**Abstract**

In the years of 1876-78, a vast and devastating Famine hit the Madras presidency in India. The natural reasons for this, as it has been so many times before in Indian history, was the lack of the monsoon rain setting in. The problems started already in 1875 in the Madras presidency where local farmers had a very bad harvest, and in 1876, the total failure of the South-West and North-East monsoons caused severe drought in 15 out of 21 districts in the Madras presidency. The need for relief in these districts was therefore of vital importance, if the inhabitants of the districts in the Madras presidency was going to survive this crisis. The problem being, that the relief never really came to the Madras presidency, and in the end the neglected relief caused between four and ten million people dying from starvation in the presidency.

The reasons for the neglected relief are many, but the most significant reasons where caused by British politics and administration in India. The correspondence between the Indian government in Calcutta and the government in the Madras presidency when it comes to the distress and famine seems to be stranding at an early stage in 1876-77 for reasons unknown. The Indian government however did not seem to acknowledge the problem of the famine and its severe consequences. Therefore, the Indian government, led by Viceroy, Lord Lytton (1831-1891), chose to cut back the finances when it comes to relief and relief work, due to rumors in the public, saying that the districts where not in a severe state of famine.

The Indian government gathered a Famine Commission, led by Richard Temple (1826-1902), to travel to the Madras presidency, and to cut back the expenses of relief with 25%. This has devastating consequences for the inhabitants of the Madras presidency, who lived and worked in relief camps where the daily calorie intake are under 1600 kcal. This “Temple-wage”, meant death for the workers in a matter of weeks or months, and was the main cause for several thousands of Indians dying of starvation under British experiments during the famine in 1876-78.

The British administration also plays a vast role in the cover-up of hundreds of thousands dying from illness caused by starvation in the Madras presidency during the famine. The main reason for this, is found in the British Imperial politics at the time, saying, “that no inhabitant of the British Empire must die from starvation”, and the local administrator or Indian Civil Servant was therefore being held responsible if this was the case. This utopic politic of the Indian government was therefore to be the reason for thousands of cover-ups in the Sanitary Commissioners Report of Madras from 1877, where death reasons caused from starvation, like Cholera, dysentery, smallpox and malaria, was put under categories like “fever” and “other causes”. Giving a very misleading picture of the extent of the famine in the Madras presidency in 1876-78, the report of the sanitary commissioner was then sent to the governments in Calcutta and Madras, showing that the famine was not as severe as expected. The governments could therefore proceed their politics, cutting back on relief work, due to the Temple-wages success, and no British administrators from the districts had to be held responsible for the deaths of the Indian inhabitants in the Madras presidency.

The famine in the Madras presidency in 1876-78 had an impact on Indian nationalism, and influenced some political personalities directly or indirectly in their politics. One of these nationalists was Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), who came from a Brahmin family in Maharasthra. He was during the famine years one out of thousands of Indians, who underwent an education at one of India’s universities, and found himself afterwards without a job. Tilak because of his job situation, decided to open a Jesuit school from where he started two nationalistic newspapers, “The Kesari” and “The Mahratta” in the early 1880s. The famine did therefore also have an effect on Tilaks way into nationalism, but not on his later Hindu-orthodox politics.

Both Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) and Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) where nationalistic moderates in “Indian National Congress”, and supporters of a collaboration between Indians and the British raj. The prime goal of their politics was to get more Indians within the British administration, and thereby make the collaboration between India and the British raj equal. None of the two nationalists wanted the British to leave India, like Tilak did, but the British raj had to realize that it was draining India, when it came to taxes, land revenue and export, causing several famines in the last half of the 19. Century. This was the main cause for Indian poverty, and it was the main reason, according to Naoroji and Dutt, for the famine in the Madras presidency in 1876-78.