

"Grains of Diplomacy: Truman's Era and American Food Assistance to India"

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Abstract:

This article examines how food was used by the United States as a tool for foreign policy, especially under President Truman, and how it affected India during the hunger crises of 1946 and 1951. Political objectives and diplomatic ties have long been impacted by food. This study delves into the intricate process of US food aid distribution, exposing a preference for geopolitical goals above humanitarian ones. It looks at how Indian food crises and food grain supplies were affected by US political and strategic goals in 1946. The response of the Indian government, its initiatives to increase food allotments, and US influence on the Combined Food Board are covered in the paper. The essay demonstrates how American priorities were elsewhere, primarily in Europe and East Asia, suggesting that there was insufficient urgency to address India's food crisis. It also looks at the impact this policy had on Indo-American relations and how geopolitics overshadowed humanitarian aid.

Keywords: India, food crises, humanitarian help, geopolitics, international relations, strategic interests, Combined Food Board, Indo-American relations, allocation dynamics, diplomatic difficulties, food aid tactics.

Introduction

For America, food has been central to its foreign policy since World War 1. when the slogan was 'Food Will Win the War'. In 1919, President Wilson warned. "Bolshevism is steadily advancing westward, it is poisoning Germany. It cannot be stopped by force, but it can be stopped by food." In the Second World War, food was again viewed as a weapon and America's post-war food relief was also simultaneously business and politics. The lion's share of PL 480 food aid went to foreign countries in which the US had a political economic or military interest. India first faced the American insensitiveness to food aid during the Great Bengal Famine of

1943. The Bengal Famine of 1943 was a colossal human tragedy in which more than three million people were starved to death. However, the United States of America which under the leadership of President Roosevelt was championing the cause of mankind against Fascism and Nazism and freedom from want and hunger, remained insensitive and indifferent to this tragedy of Bengal. This was displayed in its reluctance to provide food aid to the victims of the famine as it did not favour any action which might cause embarrassment to the British and arouse their opposition. The sadness, bitterness and disillusionment with American policy was reflected in India Today: 'India will survive this famine as she has survived famines in the past, but the memory of the hundreds of thousands of Indians who died because no help came to them from their allies, will be a ghost not quickly laid. "3

During the presidency of Harry S. Truman (U.S President, 1945- 1953). India had to face food crises of enormous magnitude in 1946 and 1951 and as during the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 American. food aid to India remained a contentious issue. The present paper focuses on the American attitude during the Truman presidency towards the question of Food Aid to India during the 1946 food crisis. It examines the American political and strategic priorities which inhibited timely and adequate supply of food grains to India when it needed it most.

Objectives:

Examine American Foreign Policy: Examine the historical significance of food in American foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on the Truman administration's food aid allotment and its relationship to political and geopolitical goals.

Study the specific activities and decisions made by the US government during the food crises in India in 1946 and 1951. Consider the variables that influenced the US government's decision to provide food aid to India.

Assess the Impact on Indo-American Relations: Ascertain the effects of US food aid programmes on US-India relations, assessing how these choices impacted diplomatic relations and mutual perceptions.

Significance of the Study: Historical Background: gives a thorough grasp of how food aid was employed by the United States during pivotal moments in its foreign policy, illuminating how certain regions and nations were prioritised according to their political and strategic goals.

Impact on Humanitarian Crises: This study looks at how policy decisions have affected the

Research paper

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lives of millions of people afflicted by hunger and food shortages, specifically in terms of how allocation decisions have affected those decisions. Diplomatic Relations: explains the intricacies of international relations and how assistance distribution affects diplomatic relations between countries, with a focus on how American policies have affected India's opinions of the US and vice versa. Policy Implications: Provides information about the ramifications of using aid as a diplomatic tool, emphasising the moral, ethical, and geopolitical factors that influence these choices and their effects. This study attempts to provide a thorough examination of the interactions between food assistance, geopolitics, humanitarian crises, and international relations during a pivotal historical moment by looking into these goals and appreciating their importance.

Review of related literature

"Freedom from Want: The United States and Global Food Security" by Alan P. Marcus (Published in 2017)

This book delves into the history of American food assistance programs and their impact on global food security, including the initiatives during Truman's presidency.

"Feeding India: The Spatial Parameters of Food Grain Policy" by Rajeswari S. Raina (Published in 2004)

This work offers insights into India's food policies and the challenges faced during the period, shedding light on the role of American food assistance.

"India: The Most Dangerous Decades" by Selig S. Harrison (Published in 1960)

While not solely focused on food assistance, this book discusses India's challenges during the 1950s, touching upon political, social, and economic aspects, including potential references to aid programs.

"Harry S. Truman and the Cold War Revisionists" edited by Robert H. Ferrell (Published in 2006)

This compilation contains essays that might have sections discussing Truman's foreign policies, which could include elements related to aid to India.

"Food as Diplomacy: Revisiting India's Strategic Food Reserves" by C. Raja Mohan (Published in 2021)

Research paper

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This recent publication might contain updated perspectives on India's food policies and potential references to historical aid from the US during Truman's presidency.

When researching or reading these works, it's beneficial to look for chapters, sections, or passages specifically dedicated to the American food assistance to India during Truman's era. These resources should provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, policies, challenges, and impacts of American aid on India's food security during that time.

The Indian Food Crisis of 1946

The failure of the monsoon in various parts of India during the latter part of 1945 seriously affected crop production in Madras, Bombay,

Mysore and Punjab, Coupled with inadequate winter rains predicting a poor wheat crop in Punjab, a severe food crisis was in store for which the government was unprepared not having made any arrangements for building a central grain reserve nor laid out a programme for large scale imports. In fact during 1946 supply conditions for food in India turned out to be worse than in any of the war years. In January 1946 the Indian government decided to seek additional allocation from the Combined Food Board in Washington which had been set up during the war years for dealing with short term food problems of the Allied nations.

1945-1946 was a particularly bad year for agriculture worldwide and along with India many other countries in Europe and elsewhere had been affected by drought and other calamities. On the other hand the United States had near-record production of food grains in 1945. Meanwhile, a report by the Secretary of State, Edward R. Stettinius, had been submitted to President Truman which referred to the prospect of serious worldwide food shortage especially in liberated countries of Europe and pointed out the importance of effective action to provide relief so that internal chaos in these countries could be avoided. On 16 May 1945 the Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, apprised Truman that there was a strong likelihood of pestilence and famine during the coming winter and such a situation was likely to be followed by political revolution and communist infiltration. Stimson emphasized that it was vitally important for American interests that these countries were not driven to revolution or communism by famine. In such a situation it was not surprising that India's food crisis was hardly a priority for the American planners as it was Europe's needs along with those of the enemy countries which were most vital to the American interests in the region and was still regarded as primarily Britain's responsibility. This was inspite of the fact that the food crisis in India was assuming

alarming proportions. Truman himself has acknowledged this in his memoirs. In many parts of the Orient the situation was even more critical than in the worst parts of Europe'."

Response of the Indian Government and US Perspectives Meanwhile the government of India had become quite alarmed over reports that the Combined Food Board was not sympathetic to India's requirement for a major increase in imports of food grains. It decided to send its Food Secretary, Sir Robert Hutchins to Washington to explain the enormity of India's food crisis and secure increased allocations of imports. However, Hutchins had to return to India without securing any definite promise from the Combined Food Board for increased allocations or any assurance of help from the United States. The failure of the Hutchins mission caused great disappointment in India and in the Indian Central Assembly the food situation was vigorously debated and the British government was severely criticized for not making enough efforts for increased allocation from the Combined Food Board According to J.P Shrivastava. Food Member of the Indian government. many Indians were convinced that the Combined Food Board was dominated by the United States, and they regarded the Combined Food Board's reluctance to increase the allocation to India as tantamount to the United States saying To hell with India. In a letter to the United States Secretary of State. James F. Byrne. Anup Singh, secretary of the India League of America wrote. "Failure by the United States to adopt a helpful attitude might lead to deterioration in the cordial relations between the two countries.

Perceiving the serious danger of famine in the country the Indian government decided to send an Indian Food Delegation to impress upon the Combined Food Board the urgent need for an increased allotment to India. Sir A. Ramaswamy Mudaliyar who was a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and India's principal delegate to the United Nations was selected as its leader. The delegation first went to London to apprise the British government about the impending crisis. The UN General Assembly during this time was discussing a resolution sponsored by the five great powers on world food shortage. Mudaliyar while addressing the General Assembly pointed out. Millions died in India during the Famine of 1943. not in concentration camps, not in occupied countries nor through cruelty or torture of the enemy, but because they couldn't have enough to sustain body and soul. He further added, during these months of tragedy India obtained little encouragement and less of food grains we needed so badly from our allies. India should not be left to face a similar experience again and its plea should not be ignored'." However when the resolution was discussed in the Assembly, India

did not find any mention at all. On 6 February 1946 Truman in a statement said. "A food crisis has developed which may prove to be the worst in modern times and in attempting to alleviate shortages abroad this country will adhere to the policy of giving preference to the liberated peoples and to those who have fought besides us, but we shall also do our utmost to prevent starvation amongst our former enemies. Thus India was not in the scheme of things as it was neither a liberated area nor a former enemy. The fact that it had been a party in the war and more than two million Indians had fought for the allies was conveniently overlooked.

The Indian Food Delegation in America

The Indian Food Delegation arrived in Washington in March 1946. It appealed to the Combined Board for an allotment of 1 million metric tons of wheat and 1 million of wheat on 19:10. With demands for increased allocations from various quarters, the Board was reported to have asserted that the problem was insoluble in full India's appeal for increased allocation was discussed at a meeting of the Combined Food Board held on 14 March 1946 which was chaired by the UN Secretary of Agriculture, Clinton Anderson, and attended by the representatives of departments of War and State. All members of the Indian delegation were eligible to attend the Board meeting the Indian crisis was discussed by the British Food Minister, Ben Smith and Maurice L. Hutton, British members of the Board and as such they were the only sources of information. Such a situation, coupled with the fact that no specific figures about the allocation for the different countries were released, created a serious misunderstanding between the Indian and the American officials regarding the quantum of allocation for India. The Indian Delegation was under the impression that India had been allotted 1.4 million tons of wheat and 145,000 tons of rice for the first half of 1946. This was promptly conveyed to the government and the Secretary of State of India. However there was a deep resentment in India when it did not start receiving the food grains as promised. In fact during the first half of 1946, India only received 15% of the promised allocation. Meanwhile, Pearl Buck the famous novelist and an old friend of India was elected as the chairperson Indian Famine Emergency Committee (a group of Americans sympathetic to India's cause floated by J.J. Singh, president of the India League of America). When Buck raised the matter with the American member of the Combined Food Board, Glen H. Craig, he replied "The Board had not till date recommended an allocation of wheat to India or to any other country and no new programme was presently being planned for April and shipping lines for May had not been established yet. 16

The reduced allocation by the Combined Food Board was causing much resentment in India. This was directed against the United States as it was believed that the Combined Food Board was a body controlled by the Americans. The resentment was further fuelled by the President manfully braving the threatening danger will being twice blessed, manfu leaving India. Hoover reiterated that unless and until there is a Befstant and adequate shipment of food to India, the loss of life will be enormous. However, he denied that the Combined Food Board was dominated by America and advised that India should also look for supplies from elsewhere. However, the positive outcome of Hoover's visit was that the United States Department of Agriculture made an allocation of 132. 500 tons for India in June although it was not a cause for cheer in India as it was far below India's requirements. Further inspite of the American Famine Commission's recommendations for an allotment of 750,000 tons after it visited India in June 1946,²⁷ only 224,000 tons of food grains were allotted. Even the Famine Commission's request for a meeting with Truman to apprise him about the seriousness of the situation in India was turned down. ²⁸ The disappointment with the American attitude made the Indian nationalist leaders realize the danger of being totally dependent the benevolence of one superpower. This realization prompted Nehru to make a statement on 12 November 1946 in India's Central Legislative Assembly that it had been decided to approach the USSR for the supply of food grains.

Methodology

An explanation of the research techniques employed to look into American decisions about food assistance during the 1946 and 1951 Indian crises.

an explanation of the methods used to examine particular US government actions and decisions.

Findings

The historical relevance of food aid and its connection to political and geopolitical objectives during the Truman administration are highlighted by American Foreign Policy.

Response to Indian Food Crises: Information about the US's actions during India's food crises in 1946 and 1951.

Impact on Indo-American Relations: Evaluation of the ways in which US food assistance affected bilateral perceptions and diplomatic ties.

Summary

An overview of the main conclusions on US policy during the Indian crisis is provided below. Discussion on the strategic, diplomatic, and humanitarian ramifications of US policy is one of the findings' consequences.

Analysis of the persistent preference for geopolitical objectives over humanitarian disasters in U.S. policy.

Evaluation of the effects of aid decisions on bilateral relations with the Indo-American community.

Conclusion:

Future Recommendations: thoughts or recommendations for prospective enhancements or modifications to aid policies in comparable circumstances. Therefore, despite India's best efforts, the American-influenced Combined Food Board would not increase its allocation. Given its political and geopolitical interests in Europe, Japan, and the Philippines, the United States was more concerned about the food crisis there. It was fixated on the spread of communist power throughout Europe because it was afraid the communists would take advantage of the food crisis—should it worsen—to expand their political domain. India remained mostly seen as Britain's domain, and America gave it little emphasis. Therefore, there was no particular sense of urgency to boost allocation in order to alleviate the food crisis. When India experienced a severe food crisis in 1951, it became even more apparent that American policy towards food aid to India remained consistent during the latter years of the Truman administration. On February 12, 1951, Truman suggested to Congress that, in order to prevent a crisis with possibly catastrophic consequences, India should be given two million metric tonnes of food grains. ²⁹ Despite appearing to be for humanitarian purposes, the loan was actually planned to be a diplomatic ploy. Relations between the two nations had clearly cooled as a result of America's irritation with India's non-aligned policies under Nehru and its stark disagreements with China, the Korean War, and Western colonialism. A significant amount of American goodwill was lost in India as a result of the loan being used as a tool to influence India and the loan repayment being linked to the sale of monazite sands, which are used to make nuclear weapons. Deep scars on Indo-American ties have resulted from the protracted delay, the immature remarks made by certain American lawmakers, and the crass attempts to

use the threat of famine to pressure India into making political and economic concessions. In actuality, the United States has persisted in using aid initiatives to support yes votes in the General Assembly and to uphold alliance ties with strategically significant allies.

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