

PART II

From Famine Relief to
Community Development:
The American Missionary
Movement in South Asia

Worldly Needs and Religious Opportunities: The Famine Relief of American Missionaries in Bombay, 1870s–1920s

Abstract

Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) scaled up their famine relief work in the 1890s against the background of American imperialism and changes in humanitarian funding. Examining the work of missionaries in one regional hotspot of famine in India, Bombay, the chapter uniquely explores how famine prepared the ground of American expansion into British India.

Keywords: Missionaries, Marathi Mission, American humanitarianism, missionary famine relief

3.1 The Missionary Discovery of Famine in Bombay

The Making of Famine in Bombay

The Bombay Province (also Bombay Presidency) was an administrative unit in the west of British India. Although its boundaries shifted during the colonial era, for most of the period of British rule it stretched across Maharashtra to present-day Gujarat in India and Sindh in Pakistan. Ecological differences contributed to the particular geography of famines in Bombay. In contrast to the humid climate of the densely populated coastal strip, the eastern part of the Deccan plateau was an arid region, known as the famine belt. It covered parts of the six districts of Khandesh, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Poona, Satara and Sholapur. Peasants in the eastern Deccan largely grew millet (*jowar* and *bajra*) for subsistence. Agriculture depended on the September monsoon that provided the water for the *rabi* crop. The general paucity of rainfall during the rest of the year and the low-quality of soil foreclosed a summer (*khari*) harvest. The failure of the September monsoon thus weighed heavy on the Deccan's agriculturalists.¹ Three times did droughts spill over into famines in Bombay: in 1876–78, 1896–97 and 1899–1902. Bombay's short-lived cotton boom in the 1860s had fuelled agricultural indebtedness and contributed to the vulnerability of the Deccan population to famine.² Even earlier, the colonisers' exuberant confidence in economic liberalism and the wish to extract resources drove the commercialisation of Indian

agriculture. The government of Bombay had made advances to agriculturalists in the 1830s and had exempted cotton fields from land revenue to provide incentives for the cultivation of the cash crop. Not all regions, however, were suitable for cotton cultivation. Whereas it grew best in the southern districts of Belgaum and Dharwar, the soil in most other parts of the province was inhospitable to the plant. Peasants lured into cultivation in areas unsuitable to grow cotton suffered immediate losses. The rising demand for cotton during the American Civil War of 1861–65 convinced additional cultivators in Bombay to produce for export. Those who succeeded found themselves in crisis when American production resumed after the war. The global economic depression that set in in the early 1870s exacerbated rural indebtedness in Bombay. It led food prices to spiral out of control, resulting in considerable hardships for agriculturalists in the province.³ Small landowners, tied to their land and the revenue system, commonly remained on their property during harsh seasons and strove to balance losses through agricultural wage labour or loans.⁴ Many landless labourers on the other hand migrated to the provinces' urban centres for work in the industries. One such urban centre was Bombay city which was connected to the rural hinterland through circular migration that intensified during famines.⁵

The El Niño Southern Oscillation that governed the monsoon in Asia resulted in a widespread drought in India in 1876. The subsequent harvest failure drastically decreased the food stocks of Bombay, while grain from surplus regions was exported to Britain instead of being used to meet shortages in the country. In the course of the famine that unfolded across Bombay and Madras over the next three years, six to ten million Indians starved to death.⁶ Governmental relief was insufficient and the extreme loss of life fuelled the institutionalisation of colonial anti-famine policies in the famine's aftermath. It was only until after the famine that the Indian Famine Code was drafted (see chapter 2 for a discussion). The existence of the Indian Famine Code, however, did little to prevent high mortality in the following famines. In 1896, the failure of the monsoon again destroyed crops in Bombay. Prices skyrocketed as a consequence of widespread scarcity. The drought developed into a devastating famine. Colonial officers discounted the warnings of Indian and international observers for too long and the relief that was eventually provided remained insufficient in many cases.⁷ The province was still recovering from the previous disaster, when drought and then famine struck again in 1899. In parts of Bombay, famine had to be declared for three consecutive years, lasting until 1902.⁸

The Beginnings of the AMM's Famine Relief

The confrontation of its missionaries with the devastation wrought by famine in Bombay sparked the AMM's sporadic assistance of the famine-afflicted population in the 1870s. The South Indian Famine of 1876–78 hit Bombay's eastern Deccan hard.

It was here that the AMM had opened several mission stations in the early nineteenth century to expand its influence over Bombay's heartland. Its missionaries, confronted with widespread starvation in 1876, began to provide ad-hoc relief near its mission stations. In Sholapur, they distributed rice, bread, soup and *conjee* (a sort of rice porridge). With the financial help of other Christian missions in India, donors in England and Scotland, as well as Indian and British philanthropists, the AMM fed 300 to 400 people daily from July to mid-September 1877. It also gave medical assistance to people who were brought to the mission station.⁹ The city and district of Sholapur was home to the largest share of the province's weavers and had started to supply western India with cotton and woollen cloth in the 1850s.¹⁰ In 1877 Bombay's industrialists opened a first mill in Sholapur. The famine gave an incentive to this business venture. The hunger resulted in an abundance of cheap labour as peasants sought temporary employment in the mills to manage harsh seasons. Subsequent famines further fanned the mill industry of Sholapur.¹¹ During famines, those taking work in the mills were often accompanied by dependants. This required the provision of famine relief to family members who camped near the mills. The AMM, which had first begun helping workers and their dependents in Sholapur in 1877, maintained this focus during subsequent famines, but it also provided aid in other parts of the province.

After the AMM added famine relief as a new set of activities to its missionary portfolio in 1876–78, it considerably expanded its famine-related activities in the 1890s. The growth of the AMM's relief work showed amongst others in the rise of the number of women and children who were taken into the mission and supported through donations.

Harvests after Drought? Famine and the Missionary Zeal

Considering that the goal of the missionary movement was to win “heathens” to Christianity, the connection between famine relief and the missionary zeal deserves attention. This requires a brief retrospection of the beginnings of the Marathi Mission. After the arrival of the first missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) to Bombay in 1813, missionaries soon discovered how difficult it was to meet the expectations of the American Board in Boston. The AMM hardly attracted new members to its Christian community. Twenty years later, the AMM still counted no more than fifteen converts. Although it found adherents among members of the rural low-caste communities (the Mahars and Mangs), the number of converts did not increase significantly in the following decades.¹² This was attributed to the failure of traditional evangelistic methods which led missionaries to intensify the building of schools. Missionary schools sought to foster the missionaries' connections to Indian communities while

attempting to introduce Christianity through education.¹³ The conflation of educational and evangelistic work was contested by Indian communities who began protesting the conversions of pupils and teachers in the schools of the AMM and other mission societies in the late 1830s.¹⁴ This protest, however, did not hinder the AMM in becoming an important provider of education in Bombay in the following decades. Conversion numbers in the meantime remained low. To a certain extent, the AMM got in its own way. The difficulty to engage (the right kind of) Indians owed partially to its approach to conversion. Unlike other missionaries in South Asia, American protestants demanded converts to abandon caste in its entirety and were at pains to evaluate the incentives of applicants, renouncing them in case they failed to provide sufficient evidence to prove their sincere wish to become Christian.¹⁵

This approach to conversion was not abandoned during famines that rather escalated the efforts of missionaries to scrutinise the intentions of its “inquirers.” H.G. Bissell, AMM missionary in Sirur (also Shirur or Ghodnadi), wrote in 1878 that missionaries “found it necessary to be very careful in receiving candidates for baptism, testing their motives sometimes by weeks of probation and close scrutiny of their conduct.”¹⁶ The AMM’s view on conversion also showed in its relationship to other mission societies. The aggressive approach of the British Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) enabled these missions to convert large groups of Indians of low-caste communities during the South Indian Famine. Between September 1877 and February 1878, the SPG gained 16,000 new members.¹⁷ The AMM rejected such a practice. Its missionaries further lamented the encroachment of the SPG into its territory and the fact that this rivalling mission society apparently converted inquirers of the AMM who, in the protestant estimation, were not ready to receive baptism.¹⁸

The missionaries of the AMM still sought to evangelise. Yet, instead of seeking to raise the number of conversions through the hasty performance of baptisms during famines, missionaries in Bombay wished to gradually convert those they had admitted to the mission. Reports indicate that the AMM increasingly capitalised on the concentration and confinement of famine-afflicted populations. The famines drove people out of the villages into urban areas and the punitive environments of aid camps and poorhouses.¹⁹ Missionaries of the AMM went to relief camps and addressed people as they migrated in search for relief. Pastors preached to the people and handed out leaflets to declare famine a sign of God’s demand for repentance.²⁰ Starvation, in this regard, played into the hands of missionaries because it made it easier for them to approach the population.

While the AMM seemed to concentrate on using its famine relief work to draw in those directly afflicted by starvation, it actually sought to address a wider Indian audience. Given that philanthropy was an important marker of social standing in British India in general and in Bombay in particular, missionary famine relief

meant to boost the popularity of the AMM among Indian elites. Sporadic signs of such appreciation can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Gopal Krishna Devadhar (1871–1935) of the SIS used the occasion of the AMM's centennial celebration in 1913 to applaud the mission for its previous famine relief work.²¹ Equally appreciative was the moderate INC politician Narayan Ganesh Chandarvarkar (1855–1923), a leading member of the Hindu reform organisation Prathana Samaj (Society of Liberal Religionists) in Bombay. He was invited to serve as a member of one of the distributing committees of US aid in Bombay.²² Both men were English educated Hindu social reformers of high-caste, who had themselves been involved in famine relief activities.

Donations were another form to display goodwill and acknowledgement. Members of the influential Parsi community for instance gave to the AMM in times of famine. Parsis not only donated during famine. The money of the textile magnate Dinshaw Maneckji Petit (1823–1901) allowed the AMM to open the Sir D.M. Petit Industrial School in Sirur in 1891 that offered vocational training to Indians.²³ Although many Parsis defied the attempts of missionaries at converting members of their community, some showed sympathy for the philanthropic work of missionaries and gave in its support.²⁴ Zoroastrians in general and Parsis in Bombay in particular considered philanthropy a matter of social service and civic duty. Parsis had used philanthropy strategically to bolster their standing much earlier than American missionaries started to embark on a similar path.²⁵

The discussion of Indian responses to the AMM's relief work in the nineteenth century, however, would not be complete without mentioning that it also fuelled opposition. The most vocal opponent was the Arya Samaj who interpreted the relief activities of missionaries—in particular the sheltering of women and children—as a deliberate attack on Hinduism and strove to mobilise nation-wide opposition against missionary famine relief. The Hindu socio-religious reform organisation that was founded in Bombay in 1875 now began to assist Hindu orphans and widows.²⁶ In providing relief, the Arya Samaj wished to demonstrate the capacity of Hindus to assist their co-religionists.²⁷ Missionaries of the AMM rejected the claim that Hinduism could serve the betterment of the people, calling Hindu customs a cause of rural impoverishment.²⁸

3.2 Giving to India: US Funding of Missionary Famine Relief in Bombay in the 1890s

Although AMM missionaries held more complex views about the link between famine and conversion and were often sceptical about promoting baptisms during famines, fundraising required a simpler message.²⁹ In appeals to the American

public, missionaries clung to the idea that the larger the American involvement in famine relief, the larger the turn-out of converts as this helped to solicit the support of Evangelicals in the United States.

The expansion of the AMM's famine relief work in the late 1890s was due to its success in tapping American donations, which occurred against a backdrop of changes in the way Christians in the United States gave money to missionary work. At the outset of the famine of 1896–97, the American Board in Boston noted with concern that regular church donations dwindled. The consequence was a cut of funding. The AMM was already suffering from a steep rise in prices in Bombay when the cut of allowances of American and Indian mission members aggravated its financial plight and caused an existential crisis.³⁰ Missionaries in Bombay reminded the Board of the special needs of Indian converts, arguing that conversion had cut off native Christians from their communities and rendered them dependent on the allowances of the AMM. The harsh reduction of appropriations, especially as it occurred during famine, threatened to drive converts away from the AMM, undoing the missionaries' hard-won success.³¹ Missionaries pleaded with the American Board to reverse the reduction. Although the Board was sympathetic to the appeal, church donations further declined and the Board considered it impossible to raise the allowances to the previous level.³² The future of the AMM looked bleak at this point, but it weathered the famine and even expanded its activities in Bombay in the coming years. The answer to this conundrum lay in a change in funding. American Christians who had previously supported the foreign missionary movement through church collections, had begun to give to special funds.³³ Such "special objects" were instituted to cover missionaries' philanthropic rather than outright evangelistic work. Touting famine relief and the assistance of "native helpers" in India as such "special objects", missionaries were able to fill their funding gap. Contrary to the recent fears of the AMM, Robert Hume enthused in 1898 that the previous year "was unquestionably the most successful year in the history of the Marathi Mission."³⁴

The Christian Herald of New York and the Alliance of American Imperialists and Evangelicals

Reverend Charles C. Creegan, ABCFM secretary of the US Middle District noted in 1897 that his congregation would rather donate to the *Christian Herald's* Indian famine relief fund than to the foreign mission funds.³⁵ The success of the *Christian Herald* to mobilise large funds in support of missionary famine relief in colonial South Asia in the late 1890s demonstrates the influence of evangelicalism on American humanitarianism in these years.³⁶ A leading religious journal in North America since the 1890s, the *Christian Herald* was run by Louis Klopsch (1852–1910)

and the controversial Reverend Thomas De Witt Talmage (1832–1902). The *Christian Herald* undertook massive humanitarian fundraising campaigns in the 1890s that contributed to the popularity of the paper. Its editors gained experience in mobilising funds for the famine-afflicted population in Russia and Christians in Armenia before they started to raise money for famine relief in India in 1896–97. They renewed their efforts to collect money for India in 1899 and again solicited large sums in support of the famine relief missionaries provided. The *Christian Herald* now raised \$640,000, topping the record sum of \$400,000 it had solicited during the previous famine in India.³⁷ In addition to donating to the *Christian Herald*, the ABCFM's constituencies also gave to a famine relief fund of the *Congregationalist* and the *Advance* in Boston which collected a sum of \$125,000 that benefitted the work of missionaries in India.³⁸

The change in funding of missionary work echoed wider transformations. Although Americans had shown interest in alleviating social ills outside the confines of their own nation before the 1890s, the scope of such spending was unprecedented. Americans seemingly plunged with vigour into sharing their wealth with those seeking to alleviate famines, wars, and other disasters abroad. The American missionary movement gave crucial impulses to this discovery of humanitarianism in the United States. Missionaries made Americans aware of the world outside their own country and solicited support for their philanthropic work.³⁹ Of similar importance to the popularity of American-sponsored humanitarianism was the rise and transformation of US imperialism. US imperialism and humanitarianism became inextricably linked in these years. The fundraising of the *Christian Herald* serves as a case in point. The bulk of the money raised by the *Christian Herald* during both famines was invested to purchase grain surplus in Kansas that was shipped to India on the *City of Everett* in 1897 and on the *Quito* in 1900.⁴⁰ The material prosperity of the United States had enabled donations, while the will to gain access to markets that could absorb US agricultural surpluses advantaged the sending of grain.⁴¹ US Congress voted in favour of bearing the costs of the aid shipments to India, hoping that it demonstrated the strength of the US agricultural sector and its aspirations to dominate the global grain market.⁴²

US imperialism benefitted from the display of the purportedly moral, religious and cultural supremacy in which many American humanitarians firmly believed and that missionary famine relief in India allegedly displayed.⁴³ The editorial board of the *Christian Herald* made no secret of its efforts to use the aid as a sign of Christian America's moral and religious superiority. To spread this message widely, it sought broad media coverage of the aid shipments. It invited journalists, philanthropists, and politicians to bid farewell to the crew members in America as well as to greet them upon their arrival in India. When the ships landed at the docks of Bombay and Calcutta, the stars and stripes alongside the Christian cross

were waving on deck; and when dockworkers unloaded the cargo, the names of the mission societies that had donated money surfaced in bold letters on the sacks of grain.⁴⁴ In 1899–1900, the *Christian Herald* even used its aid drive for India to lend more direct support to American imperial aspirations. As Heather Curtis has demonstrated, the decision of the editorial board of the *Christian Herald* to raise funds in 1899 was motivated by the wish to unite US evangelicals who had grown apart during the Philippine-American War.⁴⁵ The atrocities committed by US soldiers in the Philippines, brought to public attention by the Anti-Imperialist League, led religious leaders to speak out against US colonialism.⁴⁶ The *Christian Herald*, in an effort to defend US expansionist policies and to counteract criticism levelled against the sanctity of Christian America, emphasised the good Christian aid could achieve in India.⁴⁷

American Business Philanthropy Reaches for India

The *Christian Herald* was still the largest contributor to Indian famine relief in the US in 1900, but with the formation of the Committee of One Hundred on India Famine Relief (*hereafter* Committee of One Hundred) it received a competitor.⁴⁸ The Committee of One Hundred united New York's leading business philanthropists, including the mining magnate William E. Dodge Jr. (1832–1903) and John D. Rockefeller Jr. (1874–1960) and assembled in the Chamber of Commerce in New York for the first time in May 1900. Its formation followed the initiative of a group of American missionaries who had gathered during the Ecumenical Missionary Conference in 1900. They demanded a “larger national movement” to aid the people afflicted by famines in India.⁴⁹ In an effort to represent such a national effort, the Committee of One Hundred opened additional fundraising bodies throughout North America in the weeks that followed its inception.

The Committee of One Hundred signalled the diversification of fundraising for India and a cleavage among American protestants. Rockefeller Jr. was brought up under the influence of evangelical Protestantism which motivated his and his father's philanthropic endeavours. Evangelical protestants like Klopsch and Charles Sheldon however sharply criticised New York's capitalists for enriching themselves and easing their conscience by contributing a fraction of their wealth to philanthropic purposes. Prior to the formation of the Committee of One Hundred, Sheldon decried that the dividends distributed to shareholders of the Rockefeller corporation could have saved millions of people in India. The *Christian Herald* continued to oppose Rockefeller in the early twentieth century, but eventually lost out to the financial potency of the Rockefeller Foundation.⁵⁰

The Committee of One Hundred differed from the evangelistic outlook of the *Christian Herald's* fundraising campaign. The Committee of One Hundred

presented itself as a “citizen’s movement” that intended “to show the sympathy felt by the citizens of New York for the victims of the famine in India.”⁵¹ Differences between the two committees surfaced as well in the disagreement about the composition of the committee in India that was in charge of distributing US funds and grain. The Committee of One Hundred rejected the idea of donating the money to the all-white and all-missionary committee that distributed the aid sent from the *Christian Herald*. Consequently, the Americo-India Famine Relief Committee was set up to administer the donations from the Committee of One Hundred. Its formal separation from the *Christian Herald* served to ensure that Indians perceived the Committee of One Hundred as “a civic agency” that provided aid irrespective of differences of “race or creed.”⁵²

The differences that in New York seemed fundamental, however, lost traction in Bombay. The Americo-India Famine Relief Committee merely counted Narayan Chandavarkar as its only Indian member. And whereas it forwarded a part of its donations to a small group of Indian organisations, the bulk of its funds still benefited missionaries.⁵³ The formal differences between the committees further collapsed in light of an overlap of membership. The AMM missionary from Ahmednagar Robert A. Hume (1847–1929) had a leading position in both distributing committees, commuting between the city of Bombay and Ahmednagar to participate in their meetings.⁵⁴ As he occupied these positions, the Yale-trained missionary was turned into a heroic figure by the American press and missionary publications. The press seemingly enjoyed reproducing the narrative of the one man’s battle against famine in the subcontinent. When the colonial administration awarded Hume for his famine-related work with the *Kaisar-i-hind* gold medal in 1901, it contributed to this narration.⁵⁵

American Famine Relief and British Colonialism

Given that American missionaries relied on money that was sent directly from US donors, they had considerable latitude to design their “charitable work” to their own ideas. This, however, did not lead to a conflict with the basic principles of colonial famine relief. Similar conceptions of poor relief on the one hand, and the need to appease the colonial state on the other hand, account for the fact that American missionaries organised aid largely in accordance with colonial expectations and standards.⁵⁶

The United States occupied a special place in the domestic, imperial and international efforts to relieve famine in South Asia in the 1890s. This is because the majority of donations that were mobilised across and beyond the British Empire (including India) by and large went to the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund.⁵⁷ Split into a series of semi-official committees on a district and provincial level that were centrally

supervised from Calcutta, the Indian Famine Charitable Relief Fund was in charge of distributing the money in adherence with colonial ideas of legitimate charity. This included the identification of the “deserving poor” through a rigorous assessment of needs that was meant to prevent those purportedly “undeserving” from receiving assistance.⁵⁸ The colonial administration further wished to channel charity into particular areas of work such as the provision of ‘comforts’: milk, *ghee* (clarified butter) and vegetables to young children and the infirm, as well as garments and blankets. Charitable funds financed orphan care and the relief of “respectable persons” who the colonial state believed were inhibited by caste, class and social norms to join labour gangs.⁵⁹ Such money was also used to open relief works in villages for people who were unable to seek relief in distant government-run centres.⁶⁰

The writings of Hume illustrate how American and British colonial famine relief converged. Confirming the basic principles of the Indian famine codes, he stressed the importance of a stringent need assessment and the employment of those afflicted by famine to prevent indolence.⁶¹ The AMM also created relief camps that resembled British colonial institutions. Its “largest single relief camp” was set up in Sholapur, where famine sufferers conducted labour that corresponded with the sort of work demanded at official public works. At the peak of the famine, over 2,400 famine-sufferers were digging, breaking stones, and fetching lime and sand to earn their livelihood in the missionary relief camp. In adherence to official standards, the relief camp was situated within the compound of the AMM Sholapur station “on open ground just outside the yard” and was overseen by guards who maintained discipline.⁶²

At times, American missionaries even occupied positions normally held by colonial administrators. At the request of the provincial government, Robert Ward of the Methodist Episcopal Church managed a poorhouse in Godhra in the Bombay Province (today in Gujarat) in 1900. In *Some Fruits of the Great Famine* Ward is depicted as a benevolent superintendent who “made it a point always to be accessible to the complaints of the people.”⁶³ Despite the many convergences of British and American famine relief, American missionaries also intended their aid to be discernible as Christian American. The portrayal of Ward’s management of the governmental poorhouse in missionary publications was thus infused with the idea that Americans were more sympathetic to the needs of Indians than British colonial officers. Additional anecdotal evidence points to the efforts of missionaries to distinguish themselves from the colonial authorities. When missionaries distributed doles of seed they attached a note that explained to peasants how the next harvest would testify “God’s satisfaction with American charity.”⁶⁴

Meanwhile in the United States, some American missionaries defended the colonial state against mounting public criticism that emerged in 1900. American opposition to British imperialism grew against the backdrop of press reports of

the British war against the Boers in South Africa that appeared alongside accounts of Indians dying of famine in India in 1900. The combination of war and famine diminished US sympathies for British imperialism and instead created US solidarity with Indians and the Boers.⁶⁵ Analogies between the fight of Boers in South Africa and the struggle of the forefathers of the United States for national liberation appeared in the public debate.⁶⁶ The *Cleveland Leader* called the disproportionate investment in the defence of the Empire in South Africa at the expense of famine relief in India “one of the sorriest spectacles which our poor human nature has presented in many years” and added that this was “especially disheartening in view of the fact that it is the work of the nation which claims to lead the van in human progress and stands for all that is best in civilization.”⁶⁷ The *San Francisco Call*, which reproduced the statement, carried a cartoon that showed how civilization demanded John Bull to stop pouring money into its war machine to assist its famine-stricken colonial subjects. Protest against British war-spending even mounted in the heart of the empire itself. The *Illustrated Missionary News* from London noted in June 1900 that “war has slain its hundreds, but famine its tens of thousands.”⁶⁸ While even some British missionaries were outspoken in their criticism of British war spending, American missionaries by and large remained silent during the controversy. When the Committee of One Hundred assembled for the first time, its members consulted the missionaries Henry C. Potter (1834–1908) and Justin E. Abbott (1853–1932) who had recently returned from India. Members of the committee raised concern over the “drain of wealth” from India to Britain and the insistence of the colonial administration on relief through labour during the public meeting.⁶⁹ Potter and Abbott discouraged such criticism, referring to the allegedly demoralising effect of gratuitous relief on the Indian society. They also defended the free market paradigm and praised the Indian Civil Service as “the best civil service in the world.”⁷⁰

3.3 The White Man’s Shadow: Women, Indian Mission Members and the Human Legacy of Famine

Women and Indian Mission Members

The ubiquitous presence of men like Hume in the famine relief funds and committees in India and the United States overshadowed the contributions of women and Indian mission members (women and men) to the AMM’s famine relief in India. Despite the many self-celebratory depictions of American aid that presented hagiographic accounts of male missionaries who seemingly single-handedly saved thousands of children and women from starvation, female missionaries and Indian

mission members were at the forefront of missionary famine relief. Their stories are much more difficult to trace.

The first American women to join the protestant missionary movement in South Asia had accompanied their husbands. Harriet Atwood Newell, the earliest woman missionary of the ABCFM who set out to live and work in India never arrived in the country but died together with her new-born at sea in 1812. Succeeding generations celebrated her bravery and devotion to the missionary movement and her tragic fate curiously drew more women into missionary work.⁷¹ Since women were denied ordination, they mainly became teachers and organisers of women's clubs and bible study groups.⁷² The demand for additional female teachers and trained missionaries who could support the work of the mission by targeting Indian women in particular created new opportunities for single women in the 1860s and 1870s. After the inception of the Woman's Board of Missions in 1868 that financed single women and collaborated with the ABCFM to meet the demands of personnel of the foreign mission movement, American women ventured abroad in greater numbers to aid the mission movement.⁷³ The famines of the 1890s further emphasised the importance of the presence of women, while similarly reinforcing traditional gender roles. Women played a prominent role in overseeing the education of the female survivors and children as their gender purportedly cast them as their natural custodians. They were not alone in consolidating their place in the AMM in the famine years.

The AMM had begun to scale up the training of Indian members in the 1850s. In 1896 it counted 362 Indian workers, of whom 20 were ordained pastors, 23 preachers and 66 bible women.⁷⁴ The count included Sumantrao Karmarkar (1861–1912) and Gurubai Karmarkar (1862–1933).⁷⁵ The missionary couple were born as the children of Indian pastors in Ahmednagar and Belgaum. They had joined the AMM in the 1880s, but their frustration over gender and racial barriers that prevented them from pursuing higher degrees in medicine and theology in India had led to their decision to seek education in North America in 1888. They did so against the resistance of missionaries in Bombay and the American Board, who feared that their exposure to American culture would diminish their 'Indian-ness' and reduce their ability to earn the trust of Indian communities they wished to convert.⁷⁶ Managing to pursue their education in the US nevertheless, Gurubai Karmarkar became the second Indian woman to graduate from the Women's Medical College in Pennsylvania, following in the footsteps of Anandibai Joshee (1865–1887).⁷⁷ Sumantrao Karmarkar in the meantime, earned degrees in theology from Yale and Hartford. When they returned to India in 1893, they brought with them new contacts to American donors and changed ideas on missionary work. The fruits of such influences showed when the Karmarkars joined the Indian YMCA and YWCA. Their dual involvement left traces as some Y-methods made inroads in the more conservative Marathi Mission.⁷⁸ Sumantrao Karmarkar, who made a

name for himself as “the premier evangelist of Bombay” at the turn of the twentieth century, also became known for his tent meetings and the use of a stereopticon he had brought with him from the US to attract Indian audiences.⁷⁹

After their return to India in the 1890s, the Karmarkars contributed to the famine relief of the AMM. Indian members of the AMM visited relief camps and villages during the famines. They often camped near labour gangs, in which the famine-afflicted worked to earn a subsistence wage, to speak to the women who either laboured on the public works or had accompanied their family members. They also visited government relief works to assist Indian Christians in practicing their faith and to spread the gospel among non-Christian workers.⁸⁰ Female Indian mission members were going from house to house to identify women who were susceptible to the gospel and parents who were willing to give their children to the missionaries.⁸¹ The Karmarkars took several children in their custody who had been rendered destitute by the famine. At the turn of the century, the AMM accommodated 3,000 Indian children, in boarding homes, orphanages and missionary families.⁸²

Raising Children, Negotiating Differences

The photo below (figure 2) shows the Karmarkars and a group of children the couple adopted during the famines of the late 1890s.⁸³ Information on the rearing and lives of these children is scarce. One of the adopted girls, who was given the name Prithi Hannah after her conversion, died in 1900.⁸⁴ Another boy, named Vishvas Rao, had been taken in by the Karmarkars at the age of six, was raised by them and later followed his foster parents’ example.⁸⁵ He went to America to study medicine in Pennsylvania and worked as a doctor at a hospital in Pittsburgh during the influenza pandemic of 1918–19, when he contracted the virus and died.⁸⁶ The ABCFM commemorated him tellingly as “the best product of India’s life”, while the Mayor of Pittsburgh and the Governor of Pennsylvania sent their condolences to his foster mother.⁸⁷ The adoption of children during famines was, to a certain extent, a continuation of earlier practice. From the early years of the AMM, the American Board and donors in the United States had encouraged the adoption of children in India who it regarded as being particularly receptive to the Christian message. In the nineteenth century, the AMM occasionally took the custody of children, who were either orphaned or placed in the care of missionaries by their parents.⁸⁸ Whether the children were to be raised in institutions or family homes, missionaries of the AMM hoped to turn them into members through their education and gradual conversion. At the same time, the missionaries were cautious about the extent of such a transformation. Since Indian members of the mission were to serve as intermediaries between the AMM and Indian communities, missionaries were anxious to limit the children’s adaptation to their new American protestant environment.



Fig. 2. The Karmarkar Family: To the left and right of Gurubai Karmarkar, who is at the centre of the picture, are children the couple had adopted. The different status of these children within the composite family is rendered visible through the embroidered hats and dolls that distinguished them visually from the other children who although they lived with the missionaries, had not yet become part of the nuclear family. Source: "From the Report of Mrs. Gurubai Kamarkar, of Bombay," *Life and Light for Women* XXIX:3 (March 1899), 120.

In a 1911 article in the *India Alliance* of the India Mission of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), an evangelical protestant mission society from New York that worked in Akola (Bombay), the author claimed to be the daughter of an American missionary couple who had taken in an Indian orphan in 1900.⁸⁹ Although it is not certain whether *My adopted sister* draws on the memories of the author, Ruth Andrews, it does shed light on how missionaries strove to preserve the children's 'Indian-ness'. After the adoption of the child, Andrews's mother considered it important "to keep her like her own people."⁹⁰ The Indian girl hence kept her name (Durie), ate separately from the family, consumed Indian food and wore Indian clothes. That the child tragically died only shortly after her adoption was meant to prove the importance of missionary work, since the child's timely conversion allowed her ascendance to heaven. Andrews reminded readers that "little Durie would not now be waiting for us in heaven, if we had not been able to take her in and provide for her."⁹¹

Stories like that of Durie were published to solicit money for orphan care in India. Missionaries in India depended on the generosity of American donors to finance the education of the children. Orphan care had become a part of the

ABCFM's work only recently, namely since the Armenian massacre of 1894–96 had pushed missionaries to open orphanages in Armenia.⁹² Emily C. Wheeler had worked as a missionary in Armenia before she began channelling her energies into popularising child sponsorship campaigns that raised money for children in Armenia and India.⁹³ Substantial assistance was also coming from the *Christian Herald*, whose readers subscribed to annual contributions of \$15 per child to ensure that the children taken in by missionaries would become useful Christians.⁹⁴

Training a New Generation of Indian Christians

Child sponsorship remained a popular cause of American humanitarianism in the early twentieth century. Missionaries were concerned, however, about the unreliability of such funding, as these donations could cease at any time. Not long after the famine ended, the AMM lamented its dependence on American money which interfered with the Mission's goal to build a strong, self-reliant Indian Christian community. The wish to gain independence from American donations gave impetus to the AMM's vocational training that aimed to turn the children and women admitted to the Mission during the famines into self-supporting members.⁹⁵ These efforts similarly grew in light of the dissatisfaction of missionaries "with the result of a purely literary education" and the perception that it needed manual labour to change boys "from dullards into stirring active workers."⁹⁶

Education had long made up a large proportion of the activities of the AMM and trades such as woodwork and industrial drawing had been taught in the Sir D.M. Petit Industrial School in Sirur since 1891. By 1900, the school had two model farms and departments of carpentry, blacksmithing and aloe fibre.⁹⁷ Vocational training was also offered at widow homes that identified sewing as the most adequate trade to be taught to the women. In 1900, Hume wished to expand the AMM's industrial training in Ahmednagar to include the children taken in during the recent famines and to this end applied for support from the American Board. Deploring that missionaries were not trained well-enough to oversee vocational training, Hume suggested bringing American university graduates to Ahmednagar as technical experts. The response of the American Board was lukewarm. While the board allowed Hume to proceed with his plan, it offered no financial support. Hume made another attempt, now soliciting the support of the American philanthropist Henry Phipps.⁹⁸ He eventually secured the seed money from the Americo-India Famine Relief Committee that until recently had administered the funds raised by New York's business philanthropists to support American aid efforts.⁹⁹ In his letters to sponsors, Hume explained that he wished to model education in Ahmednagar after the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama that under the lead of Booker T. Washington sought to revolutionise the education of African-Americans. Hume's writings

exhibit the idea that African-Americans and Indians shared similar qualities that rendered the transfer of educational methods between the United States and South Asia possible. Such racial thinking also undergirded the use of the Tuskegee model in other parts of the world.¹⁰⁰ Hume enthused that testing the Tuskegee model in Ahmednagar above all other places was ideal, because its people “are among the best races of India.”¹⁰¹

Hume brought David Carroll Churchill, a young MIT graduate, and J.B. Knight, a former student at the Massachusetts Agricultural College at Amherst to Bombay. The two men arrived in India in August 1901. Following an inquiry into local conditions, Knight opened a model farm to teach forty famine boys “the principles of scientific farming with their practical application.”¹⁰² He chose a small group of orphans, whose prior English-education supposedly made them more susceptible to American expertise. The training entailed a daily schedule of four hours of work in the field, one hour of livestock and poultry keeping, and three hours of school education. In addition, Knight oversaw the training of a group of boys and men, who he aimed to turn into “agricultural leaders.”¹⁰³ To this end, their training also entailed daily lectures in chemistry, zoology and botany.¹⁰⁴ When funding ceased a year later, Knight’s model farm in Ahmednagar came to an end.¹⁰⁵ The government of Bombay had initially advanced two grants to secure the continuation of the agricultural experiment station. Instead of continuing to fund the missionary farm, however, the government encouraged Knight to continue his work on a governmental model farm to which he not only brought his expertise in early 1902, but also his former students. He later became a Professor of Agriculture in Poona and continued his agricultural research.¹⁰⁶

Churchill, in the meantime, had started to work in the Sir D.M. Petit School for Industrial Training. Similar to the model farm, the days of students were split between literary education and artisanal work. Workshops taught rug-making, wood-carving and the making of brass, copper and silver-ware. That such industrial education had a more wide-reaching agenda which aimed at the transformation of the students’ character and physique surfaced in a report of the AMM in 1902. Its author confidently declared that “to those [...] who enquire what we make in these workshops [...] I always answer, *Men*.”¹⁰⁷

Churchill identified one particular handicraft which he believed would benefit from the skillset he had acquired at MIT. Dissatisfied with the available hand-looms in Bombay, Churchill developed a semi-automatic loom to raise productivity.¹⁰⁸ He began to lead a weaver’s workshop for boys in Ahmednagar, who were employed in a nearby rug factory after their training.¹⁰⁹ The prospect of finding employment drew additional children into Churchill’s weaving workshop.¹¹⁰ His loom initially won prices across India and was widely celebrated. Yet a decade later its inventor grew dissatisfied with his own accomplishments. The advancement of Churchill’s

invention resulted in high costs of maintenance of the looms and made repairs unaffordable to Indian weavers. Failing to reconcile the wish for technical development with the needs of Indian weavers, Churchill eventually left India in 1917.¹¹¹

3.4 American Missionary Humanitarianism in the Wake of World War I

War, Famine and Disease in Bombay, 1918–21

After one and a half decades of relative stability, World War I wrought economic dislocation in India as the country's economy was geared towards Britain's military needs. Apart from soldiers and auxiliary forces, India supplied leather, hides, clothing, and ammunition to Britain, as well as railway tracks, locomotives and cattle to Mesopotamia. In addition, food was exported from India to supply troops in the Near East and civilians in the metropole.¹¹² The transport of war products and the movement of troops furthermore diminished available tonnage and created scarcities in India.¹¹³ In the Bombay Presidency, where the monsoon failed twice in three years, drought intensified pressure on the food market. Famine struck Bombay's population in 1918–19 and again in 1920–21.¹¹⁴ Although the end of the war brought relief to Bombay's food market, parts of the population remained vulnerable to famine.

The prices of food, cloth, kerosene and other basic commodities had risen sharply during the war.¹¹⁵ The war-induced inflation struck wage labourers hard as their salaries were not keeping pace with the surge of living costs. Whereas labourers suffered from the steep rise of costs, Bombay's mill- and landowners reaped enormous profits during the war as they benefitted from the high demand of cotton and the rise of prices.¹¹⁶ Their wealth empowered them to engage in philanthropy. Bombay's industrialists and merchants formed a relief committee that assisted the efforts of the government to mitigate the hunger of the population in Bombay. The Gujarati merchant Purshottamdas Thakurdas (1879–1961), also known as Bombay's cotton king, oversaw the work of the Bombay Presidency Relief Fund that received large donations from Shapurji Broacha (1845–1920).¹¹⁷ After the failure of the rains in mid-1918, the government of Bombay opened poorhouses and test-works in the affected districts. As the drought continued, parts of Panch Mahal, Poona and Satara and the total area of the Ahmednagar district were declared famine areas. Scarcity was much more widespread.¹¹⁸ In the famine-afflicted districts, officials now started to employ men and women in so called village works, where they cleared tanks, repaired roads, built railway tracks and broke metal to earn food doles. Governmental relief continued for nearly a year. Only in August to October 1919 did the government wind up its relief camps and poorhouses.¹¹⁹ In 1920, district

officials were again mandated to declare famine in Ahmednagar while parts of Nasik, Poona, Sholapur, Satara, Bijapur and Belgaum suffered from scarcity.¹²⁰

The timely provision of relief resulted in the containment of famine, but Bombay was beset by an even greater menace to public health in the meantime. A first wave of the influenza pandemic hit the province in June 1918. When it flared up again in September, hunger lowered the population's resilience to the virus.¹²¹ Between 10 to 20 million lives were lost in India in 1918/19; in no other country did so many people die from the influenza.¹²² Troops had carried the virus into Bombay after which the disease spread from the city of Bombay to the rural hinterland. The influenza was particularly virulent in the crowded *chawls* that accommodated many of the city's industrial labourers.¹²³ When the epidemic entered villages, it preyed upon a population struggling to fill their stomachs.¹²⁴ Hunger and poverty intensified migration into the city of Bombay. Colonial officials considered these "famine refugees" a threat to public health and decided to stop them on their way, to round them up and confine them in poorhouses in the suburbs.¹²⁵

The Famine Response of the American Marathi Mission

The septuagenarian Hume was still working in Ahmednagar in 1918 when the food situation in the Bombay Presidency again drastically deteriorated. The AMM was not immune to the social and economic turmoil that unfolded in the Bombay Province. Missionaries died of influenza and the rise of prices sapped the AMM's resources.¹²⁶ The financial woes of the AMM again struck its Indian members severely. Missionaries noted that their allowances fell below the salaries paid at governmental relief camps.¹²⁷ To assist its Indian members as well as the population that lived in proximity to its mission stations, the AMM began to mobilise funds in late 1918. The *Congregationalist* in Boston published a first appeal to give money in support of Indian members of the AMM in December 1918, stressing that the famine afflicted "the very people who count most for the spread of Christianity in India."¹²⁸ The subsequent relief followed the conventional script. A committee was appointed first to oversee the collection of funds and to identify where and how missionary aid was most effective. In addition to supplements paid to increase the allowances of Indian mission workers, the AMM provided food and cash doles to the infirm. It assisted famine-afflicted men, women and children who were trying to reach governmental relief camps and opened small-scale relief works themselves.¹²⁹ Missionaries also helped through their educational institutions. The women's homes and boarding schools of the AMM noted an "unusual number of applications for admittance" as parents admitted their offspring into missionary institutions and women whose fathers, husbands and brothers had left in search of employment, sought shelter in the mission stations.¹³⁰

Indian mission members were again at the forefront of the relief effort of the AMM, but continued to receive little recognition in the press reports that detailed the missionary aid efforts. The AMM had almost doubled its Indian membership since 1896, now counting 608 Indian members. Most of them worked as teachers (169 men and 135 women). In addition, 59 bible women, 48 unordained and 44 ordained Indian pastors were active in the AMM.¹³¹ Among them were Reverend Anand Sidoba Hiwale (1879–1922) and his wife Taibai Hiwale who had opened a shelter for famine children during the current famine in Sirur that accommodated approximately 200 children.¹³² For this endeavour, the couple enlisted the support of the Parsi community. Converted into a boarding home for children, it continued its work after the famine years and became known as the Sir Ratan Tata Institution for Destitute Children.¹³³

Anand Sidoba had been a student at the AMM's Byculla High School and the Ahmednagar Theological Seminar before he received further education in Maine, New England. He had graduated from the Bangor Theological Seminary in 1907 and Bowdoin College in 1909. When he returned to India in the same year he married his fiancé Taibai Patole and the couple started to work as missionaries of the AMM. Like the Karmarkars before him, A.S. Hiwale had established lasting ties to American supporters during his stay in the United States. After his return to India he received assistance from the YMCA and his alma mater in Maine. Bowdoin College prided itself on its Indian missionary. It reported on his work in the *Bowdoin Orient* and invited students to stereopticon lectures that featured Hiwale's work in India.¹³⁴ There were other similarities to the AMM's previous famine relief activities. The AMM reiterated earlier doubts concerning the performance of baptism during famines. "Many requests have been made for baptism, but many have been refused" noted the report of the AMM in 1919 that also recommended to "go very slowly."¹³⁵ Missionaries however did not cease to evangelise. Missionaries approached inmates of governmental famine relief camps and the women who passed through Ahmednagar on their way to and from the governmental famine works.¹³⁶

Unlike in the previous famines, missionaries in India were now organised in the National Missionary Council of India which gave the AMM another instrument to mobilise the missionary aid response in these years. Robert A. Hume, among others, represented the AMM on the Bombay Representative Council of Missions, the provincial branch of the National Missionary Council. The Bombay Representative Council of Missions had early kept an eye on the deteriorating famine situation in the province. It made recurrent offers to supplement the governmental relief efforts in case famine was declared, however refraining from antagonising the colonial administration by acting on its own.¹³⁷ When famine was declared in parts of India in late 1918, the Bombay Representative Council of Missions set up the Special Committee on Famine Relief. Under the chairman Hume, the committee

united missionaries of different nationalities and denominations who began to disperse funds to mission societies across India to assist missionary famine relief.¹³⁸ In line with the aim of the National Missionary Council to foster cooperation between mission societies across India, it now integrated the relief efforts of missionaries in the different Indian provinces in a national structure.¹³⁹

US Missionary Fundraising for India

When in late 1918, missionaries in India began to solicit funds for famine relief, Americans were taking centre-stage in the relief efforts in Europe and the Near East. The havoc caused by the warring nations of World War I gave impetus to the formation of relief organisations in different regions of the world, but in light of the economic prosperity of the United States “the largest and most influential humanitarian organizations hailed from the USA.”¹⁴⁰ Missionaries were not absent from this surge of American humanitarianism. Although the professionalisation of American philanthropy in the Progressive Era had seen the emergence of secular aid providers, faith-driven philanthropy or more traditional forms of charity did not lose their significance.¹⁴¹ The relief work of the AMM in India in 1918–1921 is evidence of the continued importance of missionaries as providers of American foreign aid. While American humanitarians largely looked towards Europe, missionaries strove to raise awareness of the war-induced misery in other parts of the world, including South Asia.

Given that, instead of peace and progress, “Christian nations” had brought violence and devastation to the world, the foreign mission movement suffered an ideological crisis during World War I which fuelled a rethinking of the mission movement in the interwar period.¹⁴² Yet there were also those who argued that the war had demonstrated Christian virtues and therefore saw new opportunities emerging on the horizon. Bishop Frank Warne, for instance, believed that “the war has given India a clearer conception of the true Christian spirit.”¹⁴³ Warne referred to President Wilson’s principle of political self-determination which he saw as a powerful demonstration of American Christianity. There were other ways in which Warne claimed World War I had created new openings for American missionaries in South Asia. Since missionaries had aided colonial troops who fought in various theatres of the war, Warne and other missionaries assumed that returning soldiers were more likely to embrace Christianity because of the help they had received.¹⁴⁴ The service of Indian soldiers in the imperial army had also supposedly eroded their attachment to caste which was held as a major obstacle of conversion in India. The Canadian mission scholar John Lovell Murray furthermore concluded that the exposure of Indian villagers to the outside world through army service bred appreciation of the Christian way of life.¹⁴⁵ Murray was an advocate of

Christian internationalism who considered missionary humanitarianism a means to demonstrate the relevance of the missionary movement after the war. As the author of *The Call of a World Task in War Time*, he lamented that attention given to the suffering of people in mission lands was fading.¹⁴⁶ “We have been solicitous for the hungry in Belgium and Poland during the present emergency. But more people have been suffering from the pangs of hunger in India than in Belgium and Poland combined.”¹⁴⁷ Murray penned these words for the delegates of the conference of the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) in Northfield in 1918. The SVM had been a source of personnel to the foreign missionary movement since 1886. By 1900 it had tipped the ratio of British and American missionaries on the world stage to the advantage of the latter.¹⁴⁸ By World War I, many of its members had already taken part in missionary philanthropic and humanitarian work.¹⁴⁹ The postmillennial advocates aimed to better living conditions to pave the way for the return of Christ and therefore devoted themselves to social work and reform.¹⁵⁰ In the interwar period, they provided nourishment to the claim that missionaries ought to invest in social work, including the mitigation of hunger. Aiming to mobilise aid for India after the war, missionaries of the AMM lauded the American willingness for “sacrifice and service” and hoped to extend it to India.¹⁵¹ If we consider that most Americans perceived the needs of Europe as more urgent, the sum raised by the American Boards for famine relief in India in the year 1919 is testimony to the success of missionary fundraising. After the first reports of American missionaries in India reached the United States, the Methodist Centenary Department of War Emergency and Reconstruction promptly set aside \$10,000 to support famine relief in India.¹⁵² Throughout the year 1919, the American Boards raised \$150,000 through religious and secular newspapers, church papers and their constituencies.¹⁵³ The *Christian Herald* similarly renewed its fundraising for Indian famine relief in 1919.¹⁵⁴ From January to November 1919, the *Christian Herald* that was now edited by G.H. Sandison, raised \$65,000 for India. This was a fraction of the amount raised in the 1890s. The diminished support of the *Christian Herald’s* fundraising efforts, that also showed in an additional campaign for China, illustrated the growing disagreement between American evangelicals. Many of its former supporters no longer believed that missionaries should engage in humanitarianism. Some even considered it a vital threat to the mission movement, because it diverted time and money away from outright evangelistic work.¹⁵⁵

The general success to mobilise money in support of missionary famine relief in India in the wake of the war partly owed to the news coverage, some of which turned out to be exaggerated in hindsight. Readers in the United States who followed the reports of missionaries in India in the American religious and secular press gained the impression that the subsistence crisis currently unfolding in Bombay and beyond compared to famines of the 1890s. Whereas the official

report of the government of Bombay noted in 1920 that no visible signs of bodily emaciation were to be detected in 1918–19, missionary reports suggest widespread starvation. In March 1919 Hume testified that Indian members of the AMM were “slowly starving to death.”¹⁵⁶ Sam Higginbottom, writing from Allahabad in the United Provinces in May, noted that the province was going through “one of the most widespread famines of modern times.”¹⁵⁷ At the height of the aid drive, newspapers reported about a figure of 32 million people that supposedly were at the brink of death in India—a number that the colonial administration sharply refuted.¹⁵⁸ Criticism of the British colonial government prompted an apology of the National Missionary Council in November 1919 when it stated its “regret and emphatic disapproval of the sensational and incorrect reports.”¹⁵⁹ Although the National Missionary Council declared to scale back its appeals, it nevertheless stood by the missionaries’ continued calls for foreign aid that was needed to assist famine-stricken populations in Bombay and other parts of India.¹⁶⁰ The colonial government had ended its famine relief in Bombay’s Deccan in late 1919, yet the population remained at the brink of famine. In 1920, missionaries in Ahmednagar raised alarm at the renewed onset of famine conditions. “By the testimony of those who have long lived there” Hume wrote now, “the Ahmednagar district was never so hard hit!”¹⁶¹ The missionary, however, used his reports to similarly appease the colonial government as he stated that “no government [was] able to create rain or to cause water to run uphill for itself.”¹⁶²

3.5 Conclusion

Tracing the involvement of American missionaries in alleviating famine in South Asia is part of this book’s broader aim to break away from the spatial and temporal frameworks that dominate research on famine in South Asia. The beginning of American food aid in South Asia is commonly attributed to the decade succeeding World War II. The earlier missionary famine relief shows the longevity of American investment in South Asia in the field of food aid. Famines also prompted contact and exchange between American and Indian societies, albeit not on equal terms. In 1900, Robert A. Hume was convinced that the aid missionaries brought to Indians in the previous years had drastically altered the relationship of India and the United States. “Today multitudes of people in the United States of America who never before had any interest in India now have become interested in all that affects this country”, Hume wrote enthusiastically.¹⁶³ According to Hume, missionaries helped generate American compassion for famine-stricken Indians and Indian gratitude for American assistance, resulting in a bond of affection between the two countries. This, he prophesied, was to serve as the foundation of future US

involvement in South Asia. That this bond was never purely affective but equally material is evidenced by the movement of money, grain and people between India and the United States in these years.

To fan the willingness of Christian donors to engage in humanitarian work in South Asia, missionaries portrayed India as a country of evangelical opportunities. The missionaries of the AMM saw famine relief primarily as a means to gain ground in a mission field that proved inhospitable to its evangelicalism. The unprecedented sums to support the relief efforts of American missionaries helped the AMM to expand its activities in the province. The AMM had long struggled to raise the number of Indian converts, and the famines of the 1890s allowed it to make some progress in this regard. The migration of the famine-afflicted population to urban centres in search of labour and relief gave missionaries access to larger rural populations. The sheltering of women and children in the mission stations proved another way by which the AMM expanded its influence over Indian society. The efforts of missionaries to exploit famine also had limits and donor expectations were often not met. American donors sought formal distance from British colonialism, and therefore channelled money through committees controlled by US missionaries. Such efforts, however, were contradicted by the AMM's adherence to British colonial standards of famine relief and its cooperation with colonial administrators. And although many donors in the US viewed famine relief as a suitable channel to improve Indo-US relations, US-sponsored famine relief accelerated conflicts between Indians and missionaries in Bombay. The reliance on Indian mission members to implement relief further limited American control and efforts to stage missionary aid as uniquely American. Despite the many self-celebratory depictions of American aid that presented hagiographic accounts of male missionaries who seemingly single-handedly saved thousands of children and women from starvation, Indian mission members were at the forefront of missionary famine relief. Their stories are much more difficult to trace. When we do, they reveal that the change which the AMM aimed to bring about in the hearts and minds of famine-stricken Indians, primarily affected itself and its relation with South Asia.

Promising Freedom from Famine: American Missionary Rural Reform, 1910s–1940s

Abstract

The urge of American missionaries to demonstrate their capacity of preventing rather than mitigating famine fuelled their growing involvement in agricultural training and rural reform in the early twentieth century. The chapter offers a new perspective on the link between famine prevention and rural development in colonial South Asia, discussing the contributions of American missionaries from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s.

Keywords: American missionaries, rural reconstruction, agricultural training

4.1 Latecomers to the Field of Famine Prevention

The downtrodden masses of India's unreached multitudes lie like a beggar at our gate, full of sores and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fall from our table. We can help them best, not by fitful famine relief in special times of distress, but by the prevention and provision which the gospel of Christ can give to India, with all its uplifting power.¹

—Sherwood Eddy (1912)

Behind this statement of Yale-educated Sherwood Eddy (1871–1963), world-travelling missionary of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), was a shift in the responses of American missionaries to famines in India. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a vocal group of American protestants emphasised the significance of preventive action over short-term food and medical aid. In a sense, the turn of American missionaries to famine prevention was preordained. At the very least, it was a logical step. The increasing presence of American missionaries in rural areas and the provision of famine relief facilitated later experiments in rural uplift. This was not only the case in South Asia, where Robert A. Hume opened a model farm in the aftermath of the famine of 1899–1900 to train Indian children—many of whom had been taken in by missionaries during the famine—to become better farmers. This widening of missionary activities also showed in China, where American famine relief in the early 1920s subsequently fanned missionary rural

reform, with agricultural education seen as key to the prevention of famine.² Not all model farms and agricultural training institutes that American missionaries ran in South Asia in the early twentieth century trace back to earlier missionary famine relief. Yet they similarly took poverty and hunger as a starting point to promote Christian rural reform.³

American missionaries were late in pointing to the importance of averting famine in colonial South Asia, where calls for its prevention had emerged in the previous century. Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chandra Dutt, to name just two prominent Indian advocates of famine prevention, had studied the economic causes of subsistence crises in rural India in the late nineteenth century. They identified the impoverishment of rural populations and the deindustrialisation of India under colonial rule as causes of famines and called for the investment of taxes raised in India in the development of the country (see chapter 5 of the book for a discussion of Indian demands for famine prevention).⁴ In the late nineteenth century, many in and outside of the colonial administration promoted the construction of railroads and irrigation networks in the name of famine prevention, although the effect of such infrastructural development on the reduction of food shortages was limited. Aggravated by the disagreement on the meaning of famine, famine prevention alluded to a spectrum of demands and measures that continued to expand throughout the twentieth century. On one end of the spectrum, populated by Indian nationalists and British socialists, famine prevention meant the eradication of all forms of hunger. At the other end of the spectrum, it was merely about containing mass starvation. Colonial administrators in general espoused this latter position which did not completely rule out the future occurrence of famine, nor address nutritional deficiency outside its temporal scope. Somewhat counter-intuitively, efforts to prevent famine did not necessarily imply a refusal of the idea that famines were inevitable and natural phenomena. Demographic pressures, climate, and culture remained common scapegoats that were invoked to evade responsibility and depoliticise the causes of famine in India.⁵ American protestants were represented across the spectrum, but a growing group began to embrace the claim of Sherwood Eddy that the “uplifting power” of Christianity enabled rural populations to durably overcome hunger and poverty, and with it, famine as well. It was no coincidence that such a claim was made by a prominent member of the YMCA.⁶ The YMCA was tied to the Social Gospel movement that sought to improve living conditions and address social injustice to prepare for the Kingdom of God.⁷ YMCA missionaries had recognised early that improving the living conditions of the communities they wished to convert was central to the success of their mission. Moreover, given its international organisational structure, the YMCA contributed greatly to internationalise rural social welfare in the early decades of the twentieth century—a topic I will return to later in this chapter.⁸

Given that famines in South Asia rarely made international headlines in the interwar period, one would expect the American public's interest in preventing famines in South Asia to wane. Yet famine control still drew support from the United States, because the interwar period provided an atmosphere that was conducive to appeals to counter hunger in South Asia. Nationalist mobilisation in India (and wider Asia) amplified the political ramifications of starvation and gave urgency to effective famine prevention. This further intensified after World War I, when Indian economic nationalist critique "broadened [...] into calls for self-determination."⁹ Indian nationalists linked political independence more closely to the fight against hunger and poverty. In light of the Bolshevik revolution and the rise of Asian nationalisms, Americans considered rural poverty and hunger in (South) Asia a threat to global political stability. For liberal American protestants who sought to engage with, and benefit from, Indian nationalism, the motivation to engage in rural welfare (and famine prevention) followed a different logic. Since claiming the improvement of the conditions of India's rural populations through social service had become central to Indian nationalist mobilisation, missionaries had to demonstrate the contributions Christians were able to make to rural life.¹⁰

Americans back home realised that Indian nationalism was not a distant movement that was thousands of miles away from them. The exposure of the collaboration between Indian radicals and the German government during World War I and the persecution of Indian anticolonial activists in the United States affected American public opinion, as some North Americans feared being drawn into a conflict that was not theirs. Many blamed the prevalence of hunger and poverty as a key driver of both South Asian migration to the United States as well as the surge of Indian nationalism.¹¹

Against this historical context, it seems conspicuous that when Sam Higginbottom, the founder of the Allahabad Agricultural Institute (AAI), visited the United States to solicit money in 1919, he described the prevalence of hunger in India vividly. An attendee of one of his talks noted that when "others [spoke] on famine conditions [...] all one sees is a thin man; when Sam describes him, one can count every rib in his body."¹² Prior to his journey to the United States, the missionary had reported on the current food scarcity in the United Provinces for the *Christian Herald* and explained how the introduction of American farming methods was the most adequate way to avoid future famines in India.¹³ Two years later, he reiterated this claim in *The Gospel and the Plow*, arguing that "the rapid introduction of better farming [...] is the one sure way to rid India of the ever present nightmare, as well as the reality, of famine."¹⁴

Whereas famine relief had become a popular cause of humanitarianism in the mid-nineteenth century, rural development had yet to build its funding base. In light of the politicisation of famine described above, and since it was not far-fetched

to claim that rural improvement helped to prevent future food crises, missionaries strategically invoked famine to attract funds.¹⁵ This again was not only the case in South Asia. In the aftermath of famine in China in 1920–21, American missionaries applied for the surplus funds of the America Committee of the China Famine Fund to finance the curriculum revision at Nanking University. They pitched the need to include agricultural training at Nanking University by suggesting that it would serve famine prevention—“a term elastic enough to encompass anything” as Randall E. Stross noted in his study of the American agricultural reform movement in China.¹⁶

Despite the fact that American missionaries had started to attend to the material needs of rural people in the late nineteenth century, the attention that American missionaries gave to rural reform in the first decades of the twentieth century was novel. This was a global phenomenon from the outset. In the first decade of the twentieth century, missionaries in different regions of the world began offering agricultural education to promote rural reform.¹⁷ It was in the interwar period that agricultural reform gained considerable momentum and rural reconstruction became a buzzword.¹⁸ The most prominent examples of missionary rural reconstruction in South Asia of the interwar period were the AAI in the United Provinces and the YMCA-led Rural Demonstration Centre in the South Indian village of Martandam. The AAI was the brainchild of the aforementioned Manchester-born Sam Higginbottom who had gone to the United States for his studies and became an active member of the SVM at Princeton. He agreed to his first mission to India in 1903 and although he initially intended to leave after two years, Allahabad became his new domicile. The demand for English education in the Allahabad Christian College resulted in Higginbottom's involvement in teaching. Concurring with the growing popularity of the social gospel, Higginbottom began to envision an institution that applied American expertise and practical education to train Indians in modern agriculture. In preparation for this project, he temporarily left India in 1909 to study agriculture in Ohio and Princeton. He returned to the subcontinent in 1911 and founded the Allahabad Agricultural School (later AAI) in the following year. He led the AAI until 1944, when he retired to North America and was celebrated for his life-time battle against famine in South Asia.¹⁹

The Rural Demonstration Centre in Martandam was set up by Duane Spencer Hatch in 1924 and quickly became a lighthouse institution of rural reconstruction in the following years. Hatch, a Cornell-graduate, had gained practical experience in the university's extension work before he ventured out to India as a member of the YMCA. After serving with the war department of the Y in India and Mesopotamia, he was assigned to Martandam in 1921. The promotion of rural work within the Indian Y however traces back to the first Indian YMCA secretary, K.T. Paul.²⁰

Despite discernible differences, the AAI and the Martandam Rural Demonstration Centre shared many commonalities that started to define American

rural reform in India. Such was the focus on self-help (or its synonym, self-development), which under the guise of equity, voluntarism and democracy, imposed rules on those ostensibly in need of help.²¹ Hatch and Higginbottom both looked to Booker T. Washington's vocational training in Tuskegee as a role-model, applying its methods to South Asia.²² They experimented with the introduction of new seeds and livestock, and the promotion of village industries, engaged in physical education, emphasised hygiene and sought to stipulate moral reform. The aim was to incite a wide-reaching transformation of rural India and its inhabitants.

4.2 Gendering Rural Reform

The Chicago tabloid *Day Book* announced in 1912 that Elsie Leue from Cincinnati was expected to leave shortly for India. She was to teach American agriculture to Indian peasants to empower them to "raise crops large enough to feed the people." Leue was a member of the YWCA Cincinnati chapter and the first woman to ever complete the four-year bachelors in agriculture at Ohio State University. However, despite the *Day Book's* enthusiasm who pictured her as the "first farm missionary to the land of Hindoos", Leue decided to join the YWCA extension work in Ohio instead of becoming a missionary to India.²³ By the time the tabloid printed Leue's portrait, Higginbottom had received his first batch of students in Allahabad.

According to American missionaries in the first decades of the twentieth century, taming Indian agriculture was a man's job. Missionary agricultural training aimed to make boys into men and peasants into agricultural leaders. Women had a place in missionary rural reform, but they were encouraged to take up a different set of activities that allegedly fitted their abilities and role in society. Budget-making, infant welfare, gardening and poultry-raising were subjects of missionary education of rural women in the interwar period and aimed to promote modern domesticity; tilling the soil, on the other hand, was meant to be done by men. The gendering of agricultural life in American mission stations in India paralleled a similar differentiation in the US, where agricultural extension initially excluded women altogether. After it was realised that the exclusion of women was a major hindrance to the success of rural reform, agricultural extension started to be tailored to families, married couples and later, children. It still neglected women who worked the fields and depicted women primarily as homemakers.²⁴

The gendered division of missionary labour and rural reform was evident in the AAI and surfaced in the shared life and work of the AAI's most prominent couple, Sam and Ethel Higginbottom. The lives of missionary couples who displayed protestant ideals of marital relationships and domesticity in the quotidian spaces of mission stations, offer glimpses on the gendering of missionary work. Jane Ethelind

Cody, a trained kindergarten teacher and aspiring missionary, had married Sam Higginbottom on the day of her arrival to India in 1904. In the initial years in Allahabad, Sam Higginbottom taught at the Allahabad Christian College and the couple became involved in missionary leper-care. They also oversaw a boarding home for students of a Christian high school, adjacent to the Allahabad Christian College. Ethel Higginbottom considered it her task to ensure that students were well-fed by overseeing the purchase and preparation of food. Sam Higginbottom, on the other hand, emphasised the children's physical education by playing tennis, football and cricket with the boys. Ethel Higginbottom furthermore started a Bible class and gave birth to the couple's first two children in 1905 and 1906. Motherhood prompted her to take informal medical training from a civil surgeon to prepare herself for the treatment of children's diseases. She also pushed her husband to start a dairy farm to ensure the children's milk-intake.²⁵ Ethel Higginbottom's role in the AAI began to change in the 1930s when she promoted and participated in female education. While prior to 1935, she had sporadically contributed articles to the *Allahabad Farmer*, the AAI's in-house magazine, from 1935 onwards the magazine regularly featured the writings of Ethel Higginbottom and other female educators at the AAI.²⁶ In the May-edition of 1935 she offered readers of the *Allahabad Farmer* a review of the educational work in rural Mexico, suggesting that similar schemes be implemented in India.²⁷ The same edition featured a new segment, the Rural Home Section, that was devoted to Indian rural women. Not long after, in late 1936, the AAI introduced a two-year course in house-keeping and home-building (the predecessor of the AAI's Home Science Department) which covered a broad range of subjects, reaching from (Christian) ethics, music and art to home furnishing and home industries.²⁸ The Home Science course of the AAI, led by Ethel Higginbottom, was designed for middle-class women. Applicants had to provide their matriculation certificate; only in exceptional cases did a proficiency in English suffice to enter the programme.²⁹ Another important condition for enrolment was the ability to pay substantial fees for tuition and lodging. Despite such limitations, the first twelve students had enrolled by the end of the year 1936.³⁰ The AAI did not have to search for suitable teachers of its new department, since wives of the AAI's American staff had brought degrees in home economics and medicine from American universities and institutes to India. External support was also forthcoming in Charlotte Wiser who was offering courses in food and nutrition. Wiser had recently acquired international fame for her monograph *Behind Mud Walls* (1930), an anthropological study of Indian villages.

Ethel Higginbottom's changing involvement at the AAI points to a larger trend. Missionary Home Science had important precursors in the vocational training mission institutions offered to women. The wish of the Anglo-American mission movement to expand its work with Indian women and children had brought new

opportunities for women missionaries (American and Indian) to participate in social service activities. After women took up positions as teachers, nurses and doctors in boarding schools and widow homes and participated in famine relief and social welfare, they started to tap into the global Home Science movement in the early 1930s to expand the education of women.³¹ Home Science boomed in India in the 1930s, where it drew strength from the simultaneous endorsement of Indian nationalist and feminist movements and also received visible stimulus from the United States. The American Ann Gilchrist Strong authored two well-used teaching manuals for Home Science in India in 1931 and 1945, and set up a Home Science Department at the University of Baroda.³² After years of fundraising campaigns of the AIWC, the Lady Irwin College for Women opened its doors to students in New Delhi in 1932. It became a central post-secondary educational institution for women in India.³³ As the AAI demonstrates, American missionaries contributed to the Home Science movement in South Asia. While other institutions offered courses and study programs to women in urban settings, the AAI strove to educate rural women. It sought to integrate female education in modern domesticity into their otherwise male-centred approach to agrarian reform.

That the advancement of rural reform had suffered from the lack of emphasis on female education and the participation of women as rural workers began to filter through to male architects of missionary rural reconstruction in South Asia in the 1930s. Duane Spencer Hatch remarked with remorse in 1938 that women were underrepresented in rural reconstruction.

It is a mistake, *though a natural one*, that those actually engaged in the first years of the rural reconstruction movement are at least ninety per cent men. Rural reconstruction workers should number fifty per cent women. We cannot possibly make creditable progress until we have with us not only women workers but the general interest, understanding and participation of the women of the rural areas. I regret that among all the 900 leaders who have come to us for training since 1926 only ten per cent of them are women.³⁴

The YMCA had not followed in the footsteps of other institutions by offering classes in Home Science to female students. In response to the failure of the YMCA to attract Indian women, Hatch instead started to provide incentives and rewards to Indian YMCA workers and apprentices, who could demonstrate that their wives participated actively in the Y's mission.³⁵ The claim that wives were able to offer invaluable support to the advancement of YMCA's rural work promoted conjugality as a pillar of rural life. It might have been also the outcome of his own experience. As Harald Fischer-Tiné has pointed out, Emily Gilchrist Hatch participated greatly in "planning and implementing new schemes in rural development."³⁶ Emily Gilchrist Hatch had studied drama at Syracuse before she decided to accompany

her husband to India. She later became Provincial State Commissioner for the Girl Guides and taught rural drama among other subjects in the Practical Training School in Rural Reconstruction.³⁷ She wrote a number of pedagogical plays, used to convey protestant modernity to South Indian audiences and her audience widened considerably after Oxford University Press published her plays in “Drama for the Village Teacher” and “Little Plays” (1932).³⁸

4.3 (South) Asia and the Internationalisation of Agricultural Missions

In the first years after World War I, a small group of American protestants aimed to institutionalise the until then loosely bound network of agricultural missionaries working in different regions of the world. The purpose of this endeavour was to learn from regional experiences and to popularise agricultural education and rural uplift within the American mission movement. This meant standing up against fundamentalist criticism that wished to limit missionary activity to evangelism. Tying in with the rise of Christian internationalism in the interwar period, agricultural mission work became a domain of enhanced international collaboration that aimed to better international relations through rural improvement.³⁹ American missionaries working in India took part in this collaborative effort. The mobility of YMCA members including Indian secretaries, and a surge of publications on rural mission work in South Asia further contributed to the integration of India into a global dialogue on missionary rural uplift in the interwar period.

Under the auspices of the American YMCA and the President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College Kenyon Leech Butterfield (1868–1936), the World Agriculture Society was formed as an organisation striving to internationalise rural work in 1919. It grew out of a conference that Butterfield organised in French Burgundy. Its venue was the American Expedition Forces University in Beaune, established by the YMCA in 1919 to keep the soldiers in Europe busy while they waited to go home.⁴⁰ The YMCA had invited Butterfield to teach agriculture to the American soldiers to prepare them for their future as farmers in the United States. To prepare for creation of the World Agriculture Society, Butterfield assembled Canadian, Belgian, British, French experts, as well as the secretary of the Chinese delegation to the Peace Conference, at a four-day convention on the “World Problems in Agriculture and Country Life” in 1919. The workshops held during the conference covered topics such as the world’s agricultural problems, scientific agriculture and rural life and welfare.

The food problem, that only recently had acquired the prefix “global”, figured prominently in the writings of the World Agriculture Society.⁴¹ To begin with, it considered itself “a voluntary fellowship of individuals and organizations who

recognize the importance of seeking a solution of the *world's food problem*.⁴² Its periodical *World Agriculture* featured the writing of agricultural experts who explained how future food shortages were to be prevented. Although American missionaries in the interwar period tirelessly emphasised the superiority of American farming methods over “local” knowledge and technology, this dominant narrative was punctured in *World Agriculture* which offered articles on China detailing how Chinese horticultural knowledge and seeds could improve American farming. George Weidman Groff (1884–1954), the director of Agricultural Work in the Canton Christian College and author of “Agricultural Reciprocity between America and China” (1911) described China as a “‘gold-mine’ for Western students of agriculture.”⁴³ Other authors explained how the import of Chinese crops benefitted cultivation in the United States.⁴⁴ To further foster Chino-American collaboration and to promote “‘better understanding’ of world agriculture”, the World Agriculture Society opened chapters in China and in the United States in the 1920s.⁴⁵ The World Agriculture Society belonged to Butterfield’s efforts to push rural reconstruction onto the agenda of the American mission movement while also redirecting American attention to Asia.⁴⁶ Ian Tyrrell has argued that apart from China, India had been of particular importance to the work of Butterfield. Given his longstanding connections to the YMCA of India, he began to promote the transfer of lessons-learned from India to China.⁴⁷ Butterfield also helped the global popularity of Martandam in 1930, when he published the widely read *The Christian Mission in Rural India*. The book was the outcome of six months of travelling in India, a journey prompted by the request of the International Missionary Council (IMC).⁴⁸ Another keen admirer of Hatch’s work in South India was John H. Reisner (1887–1965). The son of farmers had studied biology and agriculture in Yale and Cornell before becoming a missionary to China in 1914. He later turned dean of the College of Agriculture at Nanking University, where he oversaw the university’s agricultural experiment station. In the 1920s, after witnessing famine in China, he advocated reforestation in China’s flood prone areas to deter the destruction of crops that had preceded the recent and earlier famines.⁴⁹ It was in the 1930s that his interest in South Asia grew. Reisner visited India as the secretary of the Christian Rural Fellowship in 1939 to assess the state of rural reconstruction in the subcontinent. Reisner and Hatch had been corresponding prior to his visit to India and in preparation of his journey, Reisner had studied Hatch’s *Up from Poverty in Rural India* (1932) and *Further Upward* (1938). His personal visit to Martandam further fanned his enthusiasm: “in my whole missionary experience I have never seen anything like that.”⁵⁰

Another stop on Reisner’s journey through India was Allahabad where he visited the AAI. Sam Higginbottom’s monograph, *The Gospel and the Plow* of 1921, had made him well-known beyond India. Higginbottom was a founding member

of the International Association of Agricultural Missions (henceforth Agricultural Missions) that also named Reisner as one of its members. The first meeting of Agricultural Missions was organised by Benjamin H. Hunnicutt in 1920. Since 1907, Hunnicutt had been a missionary to Brazil, where he had opened an agricultural school in Lavras. By the 1930s, he was celebrated as the first agricultural missionary to South America and as “one of the outstanding leaders” of agricultural mission work.⁵¹ Agricultural Missions were committed “to promote the interests of Christian agricultural work in all lands” and to this end commissioned studies, held training and assisted the exchange of missionaries involved in agricultural education.⁵² Unlike the World Agriculture Society that seemed to have fallen into oblivion after Butterfield’s death in the 1930s, Agricultural Missions proved more enduring.

4.4 Missionary Rural Uplift in the Aftermath of the Bengal Famine

At the end of World War II, the imminent independence of India caused another phase of introspection of the American mission movement. American missions looked to their future prospects in India with a mix of confidence and scepticism. Criticism of Christian proselytisation had grown in India in the 1940s and was prominently showcased in Gandhi’s increasingly overt opposition of missionary conduct.⁵³ Responding to Gandhi’s demand that missionaries limit their involvement to humanitarian work or leave India, William Hazen of the ABCFM concluded in 1943 that “it is probable that missions in future cannot expect as sympathetic treatment as in the past.”⁵⁴ Hazen’s prediction held the test of time to some extent as in 1956, the Niyogi Committee Report on Christian Missionary Activities recommended a ban on religious conversion. Although the Indian government did not follow the Committee’s recommendations and conversion remained legal, missionary evangelical work in postcolonial India incited further controversy and outright violence.⁵⁵

In 1946, the National Christian Council of India (NCCI) called for a conference to discuss the future development of Christian institutions in the subcontinent.⁵⁶ The conference resulted in a ten-year programme that aimed to cement the role of Christians as the alleged drivers of Indian development. It entailed a threefold approach: assisting Indian organisations that set out to increase economic performance and drive India’s industrialisation; forming technical institutions that offered relevant practical education; and lastly, training village Christians in their respective villages. This last pillar of reform, summarised under the title “Self-Help Projects”, planned to intensify the education and training of villagers to help them “to free themselves from the clutches of poverty by using their own resources.”⁵⁷ The plan favoured those American missionary institutions that had proven their

ability to shift from outright evangelicalism to rural welfare and reconstruction in the interwar period. Fittingly, the NCCI chose the AAI as its venue.

Although Higginbottom had returned to the United States in 1944, the AAI had survived the war and the partition crisis. Higginbottom was succeeded by John Goheen and later, by Arthur T. Mosher. In 1952, four years after Mosher joined the AAI as its director, the institute made a new foray into rural development. Financed by a Ford Foundation grant, it employed over a hundred rural extension workers to supplement the government's work in community development.⁵⁸ The Rural Demonstration Centre of the YMCA in Martandam was also still thriving in the aftermath of the departure of Spencer and Emily Hatch in 1940. In 1947, it inaugurated the YMCA Rural Welfare Workers Training Institute.⁵⁹ Thus, missionary rural uplift that commenced in the interwar period continued to influence postcolonial development in India. This continuity was also helped by the fact that missionaries started new projects on the eve of independence and in its aftermath.

Post-war missionary rural development in India received impetus from the Bengal famine, which (again) called attention to food insecurity in South Asia. In April 1945 John Fischer (1910–1978) recalled his memories of the Bengal famine for readers of the American *Harper's Magazine*.⁶⁰ The article was reprinted as a stand-alone booklet titled *India's Insoluble Hunger* in Bombay in 1947.⁶¹ Fischer's writing seemed to be that of a journalist who, although shocked by starvation, death and indifference, witnessed the famine as a bystander. This was a misrepresentation. Although Fischer penned his words as the associate editor of *Harper's Magazine*, he had been a US diplomat at the time of the Bengal famine. As a senior representative of the US Board of Economic Warfare and as the special assistant to the President's Personal Representative in New Delhi, William Phillips, Fischer had overseen the gathering of economic intelligence.⁶² He was amongst the first Americans to learn about the famine in Bengal and he was in a position to lobby for US food aid. Unlike Phillips who became known as a strong advocate of US food aid, Fischer did not seem to have been in favour of American assistance for Bengal.⁶³ Fischer, who left his government job to return to journalism after his arrival from India in 1944, spoke out against any kind of US involvement in South Asia. In *India's Insoluble Hunger*, he claimed to remember a conversation with an American general in India, who had told him about a nightmare that plagued him. "I dreamed that all the Englishmen quietly slipped out of this country during the night, and left us Americans holding the bag. Can you imagine anything worse?"⁶⁴ The deaths of millions of Indians in Bengal in the years 1943 and 1944 were, according to Fischer, inevitable.⁶⁵ He prognosed that India would see worse famines in the future. The chief culprit was "relentless fertility" that in combination with agricultural inefficiency provided a recipe for disaster.⁶⁶ There was no solution, he claimed. Fischer's nightmarish vision had a long genealogy. It traces back to Malthusian population

theory of the eighteenth century which undergirded colonial governance in the nineteenth century. It reincarnated in the interwar period when under the influence of eugenics, population growth was framed as the “population problem.”⁶⁷ Fears of Asian overpopulation gained further momentum after World War II, when another global war had devastated food economies. Elites now lashed out against poor sections of society and advocated fertility control.⁶⁸

In 1945, Fischer’s article provoked the response of the current executive secretary of Agricultural Missions, John H. Reisner. Reisner sent a copy and a questionnaire to sixty American missionaries in India to inquire about their views on Fischer’s assessment. Agricultural Missions summarised the missionaries’ responses in *The Future of Rural Christian Missions in India* (1945).⁶⁹ Somewhat unsurprisingly, the missionaries opined that contrary to Fischer’s analysis, India was to be helped and although the problem was “terrible baffling,” American missionaries had a duty to assist.⁷⁰

In 1944–45, Reisner participated in the formulation of a new venture in the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh after 1947) that would become known as India Village Service (IVS). The original idea to launch this missionary experiment in rural improvement is attributed to a New York-based Indian businessman named B.N. Gupta. Gupta had led India Famine and Medical Relief in New York that raised funds in the United States during the Bengal famine.⁷¹ Agricultural Missions quickly took up the idea and commissioned William H. and Charlotte Wiser, who were known for their studies of Indian village life in Karimpur, to work out the details of IVS.⁷² Gupta became part of the provisional American committee that steered IVS and that next to Reisner also included A.T. Mosher of the AAI.⁷³ IVS was based in Mahrera, 600 kilometres to the north west of Allahabad. The decision to work in Mahrera owed to the proximity to AAI, to which the IVS maintained close contact from the outset.

Like other contemporary rural development projects, IVS was an amalgam of various influences. It exhibited the continuation of a transnational exchange that had exerted its influence on the evolving body of knowledge on rural development since the interwar period.⁷⁴ IVS set out to function not so much as an institutional set-up but an educational programme, which aimed to establish a prototype to be copied and applied all over India and possibly beyond the subcontinent. It sought to train Indian village teachers, who were expected to act as intermediaries between experts and the villagers. The largely western expert “counsellors” offered knowledge and advice to the Indian staff, but never directly interfered in the village experiment. The Indian teachers on the other hand assessed the needs of the villagers and supervised their learning. Because of this, Indians who wished to become leaders of village progress were expected to exhibit empathy and a strong interest in understanding village life. While a college degree and training as a teacher were mandatory, agricultural knowledge and experience in farming was not only not necessary but rather viewed as a disadvantage. The adoption of this specific approach

by the IVS traces back to Martandam. However, its underlying ideas had much wider breeding grounds. IVS also drew from the work of the Near East Foundation, which had run a rural reconstruction programme in Macedonia from 1928 to 1938.⁷⁵

The recruitment of suited personnel was important to IVS. Despite its similarity to secular development initiatives, it strove to safeguard its protestant identity. According to the Wisers, IVS “[sought] to be frankly Christian in its inception, operation and spirit.”⁷⁶ Indians who wished to become teachers of IVS needed to demonstrate that they were “good Christians” and sought their motivation in a Christian ideal of service. A further notable feature of IVS was its goal to employ an equal number of men and women teachers.⁷⁷ Although Indian women’s organisations and missionaries long lamented the low number of women working in rural areas, women were outnumbered in Indian community development in the 1950s, with programmes tailored exclusively for men.⁷⁸ Vidyawati Singh, working as an IVS village teacher, identified a series of reasons for the underrepresentation of women in community development. According to the rural worker, especially young single women from cities were neither accepted by the villagers nor were they accustomed to living conditions in rural areas. Safety problems, alongside inadequate salaries and housing conditions rendered social work in rural India unattractive to women.⁷⁹ The need to integrate Indian women in community development was highlighted by Shanti Daniel, also a staff member of IVS, when she attended the National Seminar on Development Work Among Rural Women in 1956. Daniel presented a paper that sketched the women’s programme of IVS. According to Daniel, IVS aimed at improving women’s literacy and educating them in hygiene and cleanliness, childcare, nutrition, recreational activities as well as knitting, stitching and spinning. Women were also encouraged to organise village functions to celebrate Independence Day, Republic Day and *Gandhi Jayanti*—a task that demonstrated best how IVS tried to craft Indian citizens. As the women’s programme of IVS demonstrates, missionary rural uplift cemented traditional gender norms rather than challenging them. When secular Indian community development began to give greater attention to women’s education and communal participation after 1958, it took a similar course.⁸⁰ IVS thus demonstrates links between rural reconstruction and village uplift schemes of missionaries in the interwar period and secular rural development in the post-war era. In this context it is also noteworthy that the much better-known community development experiment of Albert Mayer in Etawah in 1948 that was expanded by the Nehru government into a nation-wide scheme in 1952, drew from IVS. The transfer of methods from Mahrera to Etawah can be illustrated by a training technique called Training Within Industry (TWI). Elaborated first in the United States, TWI was later used by IVS and adopted by Mayer.

TWI was developed by members of the War Manpower Commission in World War II. The commission was tasked to improve the training of women and labour

migrants to compensate the drain of labour due to war service.⁸¹ TWI was adopted by the American industrial sector in 1941, and by the Extension Farm Labour Program in 1943.⁸² As the name indicates, TWI trained people on the job and aimed “to put knowledge to use in the shortest possible time.”⁸³ TWI entailed the breaking down of a job into a series of basic steps that allowed unskilled labourers to carry out even technical and specialised jobs. After the war, Agricultural Missions, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, began to teach TWI to American missionaries. When the staff of the Department of Agriculture visited Mahrera in 1950, they were enthusiastic to see the results of their courses. “We go on every year after year with short courses for missionaries and never have an opportunity of studying the results in the Field. It is a joy for us to see our materials in use and to know that they are being of help.”⁸⁴ Previously, William Wiser had taken a course offered by Reisner in New York and subsequently applied the method to Mahrera.⁸⁵ The reasons given by Wiser for choosing TWI as a pillar of IVS in India provide insight into contemporary development thinking that was not unique to IVS. Wiser believed that similar to the unlearned and predominantly black and female labourers in North America, Indian peasants could improve their skills through the right method of instruction. He was convinced that “one reason why villagers do not change their practices is because they do not fully understand.”⁸⁶ TWI used “key point lessons”—a summary of the basic steps of a specific task—for instructional purposes. In the case of IVS, key point lessons were meant to teach Indian villagers what they needed to know to improve village life. The Wisers directed Indian teachers to write such instructions in cooperation with agricultural experts. In the process, the Indian teacher as the intermediary between villager and expert translated expert knowledge into a manageable form and content. The key point lessons thus generated proved very popular. While the AAI reproduced them in the *Allahabad Farmer*, William Wiser explained the method to the American agronomist Horace Holmes who took it to the Etawah project.⁸⁷

TWI was just one of the methods that IVS developed to teach Indian villagers and that started to radiate globally. After the American funding committee pushed IVS to adopt “demonstration” as a teaching method, IVS began to employ dramas, games, and films to convey the lessons of self-help to the mostly illiterate villagers.⁸⁸ In IVS’s own estimation, the *garhagaph*—an Indian adaptation of a flannelgraph—was particularly successful.⁸⁹ This was a story-telling device consisting of a painted cloth spun across a frame and a series of paper cut-outs placed on the canvas. Another source of missionary enthusiasm was an adaptation of the board game “Snakes and Ladders” intended to teach villagers about adequate diets and nutrition. When the token of a player landed on a space labelled “wrong food”, he slid down a snake. If he landed on a space that depicted a “right food”, he advanced via the ladder.⁹⁰ The main producer of such educational material was Gladys Rutherford, a missionary

who worked for the IVS as a Public Health and Sanitation Counsellor. Her teaching material had a remarkable longevity. In addition to the IVS flannelgraph stories, Rutherford instigated the production of the IVS Jet Series, which remained the preferred means of instruction for the Peace Corps in the 1970s.⁹¹

4.5 Conclusion

The AMM missionary Robert A. Hume, as shown in the previous chapter, established a short-lived centre of agricultural reform in Ahmednagar 1901, so as to introduce American farming methods and technologies that aimed to modernise Indian agriculture. Hume's isolated experiments anticipated the arrival of a group of American missionaries in the 1910s and 1920s, who promised to free India from famine through Christian-inspired rural reform. Missionary famine relief anticipated the growing involvement of missionaries in rural reform in South Asia. The broadening of missionaries' famine-related activities was driven by developments in the United States and in India. On the one hand, the cause of famine prevention became increasingly popular among donors in the United States, influenced by the export of Indian radicalism to America and the anxiety of Asian nationalisms. On the other hand, the American mission movement's contribution to the fight against rural poverty and hunger became urgent in light of the significance Indian social reformers and politicians attached to poverty alleviation. The pressure on missionaries to demonstrate their ability to work for the benefit of India mandated their emphasis on famine prevention. In the 1910s and 1920s, American missionaries touted agricultural education and rural reform as a means to attend to the root causes of famine, knowing this would free resources. Famine thus remained an important frame that influenced the way American missionaries viewed and portrayed their growing involvement in India in the interwar period.

American missionaries saw and presented the prevention of famine in India still as a central reason for their involvement in South Asia in the 1940s and 1950s. The American mission movement, seeking to consolidate its role in postcolonial India, launched new initiatives of rural reform prior to Indian independence. IVS, a post-war missionary initiative in rural education, shows the continuity of the missionary involvement in rural development in South Asia. IVS was a product of transnational entanglements dating back to the interwar period. It drew on the YMCA's work in Martandam, India, and the Near East Foundation in Greece, and introduced training methods originally developed in the US extension work. Its close collaboration with the AAI and Albert Mayer's Etawah project allowed IVS to influence these well-known Indian institutions of rural reform, and exemplifies how the American missionary movement came to influence Indian Community Development.

Seeking to address a blind spot in the history of American missionary rural reform in India, the chapter examined the role of gender and protestant notions of conjugality and family. The efforts of missionaries to shape rural life through the reworking of gender relations exemplifies another continuity between missionary famine relief in the nineteenth century and rural reform in the twentieth. Missionaries contributed to the framing of agricultural education as a masculine endeavour that aimed to make men out of boys. Women, overwhelmingly associated with the domestic sphere, attracted the attention of American missionaries in the 1930s when home science acquired importance in South Asia and beyond. The change of activities of the AAI, that under the lead of Ethel Higginbottom and its female employees now taught Indian women in home science, attested to this development. The participation of women and the work they conducted in American missionary rural reform in South Asia expanded further in the 1940s. Linked to the growing prominence of Indian women in social service at the time, IVS made it a concern to employ an equal number of women and men as village teachers. Indian members of IVS, such Vidyawati Singh and Shanti Daniel, used their association with the organisation to further promote the contribution of women in rural development.