

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Structural Violence and the Bengal Famine of 1943

Felix Padel

---

This book opens doors to understanding many neglected aspects of structural violence in the colonial era, with deep roots in Bengal, and repercussions that continue to colour patterns of violent repression in the state today. It combines riveting stories of the freedom struggle in Midnapore district with a refreshingly clear historical synthesis and analysis of the war years.

In particular, a mass of hitherto unpublished evidence reveals Winston Churchill not just as bigoted on Indian affairs, but blinkered and obsessed to an extraordinary degree, especially on the issue of Bengal, where his intransigent refusal to send urgently requested grain to areas already ravaged by a cyclone and “rice denial” stands revealed as a major cause of the Bengal famine, that probably killed as many as five million people.

This estimate is considerably higher than the published estimates in the Famine Commission's report on the famine, and is based on a neglected text by the Indian Statistical Institute's founder, Prasanta K Mahalanobis, “Mortality in Bengal in 1943”, written for the Famine Commission, but never publicised or referred to in the commission's report.

Evidence collected in *Ch-chi 'Seç e Wq* proves beyond doubt that Britain's prime minister knew through numerous intelligence reports that the famine was unfolding, yet wilfully obstructed many off

## book review

district died in 1943 alone. Simultaneously, rape was being used as a “weapon of war”, with British police and soldiers often behaving as an occupying army. Fazlul Huq was forced to resign in March 1943 by governor John Herbert, for raising police rape as an issue and for publicly admitting there was a famine when official policy denied this.

Famine relief was blocked by the combined intransigence of Cherwell and Churchill, deaf to urgent pleas from the viceroy (fi

authorities in Bengal and India went unheeded, but publicly, the same officials pleading for relief were denying that the famine existed. Offi