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CASUALTIES OF THE STATE MACHINE: RE-EVALUATING THE FAMINES OF THE- MADRAS PRESIDENCY (NATURAL VS MAN -MADE CRISIS)

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Abstract:

The Madras Presidency Famine Was One of the Most Devastating Incidents in the History of The Madras Presidency, Because Millions of People and Animals Died During This Catastrophic Period. So Many Scholars Have Examined about the Famine. Some Scholars Argue That Natural or Geographical Factors Played a Major Role of Madras Presidency Famine, While Other Scholars Argue That Political (Cruel Political) Factors Played the Major Role of Madras Presidency Famine, So That Two Perspectives Provided Historical Explanation. But However, These Are Not Only Explanation for The Famine Disaster Because One Dark Fact Inside the Two Perspective or Behind "*Like the Other Sides of a Mirror*", but These Perspectives also Reflect Different Aspects of the Same Historical Reality. While One Perspective Reflects Aspect of the Event, Another One May Reveal a Different Dimension. Therefore, This Study Explores Whether, Beyond the Natural Factors and Colonial political Factors, The Involvement of the Third Group Also Played a Significant Role like "*A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*" in the Extensive Loss of Life During the Famine. in "*Behind the Dark Real Fact*" in Real History of Tragedy. Let Us Examine the Underlying Truth.

Keywords:

Famine, Natural Disaster, Colonialism and Dark Side.

Famine:

Famine is a severe disaster characterized by widespread shortages of food and, in many cases, access to water. Famine may occur due to changes in weather and climatic conditions, particularly prolonged drought or inadequate rainfall. A lack of adequate rainfall can contribute to the emergence of famine. because As Tiruvallur observes, water is essential for the existence and substance of life. because that water adapted with the nature. So, plants, animals and human

beings all depend on water for their survival. Unlike agricultural products, water cannot simply be produced or cultivated by human beings. Its availability largely depends on natural processes such as the hydro logical cycle. because the water doesn't make by human being or any technologies, because the water produced by nature Rain falls through a natural repeating process called the water cycle, where moisture moves continuously between the Earth's surface and the sky. so, cannot we cultivate the water. Therefore, water is fundamental to human life and agricultural production, and prolonged water scarcity can contribute significantly to food shortage and famine.

During the period of the madras presidency, a large proportion of the population depended on agriculture, which was closely linked to the availability of the water and seasonal rainfall. Various food crops, including rice, maize, Kambu (pearl millet), and ragi (finger millet), were cultivated. In addition, vegetables such as brinjal, sweet potato, tomato, onion, and chilli, as well as oil seeds such groundnut, castor, and sesame, were grown. Fruits such as lime, banana, mango, and guava, etc were also cultivated. so many cultivations depended on water only. The dependence of agricultural production on rain falls and water availability meant that inadequate water could lead to crop failure, food shortage, and economic hardship among agricultural communities.

Poverty and economic vulnerability can intensify the effects of famine by limiting people's access to food and other essential resources. Food and water shortages can also increase vulnerability due to diseases could further affect vulnerable populations, while inadequate nutrition could result in vitamin and nutrient deficiencies. Like cholera and malaria.

This raises an important question was famine primarily natural phenomenon a human made crisis? Scholars have approached this question from different perspectives. One perspective emphasizes the role of natural and geographical factors, such as drought, inadequate rainfall, and water scarcity, another perspective highlights the importance of political, economic, and administrative factors, including taxation, colonial polices, and the distribution of food resources. Therefore, the causes and consequences of famine need to be examined through the interaction of both environmental human factors rather than through a single explanation.so what these perspectives were played in major reason of famine so let us examine the two perspectives in this paper with proof.

Famine as a Natural Crisis:

Famine has been a recurring phenomenon across different societies and historical periods, often resulting from natural and environmental factors. The Madras Presidency was also affected by famine before establishment of British rule. Because ancient Tamil literature contains numerous references to famine, hunger, and poverty, particularly in Ancient Sangam literature. The poet Thiruvalluvar, writing approximately 2000 years ago, portrays hunger and poverty in the Thirukural Thiruvalluvar refers to terms such as "*Pasi Pini*" (the affliction of hunger), "*nirappu*" (hunger) and "*inmai*" (poverty) in the chapter on poverty, "*Nalguravu the Thirukural*, the verse describes a truly dire situation in which the failure of rainfall and the resulting destruction of crops leave people without adequate.

perunchiththannar refers to term such as the poverty in the *Purananuru*, the poem portrays hunger, or Pasi, as a cruel monster and described as a raging fire inside the stomach. Hunger can diminish a person's dignity and desperate search for a single meal can become a matter of survival. "*Honour, Education, Generosity, Knowledge, Charity, Spirituality, Greatness, Hard Work, Love and Family Pride*". These all-noble qualities strike out instantly due to hunger. The imagery of starvation is also evident in the anthology, which contains several representations of hunger in literature. The text also focuses on the suffering of his wife and family, particularly the effects of severe hunger on the mother's ability to produce breast milk, the severe effects of hunger are evident in the description, "*dry breast, his wife breast up completely dry and milk less*" And "*Ribs like lizard*" he describes emaciated people whose ribs protrude like those of a lizard. Similar descriptions of Pasi Pini can also be found in kapilar, avvaiyar and kazhaathazhaiyar. Include. kapilar portrays Pasi Pini in *Akanaanuru*, while Kuda pulaviyanaar also describes the devastating effect of hunger. These literary representations highlight the importance of providing food as an alleviating hunger in *Purananuru*. "*He Gave Food, He Gave a Life*". For this reason, practice of annadhanam (offering or providing food) to those in need of food, is offered in temples from that day on still now. So, these literary accounts provide evidence of prevalence of hunger and famine in the region before the establishment of British colonial rule. so that is why the reason Malthus argued played natural factors major role of famine in an essay on the *principle of population source* in 1798.

Famine as a man-made crisis:

The perspectives discussed above provide important explanation of the causes of famine; However, these perspectives do not fully explain the complexity of famine. as a historical

phenomenon. famine had occurred repeatedly across in different societies and historical period; however, the establishment of British colonial rule in India introduced significant political, economic, and administrative changes that influenced the experience of famine. British policies relating to administration, taxation, land revenue, labour and economic production placed considerable pressure on the population. High levels of taxation, exploitative economic practices, low wages and harsh working conditions contributed to widespread economic hardship. Many people were employed in physically demanding occupations, including road construction, railway construction, public works, industrial production, silk factories, and coal mining. In addition, changes in landholding practices and cultivation of cash crops rather than food crops affected the availability of food and the economic conditions of the agricultural communities. These factors contributed to vulnerability of the population and intensified the effects of famine.

Several scholars have therefore emphasized the significance of political and economic factors in understanding famine during the period of British rule. Dadabhai Naoroji, in poverty and *Un-British Rule in India* (1901), criticized the economic policies of British rule and drew attention to issues such as excessive taxation and the drain of wealth from India. Similarly, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, in *The Economic History of India*, examined the economic consequence of British policies and discussed the impact of land revenue systems, including ryotwari system in the Madras presidency. The British government imposed heavy taxation, which placed a considerable burden on poor farmers and made it difficult for them to meet their tax obligations.

These economic pressures also reduced the ability of vulnerable communities to withstand periods of famine, resulting in considerable suffering and loss of life. Similarly, Subramanian Bharati expressed in *The Indian Magazine* strong opposition to British taxation and economic policies through his writings and journalistic works. Similarly, V. O. Chidambaram Pillai (V.O.C) founded the swadeshi steam navigation company and *All About Allen* in opposition to British commercial dominance and economic policies. Similarly, Thiru. v. kalayanasuntharanaar also used his writings and the magazine *Navasakthi* to criticize British taxation and economic policies and to highlight the poverty experienced by working people. wrote against the British tax and the poverty of working people. similarly, Namakkal ve. Ramalingam Pillai, he criticized the British taxation and excise duties through his patriotic poems and writings. These literary and political expressions contributed to the wider nationalist discourage against colonial economic policies and highlighted the economic hardships

experienced by the people of Madras presidency. these literary accounts provide evidence of prevalence of hunger and famine in the region after the establishment of British colonial rule.

Major famines and Estimates Mortality in Madras Presidency:

1647- during the initial period when the east India company established in madras presidency, a devastating famine, resulting in the deaths of many thousands of people and weaver.

1658 and 1686: during these two famine periods, political conflicts and inadequate rainfall contributed to severe food shortages, resulting in widespread distress and the deaths of thousands of people.

1769-1770 and 1781-1783: during these two periods of famine, food scarcity was aggravated by prevailing wartime conditions. 1781, the situation in madras deteriorated considerably due to the wartime conditions associated with Hyder Ali. As a result, a rationing system was introduced, and gruel centres were opened for the first time.

1824: food scarcity affected the madras region severely, leading to chaos and unrest in several areas. The shortage became so acute that grain was reportedly available for sale at only one shop in the entire city of madras.

1832-1833: The Guntur famine: the Guntur famine of 1832-1833 resulted in the death of approximately 1.5 million people and the loss of large numbers of livestock, including 71,000 bulls, 1,59,000 cows and 3,00,000 sheep and goats. The massive loss of human and animal life severely affected agriculture and the rural economy, resulting in long-term socioeconomic consequences.

1876-1878: the great famine: the great famine of 1876-1878 was one of the most severe famines to affect the madras presidency during British colonial rule. It caused widespread loss of life, extensive food shortages, and considerable economic hardship. Despite the severity of the famine, the colonial revenue was still demanded from the affected population. This situation further intensified the economic difficulties experienced by famine affected.

so, both perspectives appear to hold some truth. Following the abstract given above, what does the third viewpoint argue, and who bears the ultimate responsibility? Let us examine the underlying truth.

The principal perpetrators and their role:

The root cause of these massive fatalities wasn't just distant colonial policies; it was also driven by local collaborators among us. For their own selfish gains, they sucked the blood of the poor.

While the British enacted oppressive laws, imposed heavy taxes, and extracted forced labour for railways construction and roads construction, it was often local intermediaries, moneylenders, corrupt officials, and grain hoarders who exploited the famine. They hoarded essential food grains to sell at exorbitant prices, charged crushing interest rates, and forcefully seized the lands of impoverished peasants who couldn't pay taxes, reducing them to utter destitution and slavery. They played main Role of Local Elites in Colonial Exploitation. the reason is British colonial rule was primarily exercised through systems of administration and revenue collection, rather than through direct and continuous interaction with the common people at the local level. The implementation of colonial policies often depended upon local intermediaries and influential sections of society. Therefore, the question of responsibility cannot be examined solely in terms of British authority; it must also consider the role played by the upper and dominant sections of the local population who assisted in implementing and enforcing these policies.

This raises several important questions concerning the social and economic conditions of the period. Why did the ordinary people become increasingly impoverished? Why did poverty and the absence of adequate food lead to widespread suffering and death during periods of famine? Why were the socially and economically privileged sections comparatively less affected by famine and deprivation? Why did they not lose their lands, homes, and sources of livelihood in the same manner as the poorer population? While ordinary people were struggling for their next meal, how were the privileged sections able to maintain their wealth, construct large houses, and continue to live in relative prosperity?

These questions lead us towards a less visible and often neglected dimension of colonial history. Another significant question is why the common people did not openly challenge these forms of exploitation and authority. How was a situation created in which the commands of the powerful came to be regarded as law? Why were ordinary people kept in a state of ignorance and prevented from questioning the existing social and political order?

The answer can be found partly in the mechanisms through which authority was maintained at the local level. Power becomes more effective when people are deprived of knowledge, resources, and the ability to question those in authority as long as people remained economically vulnerable and dependent upon their immediate sources of food and livelihood, their primary concern was often survival rather than resistance. Those who controlled local resources and social institutions could therefore maintain their authority by keeping the poorer sections of society in conditions of poverty, dependence, and insecurity.

Social exclusion was another important mechanism of control. Individuals who challenged established practices or violated locally enforced social rules could face exclusion from the community. In some instances, their families could also suffer the consequences. People were discouraged from communicating with, supporting, or aiding socially excluded families, and those who violated such restrictions could themselves face social sanctions. Under such circumstances, an individual who wished to question injustice had to consider not only the consequences for themselves but also the possible consequences for their entire family. Such forms of social pressure significantly restricted the ability of ordinary people to question authority openly.

Therefore, an examination of these practices reveals a harsh and uncomfortable dimension of the social history of colonial India. The purpose of bringing this dimension to light is not merely to identify the colonial administration as the sole source of oppression, but to examine how authority, social hierarchy, and local structures of power operated together. The colonial system depended upon various intermediaries and local institutions through which revenue demands and administrative decisions were implemented. Consequently, the experiences of ordinary people must be understood through the interaction between colonial authority and the local structures that facilitated its implementation.

The abuse of authority and the exploitation of the population can be examined through several important systems of revenue extraction. Among them, the Zamindari system and the Ryotwari system occupy a significant place. These systems affected landholders, cult. Let's see how it affected.

Zamindari system:

The Zamindari System, introduced by the British East India Company under the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, was a pivotal land revenue administration designed to secure a fixed, reliable stream of taxation by legally transforming traditional revenue collectors into absolute, hereditary proprietors of the soil. This colonial framework established a stark agrarian hierarchy that divided rural society into absentee landlords and heavily burdened tenant farmers, leaving cultivators vulnerable to arbitrary rent extraction and chronic exploitation. Consequently, while this mechanism successfully guaranteed predictable revenues for the British administration, it severely depressed local agricultural investment, triggered widespread rural indebtedness, and institutionalized deep-seated agrarian distress across the presidencies

Under the Zamindari system, zamindars, who were powerful local landholders, were responsible for collecting land revenue directly from cultivators and tenants. The British administration did not generally undertake direct revenue collection at the village level; instead, it relied on zamindars to collect and remit the stipulated land revenue,

The Zamindari system covered approximately 148,796 square miles (385,380 km²) of land and involved many zamindars. Under the system of fixed land revenue, the amount payable to the British government was permanently assessed, irrespective of variations in agricultural yields. This arrangement provided the colonial administration with a relatively predictable source of revenue, while cultivators remained vulnerable to excessive rent demands and local forms of exploitation.

According to the calculation presented here, the total area under consideration amounted to approximately 95,229,471.9 acres. If the land revenue was calculated at 100 per acre, the resulting amount would be 29,522,947,190, or approximately 952.29 crore. If the zamindars taken at a rate of 10 per acre, the corresponding amount would be 952,294,719, or approximately 95.23 crore. These calculations illustrate the substantial scale of revenue extraction associated with the land-revenue system. However, the precise revenue figures should be supported by the relevant historical revenue records or official sources before being presented as definitive figures in the thesis. Furthermore, local revenue agents subjected defaulting peasants to unimaginable physical brutality, including forced starvation, exposure to extreme heat without dress, making sit naked on an anthill, hanging upside down from a tree and lighting a fire underneath, public humiliation with skeletal garlanding, drops the chili powder on eyes and nose, to knock heads together, injuring body parts, branding with hot irons, and severe physical mutilation. The Madras Torture Commission Report of 1855 officially exposed the horrifying scale of these systemic atrocities within the Madras Presidency, recording thousands of complaints that unmasked the brutal human cost of colonial agrarian administration.

Ryotwari system:

Introduction of the Ryotwari System and Its Impact on Cultivators

During the governorship of Thomas Munro, the Ryotwari system was introduced and gradually extended across the Madras Presidency during the 1820s. The system was developed as an alternative to the intermediary based revenue arrangements, particularly the Zamindari system,

with the objective of establishing a direct relationship between the colonial government and the cultivators (ryots). Under this arrangement, land revenue was collected directly from individual cultivators, thereby reducing the role of intermediaries in the revenue collection process. One of the principal objectives of the Ryotwari system was to reduce the dependence on intermediaries and provide cultivators with greater security in their possession and cultivation of land. The ryot was recognised as the principal holder of the land, subject to the payment of the prescribed land revenue to the government. This arrangement was expected to provide cultivators with greater protection from arbitrary rent demands and other forms of exploitation associated with intermediary control.

However, the system also placed a considerable revenue burden on cultivators. High revenue assessments, the obligation to make payments irrespective of fluctuations in agricultural production, and the strict methods of revenue collection contributed to rural indebtedness and agrarian distress. Thus, while the Ryotwari system removed the zamindar as an intermediary in the revenue relationship, it did not eliminate the economic pressures faced by cultivators under colonial land revenue administration.

The Ryotwari system imposed a considerably heavy burden of land revenue on the cultivators. Even when the monsoon failed and crops were destroyed, the cultivators were often required to pay the assessed land revenue in cash, without adequate remission or relief. During periods when cultivators were unable to meet their revenue obligations, measures such as the attachment or confiscation of their lands and the imposition of severe punishments were employed. Such punitive measures were carried out under the authority of revenue officials, including Tahsildars and subordinate revenue-collecting officials, many of whom belonged to the locally influential or upper social groups.

Cultivators who failed to pay the required revenue were reportedly summoned to kacheri the revenue offices used for the collection and administration of land revenue. These offices and their surrounding premises became important sites where coercive measures were employed against defaulters. According to accounts of such practices, cultivators were subjected to beatings and various forms of corporal punishment and torture in an attempt to compel them to meet their revenue obligations. Such coercive practices were also reported to have taken place in the rooms and verandas of revenue officials, particularly under the supervision of Tahsildars and subordinate revenue-collecting officers. Cultivators were allegedly subjected to severe

forms of physical and psychological suffering, including being hung upside down, having chilli powder drops in their nostrils and eyes, and being deprived of food and water. These practices demonstrate the coercive nature of revenue collection and the severe hardships experienced by cultivators who were unable to meet the demands of the colonial revenue administration in the *Madras torture commission report* in 1885.

Famine rationing and local level corruptions: its impact the poor,

During periods of famine, the rationing system was implemented as a measure to address severe food shortages and to ensure the distribution of essential food grains among the affected population. Under this system, foodgrains were distributed through designated channels to provide relief to people suffering from scarcity and starvation. However, the implementation of the rationing system was not free from corruption and discriminatory practices. Intermediaries and locally influential upper-class groups were reportedly involved in hoarding good quality food grains and distributing inferior-quality grains to the famine-affected population. Such practices significantly affected the availability and quality of food accessible to the poor.

The situation was particularly difficult for the Dalit and other socially disadvantaged communities, who reportedly faced discrimination in accessing famine relief. In some instances, food was allegedly denied to people unless they were willing or able to work in return for relief. Those who were considered incapable of working, including vulnerable sections of the population, were reportedly excluded from receiving adequate food assistance. Even when relief was provided, the quantity was often insufficient to meet the basic nutritional requirements of famine-affected people. Thus, the principle of "work in return for food" placed an additional burden on people who were already suffering from hunger, poverty, and physical weakness.

Another major problem was the hoarding and illegal sale of food grains. Large quantities of better-quality grains were reportedly withheld from the public and subsequently sold at higher prices. As a result, poor people, who had already lost their purchasing power because of the famine, were forced to purchase essential foodstuffs at inflated prices. This practice further intensified food insecurity and widened the gap between those who controlled food resources and those who were dependent upon famine relief.

The severe conditions prevailing during the famine were documented by William Digby in *The Famine Campaign* in Southern India, through which he drew attention to the hardships experienced by the famine affected population and criticised aspects of famine administration and relief. Accounts of the period also describe instances in which women broke open places where food grains had been stored and seized the grains, reflecting the extreme desperation created by prolonged hunger and the scarcity of accessible food.

The consequences of these conditions were devastating. The combination of food scarcity, inadequate relief, discriminatory access to food, poor-quality grain, inflated prices, and malnutrition weakened the population and increased vulnerability to epidemic diseases. Consequently, famine was not merely a crisis of food availability; it developed into a wider humanitarian and socio-economic catastrophe. Estimates of mortality associated with the famines of the period have reached approximately 18 million people, although the precise figure varies according to the famine, geographical area, period considered, and method of estimation.

Let us Conclusion to Historical famines and food crises cannot be reduced solely to the wrath of nature or entirely to human error. Nature only creates an initial crisis (a climate shock) as a starting point; however, what turns it into a massive human catastrophe is entirely human actions and improper administrative policies (manmade failures). Therefore, even though nature provides a seasonal test paper, it is the administrative systems that fail to provide proper structural framework and the economic exploitations that serve as the root cause of these famines.

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