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Public Discourse and India's Green Revolution: Defining Approaches to Relief Efforts and
Policymaking During the Bihar Famine

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Abstract

The Bihar Famine of 1966-1967 was a dire crisis in postcolonial Indian history, resulting in widespread crop failures, food shortages, and mass starvation across Northern India. However, the Bihar Famine is generally credited for being a successful response to famine due to its role in spurring India's Green Revolution, culminating in the industrialization of India's agricultural sector and India's self-sufficiency in food production. Overlooked in existing research and studies of the Bihar Famine, however, are the reactions and responses of the larger public and ordinary Indian citizens in defining approaches to famine relief. This thesis, in turn, examines land surveys, journalistic documentation, and government reports to analyze political movements and campaigns organized by members of the Indian public that garnered attention from local, national, and international agencies. Consequently, this thesis demonstrates that the grassroots action and mobilization of India's rural and working-class sectors during the Bihar Famine is responsible for cultivating the crisis atmosphere that incited drastic political action and established the precedents of the Green Revolution.

Introduction

Throughout Northern India, the land had dried up. And after two consecutive years of droughts in 1965 and 1966, the wells had dried up, too. Farmers in tracts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Orissa had watched the rich, arable soils that cultivated the crops to feed an entire nation gradually transform into gravelly dirt.¹ While all of Northern India suffered in the midst of crippling droughts, it seemed that the agricultural state of Bihar in Northeast India had been hit the hardest. The entire province was on the brink of starvation.

In Patna, crowds of men, women, and children migrated to the city center, emaciated, their eyes sunken in, cheeks hollowed, and knees knobby as they trekked dirt roads on bare calloused feet.² At the distribution sites, Biharis sat in a large circle, anxiously waiting their turn as each person presented a ration card to a volunteer who scooped meager helpings of rice out of a woven basket on to their dulled metal bowls and *thalis*.³ Millions were expected to die from epidemics and starvation;⁴ records show mothers cradling wailing babies covered in smallpox hives⁵ and lanky bodies piled on sandalwood pyres to be cremated on the riverbanks of the Ganges.

Despite the bleak landscape, the Bihar Famine of 1966-1967 is generally classified as a successful handling of widespread crop failures and food shortages. The consensus derives from a relatively low death toll, although exact figures are inconsistent and inconclusive.⁶ In addition, the Famine is also recognized for spurring India's Green Revolution, encouraging the adoption

¹ Thomas Hoepker, "A Victim of the Famine." *Magnum Photos* (1967).

² Alan Berg, "Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience." *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 118.

³ Thomas Hoepker, "Distribution of Food Aid from the US." *Magnum Photos* (1967).

⁴ Alan Berg, "Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience." *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 118.

⁵ Thomas Hoepker, "A Mother Holds Her Smallpox-Afflicted Child." *Magnum Photos* (1967).

⁶ Alan Berg, "Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience." *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 122.

of increasingly resilient seed varieties, the implementation of innovated farming technology, and the establishment of agricultural research institutions throughout India, all of which industrialized India's agricultural sector and encouraged independence and self-sufficiency in food production.⁷ The demographic achievements of the Green Revolution were evident almost immediately; between 1967-1971, India's population had grown by an estimated 54 million⁸ and food production had increased from 95.1 to 108.4 million tons at a rate of approximately 4.5% per annum.⁹ Simultaneously, international aid and food imports were reduced by 64% by 1971,¹⁰ and all grain shipments from the United States were firmly halted by 1972.¹¹ While scientific research efforts, comprehensive policymaking, and international aid are primarily credited for the success of the Green Revolution, rural demands and responses to widespread instability in the wake of the 1966 Bihar Famine also influenced local, federal, and international policymaking, defining the trajectory of Green Revolution-era reforms.

In the state of Bihar, specifically, public response to the repercussions of the Bihar Famine remains a critical and widely unrecognized element that warranted the overwhelming strides in production and development made by the Green Revolution. Academic scholarship on the intersection, repercussions, and legacy of the Bihar Famine and Green Revolution focuses almost exclusively on research measures, diplomacy, and policy proposals. In his seminal chapter on the Bihar Famine, Paul R. Brass examines the role of “[creating] a crisis out of the situation” in the formal declaration of the Bihar Famine, but analyzes the role of politicians and

⁷ Govindan Parayil, “The Green Revolution in India: A Case Study of Technological Change.” *Technology and Culture* 33, no. 4 (1992): 738.

⁸ James D. Gavan and John A. Dixon, “India: A Perspective on the Food Situation.” *Science* 188, no. 4188 (1975): 545.

⁹ Ibid. 545.

¹⁰ Ibid. 545.

¹¹ Arthur A. Goldsmith, “Policy Dialogue, Conditionality, and Agricultural Development: Implications of India's Green Revolution.” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 22, no. 2 (1988): 185.

media outlets in garnering attention and support for recovery efforts, rather than the state's general population.¹² This thesis will expand on the conditions of crisis, examining how the Indian populace contributed to the development of the famine's crisis atmosphere as well as recovery efforts. And in recent years, literature and scholarship on famine recovery efforts have primarily studied the motivations for American intervention in India between 1964-1972, addressing grain imports, funding and loan distribution, and research initiatives during India's Green Revolution.¹³ In this context, attention is detracted from the circumstances and populace in India and establishes a historical narrative that emphasizes the value of Western interests in the resolution of India's domestic crises. There is no examination of the Green Revolution that analyzes the Bihar Famine exclusively through the perspective of the rural and working-class populations.

At large, due to the Green Revolution's widely regarded success, scholars have spent less time examining how the Indian public and ordinary Indian citizens may have played a role in spurring the Green Revolution and shaping the policy response of the Indian state to famine and agricultural crises. To this end, this thesis will, in turn, examine the agricultural sector and landscape of pre-Green Revolution India throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the origins and immediate effects of the Bihar Famine on the state of Bihar, and lastly, the influence of public response on famine relief measures.

Pre-Green Revolution India: Famine Relief Policy and the Agricultural Sector in Colonial and Post-Independence India

¹² Paul R. Brass, "The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966-1967." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986).

¹³ Adil Hasan Khan, "The 'Bihar Famine' and the Authorisation of the Green Revolution in India: Developmental Futures and Disaster Imaginaries." *International Law and the Cold War* (2019): 418.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the colonial British government was responsible for administering famine relief measures in face of droughts and crop failures. However, in responding to these crises, B.M. Bhatia argues that the British colonial government relied on the precedent of its own laws rather than local laws or practices.¹⁴ As a result, their policies often exacerbated ongoing social, political, and economic issues and inhibited the development of India's agricultural sector and larger infrastructure.

Throughout the 19th century, the British government relied on the principles of the 1834 British Poor Laws to remedy widespread unemployment and starvation in the wake of famines throughout its colonial territories and enterprises.¹⁵ The development of policies enacted and implemented in India, specifically, by the colonial government were not established based on the needs and condition of the larger Indian populace, but rather borrowed and adapted from the 1834 British Poor Laws – designed for the English populace – with the intention of giving “the greatest amount of needful help with the smallest encouragement to undue reliance on it.”¹⁶ In essence, during times of economic downturn, the proposition opened temporary labor opportunities for subsistence wages in order to remedy malnutrition and starvation.¹⁷ However, this did not take into account India's existing labor surplus and “ordinary” poverty, which was difficult to distinguish from “extraordinary” poverty induced by famines. Despite passing legislation designed to provide the Indian populace with as little subsidized support as possible, the temporary job openings created out of the necessity for famine relief attracted exponentially

¹⁴ B. M. Bhatia, “Famine and Agricultural Labour in India: A Historical Perspective.” *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* 10, no. 4 (1975): 583.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 584.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 584.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 585.

more interest than they could accommodate and could not be discontinued, creating a reliance on government aid.¹⁸

The failures of British famine relief policy showcase the importance of accounting for the relationships, conflicts, and demands of local populations and economies. During the Bihar Famine of 1873-1874, the colonial government attempted to reassert the principles of the Poor Laws with the intention of severing India's rural population's reliance on subsidized work. Instead of supporting the development of the agricultural sector and rural infrastructure by uplifting working-class populations, the proposed solution by the colonial government was to discourage impoverished farmers and laborers from participating in famine relief programs by moving labor sites well outside of residential areas, lowering wages, and exacting demands more taxing and intensive than an emaciated individual could perform.¹⁹

In addition, British administrators continued to ignore India's social and economic landscape by attempting to adopt a famine relief model similar to the measures utilized during the Irish Potato Famine between 1845-1852.²⁰ This strategy led to campaigns encouraging mass migration from famine-stricken territories to other farming districts, such as the Dharampur district and provinces in Burma.²¹ While this migration did not occur in droves, the limited mobilization that occurred still aggravated indigenous populations in rural India, which resulted in violent clashes between the East India Company and indigenous groups, notably the Santhal Rebellion that took place between June 1855 and January 1856.²²

¹⁸ Ibid. 585.

¹⁹ Ibid. 586.

²⁰ Christopher V. Hill, "Philosophy and Reality in Riparian South Asia: British Famine Policy and Migration in Colonial North India." *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (1991): 265.

²¹ Ibid. 272.

²² Ibid. 273.

By 1880, the British government began to reform the Famine Codes, gradually increasing the severity of the previously instituted ordinances. In addition to starvation wages and unreasonable work expectations, laborers could also be penalized and fined for failing to meet the new demands outlined by supervisors and officers.²³ Additionally, when developing relief projects and subsidized work programs, the needs of the rural populace and larger public were, once again, ignored. Instead of advancing public works and infrastructure in rural communities, daily tasks were often limited to digging earth and breaking stones along roadsides.²⁴ By the time of completion, the results were fruitless and inconsequential. A lack of far-sighted and comprehensive policymaking during the 19th and early 20th centuries stunted economic development due to temporary and uninformed approaches to relief. By Indian independence in 1947, the agricultural sector was still deindustrialized and ill-suited to support a rapidly growing population.

This pattern of developing famine policy without accounting for local needs continued even after independence. For example, cooperation with the United States brought greater aid to India, but relief programs also demonstrated similar problems to British policies. In 1952, the Indian and United States governments signed a bilateral treaty, bringing India under the Technical Cooperation Program (TCP), permitting the American government to involve themselves in ongoing agriculture research and education in India.²⁵ Measures in India were intended to build on research and innovation developed for a famine-stricken, post-World War II Europe. However, similar to the previous colonial government, American researchers and

²³ B. M. Bhatia, "Famine and Agricultural Labour in India: A Historical Perspective." *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* 10, no. 4 (1975): 587.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 588.

²⁵ Madhumita Saha, "The State, Scientists, and Staple Crops: Agricultural 'Modernization' in Pre-Green Revolution India." *Agricultural History* 87, no. 2 (2013): 206.

scientists did not account for the challenges posed by India's tropical atmosphere, which complicated the implementation of new seed varieties and fertilizers.²⁶

Additionally, research efforts were muddled by the political ambitions expressed by ruling parties. Under the premiership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian National Congress set their sights on improving urban industrial development, economic infrastructure and social programs, as well as institutions of higher education. This diverted the focus of ongoing agricultural research, ignoring the needs expressed by rural farmers, cultivators, and laborers. Instead, the development of the agricultural sector focused exclusively on improving basic commodities such as raw, organic farming materials, including seed varieties and fertilizers. This delayed the innovation and implementation of equally necessary technologies, including equipment for the tilling of land, irrigation systems, and widespread access to electricity.²⁷

Origins and Immediate Effects of the Bihar Famine

In 1965, food production rates were at their lowest levels since 1957 – a year that also experienced severe drought and famine.²⁸ Across regions in Northern India, farmers mourned the attrition of previously fertile and bountiful lands that gradually withered after a two-year absence of monsoon rains.

“‘We’ve never had it so bad. There was hardly any rain in the summer,’ a Haryanan farmer recounted on a cold January morning in 1966.”²⁹

“‘We have good land,’ another farmer added. ‘What we need is rain. A few drops will make an acre of desert worth 100,000 rupees. Without those drops it is not worth a *naya paisa* [one-hundredth of a rupee].’”³⁰

²⁶ Ibid. 2013.

²⁷ Ibid. 2013.

²⁸ Paul R. Brass, “The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966-1967.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 249.

²⁹ Kushwant Singh, “Says the Indian Villager, ‘We’ve Never Had It So Bad.’” *The New York Times* (January 23, 1966): 5.

³⁰ Ibid. 5.

After another summer of drought, the circumstances only worsened. Between July and October of 1966, most of the *kharif* (autumn) crops had failed again. Although extensive flooding had occurred throughout the winter months, the yields from the *rabi* (winter) crops were far below normal. Quickly, the food situation in Northeast India collapsed. In the state of Bihar, the total cereal grain production throughout the territory represented “barely one-third” of the Bihari population’s consumption requirements.³¹

The food shortages were exacerbated by the national government’s mistrust of provincial governments, which delayed the Government of India’s support and famine relief initiatives in Bihar. Despite the dire circumstances, the national government’s slow response derived from a history of state governments throughout India using famine declarations to “disguise a poor record of development planning, offer an escape from foodgrain procurement liabilities, and open the door to windfall federal funding.”³² As Bihar’s state government began expressing an acute need for national support, the Government of India immediately “distrusted and discounted reports coming from Bihar and treated them as being politically motivated.”³³ Consequently, politicians and representatives within the national government tried to minimize the scope of the droughts, ignoring pleas from the state government and the local populations.³⁴

In Gerald Seymour’s interview with Indira Gandhi aired on January 19, 1966, the special broadcast further illustrated the stark juxtaposition between the desperation in India and the

³¹ Jean Drèze, “Famine Prevention in India.” In *The Political Economy of Hunger: Volume 2: Famine Prevention*, (1991): 51.

³² William I. Torry, “Drought and the Government-Village Emergency Food Distribution System in India.” *Human Organization* 45, no. 1 (1986): 12.

³³ Paul R. Brass, “The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966-1967.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 249.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 243.

national government's approach to treating the landscape in Bihar and throughout Northeast India. After she was asked about the gravity of India's food shortages, Gandhi stated,

“I don't think it's a desperate situation, by any means. But it does need tremendous unity in the country and a very determined effort to solve these various problems. And of course, you know that the situation has been complicated by the great drought we had this year. That was one of the reasons for the food shortage... If it rains – it should rain now, in January. And if it rains, it does help a bit. Of course, we are getting food from outside and I think that might tide us over the really difficult period. I've never thought at any moment that the food situation was so difficult as to create great starvation... If we drift along, anything can happen. But if we are prepared to change our food habits and to have a really good distribution system, I think we can meet it.”³⁵

Although Gandhi's response acknowledged the ongoing food shortages, her depiction of the situation appeared to be part of the efforts made to minimize the necessity of individualized federal support to provincial territories. Aside from broad rationing and distribution measures, Gandhi provided no mention of crafting relief policies targeted toward hard-hit regions and states, including Bihar. Instead, her statement indicated that recovery from food shortages hinged on the hope for rainfall and continued food shipments from the United States.

But rains did not fall that winter. Figures from Bihar's local government estimated that, on average, a normal crop outturn in the state of Bihar yielded approximately 7.4 million tons of foodgrains.³⁶ However, between 1966-1967, the figure dropped to 3.6 million tons – less than half of a normal production year.³⁷ Over the course of the spring of 1967, the provincial government declared the existence of food scarcity and famine in district after district in Bihar; with a statewide population of approximately 34 million people, estimates project that 13.4 million people in Bihar resided in zones affected by famine.³⁸

³⁵ Gerald Seymour, “Indira Gandhi on Food Shortage, January 19, 1966, 0:35 to 1:46.

³⁶ Government of Bihar, *Bihar Famine Report 1966-1967*. Superintendent Secretariat Press (1973): 108.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 108-109.

³⁸ Paul R. Brass, “The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966-1967.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 246-247.

Mass starvation was an imminent threat, and an atmosphere saturated with crisis and desperation swept the province. Despite the urgency, a fragmented and gridlocked local state government prevented the development of comprehensive famine relief policy. As a result, the national Government of India expressed willingness to provide relief and support.³⁹

The Influence of the Indian Public on American Intervention

A key actor in India's recovery from the Bihar Famine was the United States, whose aid provided support for India's food distribution and agricultural research initiatives. Since India's independence, the United States was a longtime ally and supporter of India's development. Despite ongoing agricultural research efforts and reforms throughout the 1950s and 1960s, India's agricultural output and food production were relatively low, leading to a reliance on the United States for food aid. Accordingly, rice and grain were provided under Public Law 480 (PL 480) – known as the Food for Peace program. PL 480 was the necessary supplement for India's weak agricultural sector. However, this external support allowed the Government of India to neglect agricultural development and prioritize other areas of economic development.

India's initial development strategy was tolerated by the United States primarily because of the ongoing turbulence of global politics throughout the Eastern hemisphere. Considering the nation's sizeable peasant population, democratic principles, and shared border with the communist nation of China, India was classified as the "Cold War's most important economic battleground."⁴⁰ In the eyes of the United States, India was a vulnerable territory at an increasing risk of succumbing to the rapidly spreading ideology of communism and "the Indian peasants

³⁹ Ibid. 249.

⁴⁰ Adil Hasan Khan, "The 'Bihar Famine' and the Authorisation of the Green Revolution in India: Developmental Futures and Disaster Imaginaries." *International Law and the Cold War* (2019): 418.

[were] particularly susceptible to the threat of a ‘red revolution.’”⁴¹ This perceived fragility in conjunction with an underdeveloped and deindustrialized agricultural sector made India the greatest recipient of American economic aid in the world by the early 1960s.⁴²

In June of 1965, however, the Indo-American treaty forged under PL 480 had expired and the Lyndon B. Johnson administration had opted not to renew or negotiate another agreement. Although the Johnson administration maintained that the American withdrawal of aid to India would create an environment with stressors conducive to advancing domestic policymaking toward “self-help” and self-sufficiency,⁴³ some argue that the United States’ decision was also partly motivated by India’s criticism of American activity during the Vietnam War.⁴⁴ Regardless, all food aid from the United States was discontinued for two months, compounding the severity of India’s food situation after the summer’s devastating drought. Famine was imminent, and the Government of India approached the United States again to request 7 million tons of grain in preparation for the impending emergency.⁴⁵ While a new agreement under PL 480 was not negotiated, the Johnson administration insisted on providing food aid through a “short tether” policy.⁴⁶ In other words, aid was to be provided on a short-term basis.

As Johnson’s new policy encouraged the Government of India and the Planning Commission to begin drafting and instituting measures to support the industrialization of India’s agricultural sector, food shortages across Northeast India incited social and political unrest.⁴⁷ As

⁴¹ Ibid. 430-431.

⁴² Ibid. 418.

⁴³ Arthur A. Goldsmith, “Policy Dialogue, Conditionality, and Agricultural Development: Implications of India’s Green Revolution.” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 22, no. 2 (1988): 183.

⁴⁴ Paul F. Power, “India and Vietnam.” *Asian Survey* 7, no. 10 (1967): 748.

⁴⁵ Arthur A. Goldsmith, “Policy Dialogue, Conditionality, and Agricultural Development: Implications of India’s Green Revolution.” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 22, no. 2 (1988): 183.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 183.

⁴⁷ Madhumita Saha, “The State, Scientists, and Staple Crops: Agricultural ‘Modernization’ in Pre–Green Revolution India.” *Agricultural History* 87, no. 2 (2013): 220.

American agencies began scoping and analyzing activity in India, they were concerned by their findings:

“A survey of India by a team from the American food industry has found a danger of further violence and of a political upheaval arising from frustrated hopes, hunger and pre-election agitation... The report on conditions in India, now making the rounds of Government departments, acknowledged that ‘most Indians we talked to did not believe that the Indian consumer would react violently.’ But it added: ‘However, it is our combined opinion that danger exists in this area and... India is now conditioned to change.’”⁴⁸

Coinciding with the increasing agitation was the political fragmentation of state legislatures in Northeast India as left-wing political parties and groups diverged and broke off from the ruling Indian National Congress. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the Jan Kranti Dal Party arose as a further-left offshoot of the Indian National Congress⁴⁹ and quickly gained traction alongside smaller socialist and communist alliances.⁵⁰ While the gains were not particularly significant, communist parties and organizations slowly built credibility as well. During elections in Bihar between 1962-1967, “the two communist parties together improved their position – seat-wise from 4 per cent to 9 per cent and vote-wise from 6 per cent to 8 per cent.”⁵¹

In addition to the ongoing Jharkhand separatist movement in Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal,⁵² the social unrest in the wake of food shortages indicated a dangerous trajectory, concerning to the Indian National Congress and the United States government as India’s parliamentary elections were just within reach. Despite negotiating new terms for fewer supplies and less aid from the United States, India still remained a critical economic battleground on the

⁴⁸ Felix Belair Jr., “Danger of Upheaval in India Discerned by U.S. Food Team.” *The New York Times* (April 1, 1966): 1.

⁴⁹ Mohit Sen, “A Swing to the Left.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 2, no. 10 (1967): 519–20.

⁵⁰ Navneeth, “Congress Debacle in Bihar: Voting Pattern in 1967.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 34 (1968): 1312.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 1312.

⁵² Arunabha Ghosh, “Jharkhand Movement in West Bengal.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 3/4 (1993): 123.

Asian continent. Even with the assistance and relief provided by the United States and other Western allies during the years of drought, crop failure, and famine, the agitation expressed by the Indian public indicated an acute desire for social, political, and economic stability – desires that were accounted for by emerging left-wing political groups and campaigns.

Though overlooked, amid these international and local circumstances, the peasant and rural population of India expressed their views through protest and political action. If rural agitation was left unaddressed, the fears of the Western Bloc in the midst of the global Cold War would likely be realized quickly. As scarcity and famine continued overtaking the Indian subcontinent, the unrest continued to heighten, permitting the opportunity for the fierce “political upheaval” noted in the circulating conditions report. In turn, this upheaval would open an avenue for the domination of left-wing political parties and insurgent groups that would be capable of toppling India’s democratic government, as seen in the growing popularity of the Communist Party of India and the Maoist Naxalite movement. While India’s economic development and weak infrastructure were the rationale for elevated support and aid, the morale and sentiments of the Indian public were a marker of India’s true vulnerability.

Despite the conditions of unrest in India, the United States still expressed hesitation to act on the turmoil throughout India. In order to co-opt American aid and support, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi capitalized on Cold War-era concerns and anxieties and used them as leverage in talks and negotiations with the United States. In a speech delivered in Washington D.C. during a dinner hosted by President Lyndon B. Johnson on March 28, 1966 (just days before the distribution of India’s condition report), Gandhi addressed the ongoing turbulence caused by “food barely sufficient to keep one from hunger; shelter to keep out the wind and the rain; [and] medicine and education by which to restore the faith and the hope of nearly 500 million

people.”⁵³ Invoking the needs of the Indian people as well as the fundamental conditions that cultivated the emergence of communist ideologies and strongholds, Gandhi appealed to the importance and integrity of democracy as well as the foundational pillars of Western political thought and practices:

“Every one knows that different parties have their points of view; that these points of view are put before the people to judge; and that the people judge, not always rightly but at least they try to judge rightly. Certainly, from election to election, they have shown a great maturity.”⁵⁴

Her remarks demonstrated a commitment and dedication to protecting American interests in India, supporting the institution of democracy and free expression. In doing so, however, she acknowledged that failure to fulfill the basic necessities – in this case, food security – stoked the flames for the infiltration and abuse of the democratic system. The essence of her argument was underscored by the correlation between public satisfaction and democratic stability:

“India’s problems today are her own, but they are also the world’s problems. India, if it is stable, united and democratic, can serve a great purpose. If India is not stable, if India fails, it would be a failure of the whole democratic system. It would be a failure of many of the values which you [President Johnson] and I hold dear.”⁵⁵

Compelled by public demands, the ongoing turbulence, and the opportunity to impress and cement Western political values in India, the United States embraced India’s war on hunger. In a message to Congress published on February 3, 1967, Lyndon B. Johnson urged that food, aid, and support be directed at India:

“From our own experience, and that of other countries, we know that something can be done... We know, too, that failure to act – and to act now – will multiply the human suffering and political unrest, not only in our generation but in that of our children and their children... The great lesson of our time is the interdependence of man. My predecessors and I have recognized this fact. All that we and other nations have sought to

⁵³ Indira Gandhi, “India and U.S.A. (White House)” *The Years of Challenge: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi (1966-1969)*, (March 28, 1966): 459.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 461.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 462.

accomplish in behalf of world peace and economic growth would be for naught if the advanced countries failed to help feed the hungry in their day of need.”⁵⁶

By March 1967, Congress approved Johnson’s requests for deploying additional food and aid to India.⁵⁷ As American support and collaboration with the Government of India and the Planning Commission continued, “plentiful rains [soaked] the parched fields of the states of Bihar and Uttar [Pradesh and ended] a two-year drought” by July of 1967.⁵⁸ In addition to reaping its best harvest in Indian history since 1967⁵⁹, food shipments from the United States were negotiated to continue until 1971, while India also received the support of the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and USAID in agricultural research and development.

While aid from the United States reflected considerations relating to the international climate of the Cold War, it more importantly amounted to a direct response to immediate, local conditions in India itself: the urgency expressed by the Indian public as indicated by Gandhi and recognized by Johnson. And unlike the conditions of the Technical Cooperation Program in 1952, the United States was adamant about the importance of India’s “self-sufficiency” and autonomy.⁶⁰ The contingency of American aid provided a compelling pressure for the Indian government, but the conditions of the “short-tether” policy permitted India’s national and local governments to tailor relief strategies, programs, and solutions specific to the needs and demands of India’s agricultural workers and the larger rural segments of India’s population without the significant interference of outside actors and influences.

⁵⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Urging Action on Food Help for India.” *The New York Times* (February 2, 1967): 12.

⁵⁷ “Food for India.” *The New York Times* (March 22, 1967): 46.

⁵⁸ “Rains Break Two-Year Drought in Northern India.” *The New York Times* (July 18, 1967): 11.

⁵⁹ Arthur A. Goldsmith, “Policy Dialogue, Conditionality, and Agricultural Development: Implications of India’s Green Revolution.” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 22, no. 2 (1988): 185.

⁶⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Urging Action on Food Help for India.” *The New York Times* (February 2, 1967): 12.

Addressing Food Security and Malnutrition in Bihar

Once American aid was secured, the Government of India had to temper a public health crisis ushered in by malnutrition and starvation. After the devastating drop in food production, the Government of India relied primarily on the grain, rice, and cereal shipments from the United States and other allies during the early months of the Bihar Famine. It was reported that, in 1966, India imported “more than 10 million tons of grain to meet the needs of 150,000,000 people in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.”⁶¹ But to remedy the hunger and starvation of an exponentially growing population, rationing programs were instituted by the Government of India and enforced by local governments throughout the country.

Rationing and distribution efforts were hasty, exacerbating stress and restlessness throughout the country. In January 1966, students throughout the state of Kerala “boycotted classes and paraded the streets demanding increased rice rations”⁶² to voice their dissatisfaction, but the boycotts quickly spiraled into looting and riots, which were met by police forces and tear gas shells.⁶³ Bureaucrats and government officials also expressed dissent and protest of rationing. Out of Maharashtra, an officer from the state’s Food and Civil Supplies Department wrote a pointed letter published in May 1967 that voiced his frustrations surrounding food distribution policies trickling down from the national level:

“In these statutory rationing areas the cereal availability is 10.44 ounces per head per day, as against 15 ounces per day, considered the optimum requirement for a healthy diet, and as against 13-14 ounces per day which is the current average for the country as a whole... the supply of cereals to the vulnerable sections of the population through the fair price shop is limited to 8 kg per month, equivalent to 9.28 ounces per day. In the circumstances, any further cuts in the statutory rations and the rations elsewhere may seriously jeopardise public health... Maharashtra is ever ready for any sacrifices in the national interests; but it pleads that there should be some equality of sacrifice as between the surplus and deficit States, and that the impact of help required for relief of distress

⁶¹ Kasturi Rangan, “India Has Avoided Famine.” *The New York Times* (December 17, 1972): 8.

⁶² “Kerala Students on Rampage.” *The Indian Express* (February 1, 1966): 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 1.

should not fall wholly, or in the main, on those States which have submitted themselves to rigorous discipline and which are already bearing much more than their legitimate share of the national food deficit.”⁶⁴

The same scarcity and desperation plagued Bihar. In the province, “22.26 lakh tonnes [approximately 5 billion pounds] of foodgrains were supplied by the Central Government... between October 1966 and November 1967,”⁶⁵ which did not meet the 50 lakh tons deficiency outlined and requested by Bihar’s state government.⁶⁶ While some of the demand was remedied by the surpluses held by private food manufacturers and organizations⁶⁷, the distribution efforts were still disorganized. Shipments to Bihar were rushed, and consignments brought from train stations to distribution centers were carted on open wagons, leaving bags of grain susceptible to theft.⁶⁸ When shipments were low due to delays and theft, individual rations were cut by upwards of 10%.⁶⁹ In addition, the lapses and shortcomings in distribution efforts rippled beyond hunger and food scarcity. Distribution sites occupied city centers as well as school facilities, which halted primary education and instruction in rural territories, adding another unforeseen burden to the local education system.⁷⁰

However, in the moderately and severely affected regions of Bihar, the local and national governments provided cultivators and laborers with an average of five to seven kilograms of grain every month between October 1966 and November 1967.⁷¹ This resulted in just under 400 grams of cereal grain per day, amounting to an average daily intake of approximately 1,510

⁶⁴ V.A. Kulkarni, “Maharashtra and the Bihar Famine.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 2, no. 18 (1967): 827.

⁶⁵ Government of Bihar, *Bihar Famine Report 1966-1967*. Superintendent Secretariat Press (1973): 150.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 150.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 150.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 151.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 155.

⁷⁰ Alan Berg, “Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience.” *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 125.

⁷¹ Government of Bihar, *Bihar Famine Report 1966-1967*. Superintendent Secretariat Press (1973): 155.

calories.⁷² Although the daily intake provided enough calories to theoretically keep starvation at bay, hundreds of people throughout the province were still dying.⁷³

As American aid sent USAID representatives to Bihar to begin developing specific strategies for famine relief, nutritionists concluded that starvation was not the leading cause of death, but rather, malnutrition. In his observations of Bihar's landscape during the famine, nutritionist and USAID representative, Alan Berg, wrote: "The real, more permanent, insidious and dangerous problem is that of malnutrition which is no more than an aspect of poverty. There are many protein-deficient, pot-bellied but otherwise pinched children in Bihar as elsewhere in India."⁷⁴

This discovery changed the trajectory of famine relief measures and ongoing research – not just in Bihar, but throughout the Indian subcontinent. Examining the conditions and demands of rural cultivators and laborers demonstrated to both the Government of India as well as international allies that simply providing rice and grains would not be enough to address the issues incited by drought and famine. At large, the ongoing droughts, crop failures, and the subsequent Bihar Famine were all responsible for cultivating a dire public health crisis, not only ushering in mass starvation but a crisis in nutritional deficiency. Rural demand, in turn, challenged local governments and the Government of India to develop a nuanced strategy that not only addressed food accessibility, but also encouraged the development of accessible and affordable food supplements that alleviated starvation and amended the lapses in unbalanced diets.

⁷² Jean Drèze, "Famine Prevention in India." In *The Political Economy of Hunger: Volume 2: Famine Prevention*, (1991): 55a.

⁷³ Alan Berg, "Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience." *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 117.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 118.

Prior to concerted research efforts dedicated to developing nutritionally rich food, the initial efforts to improve overall public health began with the championship of a “mixed diet.”⁷⁵ The efforts were dictated by surveys and studies of the average Indian diet, which showcased an affinity for rice – a carbohydrate lacking in substantive nutritional value.⁷⁶ Nutritional staff in local health departments made valiant attempts to begin “converting” the diets of residents in rural territories.⁷⁷ Diverting peasants and working-class people from the predominant consumption of rice, the departments launched initiatives that encouraged people to opt for alternative carbohydrates with a higher nutritional content, such as whole wheat, maize, millets, and sweet potatoes.⁷⁸ The larger state of public health expanded the mission and responsibilities of health departments, transforming the issue of food distribution into an endeavor to diversify and enrich the population’s diet.

Gradually, the issue expanded into a priority at the national level. In her inaugural address to the National Food Congress on May 11, 1970, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi spoke about how the ongoing campaigns intended not only to improve the accessibility of food, but also its nutritional content as well.

“[The] problem, first of all, is to reach food to our people. Secondly, to see that it is sufficiently nourishing them for them to live a worthwhile and useful life in the service of their region and their people... The question of nourishment is most important not only for those who are under-nourished, because they cannot afford anything else, but also important for those who are under-nourished in spite of spending too much on nourishment.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ “Changing Food Habits an Uphill Task.” *The Indian Express*. February 1, 1966.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Indira Gandhi, “Food For Millions.” *The Years of Endeavor: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi (1969-1972)*, (May 11, 1970): 343.

Gandhi's display of support was translated into the Government of India's Fourth Five-Year Plan (published in 1969). While previous Five-Year Plans focused on development and industrialization in major urban centers,⁸⁰ the Fourth Five-Year Plan made concerted efforts to direct attention and resources primarily toward rural planning⁸¹ and "urban-rural integration."⁸² On the Fourth Five-Year Plan, Gandhi acknowledged that "the very constraint of resources which we faced during the period intervening between the Third Plan and the new Fourth Plan has sharpened our sense of priorities and has facilitated the concentration of our energies and resources on vital programmes."⁸³

In turn, the Government of India used the Fourth Five-Year Plan to establish twenty research centers throughout the country designed to provide targeted strategy and support to provincial local governments.⁸⁴ This resulted in the collection and aggregation of socioeconomic data from rural villages and communities, which intended to identify gaps and deficiencies in rural infrastructure.⁸⁵

From this data, officials recognized the severity of widespread malnutrition in rural villages and communities and made enriched foods a national priority.⁸⁶ This recognition was brought to the Planning Commission and Gandhi's attention, and it culminated in federal efforts that resulted in the development of an entirely new chapter in India's Fourth Five-Year Plan dedicated exclusively to initiatives revolving around nutrition. These initiatives aimed to remedy

⁸⁰ Malcolm S. Adiseshiah, "Of Plans, Planning and Beyond." *India International Centre Quarterly* 38, no. 3/4 (2011): 52.

⁸¹ Bhaskara V. Rao, "Planning and Centre-State Relations in India." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (1986): 218.

⁸² S. M. Shah, "Growth Centers as a Strategy for Rural Development: India Experience." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 22, no. 2 (1974): 215.

⁸³ Indira Gandhi, "The Fourth Plan." *The Years of Challenge: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi (1966-1969)*, (April 19, 1969): 115.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 215.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 216.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 215.

the repercussions of the famine on public health and address the public's urgent need for nutritionally rich sources of food. The strategies went well beyond simply advocating for the adoption of a "mixed diet." Instead, the principles of the Fourth Five-Year Plan spurred nationwide efforts to reform the larger public's approach to food consumption, cultivating an entirely new line of foods and supplements enriched with necessary minerals, vitamins, and proteins as well as initiatives dedicated to education of a balanced diet. At large, the Fourth Five-Year Plan made the experiences and realities of the rural population a priority when compared to previous government programs, which focused solely on economic development. By accounting for diet and food consumption, the Fourth Five-Year plan demonstrated that the Indian government was paying close attention to the needs of the peasant population and taking the experiences of the Bihar Famine into account when developing national policy.

Although the Fourth Five-Year Plan was not published until 1969, the push toward nutritional reform (outlined in Chapter 10 of the Plan) began in 1966 after the Government of India proposed "to take over the privately run plant in Coimbatore – the first of its kind in the country – producing a cheap 'multi-purpose' food evolved by the Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore."⁸⁷ This decision laid the groundwork for Sections 10.14⁸⁸ and 10.15⁸⁹, providing support to expand research and production efforts of nutritional supplements nationwide, especially after the success of protein supplements developed with peanuts and Bengali lentils in the Coimbatore factory.⁹⁰ From this expansion came Bal Ahar, an enriched

⁸⁷ "Changing Food Habits an Uphill Task." *The Indian Express*. February 1, 1966.

⁸⁸ Fourth Five-Year Plan, Chapter 10, Section 14: "...a practical alternative for the time being would be to concentrate on producing unconventional sources of protein for supplementing the diet of those most in need of it such as children of pre-school and school-going age."

⁸⁹ Fourth Five-Year Plan, Chapter 10, Section 15: "Research is in progress on the production of unconventional protein foods and there is further scope for it. Some funds have been allocated for research and pilot experiments. These include a pilot plant for protein isolate and protein isolated toned milk."

⁹⁰ "Changing Food Habits an Uphill Task." *The Indian Express*. February 1, 1966.

protein supplement. While Bal Ahar was comparable to cereal grains in caloric value (400 grams of Bal Ahar is approximately 1,440 calories⁹¹), a single 100-gram serving provided just over 22% of the recommended daily protein intake.⁹² Not only was Bal Ahar incredibly cheap to produce, but its success was astronomical and by the end of 1971, factories had produced and distributed over 100 million pounds throughout India.⁹³

In Bihar, protein and nutritional supplements similar to Bal Ahar targeted the diet as a whole rather than merely providing relief aid. Thus, enriched foods and supplements helped to shift the population out of the worst stages of the famine. Instead of a diet reliant on rice and grain shipments, public health and morale had stirred national efforts to develop strategies to improve the accessibility and quality of food. Particularly, it was the adverse impact on the health and wellness of children that “led to the interest, and, in some cases, emotional commitment, of a number of senior government officials.”⁹⁴ Paying attention to overlooked populations such as rural communities and vulnerable demographics, such as children, became a new focus of the policy response to famine. As nutrition campaigns were well underway, reports indicated that “the main movement along the side of the roads [in Bihar were] of children carrying brass plates to the nearest school where they [were] fed powdered milk and a gruel made of American wheat and milo-grain sorghum.”⁹⁵

By 1972, nutrition had noticeably improved in Bihar. Final evaluations of the Famine “[noted] serious deficiencies, [but] also pointed to the surprisingly good nutrition levels,

⁹¹ “Balahar.” *Council of Scientific & Industrial Research, Ministry of Science & Technology*, Government of India.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Alan Berg, “Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience.” *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 123.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 123.

⁹⁵ Joseph Lelyveld, “Bihar Escaping Famine Disaster: Relief Work Brings Indian State Through Drought.” *The New York Times* (June 7, 1967): 9.

resulting undoubtedly from the relief programs.”⁹⁶ Local volunteers also “recognized a resiliency among the Indian peasants which defied all medical calculation.”⁹⁷ These strategies and reforms supported rural populations suffering acutely from the repercussions of the famine, particularly in Bihar. On a national scope, however, the research and reforms surrounding food security and distribution provided the necessary urgency that encouraged the Indian government to begin taking sweeping action in-line with the ideals of the Green Revolution. Remedying public anxieties and restlessness through innovative food research and reforms worked in conjunction with the intentions behind the industrialization of the agricultural sector, bringing India another step closer towards self-sufficiency and economic independence.

Rural Solidarity and Land Tenure Reform

Historically in Northeast India, rural solidarity and assembly has been a critical strategy for social and economic reform. The primary source of revenue for territories such as Bihar is agricultural labor and the exportation of crops, making land ownership an important economic commodity. In 1793, the British colonial government enacted the Permanent Settlement Act, which was responsible for withholding land from tillers, farmers, and laborers by establishing the zamindari system in Bihar, West Bengal, and North Madras.⁹⁸ The largely unpopular and exploitative semi-feudal land tenancy system allowed zamindars to own large tracts of land and reserve the right to collect taxes and rent from peasants, who were reduced to the designation of

⁹⁶ Alan Berg, “Famine Contained: Notes and Lessons from the Bihar Experience.” *The Brookings Institution* (1971): 127.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 127.

⁹⁸ Jaismin Kantha, “The Flaming Fields of South Bihar: The Eco-Cultural Roots of Rural Unrest.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 71 (2010): 1264.

mere tenants despite being the primary cultivators of the land.⁹⁹ Even after Indian independence in 1947, the system was still intact and continued agitating and exploiting rural populations.

To the post-independence populace and politicians alike, abolishing the system seemed like a promising step toward progress, allowing India to leave the colonial legacy behind and enact its own reforms that empowered local populations by returning the ownership of land to the cultivators. Bihar, specifically, had begun its efforts at land tenancy reform in 1947 after the introduction of the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Bill, which was designed to abolish the zamindari system throughout the province.¹⁰⁰ The bill was challenged and reformed three times before the 1950 Bihar Land Reform Act was passed under the governance of K. B. Sahay.¹⁰¹

Consequently, land possessed by zamindars was ceded to the state government with the intention of preventing the exploitation of *raiyyats*, or peasant rent-payers. However, zamindari resistance to the implementation of the new land tenure system delayed the transfer of tenant records to the state government, undermining the collection of rent and tax payments.¹⁰²

Although a series of amendments and reforms were proposed and approved throughout the 1950s, such policies were not comprehensive enough to address the widespread unemployment caused by lapses in the bill throughout the state of Bihar.¹⁰³ Mass-evictions were an issue as well, and although undue evictions were supposed to be subjected to investigation and subsidy, “such provisions [were] ineffective in preventing forcible evictions.”¹⁰⁴

In the midst of failed land reforms and widespread rural unrest, the Indian philosopher and spiritual leader, Vinobha Bhave, inspired the Bhoodan – or the “land gift” – movement in

⁹⁹ Ibid. 1265.

¹⁰⁰ Tomasson F. Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*. University of Texas Press (1974): 12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 10.

¹⁰² Ibid. 20-26.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 48-49.

¹⁰⁴ Government of India, *Causes & Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Research and Policy Division (1969): 21.

1951,¹⁰⁵ a campaign he deemed to be the solution to India's landlessness problem. Energized by the success of the "communist-dominated" nonviolent land redistribution revolution in Telangana on April 18, 1951,¹⁰⁶ Bhave argued:

"Since there are 300 million acres of cultivated land in India and an average family has five members, I felt that every family could give away one-sixth of its land-holding, accepting the poor landless man as the sixth member of his family. This is a way of bringing about a peaceful revolution in the country."¹⁰⁷

With the support of the Indian independence activist and prominent Bihari political leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, Bhave brought Bhoodan to Bihar. The movement was Bihar's first demonstration of rural solidarity since independence as the population surged with renewed intensity and enthusiasm to invoke drastic land reform. Between 1952 to 1954, Bhave and Narayan organized in Bihar together, intending to accumulate 3.2 million acres of land to distribute to the landless throughout Bihar.¹⁰⁸ But by August 1954, only 2.1 million acres of land had been accumulated.¹⁰⁹ By June of 1956, the acreage had barely increased and Vinobha Bhave left Bihar to spread his message elsewhere.¹¹⁰

Despite a fiery and impressive mobilization of grassroots support, Bhoodan did not go far in Bihar. Of the 2.1 million acres pledged by 1956, only 311,000 acres were actually distributed to the landless by 1966.¹¹¹ Rural conditions in Bihar regressed into the same strict power dynamics of the colonial era, and the average peasant's livelihood was still reliant on the whims of his superior.

¹⁰⁵ Alakh N. Sharma, "Agrarian Relations and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar." *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 10 (2005): 964.

¹⁰⁶ Tomasson F. Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*. University of Texas Press (1974): 93-94.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 97-98.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 99.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 99.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 99.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 100.

A decade after Vinobha Bhave left Bihar, the Bihar Famine generated another wave of rural unrest in 1966. By 1967, the mass mobilization of peasants and statewide rural solidarity were evident in the results of the widely anticipated 1967 parliamentary elections. A newspaper article from March 1967 reported the effects of these developments on the political make-up of the state government:

“Bihar is the second state in which the Opposition to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s governing Congress party has formed a government since the elections of Feb. 15-21... The Bihar government, which was sworn in this morning in the state capital of Patna, is headed by Mahamaya Prasad Sinha, chairman of the Jan Kranti Dal, a party that split off from the Congress in Bihar last year.”¹¹²

In a demonstration of political upheaval, the rising left-wing parties and organizations had demonstrated the reach of their influence on the rural segments of Bihar, as well as the power of the rural populace. Although the Indian National Congress dominated in the 1962 Parliamentary elections – winning 185 of the 318 seats in Bihar’s state assembly as well as the election of the Chief Minister¹¹³ – the hold of the Indian National Congress had slipped substantially by 1967 toward the opposition. In the 1967 elections, the Indian National Congress had lost almost 60 seats in the state assembly and the position of the Chief Minister.¹¹⁴

Additionally, the upset victory of the Jan Kranti Dal Party in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh showcased that the most pressing issue on the minds of rural laborers and cultivators was the question of social and economic stability. As starvation swept the state and the livelihoods of peasant and working-class populations in Bihar were threatened by drought, land was more valuable than ever before; the legacy of the reforms made under the governance of the Indian National Congress leader, K. B. Sahay – granted, with bold and progressive intent – had only

¹¹² J. Anthony Lukas, “Indian Opposition Takes Over Bihar.” *The New York Times* (March 6, 1967): 16.

¹¹³ Navneeth, “Congress Debacle in Bihar: Voting Pattern in 1967.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 34 (1968): 1312.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 1312.

exacerbated existing troubles. The concern of rural laborers and communities returned to the same cause that mobilized them a decade before, and left-wing organizations like the Jan Kranti Dal Party cultivated that restlessness into sweeping campaigns and election victories. While the state government still had possession of zamindari lands, the election results in Bihar were a declaration that rural populations expected to see the territories finally return to them.

The aftermath of the elections in Bihar only furthered the populace's existing excitement and enthusiasm and encouraged rural laborers to weaponize their momentum in order to institute increasingly progressive reforms that would allow them to bypass the formal legislating process – alarming both the Gandhi administration as well as international allies, including the United States. Capitalizing on their power, bands of peasants began traversing rural districts and attempted to seize government-held territories for their own cultivation.¹¹⁵ In his own observations of the mobilizing revolutionaries, the American economist Tomasson F. Jannuzi wrote:

“Where once the physical, social, and economic structure in those villages had been accepted as datum by the people, there was by 1968 a new capacity for even the lowest in the traditional hierarchy, the landless laborers, to articulate the need for change and to become agents for change. Deepening frustration regarding their status and economic vulnerability was evident. The inarticulate were becoming articulate.”¹¹⁶

The social and political unrest in Bihar from the culmination of the 1967 election results and the land seizure movements proved to be a major cause for concern to the local government and the national government as encroachment attempts expanded throughout India and were both repeated and persistent; movements that encouraged the forcible occupation of land also took root in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mysore,

¹¹⁵ Government of India, *Causes & Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Research and Policy Division (1969): 7.

¹¹⁶ Tomasson F. Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*. University of Texas Press (1974): 133.

Manipur, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.¹¹⁷ In its own reports of agrarian unrest, the Government of India noted that land seizure campaigns were also encouraged and supported by “extremists” within left-wing political parties and organizations that were “committed to a policy of ‘liberation’ struggle in the rural areas,”¹¹⁸ furthering fears of left-wing takeovers expressed by the United States.

Grassroots mobilization and rural solidarity forced land tenure to remain at the forefront of Green Revolution-era reforms. In an address to the Lok Sabha on December 2, 1971, Indira Gandhi’s recognition of rural assembly and protest underscored the power of peasant solidarity and showcased the significance of the issue on a national stage.

“The House is aware that there is a great deal of feeling in the country against inherited special status, against privileges unrelated to function or responsibility, [and] against exemptions and facilities enjoyed without adequate reason. We have adopted a series of measures to remove such vested interests. Absentee landlords have been eliminated. The economic power of the merchant princes is being checked... A leveling process is at work in our society, a process which is abolishing divisions and class distinctions”¹¹⁹

On a national level, the response to demands for land tenure reform were pointedly addressed in the Fourth Five-Year Plan. In order to support rural planning, development, and integration that paved an avenue to outline and institute Green Revolution-era reforms, the rural uproar needed to be quelled. Consequently, resolutions to land ownership and tenure disputes were made a national priority through a dedicated chapter within the Fourth Five-Year Plan.

The statutes of the chapter spoke to the concerns of mobilizing groups, addressing the key issues surrounding ownership, tenancy, and distribution. Addressing ongoing evictions in the

¹¹⁷ Government of India, *Causes & Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Research and Policy Division (1969). 4.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 4-5.

¹¹⁹ Indira Gandhi, “Abolishing Feudal Privileges.” *The Years of Endeavor: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi (1969-1972)* (December 2, 1971): 153.

aftermath of the 1950 Bihar Land Reforms Acts, Section 21.7¹²⁰ and Section 21.16¹²¹ of the Fourth Five-Year Plan provided the framework for state legislatures and governments to begin tailoring responses specific to their territory and populace. In addition, Section 21.9¹²² also supported the redistribution of land to local populations, offering validation and endorsement of another major concern of grassroots organizers. The direction from the national government encouraged Bihar's state government to begin deliberating and enacting land tenure reform policies specific to the demands of the local population.

In turn, this amounted to several proposals presented by elected members of the state legislature that attempted to temper the unrest with moderate reforms.¹²³ These measures, however, were met with the 1970 Land-Grab Movement, a concerted effort supported by the Praja Socialists, the Samyukta Socialists, and the Communist Party of India that intended to mobilize the peasant population and forcibly seize government lands.¹²⁴ The Land-Grab Movement was built on the principles of the Quit India movement of 1942, and the land seizure campaigns were projected to launch on August 9, 1970. The Praja Socialists, the Samyukta Socialists, and the Communist Party of India were regarded as the representatives of the Land

¹²⁰ Fourth Five-Year Plan, Chapter 21, Section 7: "The first step necessary for raising the economic condition of the tribal population is protection from exploitation. This has to be supported by legislative and executive measures. It is also necessary to ensure that the protection to tribes in the matter of eviction and land alienation, scaling down the debts, regulating money lending and controlling the rates of interest, is properly enforced at the field level. The present weaknesses in the administrative machinery and loopholes in legislation need to be remedied."

¹²¹ Fourth Five-Year Plan, Chapter 21, Section 16: "Each State should review its legislative and executive measures for providing house-sites to members of the Scheduled Castes and other weaker sections and conferring proprietary rights on homestead land already occupied by them. Remedial steps may be undertaken to bring about effective enforcement of the measures at the field level and for the removal of loopholes. Those members of the Scheduled Castes who are landless should at least be provided with house sites, if resources do not permit the grant of housing aid to them for construction of houses."

¹²² Fourth Five-Year Plan, Chapter 21, Section 9: "Schemes of economic uplift such as land allotment, grant of subsidies for purchase of ploughs, bullocks and improved seeds for development of agriculture and animal husbandry, schemes for soil conservation, land colonisation, minor irrigation, and organisation and development of cooperatives will be continued."

¹²³ Including The Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1970; The Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Bill, 1970; The Bihar Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, 1970; The Bihar Land Encroachment (Amendment) Ordinance, 1970; and The Bihar Consolidation of Holding and Prevention of Fragmentation (Amendment) Bill, 1970.

¹²⁴ Tomasson F. Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*. University of Texas Press (1974): 148.

Grab movement, although there was speculation “about the capacity of any of the leftist parties to mobilize the peasantry in a movement having meaningful scale.”¹²⁵ Nonetheless, each group developed organizing strategies that encouraged rural populations to occupy territories across the state. The Communist Party of India, for example, advocated for mass-mobilization of communities across the state of Bihar which, supposedly, resulted in the occupation of “two thousand acres over the state as a whole.”¹²⁶ Meanwhile, the Praja Socialists resolved to liberate lands overseen by Indian National Congress cabinet members through focused support of Harijan families; these efforts, in turn, were claimed to have released “one hundred acres of government fallow land in [the] Gaya District and to have initiated the movement in Darbhanga, Monghyr, Gaya, and [the] Ranchi districts of the state.”¹²⁷ The protests and demonstrations organized by members of the Samyukta Socialists culminated in “thirty [party] workers [being] arrested while engaged in land-grab activities in Palamau, Muzaffarpur, and [the] Gaya districts.”¹²⁸

Fears of these demonstrations escalating in size and severity resulted in the Bihar state government’s attempts to negotiate settlements with left-wing and rural organizers, although the efforts to contact leading members and demonstrators directly were not met with a response.¹²⁹ The implications of the silence stoked more fear within Bihar’s state legislature, prioritizing and accelerating efforts to implement the proposed land tenure reforms.¹³⁰ Within a shortened timeframe of three months, four measures were implemented by the end of the summer of 1971 that were included within the reform package presented by the newly-elected Bihar government: “(a) to enforce [land ownership] ceilings, (b) to distribute surplus lands among the landless, (c)

¹²⁵ Ibid. 154.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 154.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 154.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 154.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 153.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 148-149.

to issue ‘parchas’¹³¹ to the landless to assure their right to hold the land of which their huts or homesteads stood, and (d) to prevent the illegal eviction of sharecroppers from the lands they tilled.’¹³²

While the implementation of these reforms was far from seamless, the urgency shown by local and national officials in their deliberations demonstrated the importance of rural organizers and peasant uprisings in the development of policy that remedied the adverse effects of the colonial government as well as the Bihar Famine. Consequently, developing strategy and policies to address the demands of the rural populace showed a commitment on both the provincial and national level to upholding democratic principles – satisfying American intervention and support – while informing Green Revolution-era reform that supported the industrialization of the agricultural industry and India’s endeavors toward economic independence and self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

By 1972, grain shipments from the United States were halted due to the success of the Green Revolution in the provinces of Northwest India, including Punjab, Haryana, and Himanchal Pradesh. Additionally, the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 drove a wedge between Indo-American relations, indicating another dispute that influenced India’s decision to end the distribution of developmental aid and support. In the state of Bihar, the promising mobility and solidarity of the rural and working-class people had dissipated once again. Nonetheless, state records and journalistic documentation demonstrate the indelible role of the needs and demands of rural populations in the development of famine relief policy in the years 1966-1972.

¹³¹ Defined by the source material as “legal certificates.”

¹³² Tomasson F. Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar*. University of Texas Press (1974): 149.

On the local level, the rural populace banded together to petition land reform that expanded beyond the premises of Northeast India and garnered the attention of the national government, helping to make food accessibility and nutrition a central issue of India's domestic and foreign policies. And not only did these displays of solidarity influence land distribution and tenure policies, but the strength and influence of the rural sectors shaped nationwide food research and distribution strategies; the rural sector also became the focus of planning and development initiatives that expanded beyond the reach of the famine, defining the trajectory of Green Revolution-era research, innovation, and implementation as well as India's path toward self-sufficiency. But even larger than the nation itself, the rural uprisings and demands reflected global turbulence and politics; India became part of the Cold War ideological competition, and the spirit of that turmoil rallied the support of international allies, including the United States.

The Bihar Famine cultivated widespread rural unrest. However, this exploration of public outrage, resistance, protest, and solidarity are limited by confines of state records and documents, only allowing for the linkage of public response to local, national, and international legislation and policymaking. In addition to an examination of political deliberation and action, there must also be a focus on local and individual accounts and experiences – a history of India's Green Revolution and its famine relief programs still need to integrate the personal stories of farmers, laborers, and families in Bihar, Northeast India, and throughout the Indian subcontinent, incorporating the perspective of those people who watched their lands turn into to arid deserts and survived off meager helpings of rice and grain. Without those accounts, there remain missing pieces of the larger image of the Bihar Famine that characterize the suffering and struggles of the Indian populace.

Beyond the crisis atmosphere induced by the Bihar Famine, studying public demand provides the answers to the questions surrounding the origins of rural unrest, organizing, and rebellion – the circumstances that have been demonstrated to urge policymaking, resource allocation, and diplomatic capital. Since the advent of Indian independence, the power and influence of the Indian populace have defined the arc of modern India's growth and development, shaping the social, political, and economic landscape that characterizes a newly autonomous nation that was reborn. At large, analyzing personal accounts and public response in post-independence India is a study of the resilience and efficacy of modern Indian democracy.

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