INTRODUCTION

Famine is not a new phenomenon in history. From times immemorial reference to such calamities are available in historical documents and the chroniclers never forgot to mention the horrible and devastating effects of famines and the relief measures being taken by the rulers of the time. During the latter half of the Nineteenth century India had grappled with severe famines which came so frequently bewilder ing the British Government and the people. Along with other parts of the country the province of Punjab had also been affected by the famines. The present work is an attempt to study in detail the different famines which occurred in the Punjab during the second half of the Nineteenth century.

Although, the study of famines in India during this period had attracted some attention of historians, sociologists and economists, yet a systematic and authentic study of famines in different regions from a historical point of view had remained a desideratum. Two studies done by Dr. B.M. Bhatia and Dr. Hari Shankar Srivastva on all India level touch partially to the Punjab. Dr. Bhatia argued that the commercial agriculture developed by the British in India did not help the farmers rather it served the colonial interests as well as of landlords, traders and moneylenders in India. The peasantry along with artisans and labourers had to face recurrent calamities because of poverty which again was the cause of the frequent famines and scarcities in India.

Dr. Srivastva brought out the physical factors, relief measures, Government policy and the effects of famines. His

study, however, lacks critical analysis of the causation of famines and the famine policy of the British Government. Moreover, he did not trace why any failure of rain always resulted into a famine? And what were the economic factors responsible for the frequent famines during the period of study?

While Professor Amartya Sen, a well known political economist, studied four great famines: The Bengal Famine of 1943, The Ethiopian Famine of 1972-74, The Sahel Region (West Africa) Famine of 1968-73 and the Bangladesh Famine of 1974. In his work, Sen blasted the myth that 'Food Availability Decline' (PAD) was the factor behind them. Instead, he argued that mode of production was the major factor for their culmination.

This dissertation is an attempt to fill some of the gaps left by the studies mentioned with the object that no detailed and comprehensive account of famines in the Punjab is available. Secondly, it is important to know that a state like Punjab which was acclaimed by the British as 'the most prosperous and economically well off province of India' where the means of communication and irrigation had developed by the British, yet it suffered from a series of severe famines. Thirdly, which particular area of the province was easily prone to famines and why? Fourthly, had this area had any impact on the rest of the territory of the state? Also, why did the latter half of the nineteenth century witness the series of famines? How was it that the failure of rain in any one year, or the abundance of it, lead to famine with its corollaries - mass starvation and death? Vagaries of season have always been there and are not unknown or a rare phenomenon. Then why did

not the agriculturist have a margin of savings to steer him through the evil days which normally did not exceed one season or a year? Also why was it that the population was so much dependent on agriculture that one failure brought forth starvation, and why had the agricultural operations to rely absolutely on rainfall? These questions naturally arise and lead one to enquire into the character of administration and economy of the State in that period. It is unquestionable that famine followed the unbalance in the monsoon. But deficiency of rainfall in one year did not inevitably lead to famine, which implies 'want of food, hunger and starvation'. Therefore, while departure from normality in rainfall was the aggravating factor, the quest for the causes of famines in the latter nineteenth century has to be directed to the entire system of Government at that time.

The word *famine* derived from the Latin word *fames*, meaning hunger, has been defined in different contents with varying shades of meaning. Earlier, it was defined as 'a condition of extreme general scarcity of food, or want of food, hunger and starvation in a certain area or part of a country' \(^4\). OR 'as an economic and social phenomenon characterised by the widespread lack of food resources which in the absence of outside aid leads to death of those affected' \(^5\). Subsequently, the analysis of famine has undergone radical revision in the last few years. The simple and long standing notion that famine was the result of 'Food Availability Decline' seems not to accord with the facts in favour of the theories which stress the role of the market and of Government intervention. As long ago as 1952 Jasue de Castro attacked the simplistic Malthusian theories of famine causation in favour of a


more complicated model. "....Essentially world hunger is not a problem of production limited by the coercion of natural forces... but of politics that is based on the premediated division of the world into ruling and dominated groups" 6.

Similarly, Amarty Sen has discarded the idea that the shortage of total food-supply is the cause of famines. Instead, he argued his entitlement theory according to which 'the entitlement approach to famines does not take into account the aggregate food output but the specific mode in which different groups of people have access to food. People's entitlement to food depends upon their purchasing power which in turn depends upon a complex of interplay of forces like the pattern of distribution of income, terms of trade between commodities, the level of employment available, the structure of wages and the ownership of productive resources. Denial of entitlement of food, namely, deprivation is caused primarily by poverty' 7.

Thus, the modern developments in industry, trade and transport have wrought a radical change both in the meaning and nature of the famine problem. Instead of absolute want, famine under modern conditions has come to signify an abrupt and sharp rise in food prices which renders food beyond the reach of the poor who suffer starvation. In modern famine food may be available at all times in the market but prices are so high enabling the poor difficult to buy it. Hence, while in the pre-British days the problem of famine was associated with lack of food, now it links with problem of employment and purchasing power.

7. Sen, op. cit.
The period of study starts from the year 1858 when the rule of East India Company came to an end and the Crown rule was established. The year is also marked by the fact that the Delhi division, which was characterised as a drought prone area, was separated from the North-western Provinces and incorporated into the Punjab. Moreover, the impact of the British system on socio-economic conditions actually begins from this year. The discussion ends with the year 1901 when the Punjab Land Alienation Bill became an act, which was destined to effect the agrarian society. Also in that year, some of the frontier districts of the Punjab were parcelled out of it and were constituted into a separate Province known as North-west Frontier Province. Thus, the area of study covers the entire Punjab as it existed after the inclusion of the Delhi division and prior to the formation of the North-west Frontier Province.

The focus of study, however, is on the British territory. Although numerous Native States have also been included. Since the British laws did not apply to the Native States and the impact of the socio-economic changes experienced by the districts directly under British rule was felt only partially in these States. Hence, the critical analysis of famines in the Native States remains beyond the main discussion of this thesis and the problem in Native States has been touched upon peripherally.

For collection of relevant material various archives and libraries had visited. The study is primarily based on the original sources both unpublished and published, proceedings of the various departments of the Government of India, Parliamentary Papers, private papers of the Viceroys and Governors-General.
including other officials, vernacular newspapers and various published reports of the Government. Secondary sources have also been used to provide the missing links. However, the Punjab Government records preserved in the India office Library, London and the Punjab Board of Revenue, Lahore, remained beyond my reach.

The work starts with the description of physical and socio-economic environs of the study area. The story is narrated in the first chapter with special reference to regional variations in regard to rainfall, soil and irrigation so as to bring out the drought-prone areas. It also deals with distribution of population, migration, village and towns, growth of commercial agriculture, industry, trade and transport in order to find out the role of these variables in diffusing or accentuating the famine problem.

A concocted account of famines from the earliest times to the end of the Sikh rule has been given in the second chapter in order to understand the changes it underwent in regard to nature, effects and relief measures during different intervals of history.

What were the factors responsible for culmination of famines during the period under study, and what were their effects on the social and economic life of the province? Also, what sort of relief measures were taken by the British Government to save the famine-stricken people from starvation and death, and to what extent these were successful? The answer to these questions along with history of famines have been attempted in the next two chapters. The entire period has been divided into two parts for the sake of convenience. The first period from 1858 to 1879 covers the third chapter. While famines during the period from 1880 to 1901 have been discussed in chapter four,

British Government policy towards famine forms the subject
matter of the next chapter. The evolution and development of policy again falls into two distinct phases. During the first period from 1858 to 1879, the Government did not pay any seriousness to the problem and adopted some adhoc measures of relief. But the next period from 1880 to 1901 witnessed the emergence of a systematic policy when the Government appointed various Famine Commissions. The period is also marked by the creation of the Provincial Famine Code which took a definite shape by the turn of the country. Attempt has also been made to examine British Famine Policy in regard to the Native States. In the end, a critical evaluation of the British Famine Policy has been made by bringing forth its lacunae.

Besides the relief provided by the British Government, some voluntary organisations also remained quite active in distributing relief to the needy during famines. These non-Governmental agencies were the Christian Missions, the Arya Samaj, the Braho Samaj and the Singh Sabha. While the role of these institutions during famines have been discussed in detail in chapter sixth, attempt has also been made to highlight the objects of relief and its consequences which led to social and political conflicts between different socio-religious organisations.

The last chapter of the present work deals with the impact of famines in the Punjab during the full span of about forty years on the social, economic and political environs. Also, that how a single phenomenon like famine can disturb the web of society which creates some new social and economic problems that ultimately affects the polity of the day.