Modern History · GS - I

Why was there a sudden spurt in famines in colonial India since the mid-eighteenth century? Give reasons.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2022	GS - I	Modern History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

The rise in famines in colonial India was associated with exploitative land revenue policies, commercialisation of agriculture, rural impoverishment, declining traditional support systems, administrative failures and vulnerability to droughts. Colonial economic policies intensified the impact of food shortages on the population.

Model Answer

Introduction

From the mid-eighteenth century, colonial India witnessed recurrent and devastating famines. Although droughts and crop failures had occurred earlier, colonial economic policies and administrative failures increased the vulnerability of the population.

Body

1. Exploitative Revenue Policies: High land revenue demands, even during crop failures, reduced peasants' capacity to retain food reserves and recover from agricultural distress.

2. Commercialisation of Agriculture: The cultivation of cash crops for export sometimes displaced food crops and increased peasants' dependence on volatile markets.

3. Rural Poverty and Indebtedness: Heavy taxation, exploitation by intermediaries and indebtedness weakened purchasing power, making food unaffordable even when it was available.

4. Decline of Traditional Support Systems: The weakening of local institutions, customary relief mechanisms and older systems of patronage reduced protection for vulnerable communities.

5. Colonial Economic Priorities: Export-oriented trade and the movement of grain according to market demand sometimes continued despite local scarcity.

6. Administrative Failure: Delayed relief, inadequate famine preparedness and reluctance to intervene effectively increased mortality.

7. Natural Factors: Droughts, monsoon failures and crop diseases triggered shortages, while colonial policies magnified their consequences.

Conclusion

Thus, famines in colonial India resulted from the interaction of environmental shocks with economic exploitation and administrative failures. Colonial rule transformed many food shortages into severe humanitarian disasters.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP