

A Visit to a Ration Shop

“It is my turn,” said one.

“No, it is mine, I came first,” roared the other.

“Let us have patience and wait for our respective turns,” suggested the third.

A big queue was there and everybody seemed to be in a hurry. But this was not the scene at the ticket window of any cinema house. Nor it was the booking office at any railway station. It was simply a spectacle at a Govt. Ration shop. And the strange conversation going on was among the card holders who had come over there to collect their weekly or monthly ration.

I was also one among those three score and odd persons.

It was Wednesday, the opening day of the ration week. So, most of the people had come to purchase their ration from the shop. Everybody was keen to get his ration at the earliest opportunity. But the A.R.D. was the master of the situation. If they were the bread winners, he was the bread supplier.

If he liked, he could oblige any one. But how could he make any distinction between caste color and creed. For him the rich and the poor were all alike. First come, first served’ was his guiding principle at the moment.

At the most he could collect the ration cards and ask the persons to stand at ease, when their turn comes; he would call them to attention. They could come forward and put forth their demand for various articles.

Lo! Mr. X was called out. He was glad. His case has been taken up. He came into the dock Now began the physical verification of the card and the cross examination of the holder.

“What would you like to take – Wheat or flour?”

“Wheat, please.”

“Imported or indigenous?”

Indigenous.”

When the enquirers were over, there started the work of the crossing out various columns in the card and then issuing the cash receipt.

“Put your signatures or thumb impression here and have your ration from that side” was the direction to the customer. He paid his bill and moved on.

The weigh man was busy weighing the articles one after the other. And the buyer was careful, receiving them in big and small bags he had brought with him for the purpose.

But what is this? This card is marked "W" and that and the card is marked "R". Yes, the difference is clear. W-card is for wheat eater. R- card is for rice eater. The wheat eater would get more if wheat and only a fixed quantity of rice.

Perhaps it is some special occasion. Extra sugar is being given and the people are glad as if they getting it free. But what about some extra wheat, if it is needed. No, please. Go to your Circle office and get a temporary and for that. Here you would get only according to number of units.

While I was thinking, watching, listening and saying so many things, my home was also announced. I thanked god and got ready to face the ordeal for food that was to follow.