The consolidation of colonial rule and the underlying conciliatory approach of the state after 1857 were reflected in the recurring theme of state benevolence. These unfolded in the practice of famine relief and both created difficulties and governed their resolutions in the nineteenth century. All this coincided with the birth of the Indian National Congress as well as with the almost inevitable nationalist case made out of the poverty imposed by the British in India. Once the political implications of relief activities became evident their logical outcome was the concerted effort on the part of the early nationalists to work out the best possible ways in which these activities were to be conducted and to ensure the strongest and most explicit form of articulation which could elicit both state and popular response. The government's position of autocratic responsibility coincided with the Congress's attempt to move from an elite to a mass base resulting in state ambivalence towards its own benevolence. With the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements, the positions of the two became sharply opposed even though the role that each took in relief activities was quite similar. The high points manifested themselves in the 1930s. With the Congress's coming to power in 1937 there was a dilution in its own oppositional stand about relief efforts. While this story on "Colonial Ideology, Nationalist Politics and the Social
Organization of Relief in the late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries may seem to be ending here, in fact the 1940s witnessed a transmutation of political forms and the wider dispersion of the political space in relation to relief activities. In the ensuing years many different organizations, other than the Congress, concerned themselves more actively with this question. Some such concerns are described in this Epilogue.

During the 1940s the Congress and other organizations continued to organize relief and welfare activities in order to acquire popularity in an otherwise surcharged political atmosphere. The collection of funds by the AICC was as much part of the Congress propaganda, as was the actual carrying out of relief work. Congress relief efforts were not only uneven but usually limited to areas where it was politically valuable. Consequently in the forties we witness a slide in the emphasis that was found to be at its peak in the twenties and thirties.

In 1940 an appeal was made by Vallabhbhai Patel to collect famine funds for relieving the distressed in Kathiawar. Though the appeal set a target of one lakh rupees the fund was oversubscribed [1]. In 1940 flood relief was organized by Mahadev Desai in Gujarat. The millowners of Ahmedabad responded favourably to an appeal made by him. Contributions also came in from Bombay and a total of more than six lakh rupees was collected. Significantly, Congress workers were "told not to offer satyagraha .... as this

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1.Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel papers (hereafter SVP), 5.6.1940, No. 21, p. 189.
work was of urgency”. It was, perhaps, also not considered essential because relief work would have kept the local leaders in touch with the people leading to greater political benefit as compared to individual satyagraha. The Gujarat Prantik Samiti it was stated, elsewhere, was taking active part in relief work "as its members were trained and experienced in this work" due to their earlier involvement in such efforts [2].

During the Midnapore floods in 1940-41, no help was offered by the Congress. Official relief, the government stated, had been started. His Excellency the governor expressed regret at the catastrophe. There was an appeal for funds, to remind the people of their duty. In July 1941 the secretary of the AICC wrote to Rajendra Prasad:

I had written to you about aid to be given from the AICC funds to the flood stricken people of Bengal. Sadik consulted Jamnalal and Bapu. Both are of the opinion that it will be a bad precedent, as we have never before given funds from the AICC for any such purpose in the past. There has been no provision in the budget for such expenditure. Also there is news from many quarters of floods and if we give to one place we will have to give to all others. I think the best would be to drop the proposal, more so when Bapu is writing to the Marwari relief society [3].

An immensely important fact is that though the AICC claimed its share from the collections made at the provincial level it never made any financial contributions of any kind for relief work from the amount collected by it. Since most funds collected by the PCC and DCC were also transferable to the AICC, the AICC was using funds collected for relief purposes also for its political

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1. AICC, 25 July 1940-41, No. P-6, Volume (i).

2. SVP, undated, No. 21, p. 128.
ambitions.

In 1941, during the cyclonic havoc in Barisal, most parties met to appeal for funds. The Congress, however, participated in what a newspaper for the first time called or reported as "Congress propaganda", as all the Congressmen did was to discuss their past achievement [1].

However when in October 1941 Orissa had been hit by a cyclone which had left a large number of people homeless the Congress had organized relief activities [2]. As a result of this the Quit India movement in Balasore (Orissa), was readily accepted by the people [3].

In 1942, due to severe war time repression, most provincial leaders considered it necessary to involve themselves in constructive and relief work. The necessity of relief arose, they claimed, due to the prolongation of war which "led to a rise in prices due to dislocation of transport and the consequent scarcity of goods". The U.P. executive council in January 1942 argued that "the constructive programme if carried out intensively will have a steadying influence and will not only strengthen the masses but lessen the sufferings which inevitably accompany war conditions" [4].

By 1942 the kisan sabhas were also attempting to strengthen their

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1. *ABP*, 8 June 1941.
3. Ibid. Once out of power the Congress seems to have reverted to its pre-1937 strategies to mobilize popular opinion.
weakened base amongst the people with most PCC leaders in prison. For instance, sensing the approaching famine by the end of 1942, they had set up a number of food committees to distribute food and other essential commodities all over Orissa [8].

After the Quit India Movement the Political Sufferers Distress Relief Committee was organized in Bombay in July 1943 and functioned upto March 1944. It received 1200 applications from different parts of India, from families whose earning members were confined in jail. The committee also pointed out that a few prisoners "took advantage of Government help and their families were getting monthly allowances from the Government" [9].

The Congress, perhaps in view of the increasing political activity in the forties, did not think it essential to distribute grants for relief purposes. This prompted the government to prepare a report on the Congress's financial strength [10]. During the Bengal famine of 1943, the AICC formed no relief

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10. HP, 1940, (I), No. F-139, pp. 1-9. The statement of accounts for the year ending 30 September 1939, made during the Ramgarh session of the Congress in 1940, was an approximate balance of Rs. 1,96,365. The Gujarat PCC had a balance of Rs.2,800, Ahmedabad district and the city Congress committee had a balance of Rs. 5,437 and 3,978. The Surat DCC had Rs. 20,000, Kaira 10,000. Borsad had land worth 25,000, the Nadiad Vithal Kanya Vidyalaya a sum of Rs. 25,424. Vallabhbhai Patel according to government sources was said to be in possession of about Rs. 4 lakh representing the balance collected by him in 1927-28 for flood relief and in 1934-35 for securing the restoration of confiscated lands. Another version was that the sum of three lakhs was with Kasturbhai Lalbhai, the chief custodian of Congress secret funds [Ibid.].
committee immediately but continued to state that the famine was a direct result of British policy. However, the Congress from mid 1942 did campaign for the stopping of grain exports from the region. Congress volunteers who were participating in the August movement for independence switched over to large scale self-help measures and this became a major function of the underground Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar set up in December 1942. They provided grants to schools, organized relief amounting to Rs. 79,000, and tried to distribute surplus paddy of the well-to-do among the needy villagers [11].

The contest over the appropriation of the space for relief activities was no longer only between the state and the Congress. The Congress was no longer the only force opposing the state and it could in fact itself be rivalled in the organization of relief activities. The relationship between politics and relief is also borne out in the instance of the 1943 famine and the spectacular nature of relief organized by the Communist Party of India (CPI). The CPI who sided with the colonial government during the war and urged the people to join the party "in order that it may play its historic role in the crises" actually lost a lot of their support among the people due to their pro-war stand [12]. They, however, managed to rebuild their base amongst the people during the famine of 1943 in Bengal. The party had its own food policy and openly criticized the colonial state. In a resolution passed at its February session in 1943 it stated

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that

the root cause of this nation-wide starvation is nothing else but the bankrupt economic policy of the imperialist government, which has intensified exploitation of the people during the war....The Government alone is basically responsible for the vast hoarding of food grain [\textsuperscript{13}].

The party went all out in arguing that the only alternative was "to unite the people and all patriotic parties and organizations, in a people's campaign for food" [\textsuperscript{14}]. The party took an active lead in forging a unity of the people and bringing together men of all organizations into the Joint People's Food Committees. The party, however, was of the view that the food crisis "was an extension of the national crises and that the fight for food was closely linked agitatorially as well as organizationally with the fight....for national unity and freedom" [\textsuperscript{15}]. It further argued that the building of the people's unity behind food and food committees in localities was the "most concrete form of building national unity for defence and freedom" [\textsuperscript{16}]. To consolidate the work done by the party on the food front it was to organize food conferences. These food conferences were to be "preceded by real mass agitation" and were to bring together the widest sections of the people and the greatest number of political parties. This was considered essential so as to create a popular sanction for the food committees. The political success of the party was to be judged by its


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 115-16.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 118.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
capacity to "draw in thousands of people to food conferences and by forging mass sanctions behind food committees" [17].

The economic dislocation as a result of the Great Depression and the famine of 1943 gave the Bangia Pradeshik Krishak Sabha (the Bengal section of the All India Kisan Saöha, the peasant front organization of the C.P.I.) a chance to regain its lost support among peasants by articulating this discontent and by organizing successful local agitations. The C.P.I. "gathered enormous goodwill from the rural population" for having organized extensive relief and reconstruction operations during and after the famine [18]. The People's Relief Committee (PRC) set up by the C.P.I. accused most other relief organizations of participating in politics, thereby hindering relief efforts even though they had larger resources. A special correspondent from the People's War was of the view that

much has been written about the princely collections received by the bigger organizations; their activities have received enormous publicity. But infact a careful study of their composition and work will reveal that every one of them, from Dr. Shyama Prasad to the government, has failed to make the best use of enormous resources at their disposal. Like the famine itself, relief in Bengal became a happy hunting ground of factionalism, with all these big committees trying to exploit relief for their own political ends [19].

However, the success of the PRC lay not in its rather limited resources but in

17. Ibid., pp. 119-20.


its "heroic struggle for unity fought out for one long year in practically every one of Bengal's districts". The most "striking feature" of the collections that it made was the "large number of small collections sent by kisans, workers and the poorer sections". By January 1944 the PRC had already begun organizing medical relief and had initiated a popular campaign to prevent epidemics from taking a heavy toll [20]. The Communists and members of the kisan sabha had earlier, for the first time, undertaken relief work during the cyclone of 1942 [21]. During the famine of 1943 and the epidemics that followed the PRC excelled all other agencies in providing medical relief [22]. So impressive was the relief that local officials who often accused the "Communist activists of politically exploiting the critical food situation.... nevertheless recognized....the good work the Communists were doing". They also remarked that "they would emerge from the war with greatly increased influence" [23].

In April 1944, Sir N.N. Sircar (an editor) made the following remark highlighting the relationship between distress and politics. He was of the opinion that

memories of the Bengal Famine of 1943 are likely to help movements which may gather momentum for establishing an advanced State Socialism or Communism, the amount of its success will be in direct proportion to the inability of the present Government to improve the

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20. Ibid.


22. Ibid., p. 248.

condition of its masses, and free them from dirt, disease and poverty and save them from starvation [24].

The long term political implications of relief work in 1943, lay in that the famine relief work done by the Communists and its "humanistic aspect" was noticed by all in Bengal: "The villagers were generally appreciative of it, and the rural poor or the famine victims in particular seemed to have been greatly touched by it". It was their interaction with the villagers which kept the spirit of militancy alive in 1944-45, while the fact that

the Communist movement....was found to be actually kicking in the post-independence era....was due crucially to the historic appearance in the countryside of the unacknowledged, and heretofore unsung, P.R.C volunteers.... [25].

The most politically volatile issue, in 1945, was that of the the INA (Indian National Army) trials. In 1945 the Congress took to organizing INA relief work in most provinces. In the United Provinces Colonel Nagar was appointed as officer incharge of INA relief. The U.P. Congress executive council was of the opinion that

relief work should be, as far as possible, in the nature of constructive and productive relief and for this purpose small scale production should be organized and encouraged preferably on co-operative lines. This will mean not only relief in the most honourable and self-respecting way possible, but also help the national movement and [will be] an investment yielding rich results [26].

It was with this purpose in mind that the council appealed to the public of the

24.'The Bengal Famine', IR, Volume XXXV, April 1944, p. 175.


province to contribute to the provincial INA Relief Fund. Not only did provincial level leaders see the organization of relief as being politically beneficial but so did national level leaders. Asaf Ali was also of the view that the party "would lose much ground in the country unless it took up their cause, but if the Congress came to power it would certainly remove the INA men from the army and might even put some on trial" [27].

By 1945 the political context had changed so much that for the Congress there was no hesitation in asking for funds directly for political purposes. The demarcation between funds for political and other purposes had always been either thin or intertwined. Now it seemed unnecessary to draw a line between the two. The U.P. PCC appealed to the people on the 8 of October to subscribe to the fund for the "election campaign and other connected activities". The appeal stated that

large funds are needed for these purposes and we trust that all those who have the freedom of India at heart and sympathise with the Congress policy....will contribute ....Thus not only be partners in the [Congress] success at the election but also be fellow travellers in the onward march which will lead to the final stage of swaraj and freedom [28].

The subscribers to various funds were given a new symbolic importance as significant participants in the struggle for independence who were not less important than those who led political movements or went to jail. The president of the Mahakoshal PCC Jabalpur in 1946 made an appeal for funds

[27] Sarkar, Modern India, p. 420.
for the erection of a memorial of the martyrs of Mahakoshal who had "laid down their lives at the altar of freedom during the historic struggle for liberty that the Congress [had] waged since 1920" [29]. Justifying the need for funds he argued that the Congress was wedded to a programme of vigorous national reconstruction which included the prosperity and progress of both the working class and the peasants. The Congress, therefore, deserved the "active support of every section of society" [30]. The thousands of subscribers and their role was to be acknowledged by inscribing in detail their names so that the "donors will be remembered for several generations as philanthropic patriots who came forward to help a national organization" [31].

One might specify the parallels between colonial altruism as a self-justifying ideology and the Congress's strategy. The justification of the British was evident in their notions of the 'white man's burden' and the 'barbarism of the native', whereas for the Congress the aims were acquiring political power and independence. While the methods that it adopted were similar to those of the British, its strategy was the reverse, that is, to free the people from the white man's oppression.

The history of Indian society would have to be the articulation of many histories if it is to comprehend the totality of the social and political

30. Ibid., p. 27.
developments. This project has of course not been able to bring within its ambit the innumerable possibilities both by way of related aspects and sources, but it leads to a number of potential areas of research. There was a direct relationship between the rural and the urban areas in so far as famines, floods and epidemics were concerned. As early as the eighteenth century migrations as a result of such large calamities took place in large numbers and in most instances people migrated to the urban areas. During floods initially people moved to areas on higher altitudes, but if the waters did not recede they were forced to resort to "long term migration" which was almost always to the urban regions [32]. Migrations to urban areas often accelerated the spread of epidemics and diseases. The process of migration brought into being a far larger underclass of poor in the towns swelling the ranks of the labourers and petty traders. The growing presence of a floating population of poverty stricken job seekers and the emergence of the labouring poor as a significant social force in the towns generated grave concern amongst the urban propertied classes further aggravating the problems faced by the poor in urban areas [33]. The poor were now associated with not only crime but also unhygienic living and disease [34].


34. Ibid.
Another form of relief undertaken during colonial rule was that of relief organized for the victims of communal riots which was both urban and rural in nature but finds only an occasional mention in this study. However, riot relief was significant and its relationship with other forms of relief activities which have been discussed in this study, and with the nationalist movement and Gandhian endeavours requires detailed investigation. It is also evident from the source material seen for this project that ideologically different organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, the Arya Samaj, the Ramkrishna Mission and many other such organizations were involved in relief and welfare activities of different kinds. These organizations aided the Congress and the nationalist movement in so far as they were anti-colonial in nature but also maintained their individual identities. Their exact role in the nationalist movement and other questions specific to their organization and ideology also open an unresearched area.

Another significant and related aspect of philanthropy which has not been worked on, has to do with missionary forms of relief and charity as also with the larger aspect of social reform in colonial India. There were innumerable social reform organizations which specifically focused on women and children (orphanages and the like). These institutions were both state controlled and non-state organizations and could be promising areas of research.

This thesis has specifically stressed on high politics and the political
significance of relief and welfare activities and has not attempted a study of the social history of the concept of philanthropy. Related aspects of philanthropy and popular distress for example the effect of famines, floods and the like on family structures, with a specific eye on gender relations and the dependants in the family have not been of central focus in this study, but are with future exploration.