

## Preface

'Famine and society' is a network of scholars who have come together to study the role that starvation can play in the society. Formed in 1985, with a small grant from the University Grants Commission, it organised the first meeting in the Eleventh World Congress of the International Sociological Association held in Delhi in 1986. The attempt to evaluate studies on poverty and famine in the Social Sciences attracted a multi-disciplinary group. In 1987, a meeting of the group was held in Delhi, which elected Jean Floud of Nuffield College, Oxford as president. The statement of purpose drafted at the meeting was then circulated to scholars in a number of universities. It was also resolved to hold an international meeting in Delhi in 1988. 'Famine and Society' then began to identify scholars who would take a continuing interest in the study because it was noted even at the time that not only were there few scholars working on famine but very few persisted.

The first Regional meeting on Afro-Asian studies on Food Crises and Social Systems was indeed small and the papers few and reflected research projects undertaken in different contexts. But the discussions of a fairly large group of participants composed of academics, policy makers and students formed the very staple of the conference. 'Famine and Society' is grateful to Jean Floud for the notes she kept. Her substantial paper prepared as an aide memoire to participants is not merely an introduction to the book; it is at once a meticulous record and summing up of the proceedings.

The publication of the proceedings of the Famine and Society meeting have been unconscionably delayed. But the preface is not merely a gesture of apology to my co-editor Jean Floud, contributors and members of 'Famine and Society' who have waited patiently for the work.

I wish to explain the relevance of this publication four years after the meeting was held. The proceedings of the second international meeting, held in 1992, which I hope will be published later this year, relates to and emerges from the first. If the first stressed the urgency of an academic postulate that would permit the recognition of famine as the condition of the living and rejected a definition and public policy that can affirm famine only when mortality trends are elevated, the second focussed upon the historical evidence of the famine process. If the first argued that famine can occur in a range of political and economic systems, market and planned, democracies and other, the second went ahead to demonstrate it. The second set aside the notion that a free press and an opposition were sufficient safeguards against famine.

The first necessarily looked at the role of the state in famine. The second looked at the plight of the stateless and their exposure to

starvation even when assured refugee status. The statement that "refugees are as subject to famine as countries are" can be looked upon as a major advance in famine theory. It has drawn attention to the absence of rights or claims to food of the stateless. But the problems of the stateless are hardly new. European history documents the large movements of populations seeking food and shelter, wandering from one country to the other, persecuted in one, offered temporary succour in another. Famine studies have yet to consider them.

That the contribution to famine theory has come from the nutrition sciences must be emphasised. It not only enlarges the multidisciplinary antenna of famine studies. Its methods give it a scientific validity. Therefore the second can only be understood in relation to the first. The second went further than the first and looked at relief systems that could serve as instruments of imposing starvation.

The report of the proceedings written almost during the Conference and retaining the freshness and immediacy of the discussions, introduces the work. This book is in three sections. The first is devoted to aspects of theory; the second to case studies and the third considers relief policy. There are two relevant appendices. The first a copy of the article on famine in the Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences which offers the approach and definition. The second the statement of purpose of 'Famine and Society' signed by scholars across the world.

As Secretary of 'Famine and Society' and co-editor of this publication I bear the responsibility for the shortcomings of the work. I wish to thank the Indian Law Institute and Prof. Upendra Baxi for the generous help that has enabled these papers to be published.

Amrita Rangasami  
New Delhi  
1993