CHAPTER VII

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPACT
1858-1901.

Having discussed the history, nature, effects, Government policy, relief measures and the role of non-Governmental organisations during famines in the earlier chapters, attempt will be made here to critically examine the overall impact of famines on socio-economic and political life of the province during the period under study. But before discussing a glimpse of the structure of the Punjabi society will be a necessary prelude.

The society of the Punjab was rural in character. It was composed of peasant proprietors, artisans, menials and shopkeepers or money-lenders. The peasant proprietors were classified into land-lords and tenants. Besides, there were intermediaries between the state and the peasant proprietors. There was also a group of people having no land of their own, but working in the fields as agricultural labourers. They received their wages in kind from the produce of the soil during the harvest times. All these categories derived their income from land, and hence, were directly dependent upon the agriculture.

The artisan class, commonly known as the Kamins, or the Sepidars, included the Tarkhan (carpenter), Lohar (Blacksmith),

Julaha (Weaver), Kumhar (Potter), and Teli (Oilman). These Kamin assisted the Zamindar (peasants) almost throughout the year. The Tarkhan fabricated the plough and kept it in good repair; the Lohar usually made iron-plough; the Kumhar supplied all the earthen vessels for the use of persian-wheels; the Teli pressed oil-seeds; while, the Julaha supplied clothes. The menials included chamars and chuhras. The chamars made leather-holders, whips, ropes and bands required by the peasants. On the other hand, the chuhras were the sweepers of the village. All these kamin including the menials received their wages from the peasants in kind during the harvest times. Hence, these were also dependent upon agriculture indirectly. Their wages were generally determined by the utility of their services rendered to the community and bore no relations to their status in the rural society. However, they enjoyed different social status, the lowest being given to the chuhras, followed by the chamars. The artisans occupied somewhat higher status.

Another group in rural society was of the moneylenders, popularly known as the Shahukars. The peasants borrowed money from them for the purpose of food, cattle-purchase, seed-purchase and land revenue payments. The Zamindars also took loans to defray expenses on occasions of marriages or of other rituals, kept a running account with them and tried to repay their debts when the harvest was over.

3. Ibid., pp. 175-92.
4. It is commonly believed that Punjab was not their original homeland. They had gradually spread in the province from South and south-east. They first settled into towns, from there they diffused into the agrarian society by opening of shops in the villages; S.S. Thorburn, Musalmans and Moneylender in the Punjab, (Edinburgh, 1886), p.36.
The urban society of the Punjab (including towns and cities) was the centre of industrial, commercial, trading and intellectual activities. It consisted of non-agricultural labourers, artisans engaged in delicate arts, traders and the educated people employed in various official departments. These groups enjoyed different socio-economic status. Among them the artisans and the non-agricultural labourers working in the small-scale industries belonged to the low income group. Because during the colonial rule they suffered a serious set-back owing to the decay of small-scale industry that could not compete with the British industries in the Punjab. Hence, these were the people, along with the artisans and the agricultural labourers in the rural areas, who used to suffer at the first instance of a scarcity or a famine. On the other side, the traders, the money-lenders, and the big Zamindars or land-lords were leading a good life.

Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism were the prominent religions of the Punjabi culture. The Muslims were predominantly situated in the north-west Punjab 6, the Hindus in the South Punjab 7, and


the Sikhs occupied the central districts. The Sikh agricultural proprietors were situated in the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepure, Jullundur, Lahore, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, Ambala, Sialkot, Gurdaspur and Gujranwala. The Hindu agricultural proprietors congregated in the Eastern and Central divisions and diminished towards southern and frontier districts. While the Muhammadan proprietors were situated in the districts of Muslim population.

An acute scarcity of food at any time causes hardships to a considerable number of people, in particular those poor and weaker sections who are least able to face it, and if such scarcities occur very often and engulf large areas and population, the sufferings get multiplied and affect adversely the varied aspects of life. Famine affects the social system in many ways. Deaths among cattle and human beings, both from starvation and disease, is a common phenomenon. While the effect of famine is in increasing the death-rate, on the other hand it lowers the birth-rate. Starving people were generally forced to migrate, desert their homes and villages and sell their children and women. Famine also made many of the girl to adopt prostitutional activities out of sheer hunger. The social customs including birth, death and marriage ceremonies were also affected. On the other hand the scarcity of food and high prices also gave birth to crimes.

8. The Sikhs were chiefly found in the divisions between the Ravi and the Satlej. The percentage of Sikhs on total population was highest in the districts of Ferozepure: 29, Amritsar: 24, Lahore: 16, Ludhiana: 16, Jullundur: 14. The lowest was on the frontier, only 1 percent, except Kohat, where it was 1.26 percent. It was also low in Delhi and Hissar divisions, except Sirsa where it was 10 percent, Ibid, Paras 119-20, p.23.

dacoities, robberies and grain riots which sometimes culminated into political unrest. On such occasions different socio-religious groups remained active in converting poor starving people to their faith by offering them meagre help sufficient to sustain life. The acts of these agencies generally led to rivalry among them. In sheer deprivation the poor were forced to sell their belongings which included ornaments, cattle and land. As a result, the indebtedness of the peasantry increased and people were forced to murder their patrons. There existed social tension between the peasants and the Shahukars. The impact of famine on social order culminated in accentuating the political problems and led to the emergence of national awakening among the exploiting classes against the ruling class.

The immediate impact of famine is the loss of life due to starvation or diseases. The judgement of epidemiologists is that disease is the invariable consequence of famine. The debility resulting from lack of food or from vile food substitutes paved the way for cholera, typhus and malaria. Famine does not produce new or special epidemics, but under famine conditions the typical diseases flourish. Since famine stimulates human diseases, statistical differentiation between deaths from starvation and deaths from diseases is practically impossible. Owing to the scarcity of data, it is very difficult to give exactly the number of deaths that occurred during famines in the Punjab. However, analysing the death-rates of famine years with normal years, it becomes apparent that the death-rate always increased with the

occurrence of famine \(^{11}\). Secondly, the females were easily fell victim to famines and diseases as their ratio to their male counterparts in deaths is more \(^{12}\). The reason for increased number of female deaths is that in Indian society it is the females who were generally more under-nourished and so they easily fell prey to the ravages of famine. A heavy mortality among people caused by famines and diseases severely affects the resources and hinders the development of human race.

While mortality rate went up, the birth rate lowered significantly \(^{13}\). A temporary fall in the number of marriages, sexual abstinence, an increase in spontaneous abortions resulting from ill-health of pregnant women caused by hunger, disease and epidemic disorder, and temporary sterility resulting from amenorrhea have been cited as the usual factors accounting for low birth during famines \(^{14}\).

The continuous drought resulted into scarcity of fodder, which consequently, led to a huge loss of cattle. The total number of deaths among cattle caused by famines or scarcities is again difficult to find out as the British Government did not evolve a sound administration of registering cattle mortality. However, the loss of cattle was enormous and occurred on large scale. As has already been discussed in chapters III and IV, the same figures can be repeated here to show the loss. During the famine of 1860-61

11. See Table VII.1.
12. See Table VII.2.
13. See Table VII.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate/1000 of population</th>
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<td>1883-84*</td>
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<td></td>
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( * Famine Years in the Punjab)

(SOURCE: PAR's of relevant years; CRP of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911).
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(* Famine Years in the Punjab)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Rate/1000 of Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate/1000 of Population</th>
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<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-61*</td>
<td></td>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
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<td>41.10</td>
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</table>

(* Famine Years in the Punjab)

(SOURCE: PAR's For relevant years, CRP of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911).
in Hissar district 38,000 cattle died and in Sialkot district the number was 11,500. In an estimate there was a total loss of Rs.75 lakhs in cash owing to cattle deaths in Punjab 15. During the 1868-70 famine the loss of cattle rose to 4,53,821 and was confined to the districts of Rohtak, Karnal, Hissar and Sirsa 16. Gurgaon district had lost 1,46,679 number of cattle, Sirsa 55,532 Karnal 18,831 and Hissar cattle farm 3,351 during the famine of 1877-78 17. The scarcity of 1883-84 took 50,000 cattle in Dera Ghazi Khan district, 26,000 in Karnal district, and 5,000 in Balbgarh tahsil of the Delhi district 18. The loss of cattle in the famine of 1896-97 was 3,65,450 in number 19, which rose to 11,20,426 during 1899-1900 famine 20, the highest than ever in the Punjab.

Besides, heavy mortality among cattle, the decline in live stock prices was a common phenomenon in famine situations affecting agriculturists. Since they represent assets that the agriculturist try to sell to acquire food when all else fails; and the sudden increase in supply of such assets in the market causes a price decline. The live stock quantity declined largely as a result of the drought and the interesting point is that despite this quantity reduction in prices of farm animals also fell 21. The prospects of a drought and scarcity of fodder led to rush of anxious sellers,

18. PRAR, 1883-84, Para 3, p.2.
while in years of abundant rain the owners were in no hurry to dispose of their bullocks. At the Sirsa cattle fair, in the seventeen years between 1866 and 1882 an average of 19,070 bullocks were annually brought for sale. But in the scarcity years of 1877 and 1880, the supply increased to 27,625 and 23,031 respectively; whereas in good years 1875 and 1871 the numbers were low as 14,222 and 17,491 respectively. A bad year meant not only increased supply but a reduced demand, and this affected the fortunes of cattle fairs. During the successive famines and plague epidemics in the closing years of the 19th century, the smaller cattle fairs could not be held in most regions; supplies were diverted to bigger ones. When rains failed in Uttar Pradesh sales at the Rewari or Hisar fairs collapsed for want of buyers.

The price of bullocks, therefore, had a direct relationship to the harvest; being low in years of drought and high in years of plenty. In 1895-96 when dearth of fodder led to high rates of cattle mortality, buffaloes which ordinarily sell at Rs.60-80 could be had for Rs.25-30. However, cycles of bad years could benefit the nomadic cattle dealers who brought the cattle cheap from the arid cattle breeding zone of the south-east and sold them at higher prices in irrigated regions where cattle were in demand. The huge cattle mortality also benefitted to those who were engaged in hide trade as the figures of hides and skins show an upward trend.

23. PLRAR, 1895-96, to 1901-02.
25. PLRAR, 1895-96, p. 28.
trend. On the other hand, it was found that peasants and cattle breeders who lost their cattle or had to sell them cheap often found it difficult to replenish their stocks.

Conditions of scarcity and famine stimulated migration of people to areas of food, fodder, and work. In Punjab, two types of migration were noted during famines. Of the first type were the migrants coming from outside the province such as Rajputana, North-western Provinces and Oudh, Bombay and Kashmir. The number of these immigrants is difficult to ascertain because no data is available. But it is on record that their number was considerable.

Such type of migration used to aggravate the famine problem in the province by putting additional burden upon the resources of the State. The second type of migration was within the province and it took place from one district to another or within the district to secure areas. As during the famine of 1860-61 people from Ambala, Thanesar and Delhi districts migrated to the eastern Jamuna Canal where work was available in the fields. In Balbgarth pargana of Delhi district 10% percent of the total population migrated. In Hisar district 21,405 persons were driven away. In an estimate, 1,20,000 people migrated from the south-east region of the Punjab. During 1877-78 famine the number of persons migrated from Hazara district were 918 and Gurgaon district were

26. See Table VII.4.
28. See Chapters III and IV.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Volume of Hides and Skins in Maunds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>90,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893-94</td>
<td>66,630</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894-95</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899-1900*</td>
<td>1,41,650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* Famine Years in the Punjab)

around 700 32. The scarcity of 1883-84 forced 30,300 people in Karnal district to leave their houses 33. Besides, people from Punjab went to foreign countries in search of employment compelled by the famines and lack of working avenues. About 30,000 male Panjabis, chiefly coolies from Lahore, Sialkot and Rawalpindi, destined for work on the Uganda Railway, emigrated from the ports of Bombay and Karachi to Mombasa in 1896-97 because of famine conditions. Again due to famine in 1899-1900, people from Delhi and its surroundings were sent to Fizi, Borneo, Sumatra and Mauritius, numbering 268 34.

Records are full of reference that parents abandoned or sold their children, while the exploitation of girl orphans was a common feature. It was reported that in many States, while every poor-house contained an appreciate number of boys whom no one claimed, girl orphans were rarely found. There can be no doubt that many girls whose parents had disappeared were snapped up by the unscrupulous agents and were consigned by them to lives of semi-domestic slavery or worse 35. Some of the girls were compelled to indulge in prostitutioinal activities. As the Gujrat district Gazetteer informed that "in the famine of 1888 in Gujrat district of the Punjab many people came to sell their children, who are still to be found in the houses of the Kanjaris(Prostitutes)" 36.

33. DG, Karnal, 1875, pp. 186-87.
34. PAR, 1901-02, Paras 589-91, p. 162.
35. Famine Administration in Native States, (Calcutta, 1906), Section 120, p. 43.
Famine was a great leveller which tended to mix up of different social groups at relief works where the poorer and impoverished sections of the high castes worked side by side with the labourers who came mostly from the ranks of the scheduled castes. The impact of famine relief on caste in terms of weakening of pollution notion and temporary change was described as: "The kinship of adversity has tended to break down ancient prejudices like caste taboos in common feeding programmes. A hungry child places no value on caste status. Food for work and full employment on hard manual labour schemes are altering social relationships. The hard manual labour attracts the proletarian Harijans, but as some high caste men, even Brahmins, are also obliged to work with the Harijans, the social barriers are breaking down" 37.

It was a common experience during famines that "those people who survived remain broken and butchered in mind and were forced into a state of dehumanised existence... Husbands drove away their wives, wives deserted ailing husbands; children forsaked aged and disabled parents; parents left their homes in despair, brothers turned deaf ears to the entreaties of their sisters and widowed sisters maintained by them for years. Men, in fact, turns into a beast in sheer desperation and helplessness. Besides the break up of centuries old norms of family life, there takes place alienation among the various communities and groups. Those who are forced to loose their homes and hearths in search for food and work get uprooted physically and spiritually" 38.

Famine affected the different strata of society in varying degree. The labourers, artisans and the small farmers were always the first to hit hard on the first approach of a scarcity or famine. It is interesting to note that while in the earlier famines the labourers and artisans were in majority on relief work, the number of peasants increased during the later famines which shows the increasing poverty of the poor agricultural classes. For instance, during the famine of 1899-1900 in Karnal district at Padla work, the agriculturists constituted 40 percent of the total number of workers, Kamins 60 percent; while at Chatar 58 percent were agriculturists and 42 percent were Kamins and at Dasirpur 40 percent were agriculturists and 60 percent Kamins. In contrast, the landlords, the moneylenders and the traders usually benefitted out of such situations. This resulted in accelerating the social tension among them which was already in existence as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Famine provided opportunity for various socio-religious organizations to exploit the situation for their vested interests. The Christian Missionaries were the first in Punjab to organize relief with the object of conversion of the famine-stricken people to its faith. In their relief programmes the missionaries used to impress upon the minds of the people the benefits of their religion. As a result the number of native Christians rose from 3,912 in 1861 to 19,728 in 1891 and 38,513 in 1901 in the Punjab.

40. See, Chapter VI.
The whole-sale conversion of the Hindu orphans by the Christian Missionaries during famines drove the Arya Samaj into conflict with the Missionaries. Influenced by the Christian's method of relief and the fear of conversion of the Hindu orphans, the Arya Samaj also initiated some relief measures. In 1897, it started Hindu Orphan Relief Movement to save Hindu children from falling into the hands of the Missionaries in the Punjab and other parts of the country. The Samaj also accelerated the process of Shuddhi (purification) to bring back those converts to Hinduism. This created rivalry against the Missionaries and tension arose between them. The Arya Relief Movement, in fact, had many consequences. If on the one hand it started rivalry with Missionaries, on the other hand it engendered unity in the ranks of the Hindus and brought the literate classes into touch with the illiterate masses as never before, creating new bonds of sympathy between them. It opened the virgin territory for the training of the Hindu youths in methods of social services and enabled them to make several experiments in reviving indigenous industries through cheap time serving machinery within reach of modest means for providing the orphans with employment. Moreover, Lala Lajpat Rai and Lala Mul Chand emerged as leaders on the political arena of the province, when the Indian Famine Commission of 1901 invited Lala Lajpat Rai for suggestions in regard to famine orphans and accepted his views.

42. See, Chapter VI.
43. Ibid.
On the other hand, the colonial Government began to suspect the activities of the Samaj being politically motivated to uproot the British rule in India. As the British officials felt that "inspite of this there is reason to believe that the work (famine relief) is not only philanthropic but is intended to introduce the seeds of the 'National Development' in the rural tracts and to prejudice the people against the efforts of the Government. The emissaries of the Samaj themselves are found to be men of extreme views and strongly against the Government" 45. Innumerable British officials stood prejudiced against the Samaj. They began to keep a close watch on the activities of the Samaj. Government began to regard it as a "dangerous" and "seditious" organization in the garb of its socio-religious programme 46.

The rise in prices of food arising out of shortage of foodgrains caused widespread hardships and gave birth to various problems, such as rise in crime 47, grain robberies, dacoities, and grain riots. Before the harvest when the grain-stocks of the poor peasants were exhausted and opportunities of work limited, thefts of standing crops were common. When prices ruled high grain was regularly stolen from threshing floors, granaries and railway depots, and frequently from moving trains 48.

While petty thefts could often be the compulsive outcome of hunger pangs, crowd actions and grain riots were the product of a more complex set of pressures - social, cultural, economic. If price rise was caused by droughts and harvest failure, people

46. Gupta, op. cit., p. 408.
47. See Table VII.5.
48. PK, 1878, p. XVI, 1891, p. XLIV.
<table>
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<tr>
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<td>1882</td>
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<tr>
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<td>54,094</td>
<td>1883*</td>
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<td>1884*</td>
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<td>75,325</td>
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<td>1901</td>
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(* Famine Years in the Punjab)

(SOURCE : FCJR's for the relevant years).
were not always driven to collective action. Since their sufferings appeared unavoidable, natural, there was often a quiet acceptance of fate. But when high prices followed a good harvest scarcity appeared un-natural. If it was obvious to the consumers that traders were making profit by manipulating prices and hoarding, then distress became intolerable, and its removal seemed humanly feasible. In such a context, price rise provoked collective outrage.

When price rise and scarcity were caused by exports, grain riots were common. The feelings of the people are well reflected in a Panjab newspaper, *Mulla Do Plaza*: "If famines are due to failure of rain or some other calamity of a similar nature, the people would patiently endure it, but they cannot help feeling angry when they knew that it is simply caused by the export of wheat to England" 49. In 1891, despite a good harvest grain-prices soared due to massive exports. There was a general outcry and continuous demands for a ban against exports. "If measures to control price rise were not undertaken", warned the *Lahore Gazette*, "the people will be goaded to desperation and will loose all regard for maintenance of peace and order in the country where they find that they must either die of starvation or go to jail. Robberies, thefts and dacoities are already the order of the day" 50.

Exports could thus become the target of attack. This could produce an interesting regional variations of social response to

49. *Mulla-Do-Plaza* (Lahore), dated 25th April, 1891; SNNPP during the year 1891.

50. *Lahore Gazette* (Lahore), dated 25th April, 1891; SNNPP during the year 1891.
high price. For instance, during the famine of 1896-97, the region most severely affected was the Delhi division and within it the districts of Hissar and Rohtak suffered most. A bad Kharif crop in 1895 was followed by poor harvests in 1896. Yet according to crime reports there was no violent out-bursts in these districts of the south-east. From Hissar, it was reported, "there was an utter absence of anything like grain riots, violent crime and other mainfestations of bitter impatience..." In Rohtak, "there was no aimless wandering or grain looting." In Karnal, "people accepted the position with resignation, and when prices were highest, a palpable calm prevailed everywhere."

Hoarding and manipulation of price by traders would provoke similar reactions. When prices sagged traders usually with-held stocks. Hoarded grain was then sold in periods of scarcity. A wait for a number of seasons was not unusual. "Banias waiting for good prices and having kept grain in the pits too long so that it is bad, keep it longer still, waiting for a famine year..."

With-holding of stocks at a time of scarcity and hunger violated popular notions of justice, and arbitrary fixation of prices by the dealers was unacceptable particularly in times of scarcity.

51. Progs. Land Rev. & Ag., Famine, A., April, 1898, Nos. 30-37, p. ii.
52. Ibid., p. iii.
53. Ibid., p. iv.
54. Ibid.
55. Land Rev. & Ag. (Famine), April, 1898, A., Nos. 30-37, Grain dealers sometimes keep the grain for several years in deep holes in the ground and sell it in times of scarcity, noted Rahbar-i-Hind (Lahore) of 8th November, 1883; SNMFP, during the year 1883. Similar complaints were persistent in other Newspapers.
crisis. The popular attitude is well-reflect in the persistent complaints in the newspapers. Gham-Khwar-i-Hind, published from Lahore was "at a loss to understand why the dealers should be allowed to fix the prices of grain to suit their own convenience" 56. The Aftab-i-Punjab (Lahore) emphasized: "Undoubtedly the freedom of traders is a good thing in ordinary times, but in times of scarcity it is by no means wise to leave the market to the whims of grain-dealers" 57. The Ashraf-ul-Akhbar urged the Government to fix the price of grain at a moderate rate and prevent baniahs from raising prices 58. In each 'crisis' and price rise there were similar demands for justice and Government mediation 59. Thus, social indignation and moral outrages led to complaints, and then a demand from the local authorities for active intervention to control grain movement and fix the price. When the expectation of justice was frustrated, crowd action often followed 60. In most cases of grain riots and bazar looting, one can observe this

56. Gham-Khwar-i-Hind (Lahore), dated 19th December, 1891; SNNPP during the year 1891.

57. Aftab-i-Punjab (Lahore), dated, ibid.

58. Ashraf-ul-Akhbar (Delhi), dated 1st May, 1891; SNNPP during the year 1891, see also, Siraj-ul-Akhbar (Jhelum), 4th May, 1891; Delhi Punch (Lahore), 1st May, 1891; Akbar-i-Kesri (Jullundur), dated 19th December, 1891; SNNPP for the relevant years.

59. After the terrible famine of 1899-1900 a good rabi harvest was expected in 1901, When the baniahs continued to raise prices the consumers grumbled; "The grain-dealers have affected a combination with the object of robbing the people and what's worse there is no one to prevent them doing so. Government should, therefore, move in the matter and devise means to put a stop to this deplorable state of affairs". Siraj-ul-Akhbar (Jhelum), dated 21st January, 1901; SNNPP during the year 1891.

60. The general pattern of food riots was often similar to the food riots of Europe described by Thompson (1971), or Rude (1964). See also, Rose (1961); Walter and Wrightson (1976).
familiar sequence. But a timely gesture on the part of the authorities could restrain or moderate any outburst.

Note the situation in Ambala in the summer of 1873. Prices had doubled within a month in June and a general tension was building up 61. What incensed people was not the rise in price but the action of the traders. Anticipating scarcity the traders were withholding stocks, pushing prices up and violating agreed norms of marketing. The traders were expected to sell at a rate fixed by themselves and recorded at Kotwali every morning as the 'price current' 62. But traders turned the practice into a mock affair. On 28th June, for instance, they fixed the rate of wheat at 18 or 19 seers per rupee. Then without any formal change in this agreed rate they began selling wheat at 15 or 16 seers per rupee 63. On hearing numerous complaints and apprehending 'disturbance' the bazar chaudhary was forced to intervene. It was proclaimed by a beat of tom tom that the bazar rate could not exceed the rate announced by the Kotwali every morning 64. In situations like this official actions could often avert a possible grain riot.

Colonial officials feared sharp price fluctuations. Long term rise was associated with peasant prosperity but sudden dramatic inflation was seen as a sign of alarm. With scarcity, migrations and mortality rates increased, so did the possibilities

63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
of social 'disturbance' and criminal activity. These posed not only administrative and political problems but strained the financial resources of the State. Expenditure on relief was needed precisely when revenue collections dropped. So officials watched with concern. The police department in particular kept a careful track of price movements. The fear of riots and revolts conditioned in many ways official reactions.

Again, the general problem of price rise was here aggravated by the fact of exports on the one hand and speculative hoarding by traders on the other. Punjab, being a major source of army recruits, was in particular a sensitive area. "High prices necessarily caused discontent... which militates against the frame of mind in which it is the desire of all to keep the people of the Punjab" 65. Thus, the rise in prices of foodgrains during famine, if it were caused by artificial means were seriously opposed by the public and there was indignation against the traders and the grain-dealers, who stocked and exported foodgrains causing the prices to rule high. The Government was aware to such situations and tried to avoid grain riots as possible. In a way there was a tendency to develop a hatred against the grain-dealers as "in several places the feeling against the banias and grain-dealers, who were very strong" 66.

The famines made rapid the process of transferring of lands in the shape of sales and mortgages, particularly by lower and

65. Letter No. 6624-I G-S, dated Lahore Cantt., 14th November, 1914, the General Officer Commanding, Lahore Division area, to the Chief of the General Staff, Commerce and Industry (Comm. & Trade), February, 1915, A, No. 85.

intermediate range of land-owners to meet their needs during such occasions. Mortgage rather sale of lands was the first choice of a cultivator. The number of land transfers (both sales and mortgages) show an upward trend when compared normal years with famine years. Secondly, the numbers of transferring of lands is gradually increasing as one proceeds to the end of the 19th century. It may also be observed that in the south-east of the Punjab hold of non-agricultural over the mortgaged area was greater than the central Punjab, but much less than the west Punjab.

Peasants depended not only on the credit of village shopkeepers for their supplies of various requirements, through the lean seasons and bad harvests, but also on credit purchases from peddlers, cattle-dealers and goat-herds. The purchase of bullocks was a major expense for any peasant household and invariably an important cause of their indebtedness. It was difficult to buy cattle without credit.

The increase in transferring of lands in the form of sales and mortgages led to the impoverishment of the peasantry who slowly were relieved of their ownership of land by the Shahukars. "The land was merely assigned to the creditor by a regular deed, and the debtor remains in possession, but it was no longer reality his own land. He was merely a villein tenant of the money-lender, he handed over to him the whole crop, except the cultivator's share, which he retained for himself and the family. The screw was

67. See Table VII.6.
68. See Table VII.7.
### Table VII.6.

**PUNJAB: Transfers of Land (in Numbers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sales</th>
<th>Mortgages</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sales</th>
<th>Mortgages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1859-60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1878-79*</td>
<td>10,639</td>
<td>27,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-61*</td>
<td>Figures are</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>15,946</td>
<td>20,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861-62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1882-83</td>
<td>13,538</td>
<td>28,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867-68</td>
<td>available</td>
<td></td>
<td>1883-84*</td>
<td>15,396</td>
<td>41,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869-70*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1884-85</td>
<td>18,789</td>
<td>33,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1895-96</td>
<td>56,377</td>
<td>1,55,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-76</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>22,786</td>
<td>1897-98</td>
<td>65,645</td>
<td>1,91,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-77</td>
<td>8,946</td>
<td>21,901</td>
<td>1898-99</td>
<td>63,036</td>
<td>1,70,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-78*</td>
<td>9,922</td>
<td>26,014</td>
<td>1899-1900*</td>
<td>66,125</td>
<td>1,57,067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* Famine Years in the Punjab)

(SOURCE: PAR's, PLRAR's and PRAR's for the relevant years).
### Table VII.7.

**PUNJAB : Region-wise Mortgages of Land.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/District</th>
<th>Mortgages to non-agriculturists</th>
<th>Percentage of total Mortgages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1874-75</td>
<td>1884-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South-east:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hissar</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohtak</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurgaon</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnal</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Montane:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshiarpur</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jullundur</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludhiana</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferozepure</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahore</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North-West:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahpur</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jhelum</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawalpindi</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central and South-west:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyallpur</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jhang</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** PLRAR's of relevant Years.
being gradually tightened till the last the worn-out proprietor took Rs.50 or Rs.100 to leave the land for ever" 70.

The large scale expropriation of peasants' land to Shahukars during the famines in the Punjab led to strained relations between the cultivator and the Shahukars. The fact that most tenants were Muslims and most Sikhs peasant proprietors, while the village money-lenders were Hindus further strained the amicable relations between the Hindu and Muslims as also between Hindus and Sikhs in those areas where Sikhs and Muslims were predominantly situated 71. As a result the Shahukars were universally hated and many of the contemporary proverbs bore ample testimony to this fact 72. In the districts of Bannu and Mujaffargarh they were even forbidden to wear a turban and had to work under extremely difficult conditions. They were the object of 'unmentionable indignities'. They were commonly regarded as Kirars, a word almost synonymous with 'coward'. Here they were often brutally manhandled and even murdered 73.

The working of the Shahukars in the villages and the reaction to their deeds are reflected in the local newspapers. The Wazir-ul-Mulk, complained that "the money-lenders resort to all sorts of questionable expedients with a view to compelling the Zamindars to part with their land. Thousands of Zamindars have

70. PLRAR, 1869-70, pp. 73-74.
72. For example, one proverb says: Kan Kirar, Kuta da, Visah na kija suta da. (even if he sleep, don't trust a crow, a money-lender and a dog).
73. Himadri, op. cit., p,8.
been rendered homeless through the machination of these Indian Shylocks; and although the matter has been repeatedly brought to the notice of Government; nothing has been done to save the Zamindars from the clutches of the banias. That a certain money-lenders has purchased several villages in the course of a few years, that the Zamindars have been driven to a state of desperation and in which the Zamindars murdered their creditors, there are two such cases 74. The Himala complained that "scarcely a week passes without its having to record one or two cases of murder in the Rawalpindi district. Two murders were committed last month, and it is now reported that another mahajan, named Pritam Das, has been murdered at Mauza Phulgran. Apparently, it has become a common practice with the Zamindars to get rid of a creditor by murdering him if he presses for payment of debts" 75. The Siraj-ul-Akhbar reported that "the present famine (of 1899-1900) had proved disastrous to the Shahukars in special, and reports of their murder and their houses having been looted are coming in from all quarters. It was also remonstrated that they were migrating to cities and buying swords and guns for the better security of their lives and property" 76.

Within villages the Shahukars increasingly lived with a sense of fear, a fact which in some ways deterred the aggressive of claims. The murder of extortionate money-lenders had social

74. The Wazir-ul-Mulk(Sialkot), dated 24th March, 1893; SNNPP during the year 1893.

75. The Himala(Rawalpindi), dated 9th June, 1893; See also, Gham-Khwar-i-Hind(Lahore), dated 15th July, 1893; SNNPP during the year 1893.

76. The Siraj-ul-Akhbar(Jhelum), dated 8th January, 1900; SNNPP during the year 1900.
sanction. In many instances a collective oath was taken to
withhold evidence and the police found it impossible to detect
the killers 77.

The relations between the Shahukars and the cultivators
became so strained that the categories 'non-agriculturists' and
'agriculturists' acquired meaning in the minds of many. These
categories perhaps formulated by colonial administrators, always
keen on simplifying social distinctions and identifying commu-
nities. And the categories crystalized into opposing blocks in
the process of a specific form of political struggle. But the
identities also had deeper roots in the mentality of the society.
Popular language, folk-tales and sayings projected stereotypes
about communities which were deeply embedded in the social psyche.
Within the rural population, the Jat and the bania or the peasant
and the money-lender, were respectively seen as the personifica-
tions of good and evil, valour and cowardice, innocence and
craftiness, masculinity and feminity, honesty and dishonesty 78.

The term for money-lender: Mahajan, literally meant a
'great man', and Shah was a 'King'. It was said in Karnal and
Hissar districts: Pahle Shah, Pichhe badshah 79. This acceptance
of their social function went along with representation as despi-
cable creatures. For the Jat, a baniya could never be a friend:
Jisko baniya Yar, Usko dushman Kye darkar 80. The Jat was involved
in honest labour, themoney-lender in dishonest earning: Jatan
Wahyan te Shah Kamsyan 81. The Baniyas were like hangmen: Bhaiyon

77. The Siraj-ul-Akhbar(Jhelum), dated 8th Jan.,1900,SNNPP,
during the year 1900.
77. PR, 1898, p.18.
78. Neeladri, op.cit.,p.613.
79. "Moneylender is superior to a King",Maconachie(1890),p.84.
80. "He who has baniya as a friend needs no other enemy",ibid.,p.211.
baniye Phansigir hote hain. On the other hand, the Khatri and banias had their own definition of 'self', their own notions of virtue and meaningful activity. Without the Khatri the society could not function, the Jat could not live in times of dearth. Whenever in need the Jat came running to the Shahukar. The Khatri contrasted their own gentility with the rustic boorishness, their high status against the lowliness of the Jats.

As a result by the early 20th century the commercial classes in the Punjab came to express a sense of intense insecurity, a feeling of persecution by the state as well as by the rural society. Economically, the sphere within which they could act was shrinking. In the rural areas the banihas faced problems. By the Act of 1901 and earlier also the peasants had taken over much of the money lending business as well as the marketing of the produce. The Land Alienation Act had weakened their position further and made the recovery of loans more problematic. Faced with growing competition and threat of crowd action and criminal assault, the commercial classes tended to move out of countryside in search of alternative avenues of investment in industries, banking and trade.

On the other hand the large scale transferring of land and the continued impoverishment of the peasantry led to the

82. Ibid., p. 212.
83. PNQ, Vol.II, No.18, March,1885, Note 618.
84. It was said: "Jat bhutan te Allah nigahaban" (The Jat was such a fool that only God could help them), "Jat Maluk trua rumal" (Even when refined, a Jat will use a mat for a handkerchief), Maconachie (1890), p. 245.
passing of the Punjab Land Alienation Bill in 1900 by the Government of India. The object of the Bill was to place restrictions on the transfer of land in the Punjab with a view to checking its alienation from the 'agricultural' to non-agricultural classes. According to the bill almost all the Muslims were included among the agricultural tribes. So did the Sikhs, except the Aroras. Only a very small portion of the Hindus was included among the agricultural communities so designated for the purposes of the Act. A Hindu not included among the agricultural tribes might own the land, may even be cultivating it himself, even so he could not buy land from a member of an agricultural community. Though another member of such a community who may be an absentee landlord living in a life of ease, away from his lands or who may not own any land at all could do so.

The Bill met with a serious opposition by the Press, the commercial class, the Indian National Congress and the Arya Samaj. It was felt by the Aryas that the Bill was merely a political measure which hardly aimed at the amelioration of socio-economic conditions of the Muslim peasantry. It was further argued that the bill was designed to prevent urban financial interests from acquiring the land of the hereditary peasants. It was called an unwarranted intrusion on the right of private property and a blatant attempt to make the money-lender a scapegoat.

86. Sri Ram Sharma, Punjab in Ferment, (New Delhi, 1971), p.34.
87. Ibid.
88. Calvert, op.cit., p.137.
The Bill also furnished the impetus for a political awakening among Punjabi Hindus. During the past six years Aryas had overcome their hesitancy at joining the provincial politics and now, threatened economically by the Bill, they ventured into congress activity. Lala Lajpat Rai, Lala Lal Chand and several other Arya leaders decided to join 1900 Congress held at Lahore. Hence, the interest of the Arya Samaj into politics increased hereafter. It was resolved by the Congress that "this Congress regrets the introduction into the Supreme Legislative Council of the Punjab Land Alienation Bill to amend the law relating to agricultural land in the Punjab, with a view to restrict alienation of land as proposed in the Bill by sale or mortgage, which is calculated (1) to decrease the credit of the agriculturists and landholders, (2) to make them more resourceless on account of their inability to meet the ever-increasing state demands upon their land; and this Congress is of the opinion that the provision to give retrospective effect to the Bill is inequitable and unfair". Earlier Lala Murli Dhar of Ambala in the Lucknow Session of 1899 of the Congress strongly opposed the Bill. He pointed out that "apart from the moneylender, the Government servants at all levels were exploiting the poor agricultural classes". Consequently the Arya Samaj took to political activities. They were increasingly drawn to the politics of the Congress and felt that this national organization could be converted into

92. Progs. I.N.C. held at Lahore in 1900, Resolution II.
93. Ibid., held at Lucknow in 1899, Resolution II, pp. 46-47.
a powerful vehicle for effecting national growth and building up self-reliance.

In December, 1906, the protest meetings against the Punjab Land Alienation Act (1901) spread to villages. Aryas and Hindu teams toured the villages interpreting the Bill to Zamindars and urging them to sign protest resolutions against restrictions. Aryas were the moving figures in the agitations that followed. Peasantry was excited against the Government by seditious articles in the Press. And this led to menacing demonstrations and riots in Lahore, Lyallpur and Rawalpindi in 1907 94.

Famine provided opportunity to the leaders of the Indian National Congress to attack on such economic issues which were responsible for recurring of famines in the Punjab and other parts of the country. These issues were poverty, drain, high assessment of land revenue demand and export of foodgrains to Europe, etc. The Congress wanted to create awareness and political consciousness among the masses against the exploiting nature of the alien rule and to prepare them for 'National Movement'. In its Resolution XII of 1896 passed at Calcutta Session, the Congress deplored: "The outbreak of famine had assured that this and the other famines which had occurred in the past, are the result of the great poverty of the people, brought on by the drain of the wealth of the country, which has been going on for years together, and by the excessive taxation and over assessment, consequent on a policy of extravagance followed by the Government both in civil and military departments, which has so far impoverished the people that at the first touch of scarcity they are

rendered helpless and must persist unless fed by the State or helped by private charity". The Congress also suggested the remedy to famines that "the true remedy against the recurrence of famine lies in the adoption of a policy, which would enforce economy, husband the resources of the State, foster the development of indigenous and local arts and industries which have practically been extinguished, and help forward the introduction of modern art and industries" 95.

Commenting upon the drawbacks in the famine policy of the Government the Congress opined that "the existing Famine Codes are inadequate as regards wages and rations, and oppressive as regards task work, and would appeal to the Government to redeem its pledges by restoring the Famine Insurance Fund (keeping a separate account of it) to its original footing, and to apply it largely to its original purpose, viz., the immediate relief of the famine-stricken people" 96.

Commenting upon the poverty and suggesting measures for its removal the congress resolved that, "this Congress desired to call the attention of the Government to the deplorable condition of the poor classes in India, full forty millions, according to the high official authority, drag out a miserable existence on the verge of starvation even in normal years, and the Congress would recommend measures for the amelioration of their conditions which include permanent land revenue settlement, establishment of agricultural banks for obtaining loans, technical schools be established

95. Progs. I.N.C. held at Calcutta in 1896, Resolution XII.
96. Ibid., Resolution IX.
and local and indigenous manufactures fostered* 97.

The Congress urged the Government to institute a full enquiry into the economic conditions of India. In its Lahore Session of 1900 the Congress resolved that, "having regard to the oft-recurring famines in India, and the manifestly increasing power of resistance on the part of its population in the face of a single failure of harvest, leading as it frequently does to human suffering, loss of life, destruction of live-stock, disorganization of rural operations and interference with the legitimate work of the administrative machinery, the Congress hereby requested to Government of India to institute at an early date a full and independent enquiry into the economic condition of the people of India with a view to the ascertainment and adoption of practicable remedies" 98.

Participating in the discussion on the above resolution, B. Churamani from Hissar said,"...That a failure of single harvest tell severely on the people and is sufficient to render them so destitute and helpless as to make them leave their hearth and home and wander about in quest of food. This being the case, the necessity arises at once for a thorough and independent enquiry into the economic conditions of the people of India" 99. Similarly, Mr. M. Moharrem Ali, Chisti of Lahore said," That it is a fact that famines have become frequent in India...It is the duty of the Government to diagnose the disease accurately and fully and after

98. Prog. I.N.C. held at Lahore in 1900, Resolution II.
99. Ibid., pp.42-43.
a full and accurate diagnosis to take some practical steps. 100.

Regarding the causes of famines in India the Congress
passed: "It is not over-population... but that the land assess-
ment is so heavy that the cultivator is not able to save in good
years enough to meet the failure of harvests in bad years. All
our village industries like spinning and weaving have been killed
by a free competition with the stream and machinery of England.
Our cultivators and even our village industrial classes, therefore,
virtually depend on the soil as the one remaining source of their
subsistence... The officials do not leave the cultivators enough
to be able to save and cultivators, therefore, fell victims to
famine whenever the harvest fails" 101.

"A main cause of the disastrous consequences of Indian
famines and one of the greatest difficulty in the way of promoting
relief in an effectual shape is to be found in the fact that the
great mass of the population directly depends on agriculture, and
that there is no other industry from which any considerable part
of the community derives its support. The failure of the usual rains
thus deprives the labouring class as a whole, not only of the
ordinary supplies of food obtainable at prices within their reach,
but also of the sole employment by which they can earn the means
of procuring it" 102.

The issues like famine and poverty also attracted the
attention of the vernacular press in the Punjab which attributed
the poor conditions of agricultural masses to the economic polities

100. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
101. Presidential Address by R.C. Dutt, Prog. I.N.C., 1899,
held at Lucknow.
102. Speech made by P.N. Madholkar (Berar) on the Resolution XIII,
Progs. I.N.C., 1899, held at Lucknow.
of the British Government. A native newspaper, *The Punjab Punch* wrote that, "the native community in India has made little progress. They are growing under a heavy load of taxation. They have no industry or employment and consequently their poverty is increasing" 103.

*The Paisa Akhbar* of Gujranwala dwells upon the backward condition and indebtedness of the agriculturists and thinks that "the intricacies of the law tend to bring about this state of affairs. This class is growing under the exactions of the money-lenders, and their land is fastly changing hands" 104.

*The Akhbar-i-Kesri* of Jullundur wrote that land is rapidly passing into the hands of the moneylenders and attributes the present condition of the Zamindars to the following causes:

1. Indebtment of the agriculturists and exactions of the Shahukars;
2. Extravagence,
3. (3) law and court fees,
4. Litigation,
5. the backward state of education among the Zamindars and their inability to keep and check accounts 105

*The Mulla-Do-Plaza* of Lahore asked from the Government that "where is the Famine Insurance Fund which was realized from the people? That heavy taxes on the one hand and the abnormal rise in prices of foodgrains on the other, have nearly ruined the people...

The Anglo-Indians (karamkhors) are drawing fat salaries and enjoying themselves leaving the people to lead a miserable life.

103. *The Punjab Punch* (Lahore), dated 2nd Jan., 1890; SNNPP during the year 1890.
104. *The Paisa Akhbar* (Gujranwala), dated 21st Feb., 1870; ibid.
105. *The Akhbar-i-Kesri* (Jullundur) dated 1st March, 1890. Similar views have been expressed by *The Pata Khan* (Lahore), 8th Jan. 1890; *The Wazir-ul-Mulk* (Sialkot), 21st Feb., 1890; *The Panjabi Akhbar* (Lahore), 19th March, 1890; *The Political Soldier* (Lahore), 24th March, 1890; *Kohinoor* (Lahore), 1st April, 1890; *Wazir-ul-Mulk* (Sialkot), 4th April, 1890; *Aftab-i-Punjab* (Lahore), 18th April, 1890; *Rohbar-i-Hind* (Lahore), 18th June, 1890; SNNPP for the relevant years.
If famine were due to failure of rain or some other calamity of a similar nature the people would patiently endure it, but they cannot help feeling angry, when they know that it is simply caused by the export of wheat to England.  

The Paisa Akhbar (Lahore) of 30th May, 1892 observed that "the worst of it is that the authorities depend for their information regarding the state of crops, etc., upon reports made by petty officials of the Police and civil departments, and even if a high official sees with his own eyes, that the crops are falling he dare not believe the evidence of his own senses so long as the reports from the District Officers are satisfactory. In these circumstances it is a matter for regret that those who are desirous of bringing the real state of things to the notice of the Government should be considered disloyal. Flatterers in order to obtain titles may pretend to laugh at the views expressed by Mr. A. O. Hume and thus endeavour to deceive the authorities, but the people are gradually sinking deeper into poverty and the spirit of disaffection is increasing daily."  

Apart from the Arya Samaj, the Indian National Congress and the vernacular Press, some individuals also criticised the British rule in India in their writings and tried to awaken the people against the economic exploitation of the country. Dadabhai Naoroji's obsession with "drain" led him to claim that the "chronic state of famine" existing in India was the direct result

106. The Mulla-Do-Piazza (Lahore), dated 20th April, 1891; SNNPP during the year 1891.
107. SNNPP during the year 1892.
of "the continuous drain of wealth year after year in the form of payments that this country was obliged to make annually to England for the discharge of obligations most of which had their origin in the political relations between the two countries"^{108}. "Famines in this country", he declared before British audience, "were an indication of the fact that India is bleeding to death by constant drain of wealth... I ask you whether it is possible for any nation on the face of earth to live under these conditions?...A large proportion of population was in a normal state of starvation. The people were always underfed, even in good years and constantly when bad years come, they the more readily succumbed... Indian resources had been exhausted by British policy, which was thus responsible for famines"^{109}.

R.C.Dutt's attack was mainly directed against high incidence of land revenue which he held solely responsible for the utter ruin of the peasantry^{110}. "What caused distress and deaths was that the people had been so hopelessly impoverished that they could not buy when the crops failed in any particular locality. Let them remove the economic causes of the nation's poverty and they would remove the causes of famines"^{111}. "That it was the poverty of the people which had prevented them from buying food from neighbouring districts and provinces when the crops failed in any one province, and that famines could be prevented

110. R.C.Dutt, *Famines and Land Assessments in India*, (London,1900), Also His *speeches and Papers on Indian Questions*, (Calcutta, 1902). The same views find expression at great length in his *Economic History of India*, Vol.II.
by removing this poverty and enabling the people to buy food from their neighbours in bad years." 112.

William Digby, an Englishman in his *Prosperous British India* found fault with British Colonialism in India and declared that "when the part played by the British empire in the 19th century is regarded by the historian fifty years hence, by which time the true perspective of events will have been attained, the most striking and the most saddening of all incidents will be the steady sinking of India, and its population into a state of chronic famine strickenness" 113. "It was not the whole of India but largely rural proletariat that was 'sinking' steadily into chronic state of destitution. The causes of rural poverty lay not merely in "the drain of wealth" which has been going on for years together and (in the) excessive taxation and over-assessment consequent in a policy of extravagance followed by the Government in both the civil and military departments, but were also traceable to the unequal distribution of agricultural incomes between the cultivators and the middle class. As a result of colonial structure of the economy which itself was the product of British rule, a large part of the income came to be appropriated by the non-producing middlemen. In Punjab, it was the money-lender and the grain-merchant" 114.

Lala Lajpat Rai also published his *England's Debt to India* (1927) as a chargesheet against British rule on economic grounds. In it, he voiced the feelings of millions of Indians about the

poverty, economic backwardness, famine, ruin of industries and the fiscal injustice done by British to India. Lajpat Rai has cited a number of British opinions, officials and private, for and against the 'drain' theory and maintained that "foundations on which England's economic prosperity was built up, was made possible only by the Influx of Indian treasure and that but for this capital, not loaned but taken, and bearing no interest, the ascendency of the steam engine and mechanical appliances for mass production might have remained un-utilized. England's gain was India's loss - a loss of treasure more than enough to starve her industries and retard the progress of agriculture. No country, however, rich or resourceful, could bear such a drain unharmed."

Gopal Krishan Gokhle criticised Government attitude regarding the use of the Famine Insurance Grant. In a speech made at the Congress Session held at Calcutta, he maintained that "the first thing I want to say is that during better years we have paid to Government as "Famine Insurance" a sum equal to 25 crores of rupees. It is no business to ours to consider how this sum has been spent. We know that the greater part of it has been misapplied. We know that from 4 to 6 crores have been misappropriated in the general exchequer of the nation. Our contention is that we have paid this money in order to be insured against famine. But Gentlemen I am very sorry to say that this contention does not seem to be adequately realised by the Government of India and by some of the provincial Governments."

116. Speeches of Hon'ble Mr. G.K. Gokhle, Non-official Member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, (Madras, 1908), p.557.
Thus, to the national leadership famines were clear proof of India's poverty, and their ever-increasing intensity, extent and mortality, an 'infallible index' of the growing impoverishment of the country. The Indians looked upon the increasing indebtedness of the peasantry and the consequent transfer of land from cultivating to non-cultivating classes as signs of their growing lack of means" 117.

While the British Indian authorities blamed the famines for the misery and material losses occurring during the years of famines, their frequency, intensity and destructive nature. They claimed famines as the results of the failure of rainfall and consequently of harvests. The nationalist opinion, on the other hand, was that Indian famines were not the product of the caprice of nature but of human failings and were, therefore, preventible 118. To the nationalists, the clear cause of famines in India was the poverty that stalked the land. It was the 'decreasing power of resistance', the utter lack of staying power which determined the intensity of a famine or the extent to which failure of crops would mean whole-sale starvation. Failure of crops did not cause poverty, it was poverty which transferred scarcity into famines 119.

As a result Indian leaders began to complain that poverty was stalking the land, the peasant was rack-rented by the revenue authorities, indigenous industry had been ruined and modern industry was deliberately discouraged or at least not sufficiently

118. Ibid., pp.48-50.
119. Ibid., p.51.
encouraged, essential food supply of the country was being exported, currency policy was manipulated against the interests of Indian industry and peasantry. Indian labour was being enslaved in foreign owned plantations, railways were being extended in neglect of Indian revenues and the needs of agricultural development, the burden of taxation was crushing and the public revenues were diverted from nation-building departments to serve non-Indian interests and to wage unnecessary and expansionist wars, and lastly, the heaviest complaint of all India was being drained of its wealth and capital. And all these economic evils, the Indian national leaders came to feel, were the direct and indirect consequences of British economic policy.

Besides famine, the anti-plague measures of the Government which included house searches, removal of plague victims to hospital and segregation or evacuation of villages, were bitterly criticised by the public. As they felt that these measures affected their social prestige and sanctity of their houses. This created a political stir in the country. The feelings of the public will become clear from the following newspaper reports: The Taj-u-Akhbar (Rawalpindi) of 6th March, 1897 deprecated that "at the Pindi Railway Station both Hindu and Muhammedan female passengers were inspected by a sweeper woman with the permission of the Station Master. People were much exercised over this, that this arrangement was disgraceful in the extreme, seeing that it was calculated to wound the religious feelings of the passengers, especially the Hindus". Similarly, The Paisa Akhbar (Lahore) dated 31st March, 1897.

120. Ibid., pp. 738-39.
121. SNNPP, during the year 1897.
1897, condemned the rules framed under the "Dangerous Epidemic Disease Act", and stated that "the members of the Legislative Council being utterly ignorant of Indian Customs, apparently thought that respectable Indian gentlemen would allow their wives, sisters and daughters to be inspected by strangers and could not object to the police and European doctors visiting their houses. The members of the Council must not imagine that the natives will quietly submit to such outrages. As a matter of fact, the enforcement of these rules in causing a considerable sensation, and may lead to serious consequences. Under the present rules not only are our wives, sisters, mothers and daughters forcibly rested from them but the sanctity of their harem was violated. Moreover, their houses and furniture were burnt and their religion was being interfered with, seeing that they were not allowed to bury or burn their dead according to their rites of their religion" 122.

Thus, famines in the Punjab during 1858 to 1901, affected the society in a variety of ways. The immediate effects of famines were the mortality of cattle as well as human beings, both from starvation and diseases, migration and desertion of villages, abandoning of families and sale of children, development of prostitutional activities, disruption of social rites such as births, deaths and marriage ceremonies, rise in prices of food-grains, selling of assets like clothes, ornaments, houses, cattle and land. The rise in prices which led to rise in crimes, on the other hand if it were caused by man-made factors invoked a collec-

122. SNNPP, during the year 1897.
tive action which resulted into grain riots. The long term impact of famines were the increase in indebtedness of the poor peasantry by way of alienation of lands to the Shahukars. The continuous indebtedness increased the poverty of the cultivators which resulted into accelerating the already existing bitterness against the moneylending classes. In some regions where the Sikhs and Muslim cultivators were predominantly situated, the money lending classes were from Hindu community. This led to widening of the class differences between the Hindus and Muslims on the one side and Hindus and Sikhs on the other. The situation took a serious turn by the end of the 19th century when the commercial classes began to feel a sense of insecurity in the rural areas and tended to move to the towns and cities in search of new avenues. In fact, the growing threat from the peasants in the form of killings and passing of the Punjab Land Alienation Bill further increased their fears. As a result the Hindu commercial classes also began to take part actively in the Punjab politics to save their interests. In this context the nature and role of the Arya Samaj and the Indian National Congress can be studied which affected the politics of the Punjab in the years to come. On the other hand, famines provided opportunity for various socio-religious groups to exploit the situation for their vested interests. The Christian Missionaries provided relief to the poor famine-stricken people with the object of conversion. As a result the Arya Samaj came into conflict with the Missionaries and it followed the same lines of relief. Tussle began and they started abusing each other. The British Government also became
suspicious about the activities of the Samaj as it considered them 'politically designed to uproot the British rule in India'. Their suspicions came to be true when the Arya Samaj leaders actively participated in the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress in 1900 in which the Congress passed the resolution against the introduction of the Punjab Land Alienation Bill. In fact, the leaders of the Samaj found the Congress a right platform from where it could serve and save the interests of the commercial classes. Famines also provided opportunity for the Indian National Congress, the vernacular Press and the nationalist leaders to criticise the British Government for its economic exploitation of the country. They tried to evoke the opinion among the public against the British rule by proving that poverty and famines in the Punjab and elsewhere in India were the direct or indirect consequences of the British economic policies which were tended to exploit the Indians. The anti-plague measures further hurt their feelings. As a result these efforts brought about political awakening among the masses against the British and provided economic background for the Indian National Movement and the political struggle against the colonial rule.