

# **ECONOMIC CAUSES OF INDIAN DROUGHT**

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(ii)

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## C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(i)	
LIST OF TABLES	(v)	
INTRODUCTION	(vi)	
 <u>Chapter</u>		
I	FAMINES IN INDIA DURING BRITISH RULE	1
1.1	Economic Condition of India in the 19th Century	1
1.2	The Economic Causes of Indian Famines under the British Rule	3
II	ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FAMINE	18
2.1	Impact on Farm Income	20
2.2	Impact on Employment	22
2.3	Effect on Level of Living	25
III	EFFORTS FOR DROUGHT MITI- GATION IN POST INDEPEN- DENCE PERIOD	31
3.1	Fluctuations in Food- grains Production	32

(iv)

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page</u>	
	3.2	Role of Irrigation in Stabilising Production	34
	3.3	Depletion of Forests	39
IV		FAMINE RELIEF IN INDIA	46
	4.1	Early Relief Efforts	46
	4.2	Drought Relief in India since Independence	52
	4.3	Measures for Drought Relief	60
	4.4	Drought Mitigation	62
V		CONCLUSION	71
APPENDIX A		FAMINES BEFORE BRITISH RULE	76
APPENDIX B		FAMINES IN INDIA DURING THE PERIOD 1769-1901	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY			84

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
1.1	Inequality in Land Revenue	6
1.2	Percentage Distribution of House- holds and Area Owned by Size of Ownership Land Holdings (1953-54)	12
2.1	Estimated Unemployment in March 1980	23
3.1	Instability in Crop Production - All India (Standard Deviation in Annual Output Growth Rate)	34
3.2	Reduction in Output in Irrigated and Non-irrigated Areas in Selected Drought Years	36
3.3	Statewise Projections for Deve- lopment of Gross Area Irrigated from Ground-water Schemes	38
3.4	Statewise Forest Area Lost (1952-1983)	42
3.5	Forest Area Lost since 1956 in Karnataka (Purposewise)	43
4.1	Employment Generated and Cost Per Manday of Employment under N.R.E.P. and R.L.E.G.P.	56
4.2	Wages and Cost in Different Stages under National Rural Employment Programme (June 1987)	58

## INTRODUCTION

Drought has been constant visitor to India due to its tropical situation and erratic and uneven behaviour of Indian monsoon. Crops have been subject to failure either partly or completely resulting in famine. That means, famine is not a new feature in the history of India. In the country, famines had occurred in the past centuries, and tradition and history have recorded gruesome tales of the trail of misery which famines had left behind them. During the British rule, India has had 22 famines excluding severe scarcity. The immediate cause of famine in almost every instance is the failure of rains and this cause will continue to operate until we have a more extensive system of irrigation. The problem of drought is so acute that every year, some parts of the country suffer from drought. Some time drought is so extreme in its intensity and spread that it leads to a complete failure of crops. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in the country. It contributes about 30 per cent of the national income, supplies raw materials for a number of important industries and provides products for about 20 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. The total area of India is

330 million hectares of this 142 million consists of sown area. Of the total sown area only about 30 per cent is under irrigation. The disturbing fact is that in spite of 40 years of planned development of irrigation about 70 per cent of the sown area is still dependent on rainfall. Agriculture provides livelihood to about 70 per cent of the country's population; peoples' dependence on agriculture is such that when agriculture fails, the economy fails and the people particularly the poor starve. Common people suffer due to scarcity of water, fodder, cereals, pulses and edible oils and due to the rise in prices. People have to move from one place to another in search of employment. An adverse impact of drought or famine on agriculture produces a chain reaction on all the other sectors of the economy. Food production declines, employment declines, livestock succumbs.

It is contended that sources of livelihood for the rural population are getting diversified, and in some areas the rapid advance of productivity in agriculture has substantially raised the general living standards and reduced the insecurity of rural life; in many states a wide array of income support schemes provide a measure of protection against destitution to poor households, and by some accounts at least a discernible trend towards decreasing poverty has emerged since the mid sixties.



But even these recent changes in economic opportunities and policies do not seem to be adequate for prevention of famines. In the non-irrigated, semi-arid parts of India stagnation or near stagnation of yields, population pressure and the increasing frequency of droughts keep the rural population at the mercy of the monsoon, the vulnerability of impoverished classes remains and the need persists for a very extensive and expensive relief system.

In this dissertation, literature on economic causes and impact of famine in India is reviewed. In Chapter I, causes of famines under the British rule are examined. In the second chapter economic impact of famine or droughts is discussed briefly. In the third chapter efforts for drought mitigation in the post-1947 period are reviewed. Famine relief measures which include new approach for relief financing are discussed in the fourth chapter and conclusions are presented in the last chapter.