

NCERT Notes: The Famine In Bengal [Modern Indian History For UPSC]

NCERT notes on important topics for the UPSC [Civil Services Exam](#). These notes will also be useful for other competitive exams like banking PO, SSC, state civil services exams and so on. This article talks about The Bengal Famine of 1770.

The Bengal Famine

A disastrous famine affected the lower Gangetic Plains of India including the regions of Bengal and Bihar between 1769 and 1773 where 1/3rd of the population perished. An estimated 10 million people died of starvation and famine-triggered epidemics that also affected the regions of Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bangladesh. The territory was then ruled by the British East India Company.

Causes

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Results

- 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.
- This also increased the menace of bands of thugs or dacoits in Bengal.