Between the 'colonial' and the 'postcolonial': Rationing documents and welfare practices in India

Shortly before rationing was actually introduced, a film showing the procedure for getting a ration card and for drawing one's ration was, with the full cooperation of the local cinema managements, shown in the cinemas in Bombay and was very effective in explaining matters to the public in general. The Bombay artisan or laborer, even if he could not read, was often a keen cinema “fan” especially after the wartime rise in wages had put spare cash in his pocket.

Food Administration in India, 1939-1947, Henry Knight, 203.

This preliminary chapter demonstrates how the engagement of the late colonial and the early postcolonial state with rationing documents shaped the contours of welfare distribution in India in the years between 1939 and 1954. By remaining central to discussions of fraud, corruption and malpractice, rationing documents helped fashion a discourse of legality. In colonial India, such documents were used to enumerate and gather information about subjects and their families on the one hand and to regulate the consumption habits of the urban native population on the other. Interestingly, colonial records of ration card information were revitalized and reaffirmed by postcolonial welfare dispensations in India. This chapter studies rationing documents in their moments of formation and reincarnation in realms as disparate as wartime rationing, equitable distribution, corruption in food commodities and preparation of electoral rolls. The chapter also argues that the ration card was visually present in colonial India as a rhetorical device to manufacture consent for the war effort. In attempting these tasks, the dissertation argues that the rationing document became disembodied from its originary function of managing wartime scarcity. The ration card emerged, concretized, disintegrated and surfaced again in various realms of welfare and enumerative practice in the course of furious debates on and incessant experiments, straddling colonial and post-colonial India, with its form and function.

In the country of popular culture and visual rhetoric

Rationing during the Second World War was resonant in the imagination of popular culture, especially American popular culture which treated this theme either scornfully or reverently (as propaganda) in various animated short films such as
Ration Bored (1943), Meatless Tuesday (1943), Ration for the Tuesday (1943) and Snow White and de Sebben Dwarfs (1943). Many of these films featured popular animated characters like Popeye, Betty Boop and Woody Woodpecker but also favourite fairy tale characters like Snow White, Jack and the Bean Stalk talking in a topical sense about themes such as fuel rationing, hoarders, black marketing...and the ration card during the war. A film that treats rationing and the propaganda surrounding it with a fair degree of contempt, Ration Bored which was a clever pun on the Ration Board in America, casts Woody Woodpecker in a revolutionary role handing over an alphabet book to the gas attendant when the latter demands his ration book, also called the ABC book because American automobiles were termed A,B,C, T or X. In Britain, short propaganda and publicity films were made during the Second World War to demonstrate the wisdom of rationing and the best practical ways to use the ration card or clothing coupons. One such film in the archive of the Imperial War Museum titled Rationing in Britain (1944) describes the life in a day of an average middle class English family where the daughter consults a magazine in which a column named Your Coupon Problems offers tips on how to prudently spend the 24 clothing coupons issued to every family over a period of 6 months. Using nightclothes for “patching, mending and making things over” is, for instance, suggested as a means to save the clothing coupons so that the woman can look good even during the war. In India, Henry Knight tells us short films were made to educate the unlettered labourer to use the ration card. Besides these films, advertisements were

1These American animated short films, usually lasting over five minutes, were made during the time of the Second World War. They introduced popular characters like Donald Duck or Popeye in a very contemporary social and political context teaching children to associate them with American politics and society.

2http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6oZH1mKOqo as accessed on January 5, 2011. Cars were classified into A, B, C, T or X by the American Office of Price Administration depending on the rank or priority of the car owners – civilians, workers in the military industry, doctors, truckers and Ministers of Religion, police, firemen, and civil defense workers were differently placed in the ABC book and therefore received different quotas of ration.

http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090618142830AACAcY1 as accessed on January 5, 2011. Interestingly, similar ranks and entitlements were worked out by the British Indian rationing authorities too in Delhi. See next chapter for a detailed discussion of the hierarchies in the rationing regime.

3In this film, the wife uses her ration card to draw her weekly rations of sugar, tea, butter, lard and margarine for the family, her husband gets a special tea allowance for working in the railways, the daughter gets her daily rations from a factory canteen and where the son gets his weekly ration of chocolate with his savings stamps. Rationing in Britain,

issued both by the government and private companies such as Bata exhorting people to buy less, waste less and spend less.\textsuperscript{4} The films made in America and Britain about rationing and outlining the rationales of the ration card entrenched the relationship between civilian everyday life and priority war efforts. In short, these films either reinforce or criticize the normative expectation of patriotism implicit in the various demonstrations of the prudent use of the ration card. Some of these films at the same time sympathised with civilians over the hardships the rationing regime had caused. “Rationing brought a sense of sacrifice among civilians. It helped to sustain the martial spirit – and sanctify the dead”, one American propaganda film declared\textsuperscript{5}. “British citizens know all these (rationing) restrictions are necessary to victory” declaimed an American commentator in a British film.\textsuperscript{6}

In India, advertisements and films on the ration card rhetorically reiterate the various imperatives of wartime rationing: in addition to instilling patriotic sentiments in colonial subjects, the ration card served other functions, one of which was to display the reach and scope of the imperial state in enumerating and providing for its various subjects, unlettered, homeless and the educated alike. Memories of the ration card in UK and America invariably conjure the Second World War, related inflation, scarcity and austerity where citizens had to scrimp and save and think of “substitutes for meat, milk, eggs”\textsuperscript{7}. For the various classes of Indians (the middle class and the low income classes), the ration card was an abiding presence and a steady companion decades after independence. The War itself is scarcely remembered in India as the point of origin of rationing, let alone associated with rationing. If inflationary crises, wartime shortages and the need for well-fed labour power necessitated rationing in the last years of colonial rule, the aftereffects of war, uncontrollable price rises, epidemics and famines,

\textsuperscript{4}The ad put out by Bata in \textit{The Hindustan Times} reads, “Bata, India’s Most Popular Footwear apologises for not being able to make footwear in adequate quantities for civilians...we appeal to them to prolong the life of their shoes by getting them repaired in time at our shoe repair workshops attached to every large Bata shop.” The advertisement is titled “Our Work Speeds Up Victory” and is a strong indicator of the priority that the consumption needs of the Allied Forces and the British Army took over all civilian demands. \textit{The Hindustan Times}, New Delhi, March 21, 1943.

\textsuperscript{5}Rationing during WWII, date unknown, \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0r2D4mTRZWE} as accessed on January 5, 2011.

\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Rationing in Britain}, 1944, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid.
Partition-induced refugee flows, the lack of a self-sufficient economy and populist politics rendered the ration card into a familiar reality in post-independent India.

**The social life of the ration card**

The form of the “ration card” was notoriously diverse before independence and was far from uniform after independence. During the war, the ration card abounded as the family ration card in some provinces and as the individual ration card in others; it was replete with security features in certain areas and extremely minimal in other areas. In the rural areas, the ration card was an assurance more than a norm while in the cities and towns, the ration card was mandatory. Applications in late colonial India for ration cards were variable depending on the contingency, the commodity and the status of the applicant with extra rations made available for the pregnant woman, the family of the soldier and the heavy manual labourer. Ration cards could take the form of cloth permits, motor spirit coupons, food ration card and tyre permits depending on the commodity in question and the province of rationing. This chapter and this dissertation theoretically frame welfare discourse in a narrative of the multiple forms and practices of the ration card and other identification documents (mainly rationing-related documents) operating in India in the period roughly between 1940 and 1955.

In the recent proliferation of literature on identification practices, many scholars like Veena Das, Deborah Poole, Yael Navaro-Yashin and Emma Tarlo have suggested that documents are rarely, if ever, tacit and inanimate minions of bureaucratic authority. When Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff et al. wrote to retrieve the biographies of the commodity which they declared were animated objects or things having a life and social potential, they inspired new perspectives on the identification document, its capricious form and varying function. Yet, few scholars in India have ventured to present the genealogy of any single identification document or class of identification documents. This dissertation risks saying nothing new or surprising if it simply says that ration cards were fluid and changing entities, constantly acquiring and shifting shape. But this dissertation does hope to chart unfamiliar territory when it claims to explore the genealogy of the ration card by delving into the histories of its individual aspects such as the signature, the thumb print, columns of residence and family. It shows how the discursive formations of the ration card (such the norms of
the family and residence) are set up through affective encounters between religious communities and colonial authorities, imperial displays of infrastructural power and debates on fraud. If in a vital and basic sense, rationing documents were constituted and re-constituted as the result of encounters with historical processes, welfare practices and struggles of resistance, in a more significant and layered sense, the dissertation argues that documents could never be fixed as they were deeply imbued with culture, emotion, kinship, ethical judgements, intelligence and conscience.

In their study of institutions like the state, law and bureaucracy, scholars of political science are often inattentive to that which constructs these institutions as objects of political study. Micro-practices that encompass identification documents, stamp paper documents, revenue papers but also signifiers of state authority like stamps, seals, signatures are seen to be reflective rather than constitutive of state discourse. A significant realm of state authority, namely the practice of welfare is perceived to subsume rather than turn on the circulation, interpretation and delineation of identification documents. The dissertation argues, on the one hand that identification documents undergirded and determined the conception of welfare entitlement and on the other hand that documentary practices of identification, owing to the space for reflection, interpretation and appropriation they extended to officials and subjects, challenged the locus of welfare entitlement and problematized the history of welfare distribution.

The historical context of rationing in India

In the UK, plans to ration certain essential commodities were in place even before the War began, the food administration there being alert to the possibility of an attack on the food lines. However, in the UK, rationing did not extend to staple commodities of consumption, like potatoes and bread.\(^8\) Describing the differences between the wartime rationing in India and the UK, Kamtekar writes,

> To regulate consumption, items in short supply were strictly rationed in Britain. Whereas foodgrains were the focus of rationing in India, British rationing involved the supply of foodstuffs like meat, eggs and butter, while

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*Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee*, Government of India, 1943, 66-67. Sir Theodore Gregory, the Permanent Economic Adviser to the Government of India serving between 1938 and 1946, was the Chairman of this Committee. The detail about rationing in the UK is noteworthy because when rationing was introduced in India, it was mainly staple commodities, in India’s case, foodgrains, that were rationed.
bread, flour, potatoes and oatmeal were available in unlimited quantities. British rationing affected the vast majority of the population. Rationing in India centred on urban areas, thus involving only a fraction of the total Indian population. In Britain, the ration merely determined what a person ate; in India, it might determine whether a person ate at all. British rationing carried, for the majority of people, connotations of equality; Indian rationing offered, to a minority of Indians, a promise of subsistence. To those people able to afford very high prices for them, almost all items of consumption remained easily available in India.9

Attempts to model rationing in India along the lines on which it was introduced in UK were not considered logical, as there was a wide disparity in terms of consumption patterns and geographical location. There was said to be much more homogeneity of consumption standards in UK than could be ever found in India in terms of classes and sections of the population and geographical areas. While rationing was introduced in India as a wartime measure, it was also intended to mitigate the suffering brought on by monsoon and crop failures in Madras Presidency, Bombay and Bengal, the sudden interruption in the imports from a regular supplier of rice, Burma, which came under Japanese occupation and an unusually harsh famine in Bengal in the year 1943.10 Japan’s invasion of the three suppliers of rice in the Far-East, namely, Burma, Siam and Indo-China distressed neighbouring countries and forced the British colony in India to look for alternative sources. In Bombay, where rationing was first introduced, on the one hand, the damage done to growing crops by pest and floods was hard to undo, and on the other, there was a sudden rise in food prices owing to the Japanese occupation of Burma posing a challenge to the Bombay administration to procure rice supplies from that source.11 The Bengal Famine produced the rationales for ‘deficit’ and ‘surplus’ areas and the reasoning for some government action in deficit areas and adequate preparations in surplus areas and the creation of the Basic Plan.12 With the high risk of famine and famine conditions surfacing in other states

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10Ibid. Nominally, rationing was introduced in the year 1939, with Bombay being the first city to be rationed. But for all practical purposes, we can assume the scheme to have materialised only in the year 1943. It was only after the official endorsement of rationing by the Foodgrains Policy Committee in 1943 and consequent to Price Control Conferences between 1939 and 1942 that the formal decision to ration commodities was taken in the year 1943.
12Report of the Foodgrains Investigation Committee, (Ministry of Food, Government of India, 1950), 2-3. The Food Department created in December 1942 set up the All-India Basic Plan which was “a
and provinces, there was an onus on the administration to regulate the normal channels of trade and supply of food. No foodgrains were permitted to be removed from one province or state to another except in accordance with a central plan or the Basic Plan that the government created. The Plan fixed (a) quotas of exports of foodgrains that could be moved (under permit) from various surplus provinces to deficit provinces or determined, (b) the quantity of foreign imports that must be supplied to deficit states and provinces. This allocation was based on reports submitted on the estimates of production and consumption and the extent to which they were surplus or deficit in any grain.\(^{13}\) This allowed for a balanced distribution of foodgrains across the country enabling deficit states to have minimal stocks. The Basic Plan was prepared annually and twice, once in October/November based on the kharif harvest and in April/May before the Rabi harvest. All such movements, exports and imports were governed by permits.

Rationing in India was perceived as a means to preserve and sustain ‘traditional patterns of consumption’ given the proclivity of various classes to consume cereals and the sudden shortage thereof.\(^{14}\) If this painted the colonial intervention as benign, other scholars have decried its lop-sided and self-nurturing function. Rationing was projected by historians and economists like Sanjoy Bhattacharya and Amartya Sen as a palliative to the discontented civilian population and as a wartime necessity for the ‘priority sections’. It was hardly surprising that hungry subjects did not need much convincing to participate in civil disobedience.\(^{15}\) Sanjoy Bhattacharya considers the

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\(^{13}\) S.C. Joseph, *Food Policy and Economic Development in India*, (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1961). It was not uncommon for deficit states and provinces to exaggerate their needs or for surplus ones to play down their surpluses to escape export stipulations and to obtain imports respectively.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 4

\(^{15}\) Srimanjari, “Denial, dissent and hunger in war-time Bengal, 1942-44” in *Turbulent Times: India, 1940-44*, ed. Biswamoy Pati, (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1998), 48, 60. Local traders, nationalist leaders and influential persons instigated such disobedience. Srimanjari writes that Marwari merchants assisted Congress leaders by withholding food supplies and instigating hartals. The Birla brothers, on the other hand, distributed money to beggar boys instructing them to aggravate authorities while nationalist leaders exhorted people to fight the British, invite the Japanese and Subhas Chandra
swelling numbers of the Allied Forces, the impracticality of generating local food supplies around Burma, given the difficulty of the terrain of the battlefronts and the deferral of a Japanese invasion of India as motivation for the British to increase food production and make plans for rationing. The purchases of cereals by the Army constituted a huge burden on the food establishment having to provision British and American troops and two million Indian soldiers.\(^{16}\) Scores of men fighting for the British Army, soldiers in the Maratha regiments, policemen in the Bombay City Police, labourers in the mills and other industries of Bombay and elsewhere on whom the colonial national security of India depended were in urgent need of food replenishments. Many ranks of civilian employees, those working in the provincial civil services, workers involved in the war-industries both at various levels of the government and those engaged in private businesses, plantation and mine workers, unskilled labour employed in military and civilian building projects were covered by rationing schemes.\(^{17}\) There was naturally the question of supplementary foods such as meat, eggs, vegetables and fruits for all these sections, foods which were scarce.

A wartime document that emphasised the material importance of labour between 1943 and 1945 was the supplementary ration card issued by various states and provinces. It entitled the heavy manual worker to rations in addition to the adult scale available for every person. The manual worker’s claim however needed to be processed through the imposing presence of an employer to attest his signature and accord his paternalistic assent for the document to be issued. Ajmer city, Bengal, Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands issued additional scales for heavy manual workers, though not all of them issued separate rationing documents for the purpose.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{16}\)Joseph, op. Cit, 23.

\(^{17}\)Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propoganda and Information in East India, 1939-1945: A Necessary Weapon of War*, (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 84-87. Writing on the rationing measures adopted in Eastern India, Bhattacharya tells us that subsidised food was made available by the governments of Bihar and Bengal to civil servants earning less than Rs. 200. These governments also ensured food supplies at a concessional rate to the workers employed on the coal and mica mines. The government of Assam did the same for the workers on its tea and petroleum industries. The Labour Department’s Provincial Supply Committees arranged for rations, among other facilities, for unskilled labour in military and civilian projects.

\(^{18}\)For instance, Andaman and Nicobar Islands authorised the issue of supplementary rations for heavy manual workers without issuing them separate documents, the existing document was expanded to allow for more rations. Initially, only a few categories were recognized in the application form for a
employer’s certificate within the application for the supplementary ration card was not an aberration; it was only one of many documents like the family ration card which set up the categories of “head of the family” and “dependent” which reinforced and perpetuated hierarchies either of kinship or authority or both. In the application for supplementary rations, the heavy manual labourer had to attach verifying proof of employment in the form of statement by the employer, whether the worker paid rent, what occupation he held, where he resided (house number and street number) and where he was employed, etc. The labourer’s claim needed to be processed through the imposing presence of his employer who had to attest his signature and accord his paternalistic assent for the document to be issued.

Many factors (other than famines, the need to keep the labour and military force well-fed) were pressing on the administration to do something to regulate food supplies and to make it available to a greater cross-section. These were the impossibly large queues forming outside food supply stores, the strikes of grain merchants and the danger and the incidence of hoarding of supplies among individuals and private traders. A lot of dissident activity in Bengal for instance may have nudged the British to act: posters were issued by the District Congress urging the formation of small squads to force authorities to dispose of rice and threats to loot and plunder rice shops. The circulation of propaganda painting those arrested in connection with resisting the export of rice as victims of colonial inconsideration may have been a catalyst too. To neutralize dissent and to prepare for military attack, the British authorities in India may have maximised production in Calcutta, Howrah, Asansol, Kharagpur and other industrial areas and mines. Excessive controls, the British reckoned, were necessary to bolster the economy for wartime needs

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heavy manual worker – fishermen, woodcutters, dock workers and road making labourers; later more categories were introduced. Extra rations of half a pound of rice or atta per head per day were sanctioned to heavy manual workers in the islands. RT-1061 (2), Food, Policy, 1942, NAI.

19Srimanjari, op.cit. 52, 53. In fact, native subjects sent an open letter to a Sub-Inspector in Barisal town informing him of an impending siege on a shop selling rice and daring the police authorities to stop them. Bengal Congress leaders also incited people telling them that extensive exports of food stuffs were taking place from India to South Africa, Canada, Australia and England while the Indians were deliberately being reduced to famine conditions. Indians were being forced into the Army and the labour for war production, they told people.

20Ibid., 42.
against a background of scarcity of essential commodities.\textsuperscript{21} Besides, military protection warranted that a separate ration scale be set up for Army soldiers whose food needs in the year 1943 were estimated to be 650,000 tons of foodgrains, of which wheat constituted 500,000 tons and rice 150,000 tons.\textsuperscript{22}

Various Price Control Conferences took place between 1939 and 1942 that discussed the government purchase of foodgrains. The Price Control Conference in 1942 seriously suggested centralized purchase, with a view to address insufficient supplies in deficit areas.\textsuperscript{23} The Food Advisory Council formally endorsed the plan for rationing on March 3, 1943 while the Foodgrains Policy Committee did so when it submitted its Report in the year, 1943:\textsuperscript{24} With the Foodgrains Policy Committee arguing that rationing was indispensable in all large centres in India, 103 cities and towns were rationed in British India and Indian states by February 1944. And by October 1946, the number of towns and rural areas rationed was approximately 771 covering a population of over 150 million.\textsuperscript{25} Among these large centres, full rationing was introduced in Bombay city and suburbs, Poona and Kirkee; Cochin State, Travancore, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore City, Civil and Military Station, Bangalore, Cutch, Indore City, Dewas Senior, Morar and Leshkar in Gwalior State, Quetta Pishin, Jafarabad and Vithalgarh (in Kathiawar Agency) and partial rationing in Bhopal city, Junagadh, Thanedeoli and Manavadar in Kathiawar agency.\textsuperscript{26} By 1947, both the urban and rural areas of Madras, Bombay, Travancore, Cochin and Mysore were under rationing, though the rural areas were not statutorily rationed. Initially opposed to

\textsuperscript{21}Benjamin Zachariah, “Imperial Economic Policy for India, 1942-44” in \textit{Turbulent Times}, op.cit, 199. Zachariah mentions these controls to be the modification of wartime regulations in the Defence of India Rules, grain rationing, cotton cloth controls and the coordination of Government Departments.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee}, 1943. op.cit, 34.

\textsuperscript{23}Jos Mooij, \textit{The Public Distribution System in South India}, Calcutta, Chennai and Mumbai: Oxford University Press, 1999, 66. It was in the same year 1942 that a separate Food Department was set up. It was this Department that created the All-India Basic Plan for food allocation to state and provincial governments.

\textsuperscript{24}Rationing was however not the only remedial measure that the colonial government sought to take, it also sought to increase the available food supplies, innovation of techniques to make available home-grown supplies in bigger quantities. This took the form of the \textit{Grow More Food Campaign}, improvement in procurement and delivery machinery, a check on rising food prices and importantly, tight regulations on the movement of food stocks from one province to another, were some of the measures suggested and implemented. \textit{Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee}, 1943. iv, 66-6; Sir Henry Knight, “Food Administration in India, 1939-1947”, 202.

\textsuperscript{25Sir Henry Knight, op.cit.,189

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee}, op.cit, 68
rationing, Punjab introduced it in the cities of Rawalpindi, Amritsar and Lahore in 1944 and Simla did so in 1945. Even surplus provinces like Assam, Orissa, Central Provinces, Sind, Bihar and United Provinces introduced it in some of their towns in the beginning of the year 1947.27

Sir Henry Knight, Advisor to the Governor of Bombay during World War II, records three prominent models of rationing, statutory, non-statutory rationing and controlled distribution.28 In areas where statutory rationing orders were given, the provincial or state administration had to count the population and regulate the acquisition and the movement of rationed foodstuffs. Entitlements of ration-card holders to “specified quantities of specified rationed articles at specified prices” were to be provided in statutorily rationed areas. In the absence of a ration card, the subject was not entitled to any food supplies and subjects were forbidden to import food into the rationed area. The period till which the ration card was valid was subject to change as were the quantities that the card-holder was entitled to obtain.29 Statutory rationing was usually enforced in urban areas with the food administration finding it extremely impractical to regulate the large numbers of the rural masses through documents. Private imports of rationing stuffs by traders were banned and individual consumers were allowed to import rationed foods only against the cancellation of appropriate coupons on ration cards for specific periods. While consumers could not obtain rations without ration cards, establishments could not do so without ration permits.30

Non-statutory rationing was the model common to rural areas. Here, private imports were not prohibited; ration cards were issued to non-producers and to those who produced much below their needs or insufficiently. Usually, cards were issued on a family basis and against application forms or after official enumeration or against official records.31 Those possessing a ration card were entitled to a fixed scale of ration but it was not legally punishable if they tried to procure supplies without a

27Sir Henry Knight, op.cit, 191.
28Sir Henry Knight was considered responsible for the introduction of a rationing system in the Bombay Province which was upheld by Central food authorities as the best in India and became the basis for models used in other Provinces and states. Review of “Food Administration in India”, 1939-1947, Manilal B.Nanavati, Pacific Affairs, 28, no. 3 (1955): 286-287
29Sir Henry Knight, 191
301023/IX, Food, Rationing, 1946-48. National Archives of India henceforth NAI.
31Ibid.
ration card nor were the authorities obliged to supply the ration. While Henry Knight tells us that provincial governments observed their rationing commitments in non-statutory areas as well as they did in statutory areas, scholars writing on food entitlement and regulations during this period criticize the colonial administration for ignoring the needs of rural India.32 The third model of rationing went by the name of ‘controlled distribution’ and was prevalent in some districts across India. This was also termed informal, partial or unofficial rationing. Here private traders were allowed to issue family ration cards and the supplies that they provided could vary from those strictly supplied in other places at the time.33 Even though traders were permitted to open ration shops, they could do so only after obtaining a license. These traders opened retail shops under the control of District Officers and were assisted by voluntary organisations. They were operational in rural or semi-urban areas.34 However, the priority in colonial food regulation was the protection of cities or industrial areas: the Famine Inquiry Commission made this clear in its Report, “The maintenance of essential food supplies to the industrial area of Calcutta must be ranked on a high priority among their (the government’s) wartime obligations.”35

The question of what was to be rationed varied across the country corresponding to what was regularly consumed in those areas. One of the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee was that all the major foodgrains in the area should be rationed. In 1944, wheat, rice and millets were rationed in Bombay, Sind, Hyderabad (Deccan) and the Central Provinces. In the Punjab, only wheat and atta were to be rationed, in Madras Presidency, only rice and in Mysore, rice, wheat and ragi, etc. In select areas, cloth, kerosene and sugar were also rationed. The Committee and the Food Advisory Council

32Amartya Sen “Ingredients of Famine Analysis: Availability and Entitlements”, The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 96, no. 3, (1981): 433-464. Amartya Sen who describes the famine and post-famine conditions in rural Bengal as completely unalleviated by any government relief with many “rural destitutes trekking into the city and dying on the streets.”p.441. There was little doubt that the government was successful in its policy of keeping the Calcutta population well fed and indeed, war efforts were not disrupted in Calcutta. Sen however points out that the colonial administration was reluctant to even declare a famine as it would have entailed the imposition of the Famine Code which was necessary to organise work programmes and relief efforts. And that rationing when it was introduced was done to address shortages for the creation of military, civil defence works and strategic industries.
33Sir Henry Knight, p. 191.
341023/IX, Food, Rationing, NAI, 1946-48
35Sen provides excerpts from the Government of India’s Famine Inquiry Commission, 1945, op.cit, 441.
decided that the amount of the guaranteed ration to be made available should be 1 pound of food grains or 1 lb (pound) of cereals per adult per day.  

This could be changed later, depending on food availability, the surplus or deficit status of the area, so on. Colonial food authorities were cognizant of supplementing the diet of some consumers like manual and industrial workers, government employees, army soldiers and police guards, essential civil services personnel, pregnant women and children among others. A separate ration scale was drawn for some of these persons and in some cases, separate ration documents were issued to them. Though many provincial and state administrations objected to the homogenous ration scale, central colonial authorities were extremely concerned to uphold a sense of uniformity in the ration scale across the country. Where non-edible items of consumption were concerned, a major consideration, of course, was the production and the rationing of items of military need and transport: cloth, woollens, mineral fuels, chemicals and medicines; continuous supplies of fuels like petroleum and coal had to be ensured. These were especially vital for ‘the health of the army detachments and military labour serving on the eastern front’  

Food supplies and cloth rations were made available to a wide cross-section of society on the basis of a ration card issued to individuals or families (depending on the province) with or without a stable residential address (also depending on the province). Other commodities like motor spirit (read petroleum or diesel), electricity, tyres and tubes were sanctioned more selectively to certain classes of European and Indian residents on grounds of compassion, rank and war entitlement.

While documents for ordinary and supplementary rations usually identified consumers on an individual basis, some documents identified consumers as a group. Some government employees, police contingents, labourers drawing their rations from industrial canteens and children residing in orphanages, boarding schools and hospitals were issued permit cards in bulk. Documents were also issued to groups

36Sir Henry Knight, op.cit, 192 and Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, op.cit, vii. If this basic minimum ration could not supplied to the people through home-grown supplies, then arrangements could be made for supplementing food supplies from outside.
37Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 84.
38Joseph, 63
considered eligible for supplementary rations. For instance, personnel of the Baroda state forces posted at the Baroda House in New Delhi were issued special permits that entitled them to draw rations for a temporary period on a scale equivalent to the military scale.\(^{39}\) Also called the Pratap Guards, they were issued these permits for a week’s duration, though this could be extended for more time. A similar scheme was devised for essential services personnel in the Army and the police and their dependents elsewhere.

**Identification Documents as Information-Gathering Practice**

Preparation for rationing cities and towns ensued through the months of March and April 1943 in the form of enumeration of families and houses and a census of retail food shops and enquiries of staff needed to be trained and recruited. Some food administrations, the Mysore Residency being an example, carried out food ration censuses as did the administration of the United Provinces government for the city of Lucknow.\(^{40}\) The Delhi administration sought to do more than just arrange a census of its urban area; it was decided that the population of the city would be classified into classes in tandem with their wheat requirements and that a tribunal would be set up in each Ward to adjudicate on the claims of people for inclusion in any such given class.\(^{41}\) Different rationing surveys and censuses were carried out but statistics and information collected under previous censuses were also used.

Early into the rationing drive, documents pertaining to the 1941 census were significantly used for gathering information necessary to the preparation of ration cards. Officials, who were presented with the idea of channelling one set of enumerative data into another, were delighted at the opportunity. An early manifestation of

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\(^{39}\)NAI, No. Rp-1013/21, Food, Rationing, 1944. The Baroda state forces complained that their personnel were given insufficient civilian ration scales. The Director of Civil Supplies (DCS) of the Baroda State sanctioned the scale and ordered the issue of these permits. Accordingly, a week’s special permit was issued under the Delhi Rationing Regulations, Clause 19 for the Pratap Guards at Baroda House, New Delhi.

\(^{40}\)149-E, Mysore Residency, Bangalore, 1946, NAI and “Rationing in Lucknow”, *Hindustan Times*, March 29, 1943. Ration cards issued after the food census in Lucknow specified the number of units to which each person was entitled.

\(^{41}\)One such class would be people who buy wheat in maunds and seers. The tribunal would consist of two residents of the ward and will be presided over by an official. “Rationing for Delhi likely to be introduced: Officials consider scheme” *Hindustan Times*, March 27, 1943.
governmentality could be traced to the extraordinary concession made by the Centre giving local authorities the right of access to confidential information required to document each subject. The provincial government of Bombay Presidency, which was the first to introduce rationing in the country, requested the Home Department that it be allowed to consult the abstracts of the census records of Bombay city stored in Satara. The Home Department would not have sanctioned the use as this data was treated confidential and not shared even for administrative purposes. But interestingly, this request was granted as it was made in an ‘emergency’ situation. The importance of generating information for the rationing of cereals and the population of Bombay was paramount for all concerned. Granting this permission, the Home Department wrote back to the Bombay Presidency,

No objection. It is interesting to see how the value of the census record is coming out.

The Bombay government instructed its District Collectors to obtain Enumerators’ Abstracts of the Census of 1941 about literate and illiterate persons in each village to be used for the purpose of rationing. The Collectors of Ahmedabad and Surat (in Bombay Presidency) used appropriate census abstracts stored in Satara for these purposes. The raw material or the abstracts of the 1941 Census came in handy at a time when the colonial government was hamstrung by war-related financial stringencies forcing enumeration authorities to prepare very basic tabulations in the 1941 Census such as territorially classified lists of towns, villages, cities and towns with their population enumerated in the form of communities (religious, tribal, and scheduled caste). The same war which prompted the cutting of corners in one domain of administrative and enumerative activity (preparation of the census) paved

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43The term “abstracts” here means raw data collected to compile the Census.
445/10/42, Home, Public, 1942, NAI. It was stated that high importance had to be attached to the control of the census original abstracts. They could not usually be allowed to go into the hands of persons who were not under census control. They could not be used by anybody without the specific consent of the Government of India.
45Ibid.
46Ibid.
the way for the gleaning of information in another realm of information-gathering, (i.e., collection of data for rationing).

This act of data sharing did not simply reflect the fortuitous uses of information. This exercise of information-sharing belied conservative assumptions about the sacrosanct nature of data, in this case, sensitive census data as something that could be used only for a specified purpose. It was a moment of concession which was at the same time a moment of information gathering on a war footing. I would like to juxtapose this late colonial move of exceptional information-sharing with the Board of Trade’s 1940’s initiative in Britain to generate information in the metropolis. In the absence of reliable census data of the population needed to introduce clothes’ rationing in Britain, the Board of Trade requested the Price Waterhouse (PW) accountants in that country to administer the system of clothes rationing. These PW experts were to produce a statistical database based on numbers that would both verify rationing claims and identify those making them and throw up specific information about clothing habits of the population. Both examples of generating information in the colony (India) and the metropolis (Britain) were temporally and spatially contingent on welfare imperatives during intense war conditions. The rationing regimes in both countries generated information on the spur of the moment to meet enumerative crises that involved demands for massive ‘evidential’ statistical information.

When the imagination of the colonial official was not alive with the possibilities of creative use of existing information, it was animated by ideas of capturing the elusive subject who may or may not already exist in the census record. Henry Knight, Advisor to the Governor of Bombay during World War II, writes of a survey that was carried out of beggars and homeless persons whose particulars of identity were taken down and that ration cards were promised to them. It is unclear however why colonial officials did not make use of counts of beggars and homeless persons which were certainly undertaken before such wartime surveys. Hugely disciplinary means were common in such drives as witnessed for instance in the counting of homeless in some areas like

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49Henry Knight, op.cit., 203.
Ajmer city by police roundup.\textsuperscript{50} In some rationing areas, there was also an enumeration of those living in refugee camps and railway personnel.\textsuperscript{51} A million and a half population were recorded, their houses numbered and ration cards issued mostly to the heads of each family. In many areas, Municipal Committees had already numbered houses for census purposes and Enquiry Officers used these numbers. In other places, the Enquiry Officer and the Numbering Officers could authorize any persons in an area to paint, affix to any premises in the area, letters, marks or numbers, as may be necessary for identification.\textsuperscript{52} They could also authorize persons to collect information and statistics to enforce rationing in the area. There was a transitory trial period where the number of ration card-holders that could be handled by a given ration shop was scrutinized. Once this was done, ration card holders could register at local retail shops – if they wished to change the retailer, they were required to obtain the sanction of the local food authority.\textsuperscript{53} The number of card-holders who could be registered with any retailer was limited, though usually, applicants were given the choice of registering with shops of their choice, either licensed retailer or controlled grain shops.\textsuperscript{54} Once registered, they had to arrange with the retail depot holder to collect their rations on a specified day of the month for their convenience but also as a mark of administrative uniformity. This however became a regulation in the sense that he could lose his rations for the week if he failed to do so on the specified day.

One of the recurring anxieties pertaining to the safety of food supplies which may even have been a contributing factor to rationing in the first place was vis-a-vis the hoarder. The ration card was framed by an official fear within the country’s borders, of enemies who could drag down the war effort and the most hated of these enemies was the hoarder; the propaganda campaign against him or her was ubiquitous and

\textsuperscript{50}R1021/1/Vol.II, Food, Rationing, 1944, NAI.
\textsuperscript{51} B.P.II-1038/51, Food, Basic Plan, 1951, NAI. The PEPSU government enumerated house-holders as were living in such camps and quarters. In the PEPSU provincial area, Enquiry Officers gave forms for the heads of families to fill up, which the Officers verified on the spot.
\textsuperscript{52} Notification No. 358/R.Dis. 21 (C)/46, RT-1023/IX, Food, Rationing, 1946-48, NAI
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. and Henry Knight, op.cit.,204
\textsuperscript{54}R-1000 (21), Food, Rationing, 1944, NAI. All state and provincial governments were required to fill up a questionnaire providing details of the areas and commodities that were rationed, the size of the ration, the kinds of enumerations carried out, the kinds of ration cards that they issued – temporary, emergency or provisional ration cards, where consumers were registered, the presence of Food Advisory, Ward and Local Food Committees, etc.
worldwide\textsuperscript{55}. American popular culture during the Second World War referenced somewhat darkly the hoarder in the controversial fairy tale parody titled \textit{Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs}, a short animated film or cartoon released in 1943. The Evil Queen plotting in this film against a black So White (instead of the fair Snow White) was a national threat because she smuggled out of sight not gold or riches but rubber, sugar, gin, coffee and other rationed items\textsuperscript{56}. In India, propaganda against the hoarder was not so creative but equally unsubtle. The government launched various propaganda campaigns in the form of advertisements and passed a crop of orders and rules painting the hoarder as a sinister figure. Repeated government advertisements splashed across the \textit{Hindustan Times} in 1943, warned of “the hoarder or the unscrupulous spectator who operates illegally outside the grain trade, who hoards vast stocks of grain waiting for a further rise in prices in order to make huge profits”\textsuperscript{57}. The advertisement mentioned “the cultivator, the dealer and the customer” as the three men legitimately concerned with food, and then underlined the presence of the “unwelcome fourth man” or the hoarder, an illegitimate and sinister creature engaged in illicit trade, and an uncompromising enemy of the people and the authorities. The ad ended with dire threats against the hoarder and an appeal to the customer to refrain from petty hoarding.\textsuperscript{58} Such propaganda was backed by voluminous legislation, with one such noteworthy injunction being the Essential Articles Restricted Acquisition Order passed in 1943, which enjoined subjects against hoarding or acquiring more.\textsuperscript{59}

An interesting interpretation of the British Indian government's injunction against hoarding was that it was introduced when rationing authorities became desperate to procure supplies and needed to legitimately procure the stocks of private entrepreneurs. Sanjoy Bhattacharya who argues this point adds that this policing measure only had the effect of further encouraging the practices of hoarding.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs}, accessed on 21 January 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXFSsKFrCgY.
\textsuperscript{57}“The Fourth Man – The Hoarder”, Advertisement issued by the National War Front, \textit{Hindustan Times}, New Delhi, 7 March 1943.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. The ad also exhorted customers to buy only what they need and pronounced, “so, in serving India and India’s poor, you will be serving yourself.” This ad appeared in different versions that year in \textit{Hindustan Times}.
\textsuperscript{59}Knight., 203
\end{footnotesize}
Something that just cannot be missed in the wartime period from 1939 to 1945 is the enforcement of military regulations to safeguard India's food supplies. The most wide-ranging of these regulations were the Defence of India Rules and the injunctions under these to traders and all those engaged in movement of foodgrains or its disposal. That a piece of national legislation pertaining to security should accord so much penal space to the safeguarding of grain and sugar supplies is telling of the symbolic and material significance of food to the British colonial state at a time like this. Hoarders were an abhorrence within this legal framework where the Foodgrains Control Order issued on May 21, 1942 under the Defence of India Rules stipulated that those other producers of foodgrains who were involved in the purchase, sale or storage for sale in quantities more than 20 maunds in a transaction of specified foodgrains should be licensed by the provincial government.60 Dealers, millers and owners of establishments producing food were issued licenses and expected to maintain accounts and turn in monthly returns of purchases, sales and stocks.61

Each state and province that undertook statutory rationing was governed by an important document called the Rationing Order that spelled out the identity documents necessary to the import or export of, issue and supply of foodgrains.62 The same Rationing Order often forbade the supply of rations without the mandatory ration card, laid out rules regarding registration with retail distributors, enjoined the reporting of lost, defaced or destroyed documents and gave instructions regarding the surrender of ration card in case of migration or death of card-holder. The Order also instructed the fees to be paid for the replacement of the lost card. The Chief Commissioner was empowered by the Defence of India Act, 1915 to enforce these regulations and to punish violators.63

60Joseph, p.35-36.
61Joseph, p. 36.
62The Rationing Order was usually recorded in the Official Gazette of India and authorised the Chief Commissioner of Rationing to oversee the regulations contained within it.
63RT-1061/2, Food, Policy, 1942, NAI. Colonial officials invoking the Defence of India Act left no illusions about the regulatory nature of the rationing scheme. It also conflated concepts of food security with national and military security.
Location, residence and address

In all these Orders, location and not just residence occupied a lot of analytical and contemplative space. The accent on the monitoring of supplies outside a region or jurisdiction was unmistakable, the surveillance here pertaining to spatial allocations or entitlements and not just that of quantities allowed in trade. The administrative grid of rationing was configured territorially to ensure registration of cardholders with Authorized Retail Distributors in a given area, ARDs themselves were circumscribed based on their license to operate and their location within the district, states were regionally slotted into surplus and deficit rice and wheat zones across which movement of food grains was to be energetically monitored. This analytical space of location was populated by tensions relating to the free loader, who enjoyed free food in the hospital while retaining the units in his ration card, by apprehensions of all-too-likely negligent registrations of subjects with unlicensed catering establishments, by ARDs registering more than they were jurisdictionally allowed and by recorded and feared instances of cardholders with fictitious addresses.

The twin anxieties of violation of jurisdiction and hoarding undergirded the monitoring of the baker, the wholesaler, the retailer and those managing the fair price shops through audit and inspection services and documentary regulations in the form of food and baking permits, licenses and blacklists. Documentary checks in the form of compulsory licensing were enforced by the Foodgrains Control Order, issued by Ordinance in the year 1942, which each state and provincial government had to adhere to. If ration cards identified individual consumers, ration permits were used to identify establishments and retailers. These permits came with various indents of the articles rationed, the units rationed, the number of weeks for which they were sanctioned to provide these articles. They were subject to examination by the

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64RT-1061 (2), Food, Policy, 1942, NAI. This too was a documentary restriction that the Deputy Commissioner directed rationing authorities to observe in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the year 1946. It was cautioned that hospital inmates who were recipients of free diet did not surrender their ration cards. It was suspected that they left these at home free to be used by their families. On noting this, it was directed that those admitted to hospital should carry these with them and duly submit them to the Sister-in-Charge who was to make corresponding entries in the card until the time that the patient was discharged. Only in the instance of the patient’s relatives bringing him food from outside the hospital, could they retain his ration card.

65It was in the context of the interruption of supplies from Burma that the then Viceroy of India, Linlithgow introduced this Ordinance. Dietmar Rothermund, An Economic History of India: From Pre-Colonial Times to 1991, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 120
Rationing Officer of the area and nobody could import or export rationed food without a permit issued by the Chief Commissioner of Rationing in any given area.

The most potent manifestation of the fraught official relationship with location occurs at the site of domestic residence. Even at this early point in pre-rationing identification drives across various provinces and states, there was a tense contemplation of the place and import that residence and address should have in the ration card. This anxiety was only anchored strongly in the persistent tendency to define homeless persons, as seen, for instance in every batch of Delhi Rationing Orders and Delhi Specified Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Orders from 1945 to 1981. The obsession with floating or itinerant populations and incessant documenting of homeless persons was hardly something that the ration card heralded. The labelling, branding and tattooing of homeless persons and the creation of anthropometric passes for and the fingerprinting of vagrants, nomads, gypsies, traders and homeless persons has a resounding history across modern Europe, with almost every country marking these groups in a fashion after the eccentric fantasies of their police or prefectures and other administrative wings, Alphonse Bertillon’s mythic experiments in France with anthropometry being the most celebrated example. Nor was the marking of homeless groups a systematic token of ambitions of surveillance alone. Regulating the ration through a perusal of documentary proof of residence was symptomatic of a larger state syndrome that probes the identity of those it patronises. Characteristic of the 19th century welfare drives was the need to filter ‘public charges’ to keep out aliens (read illegal migrant workers) who by that very status were freeloaders and undeserving of state support. But running through this historically enduring modern regime of welfare regulation were wide-ranging concerns with the consequences of laissez faire policies and the official sanction of freedom of mobility marked by the curtailment of document controls. The ‘argus of the patrie’ or the watchman of the nation66 function that the passport performed was as much to protect welfare assistance from scheming and rapacious alien figures as to put in place a trail of surveillance over foreigners and political undesirables.

The ration card must be read at a remove from this historical record, being less obviously disciplinary or repressive than historically known punitive badges of identity while at the same time being a document issued to indigenous subjects and not aliens. While the discrimination against those without a sedentary lifestyle or settled habitation was not missing in that homeless persons were issued only temporary ration documents and their cards were marked to that effect, the originary purpose of issuing the card to such people was to ‘embrace’ such persons and to enable them to receive a ration, thus suspending the homeless cardholder between ‘threat and guarantee’. As I mentioned, food administrations rounded up beggars and homeless persons; however, on issuing them cards which marked them homeless ration card-holders, some administrations extended a smaller ration (than the bona fide resident) while others withheld the ration altogether. The Coorg government, which issued such cards, forbade the supply of rationed articles to householders who bore the inscription of a homeless card-holder. The Bombay government on the other hand, issued temporary ration cards to 7000 homeless persons in Bombay city entitling them to lower rations while the permanent cards were estimated to be nearly 18 lakhs. The enumeration of the homeless was not debilitating only in a narrow sense that these people were extended a very meagre entitlement compared to those with a fixed residence, but they were also discriminated against in a larger sense. The homeless ration card holder or for that matter, the slum dweller or the floating migrant who was without a fixed home and hence without the appropriate or stable rationing document was progressively excluded from government housing schemes for the poor, as I will elaborately illustrate in later chapters.

**Residence and address**

But how were homeless persons enumerated if they lacked a stable residence? It seems that rationing authorities distinguished productively between residence and address, with clear instructions to enumerating authorities to describe the living space accurately. In evaluating the enumerations carried out for the Fuel and Kerosene Rationing Scheme in Delhi in 1944, rationing officials could barely suppress their

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67 Deborah Poole, “Between Threat and Guarantee: Justice and Community in the Margins of the Peruvian state” in Anthropology in the Margins of the State”, eds. Veena Das and Deborah Poole, (Santa Fe: SAR Publications and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).
68 Notification No. 60/R.Dis. 21 (C)/46, 1023/IX, Food, Rationing, 1946-48, NAI
irritation over the lazy, confused and conceptually blurred entries that enumerators made in the enquiry forms. The clerks appointed for the task were told sternly to state the number of living enclosures and accurately describe them (whether a certain room doubled up as living room and dining room or sitting room and bedroom) and to distinguish them from the partly enclosed spaces where the enumerating authority saw that someone had set up home under a tree or in a veranda. In these instances, such persons were to be listed as “homeless”\(^{70}\). In addition, the clerks filling in the form were also required to state the nature of the relationship of every resident to the head of the family (whether family member, servant or lodger), and mention surnames as well as the exact occupation – railway coolie or loom worker – in place of “vague entries” such as service or labour.\(^{71}\) Both in the directive to count the homeless and to make entries that were sharp and precise, the colonial state may have been engaged in a symbolic demonstration of the power and reach of its enumerative machinery, one that could capture nuanced detail about those residing in houses, however makeshift, and even record those living under trees and in corridors.

**Corruption as modality**

It is remarkable that within a year of introducing rationing to India, colonial food authorities began to exchange notes on the security measures to be taken against duplication, stealing and the wrongful use of ration documents. In an analysis of files pertaining to colonial rationing documents in the National Archives and the Delhi State Archives, I came across two sets of evidence. The first, for instance, witnessed in various files on motor spirit coupons, cloth permits and food cards suggested the proliferation of corruption, a term I loosely use here to cover instances of (1) theft of a rationing document, (2) misappropriation of a rationed commodity, and (3) extortion or wrongful extraction of money. The second set of evidence corroborated the rampanty of security measures like colour backgrounds, serial numbers and watermarks, all of which had the effect of marking the document, to counter the misuse of rationing documents and to make any offence related to such misuse traceable.

\(^{70}\) 27 (26), Chief Commissioner’s Office, War and Civil Supplies Branch, 1944, Delhi State Archives (DSA),

\(^{71}\) Ibid
A relationship or conversation between these two sets of evidence could be discerned in the archival files. A certain instance of fraud was, very often, followed by a colonial corrective to create a designated authority; this authority regulated the use of the document or oftentimes, marked the same document that was breached in order to secure it. It is possible that the colonial authorities documented some instances of corruption without simultaneously reflecting on security measures. However, almost every file this researcher studied in the national and Delhi state archives in which identification practices like the fingerprint and security measures were discussed bore a discreet or explicit mention of a recorded instance of corruption. There appeared to be a productive and invested relationship between corruption and identification practices around the rationing document in these three sites of theft, misappropriation and wrongful extraction of money.

In Bombay, one of the first reported cases of fraud following the rationing of food and cloth occurred in 1944 where blank ration permits were reported to be stolen by peons of the Rationing Department. Following this incident, the Commissioner for Civil Supplies, Bombay, A.D. Gorwala submitted a report on the corrective measures that his administration took. This included a “distinctive printing background” provided to the ration card, assigning different number denominations to the bread tickets, frequent change in the design of bread coupons that would enable immediate detection of counterfeit coupons, keeping of registers recording the number of units of bread issued to a ticket-holder. If four units of bread were issued to a person, then the number 0 in the top line and the number 4 in the bottom line of digits would be crossed out in the bread ticket and the week counted. Similar entries were made in the register pertaining to bread tickets. Elaborate use was made of counterfoils on which corresponding details were recorded and submitted to the Controller of Rationing. It was mandatory for bakers and authorised flour mills to keep a register where they

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72 R-1000 (15), 1944, Food, Rationing, NAI. Regulations were also aimed at bakeries which had to submit all the bread tickets they collected to an authorised flour mill along with a list showing the number of tickets of each denomination surrendered and the total number of bread units claimed. The authorised flour mill had to surrender tickets that they collected from the ticketholder to the Office of the Controller of Rationing. The office was not to accept these tickets from a baker unless they bore the stamp of the authorised number. Besides, authorised retail distributors had to keep accounts of the receipts issued and the balance of the bread tickets. The Bombay rationing establishment found a dozen bakeries to be guilty of tampering with units on the bread tickets where wheat flour was issued against tampered bread tickets ten times as large as those for which bread tickets were originally made.
entered details regarding ration permits (serial number of bread ticket, units and serial number of ration cards, date of receipt, etc.) that were checked by Rationing Officer. And at all times, flour mills and bakers were required to take down details regarding the ration cards of consumers so that any case of forgery or fraud could be traced to the card-holder. What was more, cash memos were given to consumers in exchange for the bread tickets they surrendered which carried the number of the ration card. The Bombay administration also experimented with the use of watermarks to detect different papers that were used. These measures, reported by Gorwala, became suggestions that the central office of the Controller of Rationing sent out to state and provincial administrations who were obliged to provide frequent updates. The administrations of Hyderabad state, Karachi, Orissa, the Bengal Presidency and the state of Jammu and Kashmir card experimented with marking practices and security measures like the use of special cardboard, printing distinctive text, facsimile signatures of officers, seals that were changed from time to time, machine-numbering of cards, permits and coupons and the use of carbon certificates and counterfoil.

In files containing correspondence on security features between the centre on the one hand and the states and provinces on the other, there was a recurring use of the term “vulnerable documents” invoked in a manner that placed documents at the centre of the engagement with fraud. For instance, the centre would ask provinces and states to file reports requiring enumeration of instances of fraud involving vulnerable documents and specification of the models of security features deployed around documents and by implication, of the measures undertaken to crack down on fraud. This led to a paradoxical situation, where documents armed with security features were designed to battle fraud and when lacking these features, were vulnerable or liable to be imitated and appropriated. Documents, whether vulnerable or secured, remained a central point of reference. Forgery, impersonation and allied practices of fraud became discursive sites in which to work out various markers and aspects of the rationing document. If the anthropologist Akhil Gupta speaks of corruption as a discourse through which subjects imagine and construct the state through everyday

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73 The Bengal Presidency at one point inscribed on its ration cards, “Controller of Rationing, Civil Supplies, Bengal” on its bread tickets, ibid.
74 R-1000 (15), Food, Rationing, 1944, NAI.
practices\textsuperscript{75}, it was also a modality through which the government imagined devious popular or for that matter, official, use of documents.

The colonial establishment reacted similarly to practices of wrongful extraction of money by writers (read middlemen) who sought to make petty incomes around official procedures of document production. While I cannot produce any evidence here of how popular they were in various rationed areas, it would seem from the acknowledgement of more than two local administrations that predatory writers of application forms and cards were on the prowl for credulous applicants and some pocket money. The Rationing Adviser to the Government of India, H H Kirby, complained in 1943 of writers extracting money from illiterate applicants in a government-owned rationing office in the Mysore residency.\textsuperscript{76} Kirby observed that a writer demanded two annas from an old and poorly clad woman who was only “doing her duty”\textsuperscript{77} by returning a ration card that she was not entitled to use. Kirby recorded that for the mean task of filling in an application form that the woman was obliged to complete on returning her own ration card, the writer demanded a fee. Following this incident, which horrified Kirby, he mobilised official opinion against the class of the self-indulgent writer who was to be prevented from fleecing applicants and cardholders on the job. Kirby demanded that such practices be discontinued and that officially recognised writers not be allowed to charge fees from consumers. Following this, the central food department passed an order for the creation of the post of junior clerks who would help applicants fill in application in rationing offices.\textsuperscript{78} Their duties would consist of providing rationing information to the illiterate public and filling in forms for them. No fees were to be charged for this purpose. The same debate also features the thumbprint, which was suggested in the face of confusion when it was difficult to ascertain whether the information provided in the application form was supplied by the applicant himself or by the writer who was filling in the form

\textsuperscript{75} Akhil Gupta, “Blurred Boundaries, The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State” in \textit{The Anthropology of the State}, (eds), op.cit.
\textsuperscript{76} 55 (7)-W, Mysore Residency, Bangalore Branch, 1944, NAI.
\textsuperscript{77} NAI, ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} NAI, ibid. The Governor of Punjab obeyed this order by directing the creation of posts of junior clerks to serve as writers in rationing offices. It is not clear which other provincial and princely state governments followed suit.
on behalf of the applicant.\textsuperscript{79} This became a problem, or so colonial authorities indicated, in instances where the information relating to the applicant was false, rendering, say, the acquisition of a ration card wrongful. The problem was ultimately resolved through the fingerprint of the applicant, who alone was to be held responsible. This absolved the junior clerk or the government-recruited writer of all responsibility of furnishing wrong information. In Mysore residency, where this problem of writing, and the mediation of writers for ration card applicants was first discussed, the administration took well to the idea of the thumbprint and reported that they had started using it on application forms.\textsuperscript{80} The fingerprint, in this instance, became a resource to negotiate with wrongful representation and the provision of false information.

**Debates on norms of family and individual**

Early into the rationing drive, officials were undecided about the norm most economical and least manipulable vis-a-vis the ration card. At this stage, the ration book or ration card was universal to all the statutorily rationed states and provinces while it was used irregularly in the non-statutory areas. Ration cards were issued to the head of the family rather than to individuals for the first six months of rationing. Henry Knight states that the colonial authorities believed family ration cards to be prone to much abuse. Families often included fictitious names and did not report deaths and departures. The individual ration card was considered more economical and effective once a headcount was undertaken. Henry Knight gives us the number of 1, 80, 000 ration cards as those distributed to individual persons soon after the initial six months of rationing.\textsuperscript{81} And the individual ration card, once introduced, was preferred to the family ration card in the interest of reducing excess consumption.\textsuperscript{82}

Various situations were anticipated where family members could cheat authorities by drawing rations even though they were travelling and not residing in the administrative jurisdiction mentioned in their ration card. These situations presented dilemmas that were sought to be resolved at times by imaginative reworking of the document \textit{per se} or through extraneous documentary devices such as special ration

\textsuperscript{79}NAI, ibid.
\textsuperscript{80}NAI, ibid.
\textsuperscript{81}Henry Knight, 204-205
\textsuperscript{82}Ibid., 204-205
permits for travelling subjects, for instance. Special ration permits were issued to ration cardholders when they undertook a journey somewhere where these permits entitled them to concessions for their meals on the way. However, these permits could be made available only if and when a card-holder surrendered his ration card and obtained a receipt. Though bread tickets were given in addition to ration cards, the equivalent of the bread ration was deducted from the overall wheat entitlement of a card-holder. Bread tickets were not issued in all the states and provinces, but were select to places where bread-eating habits were common. In addition to these, food coupons were issued to people who were away from their homes and travelling: the traveller must however be registered with a food shop which agreed to give him food coupons instead of a ration book. He could use these coupons to get meals in restaurants and other eating-places. At the same time, it was sought to be ensured that new members were not casually added in the ration card either. The Delhi government issued temporary ration cards for those who were permanently based outside Delhi but visiting Delhi. However only such visitors were entertained who were related to a permanent ration card-holder residing in Delhi. The applicant for the temporary ration card had to cite his relationship to the head of a family, the date of arrival and departure and his occupation. All these details were verified by an Enquiry Officer and then a temporary ration card issued.

While individual cards were thought to be less prone to abuse, they were at the same time believed to be unnecessarily expensive. It was believed that the family ration card though rife with porosities, if efficiently engineered, could yield much more savings. By providing incentives to travelling members, visitors and additional rations to pregnant women, the government hoped to discipline families into using their card well. But the narrative of the debate on the family and individual norms was

83 Notification No. 87, 1946, RT-1061 (2), Food, Policy, 1946, NAI.
84 Ibid and Henry Knight, 204. These tickets were meant for those who were used to eating bakers’ bred – Henry Knight mentions Muslims and Europeans to be bread consumers. Bread coupons or bread tickets were issued to these people whose equivalent ration was deducted from the overall ration.
85 Report of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, 79.
86 RT-1020/66/1947, Food, Rationing, 1947 and B.P.II-1038/51, Food, Basic Plan, 1951, NAI. This practice of issuing temporary cards was not unknown after Independence either: The Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) government issued two kinds of cards, permanent and temporary cards. Temporary cards were issued usually to those staying for not less than five days and for more than a month. These cards along with the permanent cards were issued by the Ward Officer of a particular area who maintained special registers for both categories of card-holders
instructive of something else, that documentary forms often spawned corruption, (translated here as misuse of the document) in their attempts to regulate the same. Family members used the incentives of travel coupons and visitors' rations but failed to report the absence (caused by death or migration) of a member. Some of the serving and retired officials who I interviewed explained this paradox (of documentary forms spawning corruption while attempting to nip it) by telling me that this was either because of the dubious and ambiguous application forms or because of the infrastructural implausibility of policing hundreds of families using ration cards.

Though confessing to the rampant corruption in the family ration card, Henry Knight defends the decision to issue these cards in his narrative of rationing, *Food Administration in India* as a move that befitted the Indian people's sensibilities and their inadequacies. In spite of a “black market in scarce foodstuffs and consumers’ ration cards”, the rationing system did work and pulled India through the crop failures of 1946, Henry Knight declared.\(^{87}\) In his narrative schema of state intervention, no decision could be wrong, in this instance, neither the decision to issue family cards nor the decision to issue individual cards though both were intrinsically problematic, by Knight’s own admission. Though the family card threw up fictitious names and the introduction of individual cards accrued a saving of 450,000 rations (when they were issued after the trial period of 6 months where family cards were issued), it was the right thing to do at the time of inception “because the inquiries were less inquisitorial, and caused less anxiety among a population uneducated and suspicious of all government action affecting themselves.”\(^{88}\) Henry Knight's statements illuminated ration cards as performances of welfare enacted to shore up the legitimacy of the state and the convictions of the people. So, if the family ration card won the trust of a rustic population by accommodating members real and fictitious, the individual ration card showed the competence and thriftiness of the government that knew how to keep its accounts clean. In Henry Knight's narrative, the 'fact' of the ration card banished disenchantment with the 'form' of the ration card.

\(^{87}\)Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India*, 195

\(^{88}\)Henry Knight, 206.
The Cultural Spheres of the Ration Card

In their stories which invoke the festival celebrations of Muharram and Ramzan, Premchand and Saadat Hasan Manto speak of the cultural norms that Muslim men and women have internalised. If Ameena, the grandmother of the child protagonist, Hamid in Premchand's short story *Idgah* feels miserable that there is no grain in the house and perhaps no milk or sugar to make *sewaiyan* on the day of Eid, the prostitute Sultana is disconsolate more than anything else because her present insolvency stands in the way of her culturally constituted desire to buy *kali shalwar* or black trousers for Muharram.  

The fiction of Manto and Premchand depicts men and women of a religious community as capable of rioting or mourning over that which forms them culturally such as a turban, a veil, a kirpan, perhaps a *roza* and maybe, *sewaiyan* and *langar*. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women who may have been dismayed by their economic and social incapacity in the context of festivals were equally, if not more anguished, by the government's indifference to their cultural desires. The government's attitude in observing austerity through wartime regulations such as food and clothes rationing, Guest Control Orders and the Catering Control Orders betrayed a failure to understand cultural desires of the everyday. These desires were manifest in the demands of communities to buy new clothes, eat traditional food and throw parties on such occasions as festivals, marriages and funerals. It was this betrayal to respect and indulge cultural everyday desires that prompted various communities to make nationalist assertions. Almost every religious community in Delhi was mutinous at a point against the colonial government for not allaying their fears vis-a-vis their religious expectations in this time of austerity. The President of the Provincial *Majlis Ittihad Millat* for instance urged the Viceroy of Delhi to give Muslims supplementary rations during Ramzan as Muslims needed sugar for making syrup with ice which they drank when they broke the fast. So did the President of the *Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee* in the year 1943 on behalf of the *Delhi Sikh Sangats* – he expressed the agitation of the Sikh community over the refusal of the rationing authorities to grant additional rations.

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90Both Manto and Premchand wrote roughly in the late years of colonial rule, i.e. between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
on the sacred occasion of the martyrdom celebration of Guru Tej Bahadur. The weekly Diwan of the Sikhs warned of violent protests if supplementary quantities of rationing articles, possibly wheat, were not made available for the langer, which they argued, was “an absolutely essential right” of the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{91} The colonial government either anticipating these demands in one area after encountering them in another or countenancing them everywhere was forced to make concessions that provided ration card-holders additional rations during weddings, funerals and festivals. These rations were meant to allay the fears these communities experienced over the Guest Control Orders which sought to limit the number of guests who could be invited to any wedding, funeral or any other social gathering such as festival celebrations and the Catering Orders which required guests at any social gathering to use limited quantities of rationed items such as sugar, rice, wheat but also sooji, atta, maida, etc. Delhi and Ajmer-Merwara were however given leeway owing, in all likelihood, to the strongly-worded assertions of cultural nationalism in these areas.

In order to claim additional rations for festivals, a concession that was furiously debated by the colonial government in various provinces and states, Indians had to procure applications for supplementary rations which they could naturally obtain only if they possessed a ration card. In some places where cloth was distributed as a ration item, marriages and funerals were contingencies when additional ration claims could not be ignored. Rationed articles in Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the year 1946 included barrack sheets and towels; besides these, residents could procure fine or coarse material of five yards. A sari or a dhoti was treated as amounting to five yards of cloth.\textsuperscript{92} No dhoti could be obtained on a woman’s ration card nor a sari on a man’s ration card or on a ration card for a child eight years or below. But apart from this, special ration permits were issued by the Deputy Commissioner or the Rationing Officer at times when additional rations of coarse cloth were required for funeral purposes. A Muslim could purchase nine yards of cloth while those from other communities were allowed to

\textsuperscript{91}Ibid and No. 277/44, Home, Public (C), 1944, NAI.

\textsuperscript{92}NAI. Notification No. 1/14/46, Andaman and Nicobar Islands Gazette, RT-1061 (2), op.cit. The whole five yards could be either fine or coarse, or in other words, an applicant could not obtain five yards of coarse and five yards of fine cloth. Cloth was rationed from 1st April to 30th June 1946 in A and N islands. It is not clear whether this ration was continued after June 1946. Cloth was a deficit commodity in the islands, with consignments sent in through steamers sailing from Calcutta.
purchase five yards of coarse cloth. To avail of these rations, applicants had to produce certificates from the Medical Officer, in the instance of a death occurring in a hospital or from the village chowdhari in the event of someone dying at home. Incidentally, supplementary rations were also provided to pregnant women (after their sixth month of pregnancy) in some places. Under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Rationing Order, 1945, a special application form was made available to pregnant women who had to specify the month of pregnancy and the age of the infant. This form was then to be signed by a senior medical officer. However, no separate ration document was issued to the applicant, the ration card that the applicant already possessed was made valid on the endorsement of the Rationing Officer. In Delhi too, expecting mothers could apply for additional rations (3 additional yards amounting to 9 yards including the normal ration) roughly three months before the baby was expected to be born. Needless to say, a paraphernalia of certificates and medical representations surrounded such applications where the application had to be supported by a certificate by a health official, welfare centre, hospital, etc.

Both festivals and marriages imposed an overwhelming cultural expectation to relax austerity controls and to release food supplies. The colonial government was not always consistent or united in responding to these expectations. An echo that was heard at least centrally in the food administration post-1943 was that festivals could be no exception to the rule of wartime austerity, even if the entire religious community threw its weight behind such demands. However, a certain liberal period of supplementary rations for festivals prevailed between 1943 and 1945 before rationing authorities put a heavy foot down on this practice. In 1945 however, after

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93Ibid. This colonial habit of consulting 'expert' and 'scientific' opinion embodied in the medical officer's report or certificate persisted long before rationing was introduced in India and was institutionalized in independent India. A certain collusion of the medical officer and the state enquiring into the physical aspect of populations is something that Radhika Singha remarks on in her article, ‘Settle, Mobilize, Verify: Identification Practices in Colonial India’, *Studies in History*, op.cit.
94RT-1061 (2), Food, Policy, 1946, NAI. The supplementary ration included rice and/or atta and sugar. The extra quantity sanctioned per head per week was authorized to be 6 ounces or ozs of cereal rations and 2 ozs of sugar. A scheme was also drawn up to open special shops selling food supplies at controlled prices to women and a legislation to this effect was under consideration in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. It is however not clear if this scheme involved special ration cards for such women. “Food supplies: special shops to be opened for women”, *Hindustan Times*, March 28, 1943.
95Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Civil Supply, Delhi to Controller of Rationing. Delhi12 (47)/1945, Civil Supply, DSA.
consultation with the Food Advisory Council, the Department of Food passed a resolution valid for all state and provincial administrations, with the exception of Delhi and provinces of Ajmer-Merwara, tightening control over consumers who were not to be indulged with supplementary quantities of rationed foodstuffs even during festivals.\textsuperscript{96} No concessions were to be made in the allotments under the Basic Plan so that governments were left with little choice. They could either provide additional rations but take care to not let them exceed the quotas available to them under the Basic Plan or they could simply not issue additional rations at all. Under the Delhi Rationing Regulations which constituted an exception, a special ration card for those seeking additional rations was made available for celebrating their marriages. The total supplementary rations that could be claimed were 15 seers of cereal including, at the choice of the applicant, a maximum of 8 seers of rice and 30 units of sugar.\textsuperscript{97} Apart from this, separate scales for supplementary rations were drawn up for different religious festivals like Easter, Ramzan or Diwali.

Prescribed forms were available for special ration that could be obtained in Circle Offices and such applications were to be made at least 10 days prior to the day of the wedding. This application should contain the name of the applicant, the exact relationship to the person getting married, a statement to the effect that he or she is responsible for the arrangements during the marriage, the code number on his ration card, the name of the bride and the bridegroom, the place where the marriage is to take place, the date of the marriage and certification of the details contained within. An affidavit was to be procured to this effect which had to be attested before a Judge, Magistrate or oath commissioner or countersigned by a Gazetted Officer of the government.\textsuperscript{98} Only one ration card could be issued for a marriage even if both parties of the wedding resided within the rationed area. And such applications would not be considered if parties wished to entertain guests outside the Delhi Rationed Area.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{96}R-1000/24, 1945, Food, Rationing, NAI.
\textsuperscript{97}Regulation 17-A , Delhi Rationing Rules, File No. R-1000/24, \textit{Op.cit}. The applicant was free to claim lesser quantities of both or claim one ration and not the other. All applicants could receive only these specified quantities, their financial, religious or social status notwithstanding.
\textsuperscript{98}Ibid. It could also be countersigned by a Secretary of the local committees or a Municipal Commissioner of the Ward in which the applicant was residing.
\textsuperscript{99}Ibid.
Ajmer, state and provincial governments encouraged claims, rationalising that they had initiated the supply much before the crucial Resolution was passed. However, most of these governments circumscribed the supplies, specifying the number of men and women who could be fed and the quantities that could be supplied at any given time. Even as late as 1950, some of these rules were observed. Yashpal, in his novel *This is not that dawn*, records the cultural burden placed by the Guest Control Order on families trying to perform weddings *dhoom dhaam se* (with the appropriate extravagance). However, for some people organizing the wedding, the restrictions could actually be a relief in economic terms because the ceiling on the number of guests naturally cut down wedding expenses. The female protagonist displaced post-Partition from Lahore to Delhi in this novel, Tara gratefully acknowledges the Guest Control Order, which in Delhi imposed a cap of 25 guests, when she regards her accumulating costs in getting her friend and ward married. If Delhi seems to have allowed only 25 guests, other states like PEPSU and the Jammu and Kashmir government confined the number of guests on festive occasions that can be entertained to 24 persons, to be relaxed in the case of *barats* or wedding processions, where 48 persons could be invited.

**Beyond the war and independence: why retain the ration card?**

Some of the concerns that prompted the colonial administration to introduce rationing in India, it was argued, had not vanished. Imports of rice into Burma, a constant supplier to India were not considered likely to resume soon. Even with the Basic Plan in place, countrywide availability of food supplies was highly uneven with many provinces and states still highly deficit and parasitical on their surplus counterparts whose patience was flailing in enduring the drain of their resources that such regional expectation caused. Besides, crops suffered great damage owing to a near-famine in

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100 The United Provinces government allowed its residents one unit of cereals per day for a person related to the bride or the bridegroom and half a unit per day in the event of a funeral both of which were subject to a maximum of 25 units. Ibid.

101 Yashpal, *This is not that Dawn*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010), 900-901. This novel was originally written in Hindi under the title *Jhootha Sach*.

102 RP-1085 (22)/1950, Food, Rationing, 1950, NAI. The bridegroom’s party was not to exceed 24 persons and in case the same person acts as a host on behalf of two brides, the number of persons to whom eatables can be distributed shall not exceed 72. This number shall not include the card-holding members of the family. Even clubs and associations when they held dinners in the premises of their establishments could not entertain more than 24 guests.
the South, a failure of the Northeast monsoon in Madras, heavy winter rains in the
North and the cyclones in November 1945 that ravaged the chief rice producing
regions of the Godavari and Krishna deltas. Mobilisation of scarce resources may
no longer be an imperative, but fair distribution remained so, according to colonial
administrators. The public response to the opening of government grain shops,
controlled distribution shops under the larger scheme of food control and rationing
was perceived to be affirming of government action in food procurement, regulation
and control. Officials of the colonial food administration argued that a section of
the population will still be in need of continuous ration supplies, predominantly, the
large number of soldiers and Army personnel who will have returned to civilian
life. Many soldiers, on taking leave and going back home, found that cloth,
kerosene and food rations were insufficient for them or that they were not available at
controlled rates. The Bengal government drew up such a scheme to provide
subsidized rations to such soldiers and their dependents. The well-being of the
police forces responsible for internal security also warranted a sizeable ration.

The creation of various bureaucratic organisations like the Famine Inquiry Commission
and Conferences like the Price Control Conferences and the Food Policy Committee
perpetuated the basis of food controls in India. The future status of rationing in India
was also to be decided in relation to the food position and the food economy elsewhere.
A shortage of foodgrains in European and South Asian countries could vitally affect the
food position in India, or so it was argued. Everywhere, countries were placing a high
onus on controlling the movement of food stocks. Countries like Canada, Australia,
New Zealand and the USA either introduced rationing or reduced the quantities of

103 Joseph, 46.
104 It was argued that only the rich, landed classes protested against continued rationing, namely, the
zamindars, landlords and moneyed men. The poor masses were still in favour of rationing or so the
rationing authorities claimed.
105 Ibid
106 This scheme entailed the submission of a certificate showing a person’s relationship to the soldier
that entitled him or her to foodstuffs, cloth and kerosene at controlled rates. B.P. 11-1013/21/52, Food,
Basic Plan, 1952, NAI.
107 Letter No. BP-256 (10)/49. BP 1013/21, Food, Basic Plan, 1952, NAI. Following representations
from police officials pointing out the lack of adequate nourishment of police forces in the form of a
ration scale more than that given to civilian population, the Food Department set a scale of 16 oz (12
oz. wheat or a basic ration and 4 oz. supplementary ration of other grains) per day per adult for the
Central Reserve Police Force and the Delhi Police Force. These families however should be treated on
par with the civilians elsewhere in terms of the rations they could draw.
essential food stuffs towards the end of the war.\textsuperscript{108} In these conditions, it was advised that the colonial government of India should attempt a survey of the food position in India and in relation to the world position of food supplies and requirements before it called off rationing. For now, rationing must continue until the harvest season of 1946 or better, until the year 1947.\textsuperscript{109}

The Partition rendered a whole new dimension to the rationale of retaining the rationing scheme. Relief quota shops were opened in some places to provide rations to those who were fleeing persecution or as a form of protection to those trying to survive in a time like this. The Delhi administration opened emergency ration shops attached to different government departments during the 1947 riots to protect the staff from the erratic functioning of retail shops. These ration shops enabled employees to get their rations from their place of work using their existing ration cards at a time when it was not possible to rely on the security of supplies in the local retail shops. To do so, different departments which were empowered to receive supplies from the Director of Civil Supplies, Delhi, stock and distribute them, had to enumerate the staff and family members in a form based on the ration cards that the staff already possessed.\textsuperscript{110}

There have been many associations made between Partition and the need to replenish the granary and bolster the sources of food supply that remained after the bifurcation of the country. Statistics of the existing population and the disproportionate extent of net irrigated area after Partition and the diminished levels of production have been part of nationalist historiographies. Such narratives have also informed historical accounts of India’s agricultural growth or its food policy.\textsuperscript{111} It is hard to estimate the impact of such

\textsuperscript{108}RP-1000/49, op.cit. and \textit{Report of the Foodgrains Investigation Committee}, op.cit., 48 The Ministry of Food believed that “vulnerable sections, i.e. industrial areas, highly deficit pockets and large cities should continue to be statutorily rationed. In other areas, a system of controlled distribution along with free markets should function for some time to act as a check in the rise of prices.”

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid. and \textit{Report of the Foodgrains Investigation Committee}, p.2. Two groups of controls were in place, ‘All India control’ and ‘local controls’. All-India control implied the procurement of foodgrains from abroad on a monopoly basis by the Central government and the implementation of the All India Basic Plan. The continuities from the colonial schemes of rationing cannot be ignored here which introduced the Basic Plan in the first place. Local controls involved rationing and controlled distribution; procurement of foodgrains from local resources and meeting export quotas prescribed in the Basic Plan.

\textsuperscript{110}RT-1020/66/1947, Food, Rationing, 1947, NAI.

\textsuperscript{111}For instance, it was cited that India received 82 per cent of the population with 75 per cent of the production of principal foodgrains and 69 per cent of the net irrigated area. The author tells us that net
statistics on the imagination of the food administration in India post-independence, whether it incited them as much as say, the Korean war boom to retain food controls in the face of depleted sources of food availability. But the Partition impelled government intervention in food distribution in another, more significant sense. The massive flow of refugee populations across the borders necessitated equally extensive relief efforts, the Indian government distributed free rations and extended free accommodation in various camps set up for refugees in Delhi. Later, many refugees were resettled and found temporary employment with the Government of India post-independence, significantly in the Department of Rehabilitation. The enumeration of the new arrivals or refugee subjects was endless, from the moment of their landing when they were given numbers, identity cards to their stay in refugee camps where they were issued ration cards to the demand for affidavits, proofs of residence and location of property from them in their applications for permanent housing many years after their disembarkation in India.\(^{112}\) The question of citizenship of these refugees, though disputed in later years\(^ {113}\) was not a vexed one when it came to ration cards immediately after Partition. Those refugees settling in independent India could acquire a ration card so long as they showed an inclination to reside in India – they were not asked for a passport to demonstrate their citizenship though they may have been asked for their refugee certificate. The government tried to provide food support to refugees through two kinds of ration cards. In order to find evidence of the first kind of ration cards, namely ration cards issued for a temporary period of stay, usually one month, to inmates in the refugee camp, I had to look in places other than academic scholarship which only implicitly refer to these documents, if at all.\(^ {114}\) Yashpal's novel, *This is not that dawn* records ration cards to have been issued for 1 month where cardholders were entitled to grains, *rotis* and foodgrain supply in India came down, owing to Partition, to about 800 thousand tons annually. Joseph, op.cit, 26.


\(^{113}\) In the years following Partition, definitions of citizenship were ensnared in what Anupama Roy termed “the politics of place-making” and what Vazira Zamindar termed “border-making”. Permits, passes and passports were introduced in an attempt to negotiate claims of citizenship of those crossing borders from Pakistan to India but more importantly, to fix the boundaries of the two emergent nation-states. Anupama Roy, *Mapping Citizenship in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010). Vazira Zamindar, “Divided Families and the Making of Nationhood in India and Pakistan 1947-65”, op.cit, 17

\(^{114}\) Ravinder Kaur, for instance, mentions that free rations were distributed in refugee camps though she does not mention ration cards in this regard, op.cit, p.89.
roasted grams and sometimes blankets but not firewood. I was also able to trace memories of these ration cards in oral narratives pertaining to the time of Partition. A retired food official\textsuperscript{115} recalls the ration cards issued in refugee camps to roughly resemble invitation cards. They recorded the name of the cardholder, his father's name, from which place he came from, members of the family and his or her signature or thumb impression. This card was usually issued by the Camp Commandant to every family staying in a camp tent. The second kind of ration cards was distributed on a long-term basis to those who resided in a house in India. Those arriving in Delhi Railway Station from Lahore or elsewhere in Pakistan, for instance, were exhorted to go directly to the ration card office and furnish information of where they were staying, assuming of course that they were not homeless like so many other refugees and that they had a friend or relative whose address they could give. “This will eliminate delay and botheration, for your ration card will be delivered to you automatically through the Circle Rationing Officer of your area”, said one notice of the Delhi government as advertised in \emph{The Hindustan Times}.\textsuperscript{116}

An interlude of decontrol prevailed in December 1947 (and later between 1952 and 1954), owing partly to strong petitions made by Gandhi and Members of Parliament like Pattabhi Sitaramayya and M K Siddhwa. Gandhi equated the idea of providing a rationed subsidy, measured out by a document, with the curbing of individual initiative, dependence on artificial supplies, the anarchy of black markets and the depredations of defaulting grain dealers and traders, all of which had the effect of further impoverishing the poor. Gandhi said on rationing, “Controls give rise to fraud, suppression of truth, intensifications of the black market and to artificial scarcity. Above all, it unmans the people and deprives them of initiative, it undoes the teachings of self-help they have been learning for generations. It makes them spoon-

\textsuperscript{115}This interview was part of my larger fieldwork where I spoke to various retired and serving food officials about a variety of themes like ration card enumeration, oil and sugar mafias, austerity regimes, the License Raj. Most of these officials wished to stay anonymous which is why I don't furnish a name here. This particular official stayed in a refugee camp for a brief while in Karnal, having migrated there from Lahore. He was included in his father's ration card.

\textsuperscript{116}Issued by Delhi Rationing Organisation. Notice printed in \emph{The Hindustan Times}, 10 August 1947 as cited in Ravinder Kaur, \emph{Since 1947}, op.cit, p. 92. At the same time, the Indian government also tried to tabulate the ration cardholders who were leaving India by requiring them to surrender their ration cards when they left for Pakistan. Are you leaving for Pakistan? If so, please do not forget to surrender your ration cards, (food and clothing) at your Circle Rationing Office or at the Delhi Railway Station.
Even in these years of decontrol, relief quota shops were opened on a large scale in derationed areas of provinces and states. To take stock of the scale of these shops, the ration card system followed in different places, the uniformity of cards throughout any rationed area and the issue of foodgrains in these shops, the Central Ministry of Food obtained reports from different food administrations in the year 1951 on these matters. These relief quota shops still called themselves fair price shops or Authorized Retail Distributors in statutorily rationed and ex-statutory areas; and Rural Distribution Centres and cooperative societies in non-statutory (rural) areas. It is interesting to note that in the reports submitted to the Central government that almost all the provincial governments retained the ration card, though post 1950, they were issued to heads of families and not individuals on the basis of the recommendations of the Foodgrains Investigation Committee. Bombay, Orissa, Bihar, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Mysore, Rajasthan, Saurashtra, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Cutch and Tripura reported that they all issued ration cards, most of them to families. Bombay continued to issue ration cards to individuals in statutorily rationed areas and consumer’s permits in rural areas. Madras issued ration cards in ex-statutorily rationed areas but curiously issued what it called family “identity cards” in de-rationed areas. Where cards were not issued, but relief quota shops still running, governments did not discard identification altogether. Hyderabad issued after 1951 family cards only in the cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, and in the districts, preserved lists of various shops prescribing those who were eligible for rations. New lists based on the previous ones and in consultations with the supply committees

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118 BP-II, 1109, Food, Basic Plan, 1951, NAI. The official reasoning for these relief quota shops included the “soaring prices and non-availability of foodgrains”. The official category of ‘statutorily rationed areas’ seems to have been retained in some places like Bombay even though decontrol took place first in 1947 and later in 1952. Other places like Madras abolished statutory rationing (it did so in 1952) and practised “informal rationing”. The ration size naturally varied-in Bombay itself, the size varied from 41 to 44 chattaks per adult per week in rationed cities and towns. Some places like PEPSU decontrolled wheat but not rice and confined ration card entitlements to rice purchases in the year 1952. Across India, wheat, rice, sugar, cloth and kerosene were rationed though not uniformly during this period.

119 Ibid. This information pertains to the years 1951 to 1953. Tehsildars and mamlaitdars mostly issued ration cards during this time.
comprising tehsildars and non-official members were made. Coorg issued cards to non-growers who could not afford to stock paddy for their annual requirements.120

Conclusion

This chapter framed the ration card as a critical object in the realm of welfare during a period of political transition straddling the penultimate years of colonial rule and the early years of independence. Post-independence, the impulses of a fair and equitable distribution as much as a need to regulate supplies to tide over scarcities informed the decision to perpetuate rationing. Once it was decided to retain the ration card, the Indian government lost no time in compiling and consolidating disparate information of the ration card population in the form of records maintained by ARDs and relief quota shops.

In the dispensation of a sovereign state and republic, the ration cards issued by a colonial state to manage wartime scarcity acquired, in the words of Arjun Appadurai, a “social life”. Just as the enumerators' data or the census abstracts were relevant outside the context of the census, similarly, ration cards gained a currency beyond the field of food distribution. The trajectory of these cards can be traced to various sovereign functions of the Indian state such as nutrition and the creation of infrastructure for the elections. The work of rationing organisations and the information collected through the distribution of ration cards, it was suggested, could prove invaluable for the preparation of electoral rolls and in the running of elections.121 Besides, the statistics and qualitative information available with the rationing organisations could be used for introducing other schemes such as community feeding, school feeding and milk schemes and distribution of protective foods.122 Incidentally, enumeration machineries in other countries have been known to be ingenious in channelling their identification document-based information into different departments – for instance, the British national register compiled in the early

120 Ibid.
121 RP-1000/49, Food, Rationing, 1945, NAI. Here, inferences were drawn from the experiences of UK. It was also suggested that the statistics and qualitative information available with the rationing organisations could be used for introducing other schemes such as community feeding, school feeding and milk schemes and distribution of protective foods.
122 RP-1000/49, op.cit.
years of the Second World War tripled up as data for identity cards, for rationing purposes and the recruitment of labour in military and essential services.123

The population receiving ration cards was not an inert mass of people passively yielding to the regime of austerity and arguments of scarcity. The ration card, neither in colonial India nor in independent, India could be devoid of a context of cultural affinities and roles and what Fuller and Benei termed the permeable boundary between state and society.124 Communities often reacted affectively to documentary norms impinging on their cultural selves. Ration card practices had to address the cultural affects of the everyday expressed in communities' desires to fulfil cultural roles. Ration card practices had to be re-imagined to be more socially relevant. The form of the ration card underwent dizzying change, to accommodate new interpretations of legality. The ration card had to meet new challenges of the impostor, the hoarder, the free loader and the forger. Far from being mere instruments to generate acceptance for the colonial war effort, rationing documents injected fresh life into the discourse of welfare.

123Identity cards and national registration rather than ration cards seem to have been the basis of rationing in the UK where the same register served to investigate crime, provide food rationing and furnish the number for the NHS. Neither British identity cards nor national registration lasted long after the war, as they were deemed to be nothing short of ‘Socialist card-indexing’ and repressive features of Austerity Britain and completely untenable in a more liberalized atmosphere. Edward Higgs, The Information state in England: The central collection of information on citizens since 1500, (London: Palgrave, 2004), 141-143

124C.J.Fuller and John Harriss , “For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State” in The Everyday State and Society in Modern India, eds. C.J.Fuller and Veronique Benei, London: C. Hurst, 2001, 6