

'Complete Failure Of British Policy Caused 1943 Bengal Famine, Not Drought': Says IIT Research

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Representative image (Wikipedia/Commons)

According to a paper published by IIT Gandhinagar researchers, the Bengal famine of 1943 which resulted in the mass starvation of millions of Indians was not caused by drought but by the faulty British policies, [reports *Economic Times \(ET\)*](#).

"We are trying to understand the entire history of droughts in India and what is the likelihood they will occur in future. Famines that occurred during the British period caused the deaths of millions. We investigated the factors behind the

causes of these deaths -- droughts or policy failures," said Vimal Mishra, assistant professor at the institute. He added that the Bengal Famine was "completely because of policy failure."

For the first time, researchers analysed soil moisture database from 1870 to 2016 to reconstruct agricultural droughts. Using this model, they concluded that out of the six major famines (1873-74, 1876, 1877, 1896-97, 1899, and 1943) that occurred in the subcontinent in the study period (1870-2016), five are linked to soil moisture drought, except the one in 1943.

British Aided The Process

Historians have often asserted that the British government at the time, led by Prime Minister Winston Churchill diverted vital supplies away from millions of starving peasants and artisans in Bengal towards the British administrative machinery.

The British also stopped rice imports and refused to declare Bengal as a famine-hit state. These factors together contributed to the death of nearly three million.

"We identified 1935-45 as a period under drought, but the famine-affected region, which was Bengal, had no drought during this period," added Mishra. "We find that the Bengal famine was likely caused by other factors related at least in part to the ongoing threat of World War II -- including malaria, starvation and malnutrition."

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