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# Review Of Research



## MADRAS PRESIDENCY: SPREAD OF EPIDEMIC DISEASES IN FAMINE AFFECTED AREAS AND FORMATION OF FAMINE COMMISSION AND ENACTMENT OF FAMINE CODE



G. Gowthaman

Associate Professor in History , All India Civil Services Coaching Centre ,  
Government of Tamil Nadu , Anna Institute of Management , Chennai.



### ABSTRACT

Famines were usually followed by pestilences. The famine mortality occurred from diseases such as Cholera and Small-pox that were common during non crisis years; but attained epidemic proportion both in terms of incidence and virulence in famine periods. To some extent, famines and pestilences were the twin offspring of drought which while it withered the crop, also exposed the diminished water supply to pollution. It may be reasonably supposed that the atmospheric disturbances which prevented occurrence of summer rains such as abnormal condition of temperature humidity were hostile to human life and favourable to the spread of malignant disease. When the vitality of the people was

lowered. they offered less resistance to epidemic diseases, probably in respect to susceptibility to attacks and certainly as to immunity from death. and 58 (25.90%) of women are getting support for nomination their name in election from family.

**KEYWORDS** :Cholera, Small-pox, Epidemic, Famine, Famine Commission, Famine Code, Mortality, Vaccination,

### OUTBREAK OF EPIDEMIC DISEASES

The mortality rate from Cholera and Small- pox , the epidemic diseases had been abnormally high during the famines. The reasons for the outbreak of diseases among the poor people were owing to the distress due to drought and consequent failure of crops of the previous years they mortgaged all their meager property, sold most of their oxen , pawned their jewels if they had any, and eaten all their seed grains. To solve the problem of existence, they changed their diet and tried to live on unwholesome innutritious roots and fruits of wild shrubs. This naturally brought weakness and

sickness to their families.<sup>1</sup>

The construction of mortality statistics was unreliable in many cases as Cholera deaths were registered as deaths from Diarrhea. The District Medical Officer of Ganjam had complained that much of famine diarrhea had on the opposite been registered as Cholera.<sup>2</sup> Village magistrates were held responsible for death from starvation within their village limits. One consequence was that deaths from starvation were frequently attributed to fever, dysentery and other related diseases. Moreover, village officials neither were skilled in matters of etiology nor were they legally compelled to maintain registers. Where Magistrates and Chowkidars were also victims, records were incomplete. William Digby, the Honorary Secretary to Famine Relief Fund recorded that death by the wayside were often attributed to Cholera.<sup>3</sup> Hence those who suffered and died, determining the numbers involved and cause of death was more problematic. Whether the deaths were from Cholera or Diarrhea or from starvation they all pointed to the fact that the Province was facing a crisis that brought so many casualties.

## MORTALITY

The year 1882 was a sicklier year than its two preceding years. Cholera was prevalent in an epidemic form being a continuation of the Cholera that appeared in the later part of the year 1881. Nearly 23,604 persons became victims to it in 1882 as against 9,446 in 1881. Small-pox carried off 20,159 in 1882 individuals against 15,776 in 1881 and bowel complaints 19,958 in 1882 against 18,961 in 1881.<sup>4</sup> The Cholera outbreak which began in the last quarter of 1881 appeared to have reached its maximum in 1884 with 75,476 deaths. The year 1885 also marked a very large mortality, the number of deaths being 58,109. The number of death from cholera was 32,209 or 46,864 less than in 1892. Death from small-pox was 27,289 against 43,757 in 1892. In 1893 hundreds were swept away by Cholera in Madurai district alone.<sup>5</sup> The Christian missionaries were not spared by the Cholera outbreak. Rev. J.S. Chandler of the American Madura Mission who was attacked by Cholera died within a few days in 1894.<sup>6</sup> In the year 1896, the number of deaths from Cholera alone accounted to 47,847 in the Madras Presidency. Out of the 44,678 villages in the whole of the Madras Presidency, 4,390 villages were affected by the outbreak of Cholera in 1896, although Cholera prevailed in every district. The Government attributed the insanitary habits of the uneducated masses of the people as the cause for the severity of the epidemic.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding Small-pox, the mortality in 1885 although still high was much less than in the preceding year. The deaths numbered 34,726 against 61,207 in 1884 and therefore showed a reduction of nearly half. The disease prevailed in more or less every district of the Madras Presidency, but the only district in which it was very severe was Godavari, the death rate being 4.9 per 1000. Unfortunately where Small-pox was strongest vaccination was the weakest.<sup>8</sup> The district authorities took timely measures to prevent the outbreak of a Cholera epidemic, when the diseases of Cholera and Small-pox caused unusual mortality frequently. Protection of water supply was insisted upon and disinfection of water sources was practiced freely when necessary. Segregation and disinfection of the infective matter were observed. Though the efforts directed towards repression were successful, the organization was not sufficient to effect these measures in rural areas as complete sanitary staff did not exist.

## VACCINATION

Vaccination was conducted with vigour and special inducements were in some cases allowed to workers who permitted their infants to be vaccinated.<sup>9</sup> The supervision of the Vaccination Department

became one of the important duties of the Sanitary Commissioner in the Madras Province in 1887.<sup>10</sup> Vaccination was made compulsory in all Municipalities for the first time in 1893; but there was a decline in the number of operations by municipal vaccinators.<sup>11</sup> In many places the people refused to get themselves vaccinated as they thought it contained lymph taken from donkey.<sup>12</sup> Donkey was considered to be an unholy beast and the vaccinators had to undergo hardships in persuading the illiterate mass to get them vaccinated.<sup>13</sup> Still the number of vaccinations done kept increasing year after year.

The cattle which were a prized possession of the common man also suffered from a severely infectious and contagious Foot and Mouth disease probably as a result of starvation. A severe form of cattle disease broke out in Bhadrachalam Taluk in the Godavari Agency in the end of the year 1882 and many cattle were lost.<sup>14</sup> Cattle disease prevailed in Peddapuram agency in Godavari District and the mortality was rather heavy in 1888.<sup>15</sup> During 1896 and 1897 over 3,50,000 cattle and nearly 4,00,000 sheep and goats perished in the Madras Presidency. The total loss was estimated to well over forty lakhs.<sup>16</sup> In certain places, the Madras Act II of 1866, was put into force for the prevention of the spread of disease. In 1888, the Act was introduced in Madurai District to prevent the spread of a cattle disease of a contagious character at the large cattle fair held annually during Chitirai festival in the Madurai District.<sup>17</sup> In 1899, it was promulgated in the cattle fair at Karamaddai village in the Coimbatore Taluk.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes the cattle fairs which were usually held during times of annual temple festivals for nearly ten days had to be cancelled in many places. The Government prohibited the holding of the cattle fair at Avanashi and Tirupur in Coimbatore District in 1899 to prevent the coming of people from plague infested parts and even requested the Government of India to prohibit the issue of tickets in certain railway stations.<sup>19</sup> In Rollapudukuru and Punganuru in North Arcot district, the cattle fairs were prohibited in 1899 under the Epidemic Diseases Act II of 1897.<sup>20</sup>

The main victims apart from the ryots were agricultural labourers and artisans including weavers, dyers, tailors and potters, leather workers, all of whom depended either directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihood. Life became very challenging for the common man. The miserable consequences of the famines were not confined to the famine zone and their toll was felt throughout the Madras Presidency. The famines created an acute economic crisis. Failure of one or more harvests resulted in diminution of food stocks which was succeeded by rise in prices of essential commodities. Finally the cessation of ordinary work on which people were employed intensified the already existing distress. As the season failed, the agricultural operations dwindled away and the ryot did with his hands what in better times he would do by hired labour. The ultimate result was that the agricultural labourers were thrown out of work. Similar results occurred in the various professions. Under such circumstances unless employment is found for poorer classes by the State, they had to either steal or starve. Without any means to earn a living and with many mouths to feed, the parents or relatives were forced to desert their children as happened in the famine of 1896-1897.<sup>21</sup> Possession of cattle during famine years was also a disadvantage for water and pasture was scanty and cost of fodder ran up to a prohibitive price. It was practically impossible to dispose of animals even at ruinous costs and numbers died. William Digby, Honorary Secretary of the Relief Fund cited instances of formerly well-to-do ryots selling bullocks in the Bellary at one rupee a head.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the Madras Province, the famine had its impact on the supply and on the prices. In some non-famine districts also the famine pressure was severe. In all there were high prices and scarcity. For instance, in 1899-1900 owing chiefly to the prevalence of unfavorable season and because of the large exports of grain which were made to other famine-hit provinces, prices were very high at the beginning of the year and when the unfavorable season developed there was a further general rise in the price of all staple food grains. The rise amounted to from thirty to forty six



as compared with the prices of 1899-1900.<sup>23</sup>

These famine conditions did affect the population. At this juncture when the population could find no ways of coming out of this difficult situation, which affected both the economic and social conditions, it became the bounden duty of the Government to do its utmost in devising some means of protecting the Madras Presidency and persist in its attempts till some solution of the problem had been obtained. That was the famine relief organized by the Government to tide over the crisis with partial success.

### **Famine Code, 1883**

The necessity for State relief in times of famine arose due to the diminution of food stocks, rise in prices and cessation of ordinary work pursued by the poorer classes. Unless employment was found for them by the State they had no alternative except to either steal or starve. The sense of obligation to give relief by the State developed only after the British consolidated their power. The idea of systematized and effectual action to prevent the suffering and mortality incidental to famine came only with the appointment of the Famine Commission of 1880.

The Famine Commission of 1880 on the one hand formulated general principles for proper treatment of famines and on the other they suggested particular measure of a preventive or protective character.<sup>24</sup> The Commission reviewed the general character of the action of the Government in times of famine and suggested many steps for the improvement of famine relief agencies such as appointment of a Famine Commissioner in all famine stricken provinces to guide the relief work, formulation of a famine code, formation of special famine fund, setting upon a separate Department of Agriculture and so on. Long terms measures recommended by the Commission were the extension of railways and irrigation works, reduction of excessive dependence on agriculture by diversifying rural occupations and more liberal credit facilities for permanent land improvement schemes. The Commission report played an important part not only in the evolution of famine relief policies but also in shaping agriculture and railway policies of the Government.<sup>25</sup>

The Government prepared a provisional famine code in June 1883. This Code laid down responsibilities of local officials in relation to famine relief. Organization of relief work was to follow the pattern laid down in the Code. There were to be two types of work viz., the civil agency works under the control of District authority for the weak and unskilled workers and professional agency works under the control of Public Works Department for able bodied and skilled workers. The Code did not approve of imports of food for storage on government account; but preferred a policy of supply of grains through selected contractors to localities where normal trading channels were not functioning. After 1883 the provincial governments prepared their own famine codes modelled on provisional codes mentioned above. Both the code and provisional code were revised from time to time.<sup>26</sup>

The Famine Code determined the modem policy of famine relief administration. The Ganjam Famine of 1889 and the famine in 1891- 1892 however put the new famine relief policies to some severe tests. Reforms were introduced in the existing famine relief policy in the Government of India Circular of August 1893.<sup>27</sup> That Famine policy was once again put to crucial test in the Famine of 1896-1897 and a very elaborate enquiry was conducted by the Commission of 1898. While confirming the principles enunciated by the Commission of 1880, the Commission of 1898 departed from them in recommending a more liberal wage and a freer extension of gratuitous relief. Before these recommendations had been fully considered and incorporated into the Provisional famine Codes, the drought 1899 occurred and local governments were compelled to face another at famine without a settled policy and in nearly all cases with their Famine Codes still unrevised. This led to uncertainty and

oscillation and guidance of measures of relief<sup>28</sup>

The Famine Commission of 1901 made several modifications in famine relief policy. It stressed the importance of opening test relief works at the very first signs of a famine. In spite of all these measures the actual working out of the relief policy depended very largely on the ability and disposition of local functionaries.

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