remained untouched as the permit quota for this was too little. It was suggested that the quota of fine cloth should be increased as the demand for this far exceeded that for coarse cloth. But even in the heat of these debates, the ration permit was sought to be retained as black marketing was a specter that haunted all categories of cloth sale and distribution. When this was not a fear, men of considerable wealth, it was assumed, would purchase in bulk or hoard an expensive commodity like chicken or a variety of embroidered cloth that was rationed.

Among the things that rendered the cloth rationing document rational and retrievable within an archival and administrative frame were the fixing of spatial location and the aligning of geographical co-ordinates. A permit-holder was identifiable within an administrative grid and coded by virtue of his residential address within a spatial network of authorized suppliers, dealers, shops and establishments. The validity of cloth permits was circumscribed meaning that the document was useless without the coupons that were time-bound. And so, the permit-holders could draw rations only for the specified quarter on their coupons, they could not save them (their coupons) to use for another quarter.

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78 This course of increasing local rations was preferred to the derationing of locally produced mill cloth as it was feared that the latter would entail the spiriting away of local cloth outside the province. If earlier imported cloth did not come under rationing, this too was re-considered and measures put in place to control the supply and distribution of such cloth. Amendments were made to disallow purchase of imported coarse cloth in excess of half the quantity of cloth prescribed under the permit.

79 There was furious correspondence about this commodity whether it should be rationed or not. Some officials contended that the decontrol of chicken cloth or placing it outside fine cloth rationing would allow wealthy persons to buy it all leaving nothing for mass consumption. Besides, this would encourage mills and dealers to render any fine cloth chicken thereby exempting it by simply putting some embroidery on it. Others like Ramadhyani, the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Civil Supplies believed that the prohibitively expensive aspect of this cloth was enough to exempt it from rationing as very few people would wish to buy it. 12 (47)/1945, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

80 This was however variable. At some times, it was stated that these coupons could be valid for the next quarter if they did not exceed 12 units. At other times, this did not matter, the coupons were as good as the quarter for which they were issued. And the coupons were worthless without the document. 16 (1) and 16
What was more, the permit was inserted into a tight administrative scheme of distribution and control where a holder was allowed to purchase cloth only on a certain date.\textsuperscript{81} But this kind of bureaucratic rationality implicit in spatial and temporal entitlement was undercut by practical problems posed by the local economy like the surfeit of cloth. When a conflict of this kind occurred, rules surrounding documents were viewed as a painful liability that stood in the way of economic common sense. In these instances, legal-rational practice had to give way to prudence. Rules pertaining to dates and quarters were relaxed without remorse to allow for the quick disposal of cloth.\textsuperscript{82} Through its decisions to retain the cloth permit and relax provisions pertaining to its use, the Delhi government sought to reconcile the conflicting rationalities presented by the local economy, everyday legal practice and the colonial war effort. If the various rules pertaining to validity enacted sovereign power in the everyday, the equally everyday fear of gutting the market and the wartime apprehensions posed by threats of black market and hoarding propelled colonial authorities to relax the rules. The colonial authorities hesitated but did not shrink away from modifying rules to address perplexities posed by these multiple rationalities. For instance, the coupons contained in the cloth ration permit for families and establishments could be presented for registration only to the authorized cloth dealer mentioned on the permit. Cloth dealers were authorized to sell cloth only on a license issued under the Delhi Cloth Dealers Licensing Order, 1944. But these rules were again ignored when rationing officials found themselves in quandaries of quota management, local mill resistance and excessive imports. Rules were relaxed to allow dealers to carry out trade in a locality even if they lacked a license or even if the locality fell outside the the administrative jurisdiction of a permit-holder. These concessions were made in order to dispose of the coarse cloth that was fast accumulating in the ration shops.\textsuperscript{83} It was not only dealers who were extended concessions. At other times, rationed

\textsuperscript{81}Chapter III, 22.
\textsuperscript{82}12 (47)/1945, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
\textsuperscript{83}The original clause providing for sanctioned authorised dealers providing supplies only to those registered under him are 21 (a) and 21 (b) of Chapter III of the Cloth Rationing Order, 1945. 12 (47)/1945, Civil Supplies, DSA.
subjects too enjoyed lenience to manage the “everyday affairs of the Raj”\textsuperscript{84} that could not suffer owing to the war. Special cloth permits were issued to persons for short durations, thereby diluting the rules pertaining to validity for a specific quarter.\textsuperscript{85}

**Negotiating cultural nationalism**

In Manto’s short story termed *Kali Shalwar*, Sultana, a prostitute finds herself impoverished in wartime inflation-driven Delhi as she can find no customers since she moved from Ambala. In Delhi, she can barely manage to sustain herself, having to forfeit her bangle and other expensive jewellery. Yet, she is miserable more than anything else because her financial situation prevents her from buying *kali shalwar* for Muharram\textsuperscript{86}. Her subsequent desperate attempts to procure a *kali shalwar* unsuccessfully through her companion, Khudabaksh and successfully through a friendly stranger, Shankar is an eloquent fictionalized testament to the intimate relationship between cultural norms and personal desires in India. The previous chapter showed how the colonial government could not very well afford to ignore these cultural expressions, extending documentary concessions from time to time to religious communities. Festivals and marriages were however not the only occasions pressing on the government to provide concessions. Recognizing the affective rituals surrounding funerals, the colonial government in some states and provinces issued additional cloth rations to families which had suffered a bereavement. The previous chapter documented how the administration of the Andaman and Nicobar islands provided a cloth ration for nine yards of coarse cloth for Muslims while other communities were given a ration for five yards of cloth for the same purpose. The Delhi government extended a similar concession to its religious communities. In Delhi, cloth ration coupons could be produced only as long as the person was alive and the head of the family was to report death or missing family members.\textsuperscript{87} However, the permit could

\textsuperscript{84}Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: The British in India*, op.cit, 21.
\textsuperscript{85}Chapter V, 43, The Delhi Cloth Rationing Order. These permits were issued usually for a month though it was made clear that no ration permits would be issued to visitors or anyone who did not stay for more than a month.
\textsuperscript{87}34(1), 34 (2) and 35. If the person was missing for more than three months or if a new addition was made
entitle a relative to procure cloth rations in the event of the death of a person in the family. The cloth ration permit was perhaps an exception among documents in a crucial sense – it was the only document that allotted rations to dead persons.\(^{88}\) A dead person’s ration card submitted along with his or her cloth permit when produced after proof of his death was submitted, procured for the family cloth required for a shroud to cover him or her. Such a ration card could be ironically enough, an incentive to the family to report the death and procure a revised or new ration card but also and even more ironically, an opportunity for claiming the cloth and using it for purposes other than to make a shroud.

Religious communities, the previous chapter pointed out, were adamant that supplementary food rations be issued at the time of festivals. The Majlis Ittihad Millat and the Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee both made thinly veiled threats of a religious upsurge unless their demands were met. (see previous chapter). The Delhi Guest Control Order regulating attendance at marriage and festival gatherings had to take into account the sensitive nature of Delhi as a province on account of its status as the country's capital.\(^{89}\) From 1946 onwards, applications had to be made under the Delhi Rationing (Limitation of Guests) Order whenever parties exceeding a stipulated number of guests were held. Such an application also had to include a request for a permit to be granted to a catering agency in connection with the function or gathering.\(^{90}\) These applications were usually considered only when the party was held in honour of a visiting dignitary or if it was thrown on occasions such as Republic Day, Independence Day celebrations, etc.\(^{91}\) Where private parties were hosted, those hosting the

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\(^{88}\) Chapter V, 38 and 41 (2).

\(^{89}\) See previous chapter for more details on the leeway given to religious communities Delhi in the context of this Control Order.

\(^{90}\) The proprietor in charge of the establishment or institution which agreed to serve food was obliged to give 48 hours’ notice if it was providing catering for more than the stipulated number of guests. He was supposed to report to the Controller of Rationing, Delhi specifying the nature of the party, entertainment or function, the place where it was held, the number of persons to be served, etc. Control of food distributions for such occasions was regulated both by the under the Delhi Rationing (Limitation of Guests) Order, 1946 and by the Delhi Rationing (Meals in Establishments) Order, 1946. Establishments were governed by other restrictions like the number of cereals or the ounces of bread that could be served per day and per customer.

\(^{91}\) These Independence Day celebrations could be those of other countries hosted by their embassies in
party often collected *atta* from each family or house that would be present at the party and admission to these parties was always by tickets for purchase.92

These everyday life demands which were deeply invested in a cultural sense were voiced not only in the context of special occasions, such as festivals, marriages and funerals but also for more quotidian purposes like going to church or to a mosque. If the debates on supplementary food rations were fiery, those surrounding motor spirit rations for religious travel were equally vehement. Colonial officials in Delhi were loath to entertain even missionary applications as they were fearful of opening the floodgates to applications from other communities. Evangelical Christian leaders were not entertained as evidenced in the treatment of the motor spirit application of the Delhi Chaplain’s request for additional rations. Rationing authorities in Delhi believed that by sanctioning this request, they would be vulnerable to other communities which also demanded concessions for attendance at places of religious worship. The Muslim leader, Khwaja Hasan Nizami, for instance, sought rations for his community for purposes of travel to the mosque. The Secretary to Chief Commissioner wrote suggesting that entertaining the Christian community would be tantamount to opening the Pandora’s Box of religious demands for motor spirit.93 Documents fell in this nebulous territory of ambivalent colonial pressures of rule, to negotiate cultural nationalism but simultaneously to address threats to imperial sovereignty on a larger canvas, namely that of war.

**Fortifying the city: Norms of family and residence**

Having discussed the debates underlying the resumption of rationing in Delhi post-war and post-independence, I outline them only briefly in this chapter. Initially, Gandhi’s views on rationing prevailed against the economic sense of experts in various Committees which suggested the continuation of ARDs and relief-quota shops post

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92 The Vicar of the Holy Trinity Church in Delhi made such an application to the Secretary, Rationing and Civil Supplies to the Chief Commissioner. He had to also mention in his application the menu to be served. 21 (2)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

93 28/5/43-C, Confidential, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
independence. Rationing was however regarded indispensable to manage the “severe inflationary pressures” and the “shortages of essential food items” induced by war and Partition. The refugee problem threatened to devour Delhi financially and reinforcements were urgently required.

If the city was vital to the colonial edifice during the war as a supply base of industrial resources, soldiers and labour and in peacetime as a link to commerce and trade, it was critical to the postcolonial state for several reasons. As the centre of national planning and “infrastructural modernity”, its growth and its progress marked its postcolonial distance from the stagnant village. At the same time, Delhi as a city was dependent on contiguous villages for its nourishment. Delhi’s famous historian, Narayani Gupta writes that villages in Delhi were, historically speaking, subservient to towns and urban settlements. In Delhi, villages traditionally played the role of food-givers to the city, plying it with “grain, vegetables and milk products”. It was also thought necessary to fortify the city against the alien culture of the villages. Gupta writes, “The city was fortified by massive walls not only against possible attack from enemies from afar but against villagers – Meos, Gujjars, Jats – in the vicinity”. To secure the city, to seal the boundaries between the city and the village, to improve the city through the Masterplan and to feed the city were imperative pursuits of the nation and the nation's planners.

“The basic fact of our food policy is the control of foodgrains”, declared Nehru on one occasion. Rationing in the villages was key to post-independence projects to fortify the city and secure it from rural black marketeers and hoarders. Rationing was imposed in Delhi in 1950 and again from 1952 to 1954 when the Delhi Rationing Organization (DRO) was

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95 Ravi Sundaram, Pirate Modernity: Delhi’s Media Urbanism, New Delhi: Routledge, 2010, p.4
97 Ibid, p.100.
98 Nehru found the slums of the cities to be depressing and he wished to remove the vestiges of the village from the city. Ravi Sundaram, op.cit, pp.54-55.
wound up. But rationing was intended not simply to keep rural hoarders out but to keep a check on frantic refugees piling the city. During the war, urban areas in Delhi were statutorily rationed while the various villages were most often served by relief quota shops covering non-producers and non-agriculturalists who were issued family and individual ration cards. Barring a few instances where some rural areas like Narela, Najafgarh, Mehrauli and Shahdara were brought under rationing, the rural scale of rations was considerably higher than the urban quota. After independence and following the failed experiments with decontrol (see section titled 'beyond war and independence' in previous chapter) the fear and panic regarding black marketers and smugglers of food grains peaked. With this, a case for rationing in rural areas around the city too emerged. If during the war, “priority services” had to be provided and “priority areas” were given precedence, post-independence, the term “scarcity areas” was employed. In scarcity areas, food needed to be supplied to “vulnerable sections” defined to be both villagers and refugees. One scholar, in her work on Partition narratives of rehabilitating Punjabi migrants in Delhi, gestures that the postcolonial state's refugee rehabilitation effort was akin to the wartime effort in the military precision with which it carried out evacuation of refugees. I would like to add that the colonial wartime effort and the postcolonial rehabilitation effort were comparable in another sense as well, of caring for the “bodily nourishment”\textsuperscript{100} of its subjects at a time of great crisis. If in the instance of the war, the crisis in question was the fear of military attack on the cities and the depletion of urban resources to provide for the Army, in the case of Partition, the great anxiety was that of displacement and mass movement into the cities. Free rations were provided post-Partition to refugees housed in camps set up in various points such as schools, army barracks, tents in the city.\textsuperscript{101} Some of these refugees were also put up in areas contiguous to the city and given rations equivalent to the rural scale. Refugees and other residents of the villages, were, in a sense sought to be both protected and regulated with a view to secure the city. Rationing was necessary to both clothe and feed the vulnerable sections but equally to keep them from pilfering and hoarding the city's supplies.

\textsuperscript{101}Ibid, p.89.
It was with these objects in mind that statutory rationing in villages and rural rationing organisations were sought to be introduced. It was decided in 1950 that especially those villages that were contiguous to urban Delhi would be rationed; existing relief quota shops would be turned into ARDs in rationed villages and that the rural quota of rations (from relief quota shops) would be halved. In introducing stringent rationing in rural areas, little heed was paid to the heterogeneous histories, the rural economy and the diverse lifestyles of population groups in villages. A village like Kotla Mubarakpur, for instance, whose dangerous proximity to Lodhi Colony in the Delhi Rationed Area was to be secured by all means. A village like this, with its open market conditions tempted and lured black marketers to smuggle and hoard various commodities into the rationed areas of Delhi. Kotla Mubarakpur was merely the most contested of the newly rationed villages. A host of other villages and refugee colonies in rural areas like Tihar Refugee Colony, Azadpur and Indra Nagar Refugee Colony at Azadpur, Rampur, Chiragh Delhi, Sheikh Sarai and Malviya Nagar, Kalkaji Camp, Masjid Moth and Shadipur Khampur owing to their proximity to urban rationed areas were brought under statutory rationing. Different classes of residents across these villages protested loudly against the move to half their ration while arguing their case on different pretexts. Government employees who were previously enjoying a high ration, shopkeepers who could sell rationed commodities at will who would be forbidden from carrying out trade in them, agriculturalists and producers who were harassed by rationing officials in plying seeds and their harvest from the fields to their residences and residents of refugee camps whose rations were being steadily decreased were all distressed by the decision. But rationing spawned various irritants, not simply those related to reduced ration scales. The imposition of rationing also required villagers to school themselves in new habits of applying for ration cards, submitting them and producing them. Residents of a few villages, in their petition to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi conveyed their sense of inconvenience and irritation over

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102 Controller of Rationing, Delhi to Secretary (Rationing and Civil Supplies) to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 14 (37)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1950.

103 14 (37)/50-C.S. (1), Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1950. It was proposed to bring them under statutory rationing from 7th January, 1951. Wheat and wheat products like atta, rawa or sooji and maida, rice and paddy were declared rationed articles in these villages and colonies. The first day of July was fixed as the rationing date for these commodities. 14 (37)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1950.
ration cards – while indicating that they had resigned themselves to approaching writers and clerks for permanent ration cards, they expressed their frustration over temporary or visitor’s ration cards and how it was highly difficult for them to fill out application forms, given their illiteracy, every time a guest wished to stay with them. Some others demurred saying that though the rationed area in question fell under the rural area, it was for all practical purposes urban as most of the residents were government employees and the only reason they settled there was owing to the tardy rehabilitation schemes of the government which had failed to find an alternate place for them. These people argued that they should be allowed the urban scale of rations of sugar and foodgrains. Residents of refugee camps were indignant that they had to survive on a cut of an already meagre ration to add to their woes of having to stay in the same place for many years owing to government negligence to rehabilitate them.

Later, with the introduction of rationing in villages of the Mehrauli area in 1953, objections were raised that cultivators were “molested” by rationing officials who attempted to ferry their produce from the land to their villages as under the rationing rules, only 10 seers of wheat could be transported at any given time.

If rationing of rural areas was imposed to secure the city's supplies from illegal acquisition, the imposition of rationing in urban localities was equally vital to order the city and groom its residents. The ration card eased urban residents into habits of legality where they (urban residents) accepted concepts of validity, expiry and administrative jurisdictions as well as

104Residents of Peranji, Khairpur to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 14 (37)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA. They protested on other grounds as well, that their ration was too small for labourers and kisans and that it didn’t make sense to introduce rationing in a place where most of the residents were agriculturalists who cultivate their fields and produce their own foodgrains.

105Residents of the Kalkaji Refugee Township but also the residents of Ranjit Nagar Shadi-Khampur Township petitioned the Chief Commissioner separately but on similar grounds. Secretary, Displaced Persons Association, Kalkaji Township and President, Ranjit Nagar Shadi-Khampur Township Association to the Chief Commissioner, DSA. Residents of Kotla Mubarakpur also presented the same case that most of the residents there were displaced persons and government employees who used to live in urban areas but who were forced to live here owing to housing crises. Secretary, Welfare Association, Kotla to Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 14 (37)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA

106President, Kalkaji Refugee Camp Panchayat to Chief Commissioner, Delhi. 14 (37)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1950.

107Cultivators of 12 villages to President, Delhi Congress Committee. Villages like Okhla, Jasola, Sarai Kale Khan, Nagli Razapur, Kilokri, Tarimurnagar, Khizrabad, Joga Bail, Sarai Julena, Madampur Khadar, Tekhan and Tughlaqabad fell under the Mehrauli Area.
notions of eligibility and entitlement. Residents came to view themselves as holders of permanent and temporary cardholders or as visitors. They realized the importance of owning or renting a stable residence for the purposes of being marked a householder as against a homeless ration cardholder who would be entitled to lesser rations. This was because officials enumerating those without defined residences like those staying in hutments would issue them “homeless” cards after, of course, checking these makeshift residences. Above all, the device of the ration card taught urban residents to treat their families impersonally, as if they were “households” comprising persons related to each other by blood but not by affective or kinship ties. The following chapters will explore the consequences of drawing the fault-lines between families and households.

New technologies of control were devised to compile, collate and consolidate information pertaining to existing and new cardholders. These new technologies enabled the Delhi administration to classify rationed subjects in order to confront threats to the city's granary posed by villagers infiltrating the urban areas and those hoarding supplies. They (the technologies of the ration card) also sought to discipline the postcolonial subjects into urban residents equipped in acquiring, producing and surrendering documents at local offices. This was achieved not simply by the new index card-system coupled with the new zonal scheme of rationing and door-to-door inspections but also by a staff well-trained in issuing cards on a timely basis, collecting population statistics, raiding FPSes and visiting homes to check for duplication and inquire into complaints. Let me attempt a brief description of the index card system and the zonal scheme, framed as technologies to fortify the city and fashion the urban citizen.

**Early Technologies of the Identification Document**

Post-independence, a zonal scheme of rationing was introduced in Delhi where the administration created a hierarchy, delegating powers to rationing officials at different levels. If earlier, the work of issuing ration cards devolved on the Sub-Inspector, it changed after 1950, when powers were delegated to Circle Rationing Officers, who were in turn responsible to Zonal officers. The Delhi Rationing Organisation divided the city into 6 zones
each consisting of 3 or 4 circles each of which was placed under Circle Rationing Officers.\textsuperscript{108} It was the task of these officers to call for applications, issue cards, arrange for delivery and routine checks of ARDs and maintain records. Zonal officers were to oversee the work done by Circle Rationing officers, look into complaints by the public, inquire into complaints of black marketing, exercise control over ARDs and AEPs and send mobile squads to conduct door-to-door scrutiny of ration cards to detect bogus or ghost cards.\textsuperscript{109} Where earlier, Sub-inspectors were in charge of issuing cards, under this new scheme, they were relegated to subordinate functions of collecting population statistics, delivering ration cards and they were accountable for each card they failed to deliver within 24 hours of the issuing of the card and conduct inspections of ARDs.\textsuperscript{110} In place of the register and counterfoils that were earlier used to trace cardholders, authorities devised an index system which made it easier to identify cardholders as index boxes were arranged house-wise and blockwise and contained details of residences in a block, even of those holding temporary or visitors’ ration cards.\textsuperscript{111} The index card would be updated every time a change occurred in any cardholder’s status. This system was designed to be easy to access, provided the staff were trained to use it and immediately relevant. Fairly important as technologies of sorting information, index cards were early precursors to the computer model in India.

What marked a paradigm change in the way the ration card was viewed under this new scheme was the correlation for the first time of the card population with the actual or recorded population of Delhi. While earlier, the problem of ghost cards was registered, it was acknowledged and addressed by a slew of anticipatory measures and micro-practices

\textsuperscript{108}Report of the Zonal Sub-Committee, 1950 as found in 14 (25)/50, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110}Ibid. Usually, they would have to furnish Inspection Reports of ARDs where they had to address questions like the awareness of the ARD of the cardholders being served under him, whether they are registered under him or if he is issuing rations to cardholders of another shop. Has he issued supplies without a ration card or on an expired card? Does he keep at hand a list of lost, cancelled or surrendered ration cards? Has he registered cards and permits in excess of the number prescribed? Does he cancel coupons and issue cash memos in the way stipulated? How does he register visitors’ and temporary ration cards?

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid. If earlier the code number of a ration card consisted of the Circle No./Block No./House No., in the new system, the Code Number was to consist of the Circle No./Index Card No./Block No./House No. The index cards of temporary ration cards were to use a colour different from those of permanent index cards.
like stamps, seals, use of special paper, official wording of cards, codes, etc. The power of population statistics and recordkeeping was not unyoked from enclosed offices and unleashed to undertake policing in a way they were now. The rank and scale of the rationing establishment were now engaged in this task: the Inspectorate staff under the Circle Rationing Officer was to collect population statistics and closely oversee the cancellation of entries of surrendered ration card holders or cardholders who didn’t use their ration cards for more than 4 weeks in ARD registers. The Zonal officer was to scrutinize the population reports, figures and block-wise maps furnished by the Circle Rationing Officers and compare them with the card population of various areas in the Zone. Any perceived dissimilarity within a Circle, for instance, was immediately investigated through door-to-door verifications of ration cards.\textsuperscript{112} Such checks were of course preceded by the extremely careful initial exercise of verifying cardholders’ residences at the time of delivering ration cards and the Sub-Inspector had to furnish well-founded reasons for failure of delivery.\textsuperscript{113} In a move to satisfy itself that cards were issued only to those eligible and not to ghosts or those who already possessed them, the post-independence regime devised a two-fold strategy.\textsuperscript{114} The raid of ration shops and the elaborate interrogation of ARDs would yield wrongful, illegal and fraudulent use of documents or what was termed even back then, ‘bogus cards’.\textsuperscript{115} The Enforcement staff under rationing authorities was put in charge of house-to-house checks which dispatched ‘mobile squads’ of many Sub-Inspectors armed with population lists, Rationing Orders of the day and enumeration or enquiry forms to ensure each cardholder was accounted for.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{112}Ibid. This duty of the Zonal officer was called “reverification of ration cards” and was meant to be carried out a week after the delivery of the cards.

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid. It was not enough to write remarks like “not traceable”; the Sub-Inspector had to explain adequately why he was not able to deliver the ration card.

\textsuperscript{114}When I speak of a strategy, I imply a strategy aimed at policing and verifying ration document issuance and distribution. These measures were implemented alongside myriad other (non-documentary) strategies to prevent frauds like smuggling of foodgrains. These strategies included the creation of various control barriers at places like Azadpur-Karnal route, Rohtak route, Mathura route and the Jamna Bridge Route. Besides, all provinces and state governments were asked to review their food control measures or devise ways of “adding to or amplifying measures to close avenues for black-marketing of food.” 9 (42)/1949, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

\textsuperscript{115}Secretary (Rationing and Civil Supplies) to Deputy Regional Food Commissioner (Central Region). 9 (42)/1949, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.

\textsuperscript{116}These enumeration forms were not to record details for the purpose of enumeration but for re-
Stabilizing the family norm

Apart from introducing technologies of classifying information and disciplining residents into document-wielding citizens, the post-independence Delhi administration was also engaged in debates on the norm surrounding the ration card. At the heart of these debates lay anxieties of entitlement and constructions of legality. The discontents implicit in the terms 'ghost beneficiaries' and 'bogus cards' that predominate newspaper reports and academic writing even today on the Public Distribution System (PDS) were present as early as 1950 when the model of the ration card was discussed. The debate on the family and the individual norm brought into sharp focus the official anxieties about government expense and corruption, how to secure the document from corruption and how to exploit the document to secure the government from it. From being the predominant administrative category, the individual was reduced to a speck on the horizon of food distribution and welfare consideration. A host of considerations and a whole new post-war thinking guided the government in taking the winds out of the policy of documenting the individual. This section will first conjure the arguments leading to the stabilization of the family norm after which it will signal the implications of such a discursive move.

From the point of view of Delhi's rationing officials, the individual as the unit for the card was certainly not without its benefits. They recognized it to be more popular than the family card as with the latter, changes had to be constantly made with new additions or absence caused by the death or the disappearance or migration of any member of the family.\textsuperscript{117} A new ration card had to be prepared in all these instances and a trip to the rationing office to procure the new card was mandatory.\textsuperscript{118} The rations of the family during this period of verification were sorely threatened by the whole procedure. It was not uncommon for people to conceal the sudden departure or absence when someone from their family if only to get a continuous ration and save themselves needless expense and effort. Besides, they could continue to withdraw rations of the missing member.\textsuperscript{119}

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\item\textsuperscript{9(42)/1949, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.}
\item\textsuperscript{14 (23)/52, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA, 1952.}
\item\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
\item\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
\item\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
\end{enumerate}
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The individual ration card made all this facile concealment difficult as cardholders could draw rations only by producing the ration card in person in their rationed area. This said, the family card was seen to be more suited to postwar conditions where rationing was neither as ubiquitous nor as tight as it had been during the war. It was argued that the urge to misappropriate rations was naturally stronger when the ration was fixed and enforced everywhere. With open market conditions persisting side by side with controlled distribution, the family ration card was a lesser administrative liability than the individual ration card. For one, it was easier to issue cards to a family than to distribute an excess of documents to various individuals. Besides, accounting was made simpler when cash memos were issued to the head of the family irrespective of the number of members in any given family. The savings on printing cards would be considerable if family cards were introduced.

The family ration card was issued in Delhi from 1st February 1953. Those possessing permanent cards issued to individuals could retain them until the card expired or the person sought a family card. The procedure for verifying the family ration card for changes was an improvement over the older one where amendments (to the effect of reducing the number of units of family members) had to be made on the spot on the receipt of application for change. When applications for additions in the number of units of family members were received, rationing staff were sent to deliver the card which was to be handed over after verification at the spot of the house. This way, the family ration card was administratively worked upon to manage previous discontentment with it and the government justified its superior advantage over the individual ration card. It is extremely interesting to note the impression that official parlance conveys when it uses words like ‘savings’, ‘expense and effort’, ‘superior advantage’, ‘administrative liability’ and ‘benefits’ conveying the debate as a detached and purely administrative exercise on

\[\text{(120) Ibid.} \]\n\[\text{(121) Ibid.} \]\n\[\text{(122) Ibid.} \]\n\[\text{(123) Ibid.} \]\n\[\text{(124) If cards were lost or damaged, 4 annas had to be tendered for the issue of a substitute family ration card, ibid.} \]\n\[\text{(125) The discontentment was over the fact that changes to the ration card invariably involved long trips to the rationing office.} \]
the norm to be adopted in the ration card. But a few throwaway lines in official reports like the reported tendency of families to conceal departures or demise reveal some of the deep official anxiety on the family norm besides those involving the cost on the exchequer. In snatches of official conversation, the hesitation to entrench the family norm was palpable as intense anxiety about concealment and fictitious names. This anxiety may not be visible as such in the debate that couched every argument within the format of a bland balance sheet of merits and demerits or assets and liabilities. The apprehension over the family card was manifest above all, in official fear of the imposter, the ghost beneficiary and the fraud; and the vulnerability of the family card above all to these recalcitrant figures. The repeated invocation of bogus cards and ghost cards and the fevered imagination of these figures in various surveys that were constantly ordered belied the disinterestedness of this exercise. For instance, an investigative survey that was undertaken before this debate occurred but after the war occurred threw up nearly a lakh ‘ghost’ cards showing the family card to be highly susceptible to illegal practice.¹²⁵

But the family card, even though it may not have been consolidated for this explicit purpose (so that no causality need be established), helped officials mediate social relations in a way that the individual card could not have made possible. Along with supporting documents, it helped track relations and relationships, fix filial or marital responsibility, establish identity of a person through social background and family assets, keep abreast of feuds and migrations, apprehend those who weren’t paying taxes as early applications for the ration card demanded income tax receipts¹²⁶, zero in on the family when the document was misused. In later years, the family ration card application was complete with details of income, rations enjoyed and it allowed for inquiries into family assets, amenities enjoyed, etc. Providing rations through the filter of family eventually meant the exclusion of transsexuals, eunuchs and other minorities though these people

¹²⁵Ibid and 9 (42)/1949, Civil Supplies, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA. These bogus cards were detected at the time of renewing cards in May 1949.
¹²⁶Only those who paid income tax, land revenue or house rent of not less than 12 rupees were entitled to a cloth permit. Schedule B, Cloth Rationing Order, 1945, 113 (1945), Special Press Advisor, Chief Commissioner’s Office, DSA.
were also kept out of the legal framework of the document through the column/category of gender. Even in the year 2004, the Delhi household consumer card listed only two options, name of the head of the family’s father or husband.

**Conclusion**

In her work on the centrality of credible documents to juridical authority, Bhavani Raman suggests that colonial authorities attempted to render discretionary practice into procedure by monopolizing protocols of attestation. Bhavani Raman records how in 19th century Madras Presidency courtroom procedures were relaxed and “innovative protocols” ushered in to address concerns of perjury. Within a juridical context of hearing native depositions or confessions, colonial authorities were able to exploit the illegibility of documents to normalize their acts of discretion, she argues. While she does not cite the war or any period of extraordinary crisis to frame such acts of extra-judicial authority, this chapter would like to argue that such periods more easily obscured these acts of discretion, rendering such acts indistinguishable from performances of bureaucratic rationality. The Second World War inflated the bureaucratic power of colonial authorities who used the historical context to suspend the operation of legal-rational practice to suit military purpose or to invoke it when there was a breakdown of the everyday colonial state. In treating applications for non-essential commodities (like motor spirit and electricity), officials disposed of them as if they were petitions and representations that could be summarily dismissed or sparingly entertained. In fact, as the severe regime of motor spirit rationing illustrated, officials gave themselves the discretion and the power to disregard any request from civilians, establishments and officials except when worded in the language of the imperative or in the form of official orders. At the same time, the chapter argues that certain rules and procedures were devised or relaxed to resolve tensions triggered by the locating of the everyday within the extraordinary.

In the postcolonial context, determining the ration card's form and function was vital to

127Ibid.
provide for the vulnerable sections (refugees and the poor) in partitioned India. It was also needed to fortify the city from pilfering villagers and the government from unnecessary expense. But the shape and purpose of rationing documents were crucial to the postcolonial state for much more pressing reasons, to determine the nature of entitlement and constitute the realm of welfare. Which document clinched entitlement, in what form did it certify the candidate and when did it cease to argue the applicant's case were all questions that were utterly bewildering for the postcolonial state. If this seems to be the predicament of all modern states and not simply the postcolonial state, we will see in the next few chapters, how these questions were riddled with cultural ambiguity very specific to the Indian situation. In speaking of the Indian situation, I seek to complicate the understanding of rules and interpretations of documents as emanating from a monolithic state, by studying them (the rules, etc) more locally. Through the microperspectives of rationing officials, I hope to illuminate the history of welfare processes as framed by documentary practices of identification. In the next chapter, I show how rationing officials who were neither impersonal bureaucratic automatons nor self-serving corrupt individuals, imbuing their official personalities with social meaning.