



FAMINE AND FAMINE COMMISSION IN BRITISH INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Drought is a serious global problem and a state of affairs since ancient times. Until today, the world has to face the problem of drought. Famine is a condition resulting from prolonged acute shortage of total food grains resulting in widespread starvation, impoverishment and emaciation of the majority of the population, resulting in a large increase in population mortality.

Various types of causes of droughts in the Indian subcontinent include unreliable rainfall, deforestation, floods, which have adverse effects on agriculture. In ancient and medieval times, Indian society was completely dependent on agriculture like any other society. During this period, people's life was disrupted due to drought. But due to the generous policy of the ruler, relief work was undertaken on occasion.

During the rule of the British East India Company, there were many famines in different regions of India. They include famines in Bengal in 1769-70, famine in Madras province in 1791-92, ...etc. The company helped meagerly and belatedly. Due to this, there was a terrible loss of life and financial loss.

In 1858, the administration of India was transferred from the Company to the British Crown. During this period, for the first time, the British government established drought relief committees from time to time in order to alleviate droughts in India such as Smith Committee (1860-61), Campbell Commission (1866), Strachey Commission (1880), Lyall Commission (1896), McDonnell Commission (1900). Through these committees efforts were made to get information about drought and prevent drought.

KEYWORDS: Famine, British, Smith Committee, Campbell Commission, Strachey Commission, Lyell Commission, McDonnell Commission.

1. INTRODUCTION

Drought is an ancient phenomenon. The description of drought in ancient times can be seen in Sanskrit literature and the writings of foreign pilgrims. The description of drought during the reign of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya is described in Chanakya's book "Arthashastra". Relief work is mentioned in it. In ancient and medieval times, people's life was disrupted due to drought. But due to the liberal policy of the ruler, relief work was undertaken on occasion.

The information and record of droughts in the world till date is very insufficient and its record can be found in history. From this, the main causes of global drought are explored, in which the weak elements of the society and the farming class are suffering due to the scarcity of food grains, wars, internal unrest, floods, crop pests, locust attacks due to the nature's disorder or irregular balance. Due to the problem of drought, the rural life is disrupted to a large extent.

Droughts occur only in societies dependent on agriculture. In the Pre-British i.e. ancient and medieval times, Indian society was completely dependent on agriculture like any other society. Although weavers, chambhars, carpenters, potters etc. Although the artisan trade was carried on a large scale, it was entirely associated with agriculture. In the Balutedari system, the goods or services rendered by the Balutedars to the village were paid in the form of grain. Also, the supply of raw material

like cotton needed by the weavers was also from agriculture. This agriculture was also completely dependent on rain. Except for wells, small ponds and dams, large irrigation facilities, lack of science and technology and industrial progress, could not have existed in those times. Therefore, in case of drought, there was no situation where a large balance of water was available. There were no other means of livelihood. In such a case, it was quite natural that there would be scarcity of food grains as a result of drought. Apart from drought, there were droughts during this period due to many other reasons. Heavy rains and hailstorms, crop pests and locusts caused extensive crop damage in a region. Sometimes, due to epidemics of diseases like Devi, Pataki, Plague, Influenza, the villages would die and due to this, the agricultural activities would become cold. Also, due to the lack of communication facilities during this period, it was not possible to transport food grains from the places where food was available to the drought areas immediately and on a large scale. Therefore, it was not possible to reduce the severity of drought by removing the scarcity of food grains.

2. FAMINES IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL INDIA

There are many mentions of drought in ancient and medieval India in Vedas, Ramayana, Buddhist Jataka Katha, Chanakya's Economics, Kalhana's Rajtarangini, Abhang of various saints etc. found to have come from Vadmaya.



Prior to the 19th century, droughts were naturally occurring. In it, all the people were starved and there was a terrible loss of people, cattle, animals and money. But in today's modern times, the nature of drought has changed. In this, the poor people suffered more than the rich and it was filled with it.

According to the study of historians, during the Pre-British period, there was a major and severe drought in India at least once every fifty years. At other times there were short or localized droughts. Fourteen major droughts occurred in India between the eleventh century and the fourteenth century. Most of these droughts were caused by drought.

3. EFFECTS OF FAMINE IN PRE-BRITISH PERIOD AND REMEDIAL EFFORTS

During this period, as agriculture was completely dependent on the whims of nature, drought was truly a natural disaster, in such a situation, the rulers of that time, i.e. kings-maharajas or nawabshahs, could only try to 'prevent' this disaster. Secondly, since the entire economy is dependent on agriculture, the economy would not be able to function unless the agricultural activities were resumed smoothly.

Therefore, it seems that on many occasions, the kings tried to help the drought-stricken people as much as possible. Among them, provision of food grains, provision of drinking water, assistance to the disabled, elderly and poor, provision of fodder for cattle, etc., were provided. For this, stop the export of food grains from the state, import food grains and make them available to the people at cheap rates. Remedies were taken. Knowing that it is not possible to give farm manure due to lack of sufficient crops, the Sara (tax) should be waived off. It seems that the kings also did things like building roads, palaces or forts, recruiting large numbers of soldiers so that the people could get a means of livelihood. At the same time, rulers provided seeds, implements, bullocks and surplus land to the peasantry so that they could start farming again in the new season, often helping to clear forests and build new villages.

Of course, not all kings or feudal lords take such measures. Many of these kings and feudal lords used to exploit the people even during famine. However, many famous kings are found to have taken some measures to alleviate the drought. E.g. During the famine of 1629-31, Mugal Emperor Shah Jahan started shelters, distributed food and money to the poor and waived all taxes on the public for two years. During the famine of 1661 in Delhi, Agra region, Aurangzeb himself supervised the famine relief work. Opening his treasury to relieve the famine, he imported large quantities of grain from Punjab and Bengal and sold it to the public at very low rates. Those who could not even buy grain felt free. All taxes on the public were waived during this period and money was distributed to the people wherever necessary. During this drought, Maharana Raj Singh of Udaipur built an elegant marble tower at a cost of lakhs of rupees to block the water of a large canal, and with the help of the people, he built a three-mile long earthen embankment. Due to this, the production of agriculture in this area increased and some stability was created. During the drought in Maharashtra of 1802-03, the Peshwas imported large quantities of grain and

exempted land revenue. Apart from this, landlords, traders, moneylenders etc. Through the private charity work of people of the modern class, facilities like food hostels, drinking fountains and shelters were provided to the drought-affected people.

4. FAMINE IN INDIA DURING BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY

There are records of severe droughts by the British, especially during the East India Company period. During the company's rule, there were many famines in different regions of India. In the Bengal famine of 1769-70, approximately 1/3 of the population died due to famine. The company government has not implemented any remedial plan or did not help. Not only this, during the drought, he bought rice at a low price and sold it at a high price and made a huge profit. In 1781-82 there was a famine in Madras and in 1784 in the whole of North India. The company government did relief work. But that was not enough. In 1833, 2 lakhs people out of 5 lakhs died in Guntur district. Also in 1837, severe drought again occurred in North India, in which the Company government started some public activities. But the aid did not reach the drought victims. Due to this, there was a terrible loss of life and financial loss. From this, during the rule of the company, there was no sure measure to save the common people from drought and for relief work. Therefore, the drought-affected people got substantial relief work from the company government.

5. FAMINE IN BRITISH INDIA

In 1858, the transfer of the administration of India from the Company to the British Crown and the development of railways and other means of communication, the advancement of foreign trade, changed the nature of the problem of drought. The British government also realized this. It was the responsibility of the British government to expand irrigation works in India, make agricultural laws, try to alleviate droughts, formulate a drought policy. An average of 10 severe droughts occurred during this period. In 1860-61 there was a famine abroad in Delhi and Agra. This was the first time that arrangements were made to accommodate the famine victims. It was decided to investigate the causes of the drought. Colonel Smith was appointed for this purpose. There was no concrete suggestion in his report. Even though the drought in Orissa in 1866 was more serious, no preparations were made to face the drought. So the government was following the theory of supply and demand. As a result, 13 lakhs people died. This point was proved by drought changes. A committee was set up by the government under the chairmanship of George Campbell. During the drought of 1876-78, there was a severe drought in the states of Madras, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. In this 5 crore 80 lakhs people were caught in the grip of drought. The government made superficial efforts to prevent drought. Thousands of people died in this. The Bengal famine of 1942-43 was the worst and worst of the many droughts in India, in which thousands died. Looking at the nature of this drought, due to the policy of the British government and the Second World War of 1939, it is seen that the hand of man was more than that of God in this drought.



6. CAUSES OF FAMINE IN BRITISH RULE

Seeing that, after the arrival of the British in India, there was no problem to overcome the above limits to effectively prevent and eliminate drought, i.e. eliminate drought permanently. Trade increased with British expansion in India. Also, the means of transport and communication like roads, railways, post and wire were expanded. Similarly, if irrigation, agriculture and industries were developed and expanded in India on the basis of modern science and technology and capital production methods, the ability of the Indian economy to face natural calamities would have increased. Drought would have been largely eradicated from India. But the opposite happened.

Food grains and agricultural products like jute, cotton, tea, indigo etc. were exported to Britain as raw materials from India. While the cloth, leather goods, utensils etc. from the mills of

England. Cheap ready-made goods began to be consumed in India. Therefore, weavers, tanners, coppersmiths etc. in India. As the goods of the artisans became scarce, they lost their business as artisans. Also, the British took care that no mills should be set up in India in order to consume the goods of English mills here. As a result of all this, on the one hand agriculture was destroyed and the farmers were greatly impoverished, on the other hand, due to the destruction of craftsmanship and lack of industrial development, the entire population turned to agriculture for livelihood. This increased the population burden on agriculture. In such a situation, how will the Indian economy's ability to face natural calamities like drought increase due to the arrival of the British? The opposite potential also decreased. Even a small amount of rain led to the collapse of the agricultural system and the growing agricultural population was thrown into the abyss of drought.

7. LIST OF FAMINES IN INDIA BETWEEN 1765 AND 1947

Year	Name of Famine	British territory
1769-70	Great Bengal Famine	Bihar, Western Bengal
1791-92	Doji Bara Famine or Skull Famine	Madras Presidency
1837-38	Agra Famine	Central Doab and trans-Jammu districts of the Northern-West (later Agra Province), including Delhi and Hissar
1860-61	Upper Doab Famine	Upper Doab of Agra, Delhi and Hissar divisions of Punjab
1865-67	Orissa Famine	Orissa, Bihar, Bellary and Ganjam District of Madras
1868-70	Rajputana Famine	Ajmer, Western Agra and Eastern Punjab
1873-74	Bihar Famine	Bihar
1876-78	Southern India Famine	Madras and Bombay
1896-97	Indian Famine	Madras, Bombay, Deccan, United Provinces, Central Provinces, Part of Punjab
1899-1900	Indian Famine	Bombay, Central Provinces, Berar, Madras, Part of Punjab
1943-44	Bengal Famine	Bengal

8. ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF VICTIMS OF DROUGHTS IN INDIA SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY ARE

Year of drought Drought-affected region Number of victims (in lakhs)

Year	Region	No. of Victims (in lakhs)
1838	Uttar Pradesh	8.0
1865	Orissa and Bengal	15.0
1869	Delhi-Agra region and Rajputana	15.0
1876-78	India-Mysore, Madras, Bombay Province	52.0
1896-97	North and South India	7.5
1899-1901	North and South India	10.0

It is estimated that a total of at least 2 crore 14 lakhs people may have died in India during the hundred years between 1800 and

1900 due to all major and minor droughts. The details are as follows:-

Number of victims over the years :

Year	Number of victims
1800-1825	10 Lakhs
1826-1850	4 Lakhs
1851-1875	50 Lakhs
1876-1900	1 Crore 50 Lakhs



During the 50 year period from 1850 to 1900, 2 crore people died due to famine. This drought is a cruel glimpse of the dark British colonialism that plunged India into the trenches of long-

term hunger, unemployment and poverty through immense looting and extreme exploitation.

9. IMAGES OF FAMINE DURING BRITISH RULE IN INDIA



Famine of 1770



Famine of 1776-78



Famine of 1776-78



Famine of 1899-1901

10. BRITISH FAMINE RELIEF PLANS DROUGHT COMMISSION

1. Smith Committee, 1860-61

In 1860-61 there was a famine in Delhi and Agra region. Seeing the severity of this drought, the British government established the Smith Committee for the first time under the leadership of British officer Smith. This committee worked to get information about the severity of drought in and around Delhi.

2. Campbell Commission, 1866

In 1865-66 there was a devastating drought in Orissa, Bengal, Bihar and Madras. 20 lakhs people died in this drought. 1 million people died in Orissa alone. The severity of this drought was highest in the Orissa region. Hence this drought is also called Orissa drought. Seeing the severity of this drought, the British government appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir George Campbell. This committee held the government system responsible for this drought. Sir John Lawrence was the Viceroy at this time.

3. Strachey Commission, 1880

The Great Famine of 1876-78 was the worst disaster experienced since the beginning of the 19th century. Madras, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab were affected and about 5 million people died within a year. The government made half-hearted efforts to help the drought-stricken people.

In 1880, Viceroy Lytton appointed a commission headed by Richard Strachey to formulate general principles and suggest measures to permanently overcome the famine. This commission is called Strachey Commission or Strachey Commission.

The Strachey Commission made the following recommendations

- i) The Commission recommended adjustment of wages from time to time to provide adequate food to the worker.
- ii) It should be the duty of the State to provide free relief to the poor and list the persons who are eligible for it. In it, instructions were given regarding the suspension and exemption of land revenue and rent.
- iii) Employment opportunities should be made available before starvation. Employment remuneration should be determined from time to time.
- iv) The cost of drought relief was to be borne by the provincial governments. However, when necessary from the Centre Help was given.
- v) Camps should be opened and export of food grains should be stopped during drought.
- vi) Land revenue and other taxes should be reduced.
- vii) Transmigration of animals to other places.

The Government generally accepted the Commission's recommendations and steps were taken to create a Famine



Fund. In 1883, the Provisional Famine Code was framed, which formed the guide and basis for provincial drought codes.

4. Lyall Commission, 1896

The previous drought was followed by the drought of 1896-97. It affected almost every province to varying degrees, and the total drought was estimated to have affected a population of 34 million.

A commission headed by Sir James Lyall, the former Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, followed the views expressed by him in 1896. It suggested some changes to give more flexibility to the then accepted principles. The commission recommended development of irrigation facilities. Lord Elgin was the second Viceroy.

5. McDonnell Commission, 1900

After the famine of 1899-1900, Lord Curzon appointed a Famine Commission headed by MacDonnell. In a report in 1901, he summarized the principles of relief and suggested changes where necessary.

The McDonnell Commission made the following recommendations

- i) The Commission emphasized the policy benefits of ethical policy.
- ii) Immediate disbursement of advance funds for purchase of seeds and animals and digging of temporary wells.
- iii) Advocated the appointment of Drought Commissioners in provinces when relief operations were expected to be extensive.
- iv) Emphasis was placed on enlisting non-governmental assistance on a large scale.
- v) The Commission emphasized on taking vigorous measures for better transport facilities, opening of agricultural banks, improvement of irrigation facilities and rapid improvement of agricultural practices.

Most of the commission's recommendations were accepted, and before Curzon left India he had taken several measures to prevent and deal with famine.

For example, district authorities were given the power to cancel crops if the produce was destroyed by calamity. Curzon appointed Inspector General in 1901 for agricultural guidance. An Agricultural Research Center was set up at Pusa in Bengal. However, most of the measures were taken half-heartedly.

11. CONCLUSION

Since Indian agriculture is dependent on the monsoon, certain regions of India fall into drought prone areas. The vastness of India's terrain and the monsoon climate are factors that play a role in drought. This is a state of affairs that has been going on since ancient times. During the British era India also experienced many droughts in some regions. In the Bengal famine of 1769-70 during the East India Company period, approximately 1/3 of the population died due to famine. The company government has not implemented any remedial plan. A.D. In 1781-82 there was a famine in Madras and in 1784 in the whole of North India. The company government did relief work. But that was not enough. In 1833, 2 lakhs people out of 5 lakhs died in Guntur district. Also, in 1837, there was a severe drought in North India again, and the Company government did

not organize the relief work. Due to this, there was a terrible loss of life and financial loss.

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After the famine of 1899-1900, Lord Curzon appointed a Famine Commission headed by MacDonnell. But efforts were made to avoid the suffering of the farmer. The most important of them is the relationship between agricultural crops and clan zamindars, even during droughts, agricultural crops were forcibly collected. Dadabhai Naoroji, Rameshchandu Dutt tried to solve this question regarding the British government's drought relief work. The Congress blamed the government for the drought. The British government did not adopt a nationwide policy. Therefore, it is clear that the Indian people suffered a huge loss of life and money.

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