

## Acts of Aid

*Acts of Aid* explores the interaction between politics and natural disasters after a massive earthquake hit northern India and Nepal in 1934. While famines and to some extent flood management have been written into South Asian history, government and civil society responses to ‘natural’ disasters remain an elusive topic. This first comprehensive historical overview of the earthquake aftermath argues that its disastrous outcome was a human and historical event shaped by existing social and economic practices.

Distribution of relief—and attempts at redistribution—as well as long-term reconstruction efforts, reflected the colonial government’s political economy of aid during famines and floods. At this particular moment in history, the aftermath proved an opportunity for civil society organisations, and among them the Indian National Congress, to challenge the colonial state beyond the politics of the disaster. In the distribution of aid and attempts at changing as well as preserving established social orders, the relief process turned into a display of state-making, fuelled by nationalism and public contributions to philanthropic associations.

Focusing on the 1934 earthquake and its consequences, this book conceptualises the politics of disaster in terms of governance, civil society participation and state-making in South Asian modern history. Ultimately, it argues that efforts to implement disaster relief in various forms shaped the course of governance, state-building and the fate of communities across the region.

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# Acts of Aid

## Politics of Relief and Reconstruction in the 1934 Bihar–Nepal Earthquake

**Eleonor Marcussen**



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## Abbreviations

ABP	<i>Amrita Bazar Patrika</i>
B&O	Bihar and Orissa
BCRC	Bihar Central Relief Committee
BCUL	Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire Lausanne (Lausanne Cantonal and University Library)
BL	British Library
BLCD	<i>Bihar Legislative Council Debates</i>
BLCP	<i>Bihar Legislative Council Proceedings</i>
BOLCP	<i>Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council Proceedings</i>
BVCF	Bibliothèque de la Ville (The Town Library) La Chaux-de-Fonds
BSA	Bihar State Archives
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CWMG	<i>Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi</i>
Dept	Department
DIG	Director Inspector-General
D.O.	Demi-official [letter/correspondence]
DPI	Director of Public Information
F&P	Foreign and Political Department
Foreign	Foreign Branch
Foreign-Pol.	Foreign Department, Political Branch
GOI	Government of India
HP	Home Department, Public Branch
H. Pol.	Home Department, Political Branch
IMA	Indian Medical Association
IOR	India Office Records and Private Papers
IRU	International Relief Union

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INC	Indian National Congress
JFC	Joint Flood Committee
KW	Keep With
LSG	Local Self Government
MKSKF	Maharajadhiraja Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation
Mss Eur	Manuscript European
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
P&J	Public and Judicial
PC	Pierre Cérésolle
PS	Political Department, Special Branch
PSV	Private Secretary to the Viceroy
PSVO	Private Secretary to the Viceroy Office
PWD	Public Works Department
R-L	Revenue Department, Lands Branch
R-LR	Revenue Department, Lands/Revenue Branch
RD	Reconstruction Department
RE	Reconstruction Department, Earthquake Branch
SCI	Service Civil International
UP	United Provinces
VERF	Viceroy's Earthquake Relief Fund

## Note on Transliteration

The spelling 'Behar' (Bihar) has been kept if occurring in a citation from a primary source or in a title. Transliteration of Hindi words follows the style adopted by R. S. McGregor (ed.) in *The Oxford Hindi–English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993). Diacritical marks have been used only in translations and not in case of proper nouns and place names. The contemporary place names have been used, for example, Monghyr instead of the more familiar modern Munger. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.