CHAPTER TWO

COLONIAL MODERNITY, CULINARY IMPERIALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HUNGER

Introduction

British imperial exploitation has been known for disrupting the self-sustaining socio-economic structure of India. Although this intensive friction spurred anticolonial movements at a time, imperialism is yet, "operating in the newly liberated countries in a very sophisticated manner by identifying social classes and groups which legitimise foreign aid, foreign trade, import of foreign capital and technology in the name of national interest and goals of national economic development" (Bhambri 38). Economic pressures leading to a sustained state of neo-colonialism is possible due to these indigenous groups among the erstwhile colonised countries who patronise imperialism as such and are predisposed to power-plays resulting in clash among classes, within the socio-economic scenario. They belong to the "indigenous capitalist class" who enjoyed various benefits while being equally maltreated by the British colonists (Bhambri 38). Imperialism gradually initiated the process of modernisation in India, by opposing the authority of its traditional values, the effects of which have been manifold. Of this, the most visible remains the compromised conditions of life, at least for the underprivileged or the subaltern subjects. Development and destitution go hand in hand as the modern forces are actually "mediated through a hegemonic dispensation" that can only result in short term benefits (Dash and Pattanaik 215). Observing the imperial "acts of genocide or assimilation" against groups seen as different from the white self, critics like Maggie Kilgour, describes imperialism as a form of cannibalism (*Communion* 185-186). In her article "The Function of Cannibalism at the Present time", Kilgour writes that the idea of cannibalism acts as an ideological device to construct racial binaries of savage and civilised, and to justify the consumptive desires of imperialism to incorporate and absorb the unknown Other as a part of its own ("Function" 239-240). In India, this incorporation was undertaken by the attempt at modernising the country itself, by opposing the authority of its traditional values. Modernity is supposed to uphold the autonomy of the individual being, through reason and freedom (Mahadevan 194). However, during this period India witnessed a society lodged between the assurance of freedom in modernity and the continued constriction of its tradition. This is because modernity, or more specifically

colonial modernity, has been imported from the West and forcefully grafted into the native soil. With its intrusion the original social structure of India got fragmented into numerous contesting spheres, divided along the lines of private and public spaces, whereby individuals had to observe both the laws of the state and those of the family, without letting each intrude into the other. This task demanded a constant shuffling of ideas that more often than not created inconsistencies, ironies and contradictions (A.K. Singh 261). Rooted in culture and influenced by time and location, the modernity followed by the Indians was not an exact replica of western modernity, but a tweaked version of it, simultaneously perforated by the politics of dominance as well as that of subversion.

Food and cuisine are repositories of cultural heritages. In colonial India, food acted as an agency to assess the natives and their culture (Bhushi 11). An ideological control of food facilitated a hold upon the Indian economy, as would be furthered discussed in the chapter. The complex struggles through food, in the context of colonialism and the upsurge of nationalism, will be dealt in the next chapter with reference to the dietary ideologies circulated by Gandhi. Adding to this rhetoric is yet another sphere, a discursive space, mostly visible in the cultural activities of the middle class and the bourgeois, where food and cuisine transcend their symbolic and metaphorical functions, in the backdrop of rampant capitalism and rising cosmopolitanism. Jayanta Sengupta in his influential essay "Nation on a Platter" suggests that as cuisine and consumption begin to be "implicated in histories of intimacy and in the cultural politics of the body" (82), food gets transformed into "cultural practices, with a strong ideological-pedagogical content" (81). This chapter would examine the way colonisers incorporated Indian food into their palette and attempted to conduct several experiments with the diets of the natives. Since the very essence of capitalism is dependent upon the creation of insatiable hungers, desires and wants, this chapter would focus on the crippling of Indian economy, the creation of different types of hungers, and the attempt at colonising the Indian tastes, by the British. The present consumer driven society of our country symbolises the gradual liberation of food choices as opposed to the previous principles of dietary conservatism. Additionally, the theme of hunger represents not only biological hunger for food, but also, a psychological hunger for dietary commodification, partly resulting in the homogenisation, and self-fashioning of taste. This is a form of 'culinary imperialism' that can be read as an insidious or a subtle form of colonialism, still existing in the contemporary times. This reading would be applied to analyse Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* for his

poignant portrayal of different types of hungers at different levels, directly constructed by the colonial rule; Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* that portrays the poverty and the problems of food, illness, unemployment, among the Indian farmers; Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* that reflect the utter depravation and humiliation endured by the underprivileged lot, in a world where victimisation is carried out in several levels and humanity tends to be cheaper than food.

Understanding Colonial Modernity

To begin with colonial modernity, at the outset it should be noted that modernity is an labyrinthine phenomenon where a number of dominant and non-dominant structures engage in intense dialogues with each other. Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel traces all the way back to 1492 as the year when modernity was actually born, when, in his words, "Europe could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself" (66). In other words, modernity began with Europe's exploration, subsequent discoveries of new lands and the consequent colonisation thereof. As it had to maintain a dialectical relation with the non-European alterity, it made sure that the other was, "not 'dis-covered' (descubierto), or admitted, as such, but concealed, or 'covered-up' (encubierto), as the same as what Europe assumed it had always been" (66). This silencing, simple generalisation, and "misrecognition" of the non-European assisted the development of what Dussel terms as 'the myth of modernity', which runs the irrational "justification for genocidal violence" while covering it up under the "rational 'concept' of emancipation" (65-66). Modernity is not only attached to Eurocentrism but also equally suffers from the 'fallacy of developmentalism' as it believes that development must be ontological and every culture should mirror the stages of Europe's evolution towards modernity (67-68). In pointing out this fallacy, Dussel problematises Hegel's idea of development, which is synonymous to modernity; and Kant's explanation of Enlightenment which is antonymous to the "state of guilty immaturity", as he relates non-modern cultures to be guilty of laziness and cowardice for its underdeveloped stage (68). To European modernisers the act of violent civilising is never irrational as long as their subjects can be emancipated from their guilt of immaturity, even if it means the total disregard of its subjects' realities. These constitute some of the dominant structures of modernity which when planted into non-European cultures, caused

major discontent among both. In India it grew into colonial modernity, a modernism which did not occur naturally but was forced on by the colonisers.

Tani Barlow in her book *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* talks about the continued presence of contemporary Asian modernities, which were ignored due to the steadfast focus on Europe and the United States as the source of modernism. She stresses how even Marx's narratives remain insufficient in presenting a comprehensive picture of modernity, as his analyses are inherently Eurocentric and perpetuate the supposed liberalism of European capitalist ideals. With the rise of anticolonial wars and the popularity of Leninist and Maoist scholarship, the inside-out perception of non-European intellectuals, has after decades of credulous stagnancy, finally awakened to the "unworkability of vested theoretical and evidentiary categories" (2). The present redefinition of geopolitics has also contributed to broaden one's comprehension of modernity. Any definition of modernity now has to acknowledge not only its inbuilt connection to socioeconomic politics but also the equally viable existence of non-European modernities. She suggests "colonial modernity" as an innovative conception that "connotes present deficiencies of criticism while at the same time pointing, albeit vaguely, to ways of thinking in progressive, loosely extranational or multinational ways about regions—all regions—now undergoing remapping" (3). She defines the concept of colonial modernity to be used as "a speculative frame for investigating the infinitely pervasive discursive powers that increasingly connect at key points to the globalizing impulses of capitalism" (6).

The benefits of examining colonial modernity in literature, may explain how those pervasive colonial influences are continuing to structure the demography of the present. Given its inquisitive and self-reflexive nature, such study may also facilitate to peer beyond the past and even contemporary criticism, which can generate "ensemble-like historical writing" and also new arenas of literary criticism (Barlow 6). Most importantly such readings allow one the "alternative means of engaging reflexively and critically with historical questions" (Barlow 7), while problematising the very act of historical analysis itself.

Satya P Mohanty points out to the prevalence of imprecise usage of the term "colonial modernity" and concisely defines it as follows:

> the term refers to the particular combination of modern social institutions and colonialist ideology that European colonial rule brought with it; this ideology was based on a wholesale devaluation of traditional social institutions in the societies that were colonized. This ideology was used to justify colonial rule, but it is possible to separate the ideology from the institutions (and laws, values, etc.) associated with modernity. (18)

Any analysis of colonialism or modernity in a previously traditional culture should be contextually sensitive (Mohanty 12), as it is being increasingly argued that, the language that had been generally used in such contexts, might not be completely compatible with, or truthfully portray local realities. For instance, the prevalent understanding of modernity in India, as shaped under the glare of western episteme, has obscured the parallel existence other types of modernities such as alternative modernity, early modernity, colonial modernity, fluid modernity, multiple modernities, and vernacular modernism. Such theses have emerged specifically at non-Eurocentric spaces and have become immensely popular since the 1990s (Lee and Cho 601).

However, for all its virtue, one should also keep in mind that any understanding of modernity and modernities should not be thought of as having a singular meaning or a precise definition but rather that they indicate, "a contentious theoretical terrain and a contending analytical arena" (Dube 199). Therefore, when thinking through colonial modernities attention should be paid to the role of power and difference in the construction of such discourses, while also being aware of the danger of succumbing "to the seduction of lurking nativisms, third-world nationalisms, and endeavors that turn their backs on the here-and-now" (Dube 200). Other obstructions in this area also include the superfluous diagression towards autocriticsm, psychological reductionism, and the preclusion of learned speech (Barlow 6-7). Such a well-informed approach would, as Barlow suggests, facilitate "ways of stepping around some well-rehearsed impediments to critical scholarship" (6).

Colonial Modernity in India

The devastation wrecked by colonialism, so as to feed its system of capitalist world economy, had a long-term effect upon the consciousness of the Indian population. Britain's engagement with self-benefit has been one of the major reasons for the negligence meted

out to India's traditional economy. The colonial rule irrevocably destructed India's self-sufficient socioeconomic condition by introducing foreign trading methods based on commercialisation and capitalism. Measures such as the introduction of new land revenue systems, exploiting traditional agricultural methods and crops in favour of cash crops, military seizure of land and so on resulted in the shortage of food grains and inflation of the already meagre stocks. The railways have further contributed to this by upsetting the storage methods and unequal transportation of food. Added to this was the process of industrialisation which put many traditional workers out of business. These factors ultimately gave rise to artificial poverty and artificial famines.

The ideological apparatuses of colonial administration brought severe crisis in the social sphere of India. Crises in the economic sphere were equally mirrored in the intellectual and political sphere as "colonial enlightenment was beginning to "modernize" the customs and institutions of a traditional society" (Chatterjee, *Nation* 5). It caused a severe disintegration during the period of 1820s to 1870s, which Partha Chatterjee terms as the period of "social reform" (*Nation* 5). Several public outbreaks during this period were also fulfilled by the vector of food, such as the First War of Independence or the Mutiny of 1857, that revealed political power of food as an ideological apparatus. This revolt remains as remarkable for its strong voice against the colonial oppression, as for its narrative of alimentary intrusion and the alleged circulation of coded chapattis among the Indians. The speculative idea that the chapatti-encoded message may have sparked the revolt, suggests the fact that food is mutable and resists the constraints of epistemological boundaries (Mannur 116). Defining its influential role Mannur states that, "food at this particular historical moment became a source of anxiety for the colonial powers because it became linked to struggles for freedom, national identity, and self-determination" (Mannur 116). The Mutiny, as Susan Zlotnick points out in her essay, "Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England", remains a "turning point" in the colonial discourse of incorporating India, as it rattled Macaulay's "recipe" for transforming "the raw ingredients of the Indian" into "the naturalized products of the British empire" (57-58). Further, it reiterated the fact that the mouth and the alimentary canal are sites of encounter, "where domination can be exerted or resisted: voices can be silenced, languages suppressed, tastes controlled and food withheld, rejected or force-fed" (Durmelat 125).

As a counteractive measure the British then applied this very tool of food to construct the stereotypical notion of effeminate Indians and masculine British. To justify the colonial rule the rumour that was propagated was that Indians being vegetarians were prone to natural feebleness and effeminacy, and therefore were in need of meat-eating, masculine British leadership. Although Macaulay back lashed the Bengalis in particular, his remark can also be related to the Indians in general. It resulted in major discontent among the Bengalis as major personalities like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda internalised such discriminatory colonial ideals and started to further the project of anglicisation of the Bengali men. Even in the mainstream, nationalists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati joined in the bandwagon of internalising the oriental mindset, while many nationalists also influenced the modification of the shastras to suit a changing society (Mahadevan 200). The adoption of foreign foods, especially among the upper-class Indians, is also reflective of the fact that, "knowledge of foreign food indicates the eater's urbanity and cosmopolitanism" (R. Fox 4), and therefore it seemed essential at a time when localism was insulted in such manner. Thus, Vivekananda's curative of 'beef, biceps, and Bhagavad-Gita' was adopted with much gusto among many Indians, and critics like Parama Ray consider it "the best-known of the Indian responses to such a reproach" (Roy, "Meat-Eating" 65). On the other hand, an equally forceful but opposing response was presented by Gandhi, who instead of prescribing to beef or biceps, propagated vegetarianism and self-control as means to subvert this very British allegation. Gandhi linked dietary frugality to spiritual holiness.

Thus, food found itself among the intersections between the ruler and the ruled, as imperialism began to condition the tastes of its subjects. The space of kitchen which was deemed as a "spiritual" inner domain, was invaded by numerous foreign foods, including the glorified stereotype of meat-eating (Chatterjee, *Nation* 6). It disrupted a fundamental feature of anticolonialism which revolved upon the control and balance of both "the material and the spiritual" domain (Chatterjee, *Nation* 6). India's inability to achieve success in the material domain was well mirrored in the subtle alimentary intrusion in the spiritual domain- one instance of the many, which made them choose their site of autonomy from a subordinate position. Mediated by cultural amnesia, many identities that were constructed were tinged with the lack of self-confidence. In satisfying this want, some of the newly educated class began to fashion themselves after the colonisers, to the extent of acting as brokers of the colonial enterprise. They modernised not only their

education, by learning English, but also upgraded their dress and food habits by turning to the West for inspiration, while the preservation of the spiritual domain took the backseat. It gradually resulted in the formation of hybrid identities and hybrid tastes which went on to create division and disruptions as the British strategically "impaired the organic connections between the literate and the rustic levels" (U. Ray 4) of many Indian societies. What was then achieved was not a sense of unity, but an environment of different and opposing definitions of identities, constructed along the lines of language, religion, location, society, intellect and so on. Food therefore, remains an extensive register for examining the nuances of colonial modernities, the presence of culinary imperialism, the habit of colonial mimicry, the construction of hunger and so on.

Additionally, the study of food during the colonial period also provides an insight into the household chores of the colonialists, which is significant because, "In colonialism's encounter with the urban poor, the household was as significant as were docks, roads, canals, tanks, and bazaars" (Sinha 204). The study of British diet in India also provides a space to examine the role of British women, who are generally ignored in historical analyses of the period. While women were not officially engaged in the maintenance of the colonies, they were responsible for the creation of culinary imperialism, which allowed them to adjust to and negotiate with the domestic life in India, a development which later turned into an aim of the imperialist project (Tunc 6). The next section presents a brief overview of culinary imperialism and the way it influenced some Indians to self-fashion their tastes along with their lifestyle.

Culinary Imperialism and the Self-(Re)fashioning of Taste

Food is one of the potent cultural sites where bodily differences between the ruler and the ruled can be prominently enacted (Chowdhury 584). The Revolt of 1857 visibly furthered the distance between the colonisers and the colonised and fuelled racial theories along with the justification of the British rule. Scholars like Susan Zlotnick, Lizzie Collingham, Uma Narayan, Leong-Salobir, and Utsa Ray, have repeatedly argued how this distance was reflected in the imperial diet and their attitudes towards the native cooks and servants. While native dishes were removed from formal menus, the colonisers still continued to partake of hybrid dishes like curry or mulligatawny in their daily diet at home (Leong-Salobir 47). Also, their daily fares remained extravagant due to the colonial notion that an aristocratic lifestyle would render loyalty from its subject (Chowdhury 584). However, an

examination of colonial food discounts the very notion of colonial superiority which necessitated them to maintain strict distance and approximate the inferior native. Therefore, at the outset it should be stressed that the sustenance of culinary imperialism in India was actually made possible due to the cheap labour provided by the Indian servants in the households of the British expatriates (Leong-Salobir 2). Tanfer Emin Tunc describes culinary imperialism as, "a multivalent strategy that required the negotiation of various factors—differences in race, class, social status, gender, culture, traditions, expectations, and preferences—culinary imperialism involved conquering, colonizing, and dominating the subaltern through food" (6).

It was developed under the mechanics of colonial appropriation as the colonists went on to forcefully transplant their dietary preferences everywhere, which was built on the myth of British superiority. Culinary imperialism accordingly, was the direct result of the domestic interaction between memsahibs and Indian servants, as they tried to maintain their civilised and sanitised kitchens with help from the crude, uncivilised natives. Thus, in spite of the widely circulated notion, imperial food has never been essentially different from that of the natives. The constant requirement of local servants, considered as the uncivilised other, was central to their comfortable sustenance, and ironically facilitated the maintenance of European colonial prestige and practice (Leong-Salobir 2). The native cooks working in British households were instrumental in the creation of Anglo-Indian fusion food as contributed by their "knowledge of local ingredients and where to source them, their cooking skills, their resourcefulness and the cheapness of their labour" (Leong-Salobir 2).

Susan Zlotnick in her paper "Domesticating Imperialism", observes that imperialism and domesticity were two core values among the Victorian middle class which went on to become national values (53-54). While for the English women the ideological impetus granted to their domesticity became a sign of their nation's superiority, for India this very ideology got manipulated to create a subjugated nation, as its women became prime objects of subjugation. (Zlotnick 54; Mahadevan 200). While Indian food in England as Zlotnick argues, functioned "metonymically for India" (52), in a bid to domesticate imperialism, Indian things were vehemently rejected in India itself, in a bid to differentiate themselves from the nation. Nupur Chaudhuri reads this overt ethnocentrism as the memsahibs' special duty so as to conserve Britain's imperial power

over India (242). However, the seeds of cultural exchange continued to germinate and memsahibs had to derive nourishment from the "source of threat and contamination" itself (Zlotnick 53).

Similar to Europe's exercise in culinary imperialism and domesticity, was a concurrent development in India. The dialectical relation between colonial modernity and the colonised self, fuelled the re-imagination of colonial subjectivity. As food evolved into "a site of colonial supremacy" (Chowdhury 586), groups of Indian middle class began the task of refashioning, as an indigenous attempt towards modernisation, where they attempted to define themselves in opposition to the colonisers. Instead of fashioning, it is termed as refashioning to emphasise the fact that this exercise requires the simultaneous knowledge of both the old and the present selves (A.K Singh 262). For example, in Bengal, this self-fashioning or self-(re)fashioning, among the Bengali middle class was carried out by the rectification of music, education, literature, arts, and cuisine, as a means of survival against the moral corrosion brought about by the colonisers. Utsa Ray's study on the same traces how self-fashioning during the colonial period was meditated through the reconstitution of Bengali culinary cultures, that drew from the annals of both the regional as well as the cosmopolitan platter (U. Ray 6). In colonial Bengal, food was cooked by the amalgamation of both local and British ingredients and methods, quite similar to those created in the memsahibs' kitchens. Observing the play of the foreign and the indigenous, Utsa Ray succinctly calls the development of Bengali cuisine a case of "regional cosmopolitanism" (21).

Bengal being the hotbed of colonial dominance, serves as a quasi-microcosm of India as a whole. The conscious construction of Bengali cuisine is influenced by the Bengali middle class, which consisted of compradors and the English educated literati. Their refinement centred on a balanced approximation of the othering followed by the colonial state (U. Ray 4-6). However, Ray stresses that this self-fashioning was never a product of indigenism or even a case of alternative modernity, but rather a middle path between luxury and manual labour (6-7). It had been a conscious choice of Bengaliness, marked by a specific taste in consumption that would individualise them from both, while simultaneously reaping benefits from the presence of capitalist modernity (U. Ray 8, 13).

Similarly, other parts of India too witnessed the growth of subregional cuisines during this period and with Independence, an idea of national cuisine gradually emerged,

as documented most interestingly by Arjun Appadurai. The middle class being a highly heterogeneous class not only had regional and national interests in mind, but also responded to a broader discourse of health, sanctity, and taste, in their creation of a "cultural idiom" (U. Ray 10, 12). Rejecting the prevalent juxtaposition of tradition and modernity as the nucleus of middle-class politics, as put forward by the likes of Sinha, Mukherjee and McGuire, Utsa Ray, stresses that these developments were actually "products of the contorted socio-economic context produced by colonial rule", and thus the resultant cuisine was essentially hybrid (11-13).

The gastropolitical negotiation among this class was marked by a sense of duality, selectivity, and at times ambiguity, consciously tweaked to one's benefit, which resulted in a fluid sense of identity. Therefore, the tendency to fabricate culinary authenticity was present even during this period. This desire for authenticity also supported the organic history of the middle class where a period of pre-colonial plentitude was imagined (U. Ray 62). However, more than being a nationalist endeavour, it was instead "a device to make colonial modernity comfortable for one's self", while equally distancing oneself from it (U. Ray 15). The intermixture of ideas, the confusion among their ideologies and the inconsistencies of their selves, were the result of dominating forces from the outside (A. K. Singh 262).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the growth of new food in India along with unprecedented changes in economic policies and the beginning of several experiments in cultivation. Previously unknown food like biscuits, essences, baby food, tea, chocolate, arrived and quickly flooded the Indian markets. Likewise, fruits and vegetables such as tomato, potato, okra, chilli pepper, pineapple, previously introduced by the Portuguese traders, gained currency under the colonial dominance (U. Ray 39). These changes were not spontaneous but rather governed by colonial agendas. Utsa Ray lists two reasons behind the same: "One was to bring new (modern) food to the subject population as a symbol of progress. The other was to recreate a sense of belonging for the coloniser in the colony" (39). The ideological agenda behind this was to alter the Indian palette (U. Ray 39). This attempt at dietary transformation can be identified as yet another device to tame and domesticate the colonised subject. Apart from the introduction of progress and belongingness, such strategic introduction of new food could create a demand in the Indian economy which would ultimately make it materially addicted and therefore dependent on

the coloniser's mercy. Along with the vast profits to the colonial enterprise, such a situation would very likely portray the benevolence of the colonists upon the natives, and also facilitate a subtle way to carry on the imperial intrusion into the palette of the colonised.

Keeping such ideological agendas in mind, several dietary binaries were constructed. Adding to the infamous differentiation between meat-eating masculinity and vegetarian effeminacy, other dichotomies include, wheat-eater vs. rice-eater; modern and rational agriculture vs. local and indigenous agriculture; long sighted agricultural goals vs. short sighted agricultural goals, simple and sombre meals vs. rich and spicy meals. Similarly, scientific discourse blended with cultural stereotyping and India became a laboratory for colonial dietary experiments (U. Ray 38, 44).

The Construction of Hunger: Experiments in Food and Famines

While hybrid foods are products of capitalist modernity, hunger and non-normative food remain other gifts of the same. The British rule in India was bookended by two severe occurrences of famines as in the Bengal famine of 1769-1770 and the one of 1943-1944 (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 21). Although common since the precolonial times, famines gained intensity at the hands of the British. Along with geographical extension, famines which occurred roughly every fifty years showed an increase in its frequency during the Raj. If one includes food scarcity and famines together, it would be a struggle to find even a single uneventful year in this respect (Nand 3). Improper economic estimation of the colony, changes forced upon agriculture and local occupation, failure to provide timely famine relief, increased taxation and violent revenue collection, ignorance to the benefits of peasants, military seizure of land, unequal distribution and transportation of food, are only some of the causes leading to the repeated attacks of famine and food scarcity.

The creation of hunger remains an ideologically designed, imperial motif, operating throughout the years of colonial rule, which resulted in artificial famines and artificial poverty. Of course, capitalism remains the major impulse behind hunger and also its remedy, as both the conditions are strictly governed by the politics of resource distribution and ownership. As opposed to public property, the private ownership of any means of production remains the foundation of capitalist economies (Sen 3). Therefore, in a capitalist economy, entitlement to food is unequal and is strictly dependent on the

position of personal ownership as well the value he may derive out of the exchange of what he owns. This is the reason why Amartya Sen in his book *Poverty and Famines*, famously suggests that, hunger or "starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat" (1). Therefore, to Sen, the characteristic feature and cause of famine is not the physical unavailability of enough food, but the prevalence of unequal food accessibility, that results from rapid loss of "exchange entitlements" (3).

The glad acceptance and support of such private ownership, by a section of traders and bourgeois within the Indian upper class, such as zamindars, Marwaris and Rajasthani traders, exacerbated the instances of hunger and famine. Answering to the magnetic force of capitalism the colonial state embarked on the task of rectifying the incompetent agro-economic practices of India, by adopting the western agricultural models based on reason and science. Utsa Ray refers to the pioneering research carried out by B. B Chaudhuri on colonial agricultural policies and the rise of peasant indebtedness in the essay "Commercialization of Agriculture" (27-28). Pressures to cultivate commercial crops along with high rent imposed on agriculture lands resulted in reduction of subsistence agriculture, forcing the earlier self-sufficient peasant to start purchasing food. Both Chaudhuri and Utsa Ray illustrate the agricultural disruptions caused by the cultivation of cash crops and the gradual transformation of rice itself as a cash crop, due to its increasing commercialisation for export (U. Ray 28). By the time rice began to be exported by Thailand and Burma, India was reduced to import rice from South East Asia as cultivation of commercial crops like jute and opium, drastically reduced the total land earlier used for the production of rice (U. Ray 29, 30). Additionally, gambling and speculative inflation of the price of Burmese rice, dealt blows to the common customers especially during famines (U. Ray 30). Equally responsible for hunger were the imperialist wars that constructed the denial policy of the colonial government, which resulted in the scorching of food stock and boats from the coastal villages in fear of an impending Japanese attack (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 117).

In the case of Bengal Famine of 1943, Amaryta Sen observes that:

> While 1943 was not a very good year in terms of crop availability, it was not by any means a disastrous year either. The current supply for 1943 was only about 5

> per cent lower than the average of the preceding five years. It was, in fact, 13 per cent higher than in 1941, and there was, of course, no famine in 1941. (58)

Therefore, even if there was 'indifferent' winter crop in 1942, the possibility of a serious shortfall can be ruled out. Actual shortage was caused instead by the price rise of rice which resulted in an "abnormally higher withholding of rice stock" by the profit minded capitalists from the winter harvest of 1942-3 (Sen 76). Such intense hoarding turned a minimal production shortage into an "exceptional short-fall in market release", even though 1943 recorded Bengal's largest rice crop production in its history (Sen 76, 78). Eventually these conditions ensured the Bengal famine of 1943 was bookended by "two historical price regimes", that is to say, prices which were nearly identical for decades, saw a steep increase from 1942 onwards (Sen 78). To make matters worse, famine relief was withheld by the Delhi government on the grounds that Bengalis were "overdramatizing" the food scarcity, while the presence of an efficient railway network, caused food grains to be ironically sucked out of the very famine-stricken districts of Bengal (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 118). This is why Utsa Ray scornfully comments that, "The dark and macabre side of colonial modernity reached its height with the Bengal famine of 1943" (190).

Famine bought to light what Utsa Ray calls as the "myth" of the self-sustaining village community, as it shattered the romantic imagery of a bountiful village life, among the Bengali middle-class (U. Ray 188, 190). Subsequent researches on the Bengal famine of 1943 revealed that the typical lower-class menu in the villages consisted only of coarse rice and lentils, with only an occasional consumption of vegetables (U. Ray 188-189). Although the rural population produced animal products and such, they had to sell these things so as to afford rice (U. Ray 189). Therefore, the imagined dietary palette was but a selective misrepresentation of the past, as the food of the upper caste Hindus was fancied as the general food for the Bengalis.

The painful experience of famine has deconstructed caste taboos, especially among the villagers as much as the new dietary inclusion did, among the middle-class city dwellers. As stated by Utsa Ray, during times of scarcity, lower castes resorted to consuming unconventional food sources like snails, frogs, crabs, shrimps, and even snakes (U. Ray 188). Ray further argues that while the concept of food purity and caste hierarchy may have persisted in theoretical texts, the tangible reality of the situation made the fluidity

of caste divisions much more evident (U. Ray190-191). In a survey conducted by Tarakchandhra Das, the severity of the 1943 Bengal famine is further underscored. The famine was so devastating that even the carcasses of dogs, rats, and cats became acceptable food for those in the most desperate circumstances (T. Das 8). This survey reveals how hunger became a great equaliser, as the extreme conditions of famine momentarily eclipsed deep-rooted social divisions, placing people on an equal footing as they shared the common struggle for survival. As Das aptly describes it, "the destitutes of Calcutta belonged to one caste and that was the caste of the 'have-nots'" (T. Das 9).

Another interesting fact as Amaryta Sen and Parama Roy demonstrate is that, the colonial state engaged in ambiguity and also the complete erasure of words like famine and starvation, in a desperate attempt to discredit the very existence of famine from its narratives (Sen 79; P. Roy, *Alimentary* 117-118). As such, the records of famine and the intensity of hunger prior to and even during the colonial period remain mysterious, and possibly tampered, a fact that calls for the assistance of fictional narratives to illuminate the cause of the archetypal victims of colonial modernity, of culinary imperialism, and the imperial creation of hunger. Therefore, the next section would engage with the aforementioned novels to illustrate the artistic representation and engagement of the same.

Critiquing the Representation of Food and Hunger in Select Novels

Sahitya Akademi award winner Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* came at a time when India got her first taste of freedom. The novel opens in the backdrop of Britain's war with Germany, and the resultant crisis faced by most of the inhabitants of Bengal, in the form of the Great Bengal famine of 1943. The tale depicts two Bengali families with their contrasting lifestyle, as the war creates an uneven development between the urban and rural economy, as resulting from the hoarding and the subsequent scarcity of food. Thus, the novel presents war as a subjective industry which can be both enriching and impoverishing. The aristocracy of tastes among the bureaucratic class as opposed to the necessity to identify alternate sources of nourishment, among the underprivileged, attains a remarkable representation. Most importantly, the novel provides an intense demonstration of the strategic creation of hunger as the agricultural lands, fishing boats and stocks of food grains were scorched by creating the fear of an impending Japanese attack. Bhattacharya carefully juxtaposes the picture of accumulation to that of scarcity so as to present a ruthless but truthful picture of the intensity brought about by the colonial

experiments in food and famines. Bhattacharya's understanding of this intensity is reflected through the comments of 'Grandfather', "Facts never tell much unless they are seen in terms of human experience" (Bhattacharya 25). The intensity of the 1943 famine is also influenced by the emergence of the 'Quit India' resolution and the subsequent arrest of its leaders which as Iyengar says, "led to a convulsion without a parallel, and this gave the last vicious twist to the Bengal tragedy" (413). As for his narrative technique, the novelist has been criticised for adopting a straightforward and journalistic style. However, his intense realism is backed by a generous touch of compassion, which automatically churns out pathos amongst his readers, thereby attesting his artistic capabilities (Iyengar 413).

The simultaneous occurrence of development and destitution, as presented in the novel, is a byproduct of capitalism bought in by colonialism. Neil Smith in his book *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* terms this uneven developmental process as a result of the "'seesaw' movement of capital", wherein the "moves are synchronized with the rhythm of accumulation and crisis" (197). Such moves gain magnitude with the initiation of war, whereby corruption reaches the level of an epidemic and increases the proliferation of hunger in different spheres. Therefore, one can understand the urgency of panic buying in the mind of Rahoul's mother, as the war would inflate the price of everything. Being a well to do family, they can afford to buy and accumulate the ration of half a year at once. Their list of products to be hoarded also includes costly items such as tinned fish and tinned butter, to suit their colonised tongues. The same is further revealed in the comment of Rahoul's mother, "The rivers of Bengal choked with fish-every kind, large and small- still you fancy the year old shapes packed in tins, both you and Kunal" (Bhattacharya 6). This lies in sharp contrast to the inability of purchasing essential items among the peasants as exemplified by Kajoli's family, who are forced to eat a starvation diet and supplement it with unusual food such as kachu roots, some edible leaves, grass seed rice, water hyacinth, red seed berries of banyan trees, water weeds and such. Besides, the normal fare of the villagers was simple and usually reflected the routine occurrence of food scarcity. 'Grandfather' explains to Rahoul that the meals of the peasants are simple and even the minimal combination of steamed rice, lentils, vegetable curry and thickened milk, amounted to a festive meal (Bhattacharya 24).

Parama Roy's account of the "denial policy" of the colonial government is especially useful in the context of the story (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 223). The "boat denial" scheme lent a heavy blow as boats were the lifeline of Bengal's economy, along with its agricultural fields. Kajoli's brother Kanu, unable to help his fellow fisherman hide his boat, reveals how the fishermen were tricked for commission and blackmailed by constructing a fear of invaders as a result of which, "The boats are yours, yet not yours, the labour is yours, yet not yours … yet for every fish caught nine go to the big man, and you get one" (B. Bhattacharya 53). Similarly, the "rice denial" scheme ensured the strategic requisition of rice stocks in order to feed the military and the industrial workers in the city, "who were essential to the war effort" (P. Roy, *Alimentary* Roy 223). Both the fishermen and the peasants were ensured to achieve a fair price for their troubles. However, the amount paid to them was lost among the waves of subsequent inflation, as food stocks were withheld from the market by the powerful traders so as to make more profits with the rise of scarcity. For instance, Rahoul's father Samarendra, and others like him made the most of the blockage of Burmese rice and came up with strategies like that of *Cheap Rice, Limited* (40) which would help in purchasing huge stocks of Bengal rice to be "laid up, frozen, till demand exceeded supply and the price level rose … then the stocks could be slowly released at a huge profit" (40). The food scarcity was also exacerbated through the transformation of village grocers to sub-agents, like Girish, who were commissioned to buy as much rice as possible from the peasants. Whatever amount the peasants earned depleted quickly with price rise of commodities in the market, thus barring them from enjoying their exchange entitlement even if they sold more rice than their surplus (Sen 75). All these forces worked together to create fear and crisis in the villages which destroyed the village economy even while the harvest was fruitful.

War, as Bhattacharya notes, was "the most enriching industry" (20). It increased the hunger of accumulation among the wealthy traders who were nothing but colonial intermediaries and mercenaries strategically controlling the fate of the fellow Indians. Such colonial agents are hard core capitalists, motivated by their extreme greed of capital accumulation, which renders them blind to the perils of the common man. As Kanu rightly remarks: "They are out to get rich, more rich. And how may they get rich, more rich, if they do not grab and make other folk poor, more poor?" (53). This is an example of the centralisation of capital by wealthy capitalists, as put forward by Marx, where he explains that "[C]apital grows in one place to a huge mass in a single hand because it has in another

place been lost by many" (626). War also favours and further deepens the web of the credit system, a capitalist machinery, designed to foster extreme wealth accumulation. The credit system, as Marx continues,

> in its first stages furtively creeps in as the humble assistant of accumulation, drawing into the hands of individual or associated capitalists, by invisible threads, the money resources which lie scattered, over the surface of society, in larger or smaller amounts; but it soon becomes a new and terrible weapon in the battle of competition and is finally transformed into an enormous social mechanism for the centralisation of capitals. (626)

In the same way, the novel presents how the ambitious Girish builds dreams out of the villagers' misery as he loans out not only money, but also rice and other goods to the poor peasants, while the accumulation of interest extends his capital. This way he is able to suck out all the bits of money scattered among the peasants, and enrich his capital, so that eventually he can be powerful enough to even monopolise the food transport of the village, thereby deriving utmost profit from the "enriching industry" of war (20). Girish's capitalist strategy reflects the mechanism of the metropolis and satellite model forwarded by Andre Gunder Frank, as Girish acts as a metropolis to the peasants by draining their personal resources and channeling the surplus to the world metropolis (Frank 6).

The denial policies along with the mechanism of capitalism resulting in inflation and food crisis precipitates "distress sales" among the peasants. Roy writes, "As massive price increases put rice out of the reach of peasants, sharecroppers, fishermen, and others of the rural poor, they sold what land and other goods they possessed in distress sales" (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 223). And the sale did not simply stop at land, household items, and livestock, but there were also markets for the bodies of women. The well-fed mass such as the soldiers and the bureaucrats too, suffered from hunger, but their hunger was for power over the situation and the poor women. The situation turns so bad that food is only available to those who could spare their young daughters for prostitution. As a villager retorts angrily at Kajoli's mother, "I must eat. Neeri must eat. Eat rice, not roots. You, too will eat one day, for you have a daughter" (125). The price for each female child is fixed at 10 silver rupees while each young adult woman would fetch twenty to thirty rupees (129). Prostitution was rampant in the city, and the way the heavily pregnant Kajoli was tortured on the high-road by a soldier, speaks volumes about the lack of sympathy and

degradation of human nature. The bodies of destitute women worked as a testament to the dual blows of biological and sexual hunger.

The villagers of Baruni tried to save their meagre stocks of grain by eating a "starvation diet", and supplementing their diet by the act of foraging all day long, "collecting odd bits of food: shrimps from the ponds and water-weeds; green wild figs from the tall trees; berries and soft, edible roots from wasteland", which steadily depleted the level of wild food (110). With the adoption of such non-normative food, the menu of the daily fare, as well as the modes of procurement had to be refashioned. As such, the village haat has been reduced solely to the task of "bartering of grain for trinkets and household brass" (110), while foraging in the wild became the sole way to procure food. The narrative further reveals how rice, which has been a staple food for Bengalis and a profound cultural signifier (U. Ray 151), reached the level of luxury, as each grain became as costly as a grain of gold, quite removed from the reach of the poor villagers (119-120). Therefore, rice had to be replaced with the unfamiliar plants and roots, which were boiled and seasoned with salt for consumption, that later on sickened the stomach or sat inside like a hard load. This movement from the village economy to the wilderness of the nature, refashioned the very concept of edibility (R. Das 36). The non-normative food that entered the palate of the common mass, carried a constant reminder of its invention and acceptance under an enforced culture of want (R. Das 36).

The epidemic of hunger was a forced phenomenon. The innocent villagers were forcefully uprooted from their villages, and their search for food, led them to the cities of West Bengal, particularly Calcutta. The mass that moved thus were reduced to "dehydrated sticks of humanity" (135), no more valuable than the grains of dust in the high-road. The pain of hunger is plainly evident in their figures, as they looked and behaved alike: "their backs bent, their heads bent, each bearing a rag bundle, feet dragging slowly" (134). The narrator pensively remarks that, "one group was the image of the other, all of one piece, all figures in a frieze" (135). It is ironic how they had to pass through the lush green rice fields, while moving to the city, rich with the promise of a fruitful harvest. These laden paddy fields corroborate the 1943 harvest of Bengal that contributed to its largest rice crop yield in its history (Sen 78). As such, the narrative repetitively underlines the fact that it was not due to any biological disease or natural calamity that those people suffered, but due to the selfish motives of the imperial war along with the unsustainable market

economy, distorted by hoarding and speculating, that scorched all their sources of food and livelihood.

Parama Roy observes that, “The clumsy, erratic, and inefficient interventions of the beleaguered provincial government, combined with the indifference of Delhi and of Whitehall, meant that very little famine relief reached the affected rural areas” (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 223). As the villagers of Bengal were accused of exaggerating the food crisis, no word was ever spoken about their intense suffering. Rather, the government seemed to have turned a blind eye to their pains. There was no discussion or decision on their desperate need for aid: “no true word, no food for the people’s hunger” (Bhattacharya 137). With a bland indifference, the trader retorts at their desperate cries, “It is your job to feed the Gorement, not the Gorement’s job to feed you” (Bhattacharya 136). Bhattacharya notes the injustice by which the army had enough “rice and wheat to squander”, while the peasants who created the foodgrains with their sweat and toil, were now “doomed to hunger and death” (149). Additionally, people like Abalabandhu, sped up the process of corruption and facilitated the easy storage of hoarded food grains, in “secret dumps that lay in the heart of famine areas” (173). In place of relief, guns and the military moved into Bengal: “Grains moved out of Bengal, though, even out of deficit areas! While ten million peasants groaned in hunger, the rice they had raised with their toil moved according to plan out of Bengal” (153). Even the city could not provide sufficient relief to this suffering mass. While some of them ate from gruel kitchens run by the Revenue Department and private charities, like that of Rahoul’s, the food served did not have much sustaining power. It soothed their hunger only for a while, eventually leading them to subsist on fruit skins, vegetable peels, leavings and sometimes even rats. These were their major sources of food, picked right from the garbage cans, which turned into their “food-bowls” (162). Even though the destitutes fought with each other and with the constant hunger, they did not steal. They suffered silently but this silence was also a form of revolt, they would not break their tradition and their morality, even if they face fatal consequences. Their morality instead of strategy, alleviate their constant degradation by the rice hoarders (108). As the destruction caused by the man-made famine gains momentum, the narrator observes that, “Never in the land’s history had the process that made the rich richer, the poor poorer, gained such ruthless intensity” (106).

Bhattacharya attends to the social purpose of novel writing by his accurate observation of the Indian society, disintegrating under the colonial rule. The novel examines the themes of famine, war and the different types of hungers. Thus, the novel makes a meaningful study of the plight of the archetypal victims such as the peasants at the hands of their archetypal oppressors. Along with the theme of hunger for food, the novel depicts the subjectivity of hunger at different levels, for power, for war, for sexual gratification and for more profit.

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is narrated in a reminiscent mode, staging the swift disintegration of Rukmani's family, where hunger runs as a leitmotif. Youngest daughter of the village headman, Rukmani was not lucky enough like her sisters to have a big wedding and had to settle for a poor tenant farmer Nathan, "who was poor in everything but in love and care" (4). The headman's decline of power is brought about by the rise of the village Collector, while the diminution of Rukmani and Nathan is similarly influenced by other colonial machineries. Although the beginning of their married life passed in plenty and contentment, the appearance of the tannery initiates their steady dissolution to poverty. While Bhabani Bhattacharya strictly deals with the 1943 Bengal famine, Markandaya's novel is set in an unnamed South Indian village with no point of reference to the time it portrays. However, written in 1954, just after the Indian independence, the novel bears unmistakable testimony to the upheavals bought about by the introduction of colonial modernity in the Indian soil. Entwined between the heavy rainfall, seasonal flood, and occurrence of drought, is the narrative of intrinsic colonial corruption, which intensifies the effects of crop failure, and ultimately drives the indigent couple, and many others like them, out of their village in search of food. Iyengar describes Rukmani as the "Mother of Sorrows", who receives repeated shocks throughout her life (438). Critics have variously judged Markandaya's novel as one that demonstrates unending hope and invincible optimism that facilitate the characters to tide over the muddied waters of life. Poverty of the peasants and the gnawing pangs of hunger, punctuates the narrative, which further leads to the prostitution of women or drives them in a futile search for livelihood towards the city. The novel demonstrates the cobweb of the colonial revenue system, where agricultural labourers sink deeper and deeper in debt, with each passing year. Their plight is equally challenged with the swift inflation of money at times of scarcity, that buys lesser and lesser amount of food with the passage of time.

Markandaya's novel challenges the romanticisation of the village life and the peasantry. Utsa Ray discusses how the critique of the colonisers, led the colonial middle class to construct "an 'imaginary' peasant world of abundance" (50). Living in cities, the middle class longed for the simple and nutritious fare consumed by the peasants, as opposed to the new and impure food that populated the cities (U. Ray 87). However, Markandaya's narrative deconstructs the glamourisation of village diet, by revealing the meagre meals which was part of a daily affair, even in normal times (U. Ray 87). For breakfast, Rukmani's family only subsisted on rice water and saved the rice for their midday meal. Their resources declined with each birth, and the portions of meals grew smaller.

The tannery where Arjun and Thambi worked, provides sufficient money to feed and clothe themselves but there is never enough to save for the future. This is another impoverishing feature of capitalism, which makes sure that labourers and petty workers have never enough to rise above their level. The plight of the tannery workers is akin to the condition of the coolies working at the Skeffington Coffee Estate in *Kanthapura*, as would be discussed in the next chapter. Difference in class is always maintained through the numerous rules and regulations in which these workers are bound. Questioning these managerial ideologies is never an easy task, as the workers are made to suffer even more, by cuts in wages or reduction of leisure time. As Arjun and Thambi leave their demeaning jobs in the tannery, Nathan once again becomes their sole provider, while their reserves of grain decline. One can sense the eagerness with which Arjun and Thambi leave to work in the tea plantations of Ceylon. This is a one-way journey into a lifetime of servitude, with no hope for having enough to return home. However, to the youths who cannot change their fates, a little lure of money means the assurance of daily meals, and a freedom from the pangs of chronic hunger, provided which they can gladly undergo eons of bondage. Thus, they leave one web of bondage to be swiftly swallowed up by another web of bondage.

The poverty and eventual disintegration of Rukmani and Nathan, and many other villagers like them, can be explained by Frank's metropolis-satellite model. The model presents how even a petty peasant can act as a metropolis to the landless labourers by exploiting their labour. This unjust process of extracting resources and man power from the satellites induces pauperisation among the landless lot. In the novel one can identify

the position of tenant farmers like Rukmani and Nathan as satellites whose life revolves around the whims of the metropolis, in this case, their landlords who leased them the land for agriculture. The natural failure of their crop does not provide them any relief or exemption, but they have to pay their rent by any means possible. Sivaji, the zemindari agent, although kind, informs Nathan that, "'The land is to be given to another if you cannot make payment.'" (75) When they decide to pay the half of their dues, they find that even this half was difficult to gather, although they have sold most of their belongings for the same. "Distress sales" has started in the village as Biswas, the moneylender, remarks other women have also sold their belongings to him. Men like Biswas, make most of these distress sales and "thrive on others' misfortunes" (Markandaya 76). Such sales start with small items such as costly clothes bought on occasions, unused pots and pans and other trinkets, and goes on to the sale of bullocks or cows, till it reaches the point of selling one's body only to keep it physically alive. In these cases, resources always need to be sold off and squeezed dry, until one has nothing to sell anymore. This tactful equation ultimately serves the interests of the capitalist world's metropolitan centre and furthers the development of the developed countries by decapitalising and underdeveloping or disintegrating the developing countries (Frank 9). Markandaya's novel exemplifies the fact that underdevelopment of rural areas and the poverty of its inhabitants are not due to the involvement in archaic modes of agriculture, or the shortage of capital, as capitalist theories would lead one to believe. Rather, the presence of capitalism and a stronger relation to the metropole, extorts valuable resources and man power, while subsistence agriculture is rapidly replaced by commercial mono crop agriculture. The commercial contracts through which lands are leased, provide no alternative resources to fall back upon, in times of need, and hence, the process of pauperisation and eventual displacement is initiated.

Markandaya's description of the challenging task of cultivating paddy tugs at the sympathetic chords of the readers' heart. It is not a romanticisation of the agrarian world but rather a representation of the uncertainties attached to the lives of the peasants. They are always tethered to the feelings of hope combined with fear, hunger and despair: "Fear, constant companion of the peasant. Hunger, ever at hand to jog his elbow should he relax. Despair, ready to engulf him should he falter. Fear; fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death" (81). The conversion of seedlings to the grains of rice is a lengthy procedure, with demands patience and energy. Meanwhile

this intermission requires them to fall back upon their scanty reserves. After much paring, scheming, and calculations, Rukmani divided the ten ollocks of rice, she had previously stored, into the portions of twenty-four days. She wanted to be scant and make it last for a month, but Kuti, her youngest son was ailing due the lack of food and they themselves couldn't afford to be hungry, since strength was needed for the strenuous activity of harvesting. This small treasure of rice transforms to a great burden for Rukmani, and its safekeeping becomes a matter of life and death. The value of rice and the fear of hunger is emphasised repeatedly as Rukmani hides the rice in different places in order to keep it from being stolen. Unknown to each other, Kunthi blackmails both Nathan and Rukmani about their extramarital relationships and exhorts the ration of fifteen days from them. Rice becomes a powerful symbol and for a while turns Rukmani against her own children. Her desperation due to the missing rice becomes so profound that she can even spare the death of her children. Instead of calming the crying Kuti, she exclaims that, Kuti's absence would mean "one mouth less to feed" (87). Rather than being a form of life insurance, the presence of so many mouths threaten the means of survival. Through her affective paragraphs Markandaya presents how hunger bears the capacity to turn family members to foes.

As their stock of rice ends, they were at par with the rest of the villagers and embark on the task of foraging. We see a desperate competition to gather nature's free stock, quite similar to the people of Baruni in *So Many Hungers!* As such, Markandaya shows how anything remotely edible was more than welcome: prickly pears, half-rotten sweet potatoes, bamboo shoots, sticks of left out sugarcane or even pieces of coconuts picked from the town's gutter. They had to search far and wide for these unsuitable bits of food, and, "for every edible plant or root there was a struggle — a desperate competition that made enemies of friends and put an end to humanity" (89). The food, unsuitable as it was, was never sufficient to quell their hunger. The had to resort to eat grass, out of "sheer rebellion" against hunger (89). There is a poignant description of the pain caused by hunger that can be broken down into different stages of despair. The thought of food causes mental desperation and its absence is reflected in the physical agony of the body, that starts to close its functions step by step:

> hunger is a curious thing: at first it is with you all the time, waking and sleeping and in your dreams, and your belly cries out insistently, and there is a gnawing and

> a pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost, and you buy a moment's respite even while you know and fear the sequel. Then the pain is no longer sharp but dull, and this too is with you always, so that you think of food many times a day and each time a terrible sickness assails you, and because you know this you try to avoid the thought, but you cannot, it is with you … now that the strength drains from your limbs, and you try to rise and find you cannot, or to swallow water and your throat is powerless, and both the swallow and the effort of retaining the liquid tax you to the uttermost. (89-90)

The hungry body reaches a point where it cannot even digest water. Rukmani describes the dreadful process of emaciation as she saw her fellow villagers' "flesh melt away and their skin sag and sink between their jutting bones, saw their eyes retreat into their skulls, saw their ribs curve out from under the skin" (90). Her youngest son, Kuti, was too young to bear this lack of food and nutrition. The extended periods of hunger proved too severe for him. Before Ira decided to earn money by selling her body, Kuti was offered only the rough food that the rest of the poor villagers ate, or the parched teat of his sister. None could offer him any sustenance. It was clear to the family that he would not survive to witness the harvesting. His long-drawn suffering tormented Rukmani and on many occasions, she wished he would stop living. Compared to the gradual destruction by hunger, death seems to be a rather tempting alternative. Once hunger destroys the bodily mechanisms, and the organs begin to shut down, even food becomes useless and instead, a danger to the body. This is why Kuti dies even though Ira starts to feed him nutritious food.

This tedious phase of hunger is replaced by the back breaking labour of harvesting the paddy, that consists of reaping, draining and cleaning the fields, thrashing, winnowing and at last measuring and marketing. It is a pity that they cannot afford to grieve the deaths of their sons or rest their starved and weak bodies. Even though the extremities of hunger and depression transformed them to the likes of scarecrows, thin and bony, with hollow cheeks and bulging stomachs, they continue to produce their crops and vegetables. They can't but laugh at the grotesqueness of their own bodies and feel grateful that they have apparently passed the worst. It is peculiar that they revolted against the hunger of their stomachs by eating unnatural food, and worked in spite of the failing strength of their bodies, but one hardly sees them rebelling against the ruling ideologies that aggravated

their fateful position. This is because they were fatal followers of their age-old moral tradition, which saw hunger as a form of expiation of the sins of their previous births. To them, fighting against hunger was a selfish exercise, that questioned the dignity of their souls and demonstrated one's weakness. Rather they accepted their wants as their natural companion, "from birth to death, familiar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree" (115).

A major turn in the novel comes when despite all the hardships that they suffered, they fail to rise above their misfortunes. They are asked to vacate their home within two weeks as the land was to be sold to the tannery owners at a great profit. Without land there was nothing for them to depend upon, no hope to hold on to. As Rukmani contemplates, the tannery cannot be solely blamed for all their troubles, for the land, "had never belonged to us, we had never prospered to the extent where we could buy, and Nathan, himself the son of a landless man, had inherited nothing" (136). Rukmani is correct in her statement as the root of their misfortune lay not only in the presence of the tannery but in the very existence of the colonial heritage, which intrinsically impoverished all that it dominated, ensuring the integrity of the class and caste divisions. She speaks for all the peasants of India when she says:

> those who live by the land know: that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve. We live by our labours from one harvest to the next, there is no certain telling whether we shall be able to feed ourselves and our children, and if bad times are prolonged we know we must see the weak surrender their lives and this fact, too, is within our experience. In our lives there is no margin for misfortune. (136-137)

The second part of the novel begins with their helpless journey to the city, hoping to find shelter with their son Murugan, who works there as a servant. The city was a busy affair and too bewildering and terrifying to their simple ways. Unable to locate Murugan, the city quickly jolted any inklings of hope that they had. They begin to spend their nights at a temple where free dinner and shelter for the night was provided. However, the portions grew smaller with each new mouth and every time there was a violent fight for the meals, among the homeless crowd, similar to them. To add to their misery, they lose all their belongings and their money within their first night at the temple and quickly reach the level of destitute. They find themselves lost in the maze of their lives and see no way to get out of it as they have "nothing left to sell; neither youth nor strength left to barter"

(166). Everywhere they turn they see the poor and the homeless struggling for morsels of food, adults and children alike. Rukmani notices the homeless children playing in the city who evidently never had enough food to eat. They were extremely dirty with running sores, and the pains of hunger was plainly etched on the bodies, "with their ribs thrust out and bellies full-blown like drums with wind and emptiness" (157). But as soon as a piece of food drops by them, all their childish innocence vanishes and a brutal fight for food is staged with, "teeth bared, nails clawing, ready, predatory like animals" (157). Hunger has evidently taught them many lessons in their short span of life and they can quickly change from merry children playing in the street to ferocious predatory fighters for food. At their tender age, they have also learnt to be artful as they pretend to be meek and innocent beggars in front of rich men.

As the dream of going back to their home grew, their lives in the village in spite of all its hardship, acquired a romantic aspect. They decide to save enough money by working in the stone quarry, where workers were paid eight annas for each sackful of stones broken to the required size. However, the task was extremely difficult and their weak bodies along with the absence of stone breaking instruments, such as a simple hammer, and the whims of the weather, made it even more so. This task of stone breaking reminds one of the famine victims in relief camps who were similarly engaged in the heavy task of stone breaking and road making, instead of constructing irrigation canals or performing other agricultural chores (Nand 49-50). As Nand shrewdly remarks, "When India needed bread, it was better that she should have received water than stones, but for one reason or another, stones were more in official favour than water" (Nand 50). Compared to the heavy task, that continued from early morning till dusk, the wage that they received was too low, and most of it went in buying food to supplement their meagre dinner at the temple. This way, they found it difficult to save enough to go back to their village. Nevertheless, they continued to hope and make plans to be reunited with their family. However, Nathan's malnourished body combined with rheumatism and fever, did not let him continue the hard work for long. His death provides the last impetus to Rukmani's return journey. As the novel ends, it seems to echo Nathan's words that, 'We may grieve, but there is no redress' (138). It reflects the pitiful reality of all the farmers of the nation, who can never enjoy the nectar of life, as their endless troubles perforate their existence and draws out any nectar present in it.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* is an important text where the domestic life of the servant

is presented, in multiple atmospheres. The novel traces the short and extremely difficult life of Munoo, who is both a servant and a coolie, and is born only to toil. The novel's major focus is on servitude within the household, which remains a microcosmic space, where colonial encounter with the poor native, was significantly staged. Munoo represents the general fact that the identity of the colonial servants, "existed in a continuum running from 'free' waged coolie on the one hand to 'unfree' slave on the other" (Sinha 152). Although the colonial state tried to maintain a strict balance between the two, Munoo's constantly shifting identities, highlight the fact that his existence challenges these regulative activities. The novel further highlights the ambiguous nature of domestic services, where servants are both hired, used, and abused, in accordance to the whims of their employers. Besides, the novel also provides a commentary on the Orientalising gaze, as the servant's bodies are viewed as something that can be owned for one's pleasure. Additionally, the novel presents the mutual process of domesticating foreign food, both by the colonisers and the natives, as can be seen in the households of the Bibiji and the Memsahib.

While the afore discussed novels end with the characters' disintegration, this novel presents the aftermath of familial dissolution. The introductory paragraphs explain how Munoo inherits his misfortune, with the seizure of their land, due to their inability to pay the rent, as a result of bad harvests. When his father dies of disappointment, his mother loses her life while trying to make ends meet, by grinding grains throughout the day. To make his own living, Munoo moves to the city, Sham Nagar, with his uncle, Daya Ram. He is employed at the house of Baboo Nathoo Mal, who is an employee of the Imperial Bank, trying very hard to imitate the ways of the colonisers. Munoo's brief stint as a servant at their house is interesting since Anand paints a caricature of the British memsahibs, in the figure of Bibiji. The negativity surrounding the memsahib-servant relationship is amply presented through the tense exchange between Munoo and Bibiji. On his first day, she welcomes the tired and hungry Munoo, by ordering him to run errands, the moment he arrives. He is made to work excessively while his diet consists of stale pancakes and leftover food. According to the custom of servitude, he sleeps in the corner of the dark and dingy kitchen, embracing its foul atmosphere.

In spite of all her pretences, Munoo learns that the Bibiji is unhygienic. This is because, although she keeps separate utensils for the Muslim visitors, being an orthodox

Hindu; one cannot overlook the fact that she makes tea from the same water in which she boils her eggs (Anand 20). Being a village boy, Munoo isn't accustomed to the western ways, and every little irregularity catches his curious eye. The narrator describes in detail, the pains Bibiji takes to prepare their morning tea in the English style. He cannot but marvel at what could be the logic behind such labour:

> What was the idea of pouring milk from one jug and tea from another? For, at home, his aunt boiled milk, tea leaves, sugar and water all in a big saucepan and poured it into brass tumblers, ready to drink. And then, what was the use of burning that funny fat bread before eating it? (Anand 25)

The ritual of morning tea is very different and awkward, to those who observe it, as well for those who participate in it. Apparently, the process of domesticating English food such as bread, butter, and English sweets, continues in full swing. This is because they belong to the bourgeoise class and therefore attempt to maintain their status through colonial mimicry. Although Munoo is amused at their colonial imitation, he isn't allowed to be a part of it. As soon as Sheila decides to share her tea with Munoo, he is jolted back to his actual position by the sharp cries of the Bibiji, "Haven't I told you that your place is in the kitchen?" (Anand 28). She repeatedly reiterates the fact that his position is that of a submissive domestic slave, and that his life would revolve around the chores of the kitchen. Bibiji makes sure to continue the outflow of a constant dialogue and a pressure between herself and Munoo. Both Munoo and Bibiji take their respective identities for granted, as they are the parts of an "iniquitous system" which ensure that servants shall always remain "small, abject and drab" (Anand 35). Nevertheless, servitude remains a two-way relationship as the presence of servants meant master's prestige and many servants felt empowered due to their employer's social power (Sinha 179).

However, this feeling of empowerment cannot hide the fact that they were treated as outcastes, irrespective of their castes. The narrator rightly observes that Munoo was, but an "ineffectual 'pawn'", whose very fault lay in his desire to be like his superiors (Anand 35). Munoo gradually understands that, "there must only be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor", as he being a Kshatriya and Varma, being a Brahmin, has to work as domestic servants, because of their poverty (Anand 55-56). His poverty justifies Bibiji's evil treatment towards him. As if the constant vilification is not enough, she also ensures that Munoo is never provided a plate from which to partake his food. Evidently,

plates are considered to be a privilege for the servants:

> Bibiji gave him two chapatis and a spoonful of lentils and vegetables. He had to eat on his hands, being considered too low in status to be allowed to eat off the utensils. The insult stung him. He could hardly swallow his food. (Anand 32)

This way the Bibiji, who was herself a villager before her marriage, dehumanises Munoo, for being a poor village boy. This is because, being priviledged, she imitates the imperial attitude of the colonisers, towards the native servants, that denied equality, justified discipline, and exhorted authority (Leong- Salobir 85).

Munoo's departure from Sham Nagar paves his way to becoming a factory worker and a coolie at Daulatpur. The factory of pickles and essences, that he joins, is steadily dissolved owing to a fight between its shareholders Seth Prabh Dayal and Ganapat. Munoo's life seems even harder and melancholic, then at Sham Nagar, as the commercial activity of producing jams and pickles, demands constant presence of the workers:

> It was a dark, evil life. He rose early at dawn before he had his full sleep out, having gone to bed long after midnight. He descended to work in the factory, tired, heavy-lidded, hot and limp, as if all the strength had gone out of his body and left him a spineless ghost of his former self. (Anand 89)

The novel provides detailed descriptions of how the coolies worked mechanically for long hours in the underbelly of the factory:

> they worked from day to day in the dark underworld, full of the intense heat of blazing furnaces and the dense malodorous smells of brewing essences, spices and treacle, of dust and ashes and mud… helping the bosses in the intricate business of making jams and pickles. (Anand 91-92)

The faithfulness of the servants is presented as Munoo along with Tulsi, start lifting weight in the markets, to help out their bankrupt master. An atmosphere of imbalance pervades the colonial markets, irrespective of the cities where they are located, as noted most visibly in: "The deformed, hollow-eyed; hollow-cheeked bodies of the workers…mingle with the expensively costumed pedestrians of the town" (209). In Daulatpur, the coolies sleep in the open at the grain market so that they can get the job of

lifting grain bags the next morning. The space of the market is an interesting medley of poor coolies, greedy shopkeepers, and the thrifty bourgeoisie, where Munoo experiences a hard time finding work. Being young, Munoo is unaware of the economic and political laws that generates numerous contenders for a single job, while heavily exporting grains and other essentials to England. Witnessing the frantic rush amongst the hungry coolies, Munoo realises the veracity of the adage that, "bread should be so dear and flesh and blood so cheap" (Anand 126). Even after all his effort throughout the day and night, he only manages to earn two annas a day. These circumstances are reflective of the working conditions of the poor, in the colonial market, which is governed by the principles of free market. Free market ideology has remained "the hand maiden for new industrial interests, and how those interests used that ideology selectively" (Stiglitz viii). It is indeed a sign of a faulty economy, where the idea is to make the coolies work as much as possible with as little wages. In his Foreword to Karl Polanyi's book, *The Great Transformation* (1944), the economist J.E. Stiglitz says, "For capitalists who thrive off of low wages, the high unemployment may even be a benefit, as it puts downward pressure on workers' wage demands" (Stiglitz x). Stiglitz's comment is rather illuminating in this context. It is interesting to note that not only the colonisers but also the privileged natives such as the merchants, the lallas, or even the shopkeepers, acted like brokers of the colonial enterprise, and treated the coolies "as a nuisance" (Anand 127). To them, the innumerable bodies of the coolies are an exhaustible excess/surplus, "to be rebuked, abused or beaten like the donkeys which brought the weights of vegetables to the market every morning" (Anand 127). This remains a prime example of a malfunctioning economy, that operates in accordance to the benefits of those in power, an environment where commodities are costly and labour is virtually free.

The stifling situation in the feudal city of Daulatpur gains intensity in the metropolitan city of Bombay. The novel presents the utmost exploitation of the economy as well as the coolies, due to the operation of the cotton factories in India. Hierarchically subjected to the designs of the employers, the coolies are completely dependent on their mercy. Munoo finds that food and rent are costly while labour is extremely cheap in Bombay. Moreover, the factory workers have to pay a heavy commission to the foreman, Jimmie, that acts as a security deposit for self-preservation. The little money that they save is spent on buying food, while the Sardar tricks them of their money through his high rates of interest, for the groceries lent on credit. Besides, the factory workers, who work eleven

hours a day in the stifling heat, have nowhere to go, to relieve their stress, except to the toddy shops or to visit the prostitutes. This is ironical as even if they want to oppose the unjust dictums of the colonisers, they end up getting trapped into the colonial machinery that operates via the toddy shops. Such a coercive situation ensures the steady creation of hunger as well as subjugation among the working class.

Anand's novel is as much about the working class in colonial India, as it is about the corruption of child labour. The colonial working class have for decades, remained "the victims of graft and extortion" (233). Therefore, it is no wonder when Anand describes the weak demeanour of the coolies, who look like "a queer race of men, dried up, shrivelled, flat-footed, hollow-chested, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed" (228). They further produce stunted children, who are invariably made to work from a tender age. The Indian Sahibs, Sauda and Muzaffar, who act in favour of the coolies, become the mouthpiece of Anand, as they urge the workers to take a stand against the oppressive atmosphere in which they work and live. The following lines spoken by Sauda, aptly sums up the impoverishing lives that has been consciously tailored for them, by "the hirelings of capitalism" (232):

> 'You are the roofless, you are the riceless, spinners of cotton, weavers of thread, sweepers of dust and dirt; you are the workers, the labourers, the millions of unknown who crawl in and out of factories every day. You are the coolies, black men who relieve yourselves on the ground, you are the miserable devils who live twenty a room in broken straw huts and stinking tenements. Your bones have no flesh, your souls have no life, you are clothed in tattered rags…'. (232)

However, as also presented in *So Many Hungers!* as well as *Nectar in a Sieve*, revolt against the colonial power has never been an option. Although they are in a gradual march towards death by occasional starvation, they prefer to work, as lack of work would surely mean a steady starvation (Anand 221, 228).

Another interesting fact is the perpetuation of colonial authority by the likes of Jimmie Thomas, who drunk with power, "had long since forgotten the days during which he himself had eked out a miserable existence in Lancashire" (217). According to Leong Salobir, the British, working in India, mainly come from middle class background who like to mimic the ways of the English aristocrats (Leong Salobir 74). They act as "the top echelon of Indian society", and maintain a distance from the native, in order to establish

their supremacy and oppression (Leong Salobir 74). Nevertheless, there are also memsahibs like the Anglo-Indian Mrs Mainwaring, who seem to have a compassionate heart, although her compassion towards Munoo might have arisen from her own inferiority amidst the British social circle in India. Munoo's life seems to turn for the better, when he is taken up by her, as a servant. However, being the Memsahib's servant, it is imperative that Munoo changes his lifestyle and his service accordingly. Thus, his duties are miscellaneous and he has to be always at the Memsahib's beck and call. The only time when he feels elated is during the breakfast, which is a celebrated meal and stretches on to lunch. As if the daily elaborate meal isn't enough, very soon Munoo, being the "intimate stranger", himself becomes food for the Memsahib's secret sexual desires: "The regular curves of his young body, its quick sudden flashes of movement, stirred the chords of her being in a strangely disturbing manner… Mrs Mainwaring's heart palpitated with the ache of that desire" (258). Evidently, the male body is also not spared from the piercing gaze of the colonisers, but rather gains intensity in the intimacy of the domestic sphere.

Anand further presents how India has been the land of desires and comfort, for the colonisers, as facilitated by the troops of inferior Indian servants: "For India was the one place in the world where servants still were servants, and one could laze through the morning and sleep through the afternoon, happy in the assurance that the cook and the 'boy' will look after breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner" (Anand 267). However, this is also accompanied with the occasional cheating by the servants. Ala Dad Khan, the Memsahib's Khansamah, gatheres a side income from the commissions he received from the merchants while shopping for the Memsahib's household. Critics have various read the colonial complaint of servants as stemming largely from the colonial paranoia. However, as Anand shows, the complaint has not been entirely untrue, as servants like Ala Dad Khan, justify their actions by imagining that, "there was no harm in robbing the rich. These Sahibs had plenty of money, only the Indians were poor" (260). This may be then read as an act of subversion to the colonial paranoia. Nevertheless, the fact remains that domestic servants and poor workers in India, have been vehemently neglected and vilified, but these were the people who ultimately eased the stay of the colonisers. As Nitin Sinha rightly suggests, "the anxious master vilifying his 'intimate stranger' could be a 'routine' act of colonial power and representation" (53).

Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy is based on the backdrop of imperial opium production

and the subsequent opium wars, that brings back to life the colonial events that unfolded simultaneously in India and China. The novels trace the potency of opium in generating wealth for the British empire while impoverishing the lives of its cultivators and its consumers. Ghosh's approach is multidimensional as he engages not only with the socioeconomic and political representation of the colonial period, but also studies its ecological impact. Although opium is not considered as food, its material agency is so potent that it can create various forms of hunger at all levels, from its inception by sowing to its swallowing. Ghosh taps this non-human agency of opium to churn out his trilogy that portray an alternate perspective to the Eurocentric opium narrative (Hummel 565). The textual analysis of *Sea of Poppies* centres on three major aspects through which colonised bodies are impoverished and controlled. First, it will analyse the environmental impact generated by the cultivation of opium and the way artificial hunger and poverty has been created in the cultivators' lives. Second, it would focus upon the extravagant dining habits of the colonisers and the role native servants played in facilitating it. Third, it will examine the food provided to the indentured labourers and the convicts on the ship.

That opium is a political crop is evident in its history of cultivation and consumption. The Opium Agency was one of the "most visible colonial institutions in rural India" that never faced any major setbacks or incur any losses for more than a century (Bauer 3). Mired in the influence of eurocentrism, the narrative of opium staged the moral superiority of the European over the "distinctive vice" of the native bodies that it sought to dominate and domesticate (Owen 2). However, as Carl A. Trocki, in his influential book entitled, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy* explains, opium has rather been "a crucial component" of the Empire itself that "laid the economic foundation of the imperial economy" and further generated global capitalism (xiii, 7).

Trocki explains that drugs like opium, begin to generate social problems when they are forcefully introduced in new societies, or when their cultivation and commercialisation is deliberately intensified (xi). Lisa Lowe has also noted the agency of opium as consisting more than a simple economic commodity (103). Following the ideas of Foucault, Lowe has identified opium trade as a type of 'biopower', that sought to intoxicate and control "the biology of the Chinese population independent of formal territorial or state conquest" (230). To quote Foucault, biopower is:

the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human

> species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species (16).

If we go by this definition, it is not hard to understand the political strategy behind the large-scale cultivation of opium. With the application of capitalist ideals, opium became a drug for pleasure, and thus generated a huge potential for profit (Trocki 6). It bought monumental social transformations, with the emergence of plantations, worked upon by slaves, contributing to the monopoly of the drug, creation of drug markets and unprecedented redistribution of wealth (xii). The trade in opium basically reversed the flow of silver to China, and additionally tamed its consumers, while also economically restricting its cultivators in India. While such unrestricted drug trafficking resulted in 'drug epidemics' in the consuming nations such as China, for Europe, as Trocki observes, it paved the way for global capitalism and also structured the modem nation-state (xii).

As for the cultivation of opium in India, it bought about numerous hardships for the cultivators, as best exemplified by Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies*. Although the colonial narrative deemed it as a lucrative peasantry venture, recent research has proved otherwise. Poppy has always been considered as a crop which occupied a minor percentage of the total cropped area. However, as Rolf Bauer suggests, one should estimate the impact of cash crops on the socioeconomics of the cultivated region, to determine if poppy was indeed a marginal crop (Bauer 132).

Commercial agriculture and the subsequent creation of hunger further induced the formation of indentured labourers and their mass efflux to plantation colonies in various parts of India or outside the country. *Sea of Poppies* portray a similar pattern of impoverishment at the end of which, characters from different walks of life find themselves on a final journey outside India, to be employed in the sugarcane plantations of Mauritius. Ghosh's novel begins near Patna, in a village three miles away from Ghazipur, which has been dubbed as "the unofficial capital of the opium empire" (Trocki 2). The novel begins with Deeti's vision of the *Ibis*, "a sign of destiny", juxtaposed with the hopelessness of her present life as a poppy cultivator (Ghosh 3). Their impoverishment is apparent as although they work in the fields all day long, their labour virtually bears no sustenance. They live in a broken hut and eat stale food which provide very little nourishment. The colonial greed for opium has disrupted the sustainable farming methods

with the forceful cultivation of poppies. It has converted poppy from a marginal crop to a crop of monoculture. The traditional winter crops of wheat, lentils, and vegetables has been replaced by the contracts of poppy cultivation and the lure of advanced money. According to Bauer, poppy cultivation is the prime example of an enforced culture of agricultural commercialisation (5). Being a delicate flower, poppy needs to be cultivated at the most fertile plot of land and since it requires constant attention it is best suited for plantation in the household gardens of the cultivators. In his study, Bauer notes how poppy fields were extraordinarily hungry and thirsty and required extensive labour to frequently fertilise and water the fields (137). At the end of such back breaking work, the peasants like Deeti, have only a little to pay off their advance, and virtually nothing to cover their household needs. The novel presents poppy cultivation as a repressive state apparatus as the cultivators are vehemently forced to grow the crop. As Bauer records, the "mechanics of coercion" goes far beyond the debt-bondage cycle as it involves the questions of powerful opium agents and dependency relations with landlords (6, 10). Cultivators had to face blunt threats, physical violence, abduction, crop destruction, criminal prosecution and so on while also paying a high rent for poppy cultivation (Bauer 6). What is most interesting is that all these forms of coercion were legalised. The colonial notion of free trade and liberalism granted them such authority over the cultivators.

Deeti's life in the village throws light on the lived experiences of the opium cultivators by presenting their economic condition, of which there are very few historical data (Bauer 144). As her husband, Hukam Singh lies wasted in his bed due to opium addiction, the proceeds from the poppy harvest are the only source of income available to Deeti. However, being a pain staking work that has to be completed within a few hours, Deeti has to hire additional help, which would further drain her income. As she takes her sap-filled jars to the opium factory, she discovers that the proceeds are hardly enough to cover the debt of her husband. Besides, it is an established fact that "the price for crude opium was too low to even cover the costs of cultivation", that include the expenses of buying seeds and hiring labour (Bauer 162). Deeti is given only "six dams for the whole harvest", which are too less to even feed her daughter (Ghosh 155). While shopping, she barely affords "a two-maund sack of broken rice, thirty seers of the cheapest arhar dal, a couple of tolas of mustard oil and a few chittacks of salt" (156). Taking advantage of her poverty, the shopkeeper quickly traps her in taking a loan for six months' worth of provisions, hiding his high charges of loan repayment. The guilt of keeping her daughter

hungry not only makes her a prey to the shopkeeper but also to her brother-in-law who assaults her mercilessly with sexual innuendos. Later on, as she leaves her village with Kalua, the untouchable ox cart driver, she passes by her childhood home which like her husband's home, is surrounded by the parched remnants of the poppy plants. The far and wide distortion of subsistence agriculture is evident in those empty fields which were once filled with various winter crops and vegetables: "everyone's land was in hock to the agents of the opium factory: every farmer had been served with a contract, the fulfilling of which left them with no option but to strew their land with poppies. And now, with the harvest over and little grain at home, they would have to plunge still deeper into debt to feed their families" (193). Frank's theory of satellization is also visible here, as the self-sustaining economy is replaced by monocrop agriculture of opium, that made a hefty contribution to the development and sustenance of the capitalist economy.

The opium cultivation draws upon all kind of resources- mental, physical and natural. Hunger is the perennial problem that these ex-cultivators of food have to face now. While B.B Chaudhuri and Utsa Ray depict the transformation of rice as a cash crop, Ghosh's novel portrays the disappearance of toothsome crops from the Northern parts of British India. The imperial hunger for silver has bought in "the flood of flowers that had washed over the countryside: lands that had once provided sustenance were now swamped by the rising tide of poppies; food was so hard to come by that people were glad to lick the leaves in which offerings were made at temples or sip the starchy water from a pot in which rice had been boiled" (202). The artificial lack of food induces the journey of many villagers towards the city, most of whom have already signed agreements or "girmits" to be engaged in plantation activities by the colonial state. While the opium merchants used the "highly addicting drug" to target the "biology of the Chinese population" by making them docile and dependent, in India, the opium agents target the biology as well as the agroeconomics of the country (Lowe 103). The hungry body and the abundance of labourers, are two common images in most Indian English fiction that deal with the colonial period. One can ascertain how biological functions of the body and its psychological integrity are threatened due to the coercive process of agricultural commercialisation. For instance, Ghosh writes, "The town was thronged with hundreds of other impoverished transients, many of whom were willing to sweat themselves half to death for a few handfuls of rice" (203). It is yet another method of political dominance whereby a self-sufficient agricultural nation is converted into a dependent country by the

artificial generation of hunger, scarcity of food, inflation of prices and general poverty, while sustaining and capitalising upon the excess of cheap labour.

Ghosh does not limit himself to the plight of poppy cultivators but also paints the perils of the landed aristocracy of Bengal, who engage in opium trade. Raja Neel Rattan Halder of the Raskhali estate, is another victim of the opium trade who is convicted for forgery as he could not repay his debt to the opium merchant Benjamin Burnham. The pictures of food scarcity and starvation faced by Deeti and her family, are frequently replaced by pictures of banquets and the display of preposterous dining etiquettes engaged in by the opium merchants as well as the landed aristocracy. This juxtaposition of food images serves to present the imbalance in the distribution of food resources brought in by the principles of capitalism. The politics of resource distribution and private ownership as deliberated by Amartya Sen, is presented through the apparent availability of food being governed by the politics of accessibility (Sen 3).

Neel and his father belong to the "indigenous capitalist class" who patronise imperialism and enjoy its perks, without fully assessing the risks involved in their partnership. Although Neel's father invested in Burnham's enterprise, he knew nothing of his business. The profits from opium trade that Mr. Burnham returns is exhausted in maintaining their extravagant lifestyle. The dinner scenes hosted by the Halders depict the tart encounters between the colonisers and the colonised, brought forward by the success of opium trade. The dinner episodes at the Halders engages them at a corporeal level which represent the negotiation of cultural differences between the rulers and the ruled, with both parties attempting to maintain a strict distance from the other.

The extravagant meals served to the guests reflect native hospitality, but on the part of the colonisers, it is a chance to assess the native while consuming the exotic fare (Bhushi 11). Upon receiving a dinner invitation from Neel, Mr Doughty recalls how Neel's father was an extravagant man of pomp and show, who used to organise grand feasts:

> 'Now there was a lordly nigger if ever you saw one! Best kind of native ... Wasn't a man in town who could put on a burra-khana like he did. Sheeshmull blazing with shammers and candles. Paltans of bearers and khidmutgars. Demijohns of French loll-shrub and carboys of iced simkin. And the karibat! In the old days the Rascally bobachee-connah was the best in the city. No fear of pishpash and

> cobbily-mash at the Rascally table. The dumbpokes and pillaus were good enough, but we old hands, we'd wait for the curry of cockup and the chitchky of pollock-saug … and mind you, supper was just the start: the real tumasher came later, in the nautch-connah. (47)

The play of racism is evident in the condescending remarks of Mr Doughty, who in spite of enjoying the fare and the cordiality, suggests to Zachary that sahibs should always maintain seclusion from the natives. The racial anxiety of his class is apparent when he reveals that Englishmen who show pity or are accustomed to the Indian ways, are not welcome in the social circle of the sahibs: "no sahib would have one at his table. We're very particular about that kind of thing out East" (49).

The present feast at Neel's budgerow almost turns into a battleground of race and culture, as food and its consumption threaten to break the boundaries of the carefully constructed white body (Tompkins 2). The dinner starts in an awkward manner where we witness a comic clash between the Bengali serving style and the English table manners. Ghosh's caricature of the colonial fear of sharing food with the native, is most remarkable, as the very act of consumption represents a threat to the white body. The narrative zooms in on the feeding mouth of the coloniser, which is considered as a "political organ" being "a dense and eroticized point for the transfer of power" (Tompkins 89, 55). We are presented a picture of Mr Doughty and others partaking the hybrid cuisine consisting of duck soup, roasted fledgling chickens, fish fillets, vegetable fritters, "karibat" and "chitchky of pollock-saug" (118), in a wary but impressed manner. However, the dinner proceedings come to a sudden halt when they hear Neel's mistress Elokeshi recalling her past sexual encounter with Mr Doughty, "He came to me twenty years ago" and "made me sit on his face. . . *chhi, chhi*! . . . and then licked there with his tongue . . . no silly, right there, yes . . . Oh what a licking! You'd think he was tasting a chutney" (119). Exempt from the pious role of housewife, Elokeshi's voice and her sexuality has the power to challenge the sexuality of the white body and even look at it in disgust. The episode also hints at the cannibalistic desires of the imperial state by staging the play of incorporation between the exotic and consumable body of the native and the pleasure deriving and consuming mouth of Mr Doughty (Kilgour 'Function' 239). However, "the threat of racial inversion and bodily dissolution" comes dangerously close to the imperial self, as the acceptance of sexually consuming Elokeshi's body might paradoxically mean the

dissolution of absolute difference between the eater and the eaten, making the two one (Tompkins 55, Kilgour 'Function' 240). Hence the ongoing dinner is quickly terminated, while hinting at the impending doom of Neel, as he has already lost most of his ancestral fortune and is heavily indebted to Mr Burnham.

Ghosh's presentation of English feasts paints yet another picture of extravagance, as we witness the play of culinary imperialism in the Burnham household. The British were known for their overindulgence in their material lives as "a powerful signifier of 'Britishness'" that would essentially differentiate them from the "'inferior' Indian 'native'" (Chowdhury 584). Ray Chowdhury who studies the imperial diet of the British as a symbol of their culture, writes that, "As representatives of a colonial power, they were to keep a larger number of servants, and live at a greater level of luxury that would not have been affordable in Britain" (584). Therefore, we see a large group of servants like bearers, khidmutgars, farrashes, matranees, harry-maids, malis, durwans, and so on, engaged at various tasks inside and outside the Burnham household. Grandeur is a common aspect of each and every meal in the Burnham household, that require the presence of the following servants: "the turbaned bearers who stood behind each chair; the masalchie with the sauceboat; the chobdar whose job it was to ladle soup from the sideboard tureen; the three or four young chuckeroos who always followed at the feet of the more senior retainers" (127). The kitchen staff consisted of "the curry consumah, the caleefa who roasted the kabobs and the bobachees who were responsible for the stews and the joints of beef" (127). The engagement of multiple servants allows memsahibs like Mrs Burnham to live a luxurious life, so much so that she could order the arrangements of the meals while lying in bed. Mrs Burnham is rather interested in cultivating memsahib etiquettes upon the ill-fitting Paulette, or fussing over the seating arrangements for feasts or "burra-khanas" (206) in a bid to promote and maintain the image of European colonial prestige (Leong-Salobir 2). The text presents an episode of a burra-khana occasioned by Captain Chillingworth's arrival to India. It is a spectacular presentation that include every kind of dish imaginable, starting from green turtle soup to roasted peacock, that ironically portray the lavish eating habits of the British. Ghosh makes it evident that such extravagant lifestyle of the British is facilitated by the excess of food resources and the disposable bodies of native labourers and servants.

The second half of the novel stages the journey of the girmitiyas on the *Ibis*,

through the Black Waters, where they permanently dissolve their caste divisions and construct new solidarities as *jahaji-bhais* and *jahaji-behans*. A sense of solidarity is already constructed before they embark the ship, as the women on the pulwar exchange their cooking styles and their communal discourse of taste. The ship is reconstructed as a microcosm of society with contrastive living and eating arrangements among its passengers. The diet of the indentured labourers is kept as minimal as possible while the officers gorge on generous portions of food and drink. In spite of enjoying many privileges there is less joviality among them than there was around the chuldan, where occasionally the migrants even sing songs to mark their perseverance in the face of all odds. Curiously, the novel fails to delve into a more profound exploration of the diet of indentured laborers during their voyages. This oversight by Ghosh is intriguing, given that research has indicated a lack of knowledge regarding the actual dietary conditions of these laborers, which consequently led to a distressingly high mortality rate on board (A. Kumar 42-43). As highlighted by Ashutosh Kumar, the time spent on the ship serves as a testament to the limitations of both the colonial regimes and the Indian practices (A. Kumar 50). While colonial authorities had to prioritise dietary habits of the indentured labourers as something that cannot be uniformised or imperialised; the immigrants had to undergo their caste boundaries and dietary taboos (A. Kumar 50).

The novel represents the dual nature of opium: “at once bountiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and vengeful” (452). The following lines uttered by Deeti, pretty much sums up the reason of their impoverishment and their migration: “It is the star that took us from our homes and put us on this ship. It is the planet that rules our destiny” (452). The novel traces opium’s power in the creation of other commodities by the commercialisation of land and labour, and even of the state (Trocki 9). While it induced drug addiction in China, its production and distribution resulted in a wild addiction for wealth accumulation that altered the socioeconomics of both India and China. Additionally, it generated the process of impoverishment in India, and created the concept of indenture, whereby hungry millions were trapped in the process of mass migration and plantation servitude in the sugar estates of Mauritius, which has been yet another commodity capitalised by the British.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated food as an important register whereby colonial power-plays

were variously staged. It studied the contrasting processes of development and destitution initiated by the forceful introduction of modernity in the Indian soil. In order to offer alternative perspectives on the discourse of colonial modernity, this chapter problematised it in relation to the nuances of culinary imperialism and the construction of hunger. This chapter traced the way Indian food was incorporated into the palette of the colonisers, not by the conquering forces of culinary imperialism, but as a result of the domestic exchange between the memsahibs and the Indian servants. Conversely, the reaction to culinary imperialism is visible in the subaltern self-fashioning of taste, and the creation of new dishes throughout India. The dishes incorporated both local and British ingredients and techniques of cooking, resulted in a conscious fashioning of taste, that was marked by selectivity and ambiguity.

Another important argument of the chapter lies in its study of the construction of hunger and food scarcity, through the various experiments conducted upon the native palette and its agricultural methods. The hungry belly of the empire devoured the self-sustaining agricultural economy for its capitalist motives. The intrusion of capitalism created two major types of hunger among the Indians: biological hunger due to the introduction of commercial agriculture, and psychological hungers in the form of insatiable desires and wants, among the Indian middle class. The chapter studies the ambiguity of the colonial state with regards to the frequent occurrence of famine and food scarcity, and examines the archetypal victims of this period. The selected novels illustrate how mass hunger and underdevelopment remain a man-made phenomenon, arising from the heavy dependence on commercial agriculture, capitalistic attitudes, unequal export-import ratio, inflation, and so on. Bhattacharya's novel examines the themes of famine, war, and the subjectivity of hunger among diverse social classes, from the impoverished to the affluent. The novels of Markandaya and Ghosh depict the pitiful realities of the farmers of the nation who are trapped within the tentacles of capitalism and commercial agriculture, that induce pauperisation and eventual displacement in search of food and employment. Anand's novel alternatively focuses on the expendable as well as consumable body of the colonial servant Munoo, who works both as a coolie and a domestic help, to facilitate the life of his superiors. All the novels commonly depict the hungry bodies and the abundance of labourers, that punctuated the history of the colonial period, making commodities costly and labour almost free.