

BENGAL FAMINE 1770

- “I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion. The famine was their own fault for breeding like rabbits.”

- -Winston Churchill

Under the British Raj, India suffered countless famines. But the worst hit was Bengal. The first of these was in 1770, followed by severe ones in 1783, 1866, 1873, 1892, 1897 and lastly 1943-44




- Under the Mughal rule, peasants were required to pay a tribute of 10-15 percent of their cash harvest
- In 1765, the Treaty of Allahabad was signed and the East India Company took over the task of collecting the tributes from the then Mughal emperor Shah Alam II
- Tax had been increased to 50 percent. The peasants were not even aware that the money had changed hands. They paid, still believing that it went to the Emperor.

Causes of Famine

- After the [Battles of Plassey](#) and Buxar, the British East India Company had acquired the Diwani rights over Bengal.
- The Nawab was only a nominal head with the real power resting under the company's head.
- The company was only interested in maximising revenue and profits for itself while the plight of the local farmers and others were completely neglected.
- Prior to the company's rule, the tax rate on land revenue was only about 1/10th of the agricultural produce. But the company increased it overnight to 50% of the produce.
- The farmers, who had previously stored excess produce for a lean season (they had excess because of the less tax), were not permitted to store produce, and they could not store too, because of the terrible tax regime under the English.
- The British forced farmers to harvest cash crops like poppy and indigo for export rather than food crops like paddy. This resulted in a shortage of grains for the people.

Causes of Famine:

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- There was a minor shortage of crops in 1768 which was not an alarming situation.
 - But in 1769, there was a monsoon failure followed by severe [drought](#). Starvation deaths started by 1769, but the company officials ignored this situation.
 - By 1770, the death count was increasing and almost 10 million people fell victim to this man-made devastation.
- By 1770, the death count was increasing and almost 10 million people fell victim to this man-made devastation.
 - The company continued to collect taxes from farmers who could pay by further increasing the tax rate to make up for the loss in agricultural revenue due to the famine.
 - This famine was caused, to a large extent, by the company's tax and revenue policies, and apathy of the company officials to rising starvation.


ATTACKING AREA

The rains of 1769 were dismal and here in the first signs of the terrible drought began to appear.

West Bengal and Bihar Orissa, Jharkhand and Bangladesh, Birbhum and Murshidabad in Bengal.

- The colonial rulers continued to ignore any warnings that came their way regarding the famine, although starvation had set in from early 1770. Then the deaths started in 1771. That year, the Company raised the land tax to 60 percent


- . After taking over from the Mughal rulers, the British had issued widespread orders for cash crops to be cultivated
- Thus, farmers who were used to growing paddy and vegetables were now being forced to cultivate indigo, poppy and other such items that yielded a high market value for them

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- There was no backup of edible crops in case of a famine. The natural causes that had contributed to the drought were commonplace
 - . No relief measure was provided for those affected

• **Results of the Famine**

The famine would have far-reaching consequences that would not only change the Indian subcontinent but even the world forever:

- The famine situation soothed by 1770 with good rainfall but not before claiming 1/3rd of the local population.
- Large swathes of land were depopulated as a result of the famine.
- Many agricultural lands became jungles for decades as a result of this famine.

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- This also increased the menace of bands of huge in Bengal.
 - Globally, the profit of the East India Company increased from fifteen million rupees in 1765 to thirty million in 1777.

- Despite the soar in profits, the company continued to suffer financially and influenced Parliament to pass the Tea Act in 1773.
- The Act allowed direct shipment of tea to the American colonies, without the payment of taxes. This infuriated the local merchants to the extent that they began protesting against this measure. One such protest was the Boston Tea Party of 1773.