



Dr. Jayachandran's

INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS

SOUTH INDIA'S PREMIER INSTITUTION FOR
PUBLIC POLICY AND CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS

HISTORY

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FAMINES DURING BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

Reasons

Effects of the famine

Great Bengal famine 1770

Chalisa famine 1783-84 and Doji bara famine 1791-92

Famines and Famine Relief policy after 1857

Great famine of 1876-78/ I Famine commission 1878-1880

Indian famine of 1896-97/ II Famine commission 1898

Indian famine of 1899-1900 / III Famine commission 1901

**Bengal famine of 1943-1944 / Wood Head Commission
1944**

FAMINES DURING BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

Reasons

- * All the reasons explained in Drain of Wealth and Land Revenue articles.
- In addition,
- * Due to World war and Indian Railways that was introduced in 1853 that made surplus as a deficit. During world war supplies were routed to war field as back stock over that of people's demand deliberately.
- * Railways were connecting stations of raw material to ports and not a supply link this added to famine.
- * Switching of Indian Agriculture from essential food crops to cash crops like opium, indigo, jute, and cotton that were for exports.

During the British rule in India there were approximately 25 major famines. Particular / major / worst famines were

- * **Famine of 1757**
- * **Bengal famine of 1770**
- * **Chalisa famine 1783-84**
- * **Doji bara famine of 1791-92**
- * **Great famine of 1876-78**
- * **Indian famine of 1896-97**
- * **Indian famine of 1899-1900**
- * **Bengal famine of 1943-44**

as the saying goes 'the British came with a famine and left with a famine' (With the end of Battle of Plassey in 1757, transfer of power completely took place to British).

Effects of the famines

- * Population loss
- * Associated Epidemic and Diseases.
- * Adverse impact of Agriculture production.
- * Landless labours and artisans were the worst affected population.
- * Huge migration of deprived people to British plantation colonies where they worked as indentured workers.
- * Purchasing power would reduce which would again drastically reduce the trade.
- * For Britishers-> loss of land revenue.



Great Bengal famine 1770, due to widespread forced cultivation of opium (remember Opium trade with china) in place of food crops. No measure taken by British to tackle or aftermath of famine.

Chalisa famine 1783-84 and Doji bara famine of 1791-92 in Southern India were perceived now to be the effect of Elnino. No measure taken by British to tackle or aftermath of famine.

Famines and Famine Relief policy after 1857

Relief measures were initiated for famines only after crown took over

Great famine of 1876-78/ I Famine commission 1878-1880

Affected areas were Madras, Mysore, Hyderabad, Bombay, Central India and Punjab. Lord Lyton was the Viceroy.

Causes

- * Failure of 2 consecutive monsoons. Thereby crop failure in the Deccan Plateau
- * Cultivation of cash crops,
- * Record Export of wheat to England.
- * 5 million died and outbreak of Cholera and fever.
- * Lytton's government failed in tackling the situation and relief measures were inadequate.

I Famine commission - 1880 under Sir John Strachey as Chair person.

Sir John Strachey formulated a Famine policy which dealt with measures to avoid famine.

- * Came up with Indian Famine Code of 1883 that dealt with aftermath of famine. This Famine code was passed only by Lord Rippon later.
- * Provision of funds for famine relief and construction of Irrigation works.
- * Collection of land revenue should be suspended immediately during famines and land revenue should be remitted.
- * Data should be collected about the conditions of Indian peasantry and agriculture.
- * Famine fund should be set up.

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This famine kindled some British officials, one whom A.O.Hume later founded INC a decade later.

Indian famine of 1896-97/ II Famine commission 1898

Affected areas were United Provinces, Central India, Rajputana, Hyderabad, parts of Bombay, Madras, Punjab. Lord Elgin II was the Viceroy

Causes

- * Due to Natural reasons(Meteorological Drought)
- * Export of food grains while starving Indian people.
- * Cholera, Malaria in many parts bubonic plague epidemic in Bombay led to huge life loss.

II Famine commission - 1898 under Sir James Lyall as Chair person.

- * Commission endorsed the recommendation of I commission. But made many changes in Implementation of it.
- * Called for more liberal recommendation on Land Revenue.

Indian famine of 1899-1900 / III Famine commission 1901

Affected areas were Central India, Bombay Presidency, Rajputana, Hyderabad, Kathiawar and small areas of Bengal, Madras and North-Western Provinces. Lord Curzon was the viceroy.

- * Typically assumed as a continuation of previous famine, and premature declaration of end of that famine and its relief measures.
- * In addition due to drought, Usury or land eviction policy in Western India on due of land revenue.

Lord Curzon's Measures aftermath of famine are appreciated, this was the last pan Indian famine (during British and till date).

- * Railways were tremendously extended and helped create supply network,
- * Subsistence agriculture returned Infrastructure investment particularly in Bombay increased.

III Famine commission - 1901 under Antony McDoneell as Chair person.



The commission called for the responsibility of government in every term, including moral support to the affected population.

Bengal famine of 1943-1944 / Wood Head Commission 1944

Only in Bengal region. Lord Linlithgow was the Viceroy

Causes

- * Mainly due to World War II, Japanese capture of Burma, Singapore cut off the supply chain.
- * Scorched earth plan implemented in Chittagong.
- * Calcutta stock itself was less due to cyclone and tidal wave destruction in 1942.
- * Government was in inaction according to later reports even the famine code was not implemented.

Wood Head commission was not a IV famine commission. Not much details about commission as Independence fever started.

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