

Scarcity of food, starvation, and malnutrition are closely associated with famine. Famine is a disaster causing many deaths, miseries and sufferings on the part of the people. It also works as a powerful engine of social transformation. Famine is one of the most pervasive and emotive word in our historical vocabulary and in itself makes it all the more difficult to isolate its meaning and wider significance.

Famine is caused by different reasons some of which are artificial and some natural. Cyclone, earthquake, draught, windstorm, volcanic eruption, frost and snow, crop and livestock diseases are natural causes while war, civil commotion, over population, unemployment, poverty, poor communication, excess exploitation, debasement of coins, drastic and sudden change in agrarian organization are among man made causes of famine. Among these causes scarcity of basic food was the main cause of major famines. The scarcity increased the cost of food and the process, if continued; created panic and people begin to die of starvation. Supply of food from distant areas of surplus to deficit areas was difficult in those days of 18th and 19th centuries when mechanical transport was not available.

In the earlier period of European history famines and dearth were of frequent occurrence. Dr. Sort in his book "Bill of Mortality" had given the information that 239 great famines and draughts, dearth had occurred in those countries since the Christian era. Famines regularly occurred in the first millennium B.C. There is frequent mention in Vedas about prayers in favour of the Lord of Rain to save them from draught. A. Loveday and B. M. Bhatia had recorded 70 famines in between 297 A.D. to 1943 A.D. Famine frequently visited India in the period of British conquest 1707-1815 to one famine every seven years. The famine of 1770 brought great hardship to the person who was followed by famines in 1784 and 1803 in Bombay, in 1833 in Madras Presidency and 1861 in North West Provinces. The major famines that occurred in Madras in 18th century are famines of 1729-33, 1781-82, 1790-92 and scarcity of 1799. During the first three decades of 19th century 2 famines occurred in the area i.e., famine of 1805-07, 1823-24 besides the scarcities of 1811-1812 and 1814. The great Guntur famine occurred in 1833. The famine was more severe in this tract though it also visited the southern part of Hyderabad and Deccan districts of Bombay Presidency. The famine was also severe in Cuddapah, Bellary, Nellore, Masulipatnam and North Arcot and its effect extended in some degree to Rajmundry, South Arcot, Saleem, Coimbatore and Trichinopoly. Relief was given in Monegar, Choultry in Madras and large people flocked there from far and near to sustain their lives. Groups

of people were reported to be dying in the streets everyday. Price of food grains rose high and riots occurred. The total loss caused by this famine was estimated at about 2 1/4 sterling.

In 1854, the Madras Presidency was again visited by Famine which was confined to Bellary and Anantapur only. The rainfall in June and July 1853 was scanty and the north-east monsoon completely failed. The harvest failed and the prices began to rise. In January 1854 Cholan was selling at 27 seers the rupee against an average in the ten years 1841-51 of about 58 seers and by June it had risen to 21 seers. About 16 lacks of rupees were expended for relief during the year and the number employed varied from about 9000 in January to 97000 in July. The applicants for employment were of all castes principally weavers; farm labourers and common coolies but one fourth was cultivating *ryots* with their families. About 250000 people and 1/3 of cattle perished in this famine.

So during the early part of British rule from 1800 to 1860, about 10 famines visited Madras Presidency causing severe loss in men, cattle and property. Guntur and Bellary districts were most affected during the famine of 1833-34 and 1854 respectively. The Government incurred heavy loss as land revenue could not be collected due to crop failure. Besides it expended heavily for providing relief to the distressed people. The expenditure on relief works, kitchens, though put a burden on Government treasury was not adequate to mitigate the distress of the people. The most distressing thing is that Government did not take any permanent measure to prevent the future occurrence of famines. Hardly ten years had passed when the most terrible famine of 1866 knocked the doors of the Presidency with great horror and death.

Chapter-2

THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY : A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

PHYSICAL FEATURES

The Madras Presidency also styled as the Presidency of Fort St. George, occupied the Southern portion of the peninsula of India from latitude $20^{\circ} 18'$ on the eastern coast and latitude 14° on western coast to Cape Comorin in latitude $8^{\circ} 4'$; the longitude ranged from $74^{\circ} 9'$ to $85^{\circ} 15'$. The extreme linear length of the Presidency, from north east to south west was about 950 miles; its extreme linear breadth was about 450 miles.¹ The present state of Tamilnadu was known as Madras Presidency before independence. It now consists of 32 districts* with an area of 130058 sq. km. with Chennai as its capital.² Under British *Raj* there were 22 districts* and 5 native states* in Madras Presidency comprising 150798 sq. miles with Madras as its capital.³

BOUNDARY

On every side but the north Madras Presidency was bounded by open sea. The coastline on the east commenced north at the confines of large salt lagoon called Chilka lake then in Bengal district of Cuttack extended

1 C.D. MacLean, *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1886, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2.

* see the history of Tamilnadu districts in Appendix-I.

2 [en.wikipedia.org / wiki / Tamil_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu).

3 Charles Benson, *Statistical Atlas of Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1885, p.1.

*22 districts- Anantapur, Bellary, Cuddapah, Chingliput Coimbatore, Krishna, Kurnool, Ganjam, Guntur, Madura, Malabar, Nellore, North Arcot, Tricinopolly, Tinnavelly, Gadavari, Nilgiris, South Canara South Arcot, Salem, Tanlore and Vizagapatnam.

*5 native states- Sandura, Banaganapalla, Pudukkottai, Cochin and Travancore.

up to Cape Comorin consisting of 1200 miles. The western coast was formed by the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, for about 540 miles off the south east laid the British colony of Ceylon separated by a shallow strait across which ran the string of rocks and sandbanks known as "Adam's Bridge". The irregular northern boundary of Madras had been formed by accidents of history. On the extreme north east the Bengal province of Orissa proceeding westward came the wild highlands of the Central Provinces; then for a long stretch, the dominions of the *Nizam* of Hyderabad separated by the Krishna river and its tributary Tungabhadra; lastly on north west by west the districts of Dharwar and North Canara in the Bombay Presidency. The independent state of Mysore which occupied a large portion of the centre of the area thus defined was regarded for geographical purposes as a part of Madras Presidency. The Laccadive Islands also formed for administrative purpose a part of the Presidency being attached to the districts of Malabar and South Canara.⁴

PHYSICAL DIVISION

The whole Presidency was divided into three divisions – (i) the long and broad eastern coast, (ii) the shorter and narrower western coast; and (iii) the high tableland in the interior. These divisions were determined by the two great mountain ranges of the Eastern and Western Ghats⁵.

The Eastern Ghats which lied entirely with the Madras Presidency was a continuation of the hill system of Chotnagpur. They ran in south westerly direction almost through the whole length of Madras until they merged in the Nilgiris and there joined with western range. Their average height was 1500 feet and for the most part they left a broad expanse of low land between their base and the sea. The Western Ghats on the other hand, stretched southwards along the eastern shore of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean from north of Bombay. Rising steeply at a distance of 30 to 50 miles from the coast of Madras districts the Western Ghats caught almost all the rainfall of the monsoon and in the south not a single stream broke through their barrier. Their eastern face gradually sloped down to the tableland of central plateau. Some of the peaks attained an elevation of more than 8000 feet. The highest peak of Nilgiri was 8700 feet in height while the loftiest point of Anamalai hills was nearly one hundred feet higher. The Palaghat gap afforded a singular passage to the

4 W. W. Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Oxford, 1908, Vol. IX, p. 1.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

wind which was elsewhere barred by the continuous range. The country immediately east of the gap received the rainfall of south west monsoon. Between the ranges of Eastern and Western Ghat lied the central tableland with an elevation of 1000 to 3000 feet. This inner tableland includes districts of Bombay Presidency, Central Provinces, Berar, the *Nizam's* dominions, the Ceded Districts with other districts of Madras Presidency and whole of Mysore.⁶

Each of these three divisions of the Madras Presidency had strongly marked features of its own. The eastern coast possessed the deltas of the three great rivers (names mentioned later) where artificial irrigation had combined with natural fertility. On the western coast, the rainfall never failed but cultivation was hemmed in within narrow limits by the mountains and sea. In the central plateau the country was generally bare, the rainfall light and the means of irrigation difficult. But it contained many tracts of fertile soil and the cultivator could store in tanks the local showers which monsoon brought from either coast.⁷

On the basis of geographical and climatic conditions Madras Presidency could be divided into six parts and each part contain the following districts⁸ -

- (i) The Northern *Circars* - Ganjam, Vizagpatnam, Godavari and Krishna
- (ii) The Kamatak - Chingliput, Nellore and South Arcot
- (iii) The Southern Districts - Tanjore, Madura and Tinnaevelly
- (iv) The *Deccan* Districts - Kurnool, Bellary, Anantapur and Cuddapah
- (v) The Central Districts - North Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore and Trichinopoly
- (vi) The west Coast - Malabar and South Canara

And the mountain districts of Nilgiris entirely separate and distinct by itself.

RIVERS, MOUNTAINS AND LAKES

The three principal rivers of Madras were Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri, each having a large tributary system of its own. All these rivers had risen from the Western Ghats and ran right across the peninsula in a south easterly direction into the Bay of Bengal. They watered the upper country through which they flew and were not useful either for navigation

6 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Charles Benson, *op. cit.*, p. p.5.

or irrigation. But they spread over alluvial deltas before they reached the sea and at that stage became capable of being restrained and utilized by agricultural engineer. Other rivers on the east coast of similar character but smaller dimension were the North and South Pennair or Pinakini, the Palaur, the Vellaur, the Veigay and Tambrapurny.⁹

Among the principal mountains of Madras Presidency are the Eastern and Western Ghats (described above), the Vindhya mountains which run across the broad base of the peninsula, the Nilgiri hills which formed the junction of the two main ranges culminating in Dodabetta, one of the highest peaks of Southern India. Among other minor hills are the Shevaroyis in Salem, Anamullays in Coimbatore and Pulney hills in Madura.¹⁰

The important lakes in the Presidency were Chilka lake on Coromondal coast at the confines of the Presidency and Poolicat lake in the same coast which was mostly used for inland communication between Madras city and northern districts. On the western coast the perpetual antagonism between the mountain torrents and ocean produced backwater or lagoon which skirted the entire seaboard of Canara, Malabar and Travancore. The largest was the backwater of Cochin. These backwaters were used for inland navigation. The only natural fresh water lakes in the Presidency were the Komaravolu Ava and Kondakirla Ava in the Vizagapatnam district and the Koler lake in the Krishna district.¹¹

PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

The total population of the Madras Presidency excluding native states according to census of 1881 was 35630440 excluding that of the agency tracts in the northern districts was 34336196. The bulk of people were Hindus, 6.5% Muslims and 2.5% Christians. Of the people over 14 million were Tamils, 13.64 million Telugus, 2.69 million Malayalams, 1.44 million Kanarese, 1.3 million Odiyas, and the remainder speaking various languages.¹² People mostly lived in villages. The number of people living in towns was only 10% of the total population. According to the census of 1881, there were 227 towns in the Madras Presidency. The population of 10 chief towns of Madras Presidency is given below¹³ :

9 *Ibid.*

10 C.D. MacLean, *op.cit.*, p.14.

11 *Ibid.*, p.15.

12 *Ch. D. MacLean, op.cit.*

(i) Trichinopoly	.....	84,449
(ii) Madura	.....	73,807
(iii) Calicut	.....	57,085
(iv) Tanjore	.....	54,745
(v) Nagapatnam	.....	53,855
(vi) Bellary	.....	53,460
(vii) Salem	.....	50,667
(viii) Combaconam	.....	50,098
(ix) Cuddalore	.....	43,545
(x) Coimbatore	.....	38,967

A total of 50,042 villages were there in Madras Presidency. The number of villages in each district of Madras Presidency is given below: ¹⁴

(i) North Arcot	.....	3,967
(ii) South Arcot	.....	2,850
(iii) Bellary	.....	2,084
(iv) South Canara	.....	1,282
(v) Chingleput	.....	2,003
(vi) Coimbatore	.....	1,447
(vii) Cuddapah	.....	1,241
(viii) Ganjam	.....	6,895
(ix) Godavari	.....	2,249
(x) Krishna	.....	1,823
(xi) Kurnool	.....	836
(xii) Madura	.....	3,971
(xiii) Malabar	.....	437
(xiv) Nellore	.....	1,688
(xv) Salem	.....	3,972
(xvi) Tanjore	.....	3,551
(xvii) Tinnevelly	.....	1,497
(xviii) Trichinopoly	.....	1,485
(xix) Vizagapatnam	.....	8,762
Total:		52,040

The Muslims and Christians were proportionately much more numerous in towns than the Hindus. Among Christians the ratio of female to male was higher in comparison with that of any other religion. The following table¹⁵ shows the distribution of population according to various religions in Madras Presidency.

Table: Distribution of population on basis of various religions in Madras Presidency

Religion	Population		
	Male	Female	Total
Hindus	14104942	14392724	28497666
Muslims	952396	981175	1933571
Christians	349978	361994	711072
Jains	12750	12212	24962
Buddhists	875	671	1546
Parsees	87	56	143
Brahmos	66	66	132
Jews	17	13	30

Among Hindus there were Saivites, Vaishnavas and Lingayats. The following¹⁶ table shows the major Hindu sects and their mutual proportion.

Table: The major Hindu sects and their mutual proportion

1.	Saivites	15399686	54.04%
2.	Vaishnavas	10494408	36.83%
3.	Lingayats	64580	0.23%
4.	Others and not stated	2638992	8.90%
	Total :	28497666	100%

There were three race divisions of Muslims in the Madras Presidency. The first the northern or immigrant Muslims, second the Moplah and third the Lubbay. The First race included the Mughals, Pathans, Arabs, Sheikhs, and Sayeeds who were the descendants of northern invaders and lived in Kurnool, Cuddapah, Bellary and Krishna. Their number was 695,235.

15 *Ibid.*, p.492.

16 *Ibid.*