



ROLE OF DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM IN BUCKINGHAM CANAL

Dr. S. KAMALA DEVI

Assistant Professor in History, Queen Mary's College (A), Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Indian states are full of canals used for irrigation and as water transport in different parts of the country. The Buckingham Canal is a fresh water canal runs from Vijayawada to Villupuram District in Tamil Nadu. Buckingham Canal is second longest canal in India with an length of 421.55 km runs, along with Coromandel Coast of India. It connect most of the water bodies like Pulicat Lake, Krishna River and the port of Chennai. It was once the only main route by which bulky commodities, such as fuel, salt, and dried fish, could be profitably brought to the city of Madras in Tamil Nadu state.

Keywords: Buckingham Canal, Famine, Governorship, Public Works Department.

INTRODUCTION

The Buckingham Canal runs through two states the Tamil Nadu and the Andhra Pradesh. It is almost parallel and close to the East coast, and it joins up a series of natural back waters and connects all the coastal districts from Guntur to south Arcot. It is 196 miles long north of Madras city and 62 mile long south of Madras. At its northern end it connects with the commanur canal of the Krishna Delta, which in turn is connected to the Godavari Canals running as far north as Cocanada. At its southern end it terminates in the Mahakam back water. The total mileage of the main line of navigable waterway from Cocanada to the Marakkanam backwater is 451 miles.¹

The construction of Buckingham canal wasn't fully designed. The canal system was evidently built in 3 main stages between 1802 and 1882 and the name Buckingham canal was given to it in honour of the Duke of Buckingham. Chandos (Governor 1875-80) in whose time the third and main stage was executed.²

DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

Grenville Richard Plantagenet Campbell Temple Nugent Brydges Chandos, the third Duke of Buckingham and Chandos (1823 – 1889) was Governor of Madras presidency from 1875 – 1880.³ He Succeeded William R. Robinson who had been the acting Governor of the presidency for 6 months after a vacuum created due to the death of Lord Hobart, who succumbed to be severe attack of enteric fever after holding office of Governorship for 3 years from 1872 – 1875.⁴

The Govern ship of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos was marked by the intensively severe famine that raged over south India in 1876 and 1877 and continued into 1878 also. However as the Duke had seen much of parliamentary and political life before he succeed as Governor, he was able to grapple with the terrible famine energetically because of which he became an idol of the masses.⁵ The Duke's tenure of governorship

coincided with the Governor-Generalship and Viceroyalty of Lord Lytton (1876 – 1880) ⁶

FAMINE COUNCIL

The famine Council which met to discuss the famine problem in 1877 was represented by the Viceroy and Governor-General. The Governors of Madras and Bombay. The members of the Vice-regal Council and Sir Richard Temple, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and Governor designate of Bombay. The authorities decided in meeting the disaster from Imperial finances and complains were made that sufficient information were not available regarding the actual condition in Madras. Though the government with regard to famine administration, it at the same time wished to have some control over the policies carried out by the local governments.

The famine of 1876-78 necessitated the appointment of a Famine Commission consisting of nine members including two Indians. John Strachey was its President and C.A. Elliot was its Secretary. The Commission inquired into the causes that brought about the famine and recommended such measures as might be necessary to make future famine less severe and less wide spread. It drove home the need for the issue of a Famine Code by the government of India based on which the local governments could formulate their own rules. The Famine Code would in addition to saving life and Land, would have the effect of interposing government between the weaker and stronger elements of rural society during periods of acute agrarian crisis.

It was suggested by Sir John Strachey that Sir Richard Temple would be sent as a delegate on account of his experience in dealing with famine in Berar in 1874 and also because of his experience in dealing with famine in Berar in 1874 and also because of his understanding of the strained condition of the finances would enable him to carry out an economic policy. This was approved of by the Viceroy and the proposal was

laid before the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos who also approved of it, even though the Governor did not actually favour the appointment of Sir Richard Temple and in spite of his disfavor when Sir Richard Temple was appointed it was looked upon by everyone as a condemnation of the action of the Madras government.²²

ADMINISTRATION

The Duke's tenure of Governorship was peaceful and witnessed many activities in different spheres of government. A number of important legislations were passed during his period which was beneficial to the presidency as a whole. The major event however which marked the beginning of his reign was the Great famine – 1876-1878. It proved to be a great disaster to strike the Madras presidency causing high mortality rate as well as a drain on the government finance. The Duke of Buckingham & Chandos however proved to be very successful in famine administration that he meted out to the famine stricken people and his generous and judicious policy made him an idol of the people.

FAMINE ADMINISTRATION

In Madras Presidency where the bulk of the population lived in a state of chronic poverty, famine was not a new phenomenon. But intensely severe famines ravaged the presidency only in the last quarter of the 19th Century. The most acute and extensive famine that proved too costly for the presidency occurred between 1876 & 1878. Though the entire area between the Krishna river and Cape Comorin was affected the distress was most severe in eight out of the twenty-one districts into which the presidency was then divided. Then total area however affected was 83,000 sq. miles with a population of nearly 20 million.⁷

Like most wide spread famines, the famine of 1876-78 was caused by drought but not by the drought of a single season or a single year. The harvests of 1875 had been indifferent, especially in the ceded districts. In 1876, the South-west monsoon on which the northern districts were largely dependent proved deficient, and the north-east monsoon on which the eastern districts almost entirely relied for their cultivation failed still more.⁸

The Government of Madras during this time consisted of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, Sri Neville Chamberlain, Sri W. R. Robinson and R. S. Ellis. The Governor was new to the country and unfamiliar with the people and with Indian topics. Sri Neville Chamberlain took little part in the civil affairs of the presidency as he was the Commander – in – chief; W. R. Robinson knew the country most thoroughly because as Inspector General of police he had visited every part of it and was known to possess great personal sympathy with Indians of all races. R. S. Ellis was a civilian of much experience in Southern India, a man of wide culture, of decision in action and generally able to take a large grasp of a particular situation. These were the men who had to face and fight for calamity which fell upon the presidency in

the autumn of 1876.⁹

PANIC AMONG THE PEOPLE

Merchants had been prompt to see the need which the flood stocks of the country would require for replenishment, and trade had been active long before the government made any sign that it apprehended wide spread disaster. The magnitude of the shipping operations which had been going on from the beginning of the year may be estimated from the fact that in 9 months from the district of Ganjam alone 5,00,000 bags of rice were shipped to Madras. However towards the end of 1876 residents in the Madras Presidency began to feel that their impression regarding great scarcity was wrong for it was reported that the Governor was about to proceed on a long tour to the Andaman Islands, Rangoon and Ceylon. It was argued that if danger was impending the Governor would not have left his post to proceed for a tour.¹⁰

However before the departure of the Governor with the respective suits, anxiety was again aroused on reports being from Bombay of wide spread scarcity in the presidency. It was felt that the failure of the South west monsoon must have affected many districts in Madras as well as in Bombay but as the chief reliance of the agriculturists in the Eastern presidency was on the north – east monsoon, the hope was cherished that the rains due in October would suffice to avert intense disaster. But when the monsoons failed in October 1876 it was recognized that a twelve month famine was at hand. In 1877 the south-west monsoon with help of its showers for the second time and distress gradually intensified through the year.¹¹

Panic seized the people and the grain merchants. Prices rose to double and even treble the ordinary rates and threats were made of looting the grain markets. The rise in prices was so extraordinary and available supply compared with the requirements so scanty, that merchants and dealers hopeful of enormous future held on to their stocks for an indefinite period.¹² Thus the calamitous season of 1877 was accompanied by an extremely high range of prices all over India, partly due to the deficient harvest and partly to the reduction of flood stocks through export from the Northern provinces to the South and to Europe. These two causes prolonged the distress in the Madras presidency.

The year of famine was also marked by a great mortality, partly attributable to the virulent outbreaks of cholera, small pox and fever. The area in the Madras presidency seriously affected by the famine was estimated by the Famine Commission at 83,000 square miles with a population of 19,400,000 persons. Thus though the whole area affected by the famine of 1876-78 exceeded that of 1876-78 the area of great intensity was larger and duration of excessive pressure was longer in 1876-78.¹³

PLANS FOR FAMINE MANAGEMENT

When the Governor reached Colombo, he was at once informed about the famine by W.R Robinson and R.S Ellis who had by this time estimated the difficulty to some extent and saw that large schemes were needed to provide occupation for the people coming on famine relief works. They felt that the system of petty works while sufficing for local distress was inadequate when intended to meet wide spread want.¹⁴

Moreover in the earliest stages of the famine a different opinion arose between the supreme Government at Calcutta and the Government of Madras regarding the character of the relief works to be carried out. The local government advocated large works of public utility while the supreme government upheld the system of opening small and scattered work which would not involve a large expenditure on the part of the administration.¹⁵

Finding the labor of famine relief rapidly increase, a new department, called the Famine Department was created and J. H. Gastrin, Collector of south Arcot district was placed in charge and designated additional secretary to the Government. It was decided that one large work namely the extension of the East Coast Canal popularly known as Buckingham Canal was to be undertake as a famine relief work.¹⁶ The Bucking canal work, though undertaken at the beginning of the 19th Century itself, its construction acquired greater momentum only during the time of Buckingham. He started its excavation as a famine relief work¹⁷

The canal is one of the earliest engineering feats of the 19th century. The excavation of the canal was begun as early as 1801. However prior to the famine of 1876 –1778, the expenditure incurred on it was only about five and half lakhs of rupees. During the famine nearly thirty lakh of rupees was spent on the work of which about 22 lakhs represented the normal value of labor done.¹⁷

To give employment to the distressed famine, stricken people of Madras during the continuance of the famine, it was resolved to set in hand the long projected junction canal between the Cooum and the Adyar rivers, as important link in the East Coast Canal communications which could not be executed in previous year for lack of necessary funds, but the necessity of which had been strongly advocated by Sir Arthur cotton and other able engineers. Its construction would remove the only obstructions that existed in a line of inland completed, would connect the Godavari, Krishna and their numerous navigable canals, with the Nellore, Madras, Chinglepet and South Arco Districts¹⁸

The particular importance of the Buckingham Canal during the famine lies in the that it proved to be a source of income and relief to the famine stricken people. Able bodied persons who employed persons who were employed in that construction of the Canal were paid wages and this proved to be dual a benefit for the government who got plenty of labor for the construction of the canal and for the people for whom wages for work

done meant that they could buy food during the famine. The employment opportunities give to the able bodied persons gave a little relief to the famine stricken people who had been struggling for their bread.

Besides, piracy played an important role in the construction of the Buckingham canal. Bay of Bangla was flooded with a number of pirates, who used to plunder a marchated ships. These pirating activities of the robbers gave panic to the minds of the sailors and their ships which were subjected to attack at any of time. Above all, frequent cyclones caused intolerable and immeasurable hardships to the ships which were sailing on the water of the Bay of Bengal. Every year considerable number of ships were damaged by the cyclones. In order to avoid all these hardships the East India Company begun to find the ways and means to prevent such hardships. The outcome was the construction of Buckingham canal started in 1802 and it was completed in 1892.²¹

DUKE'S PERSONAL INTERVENTION IN FAMINE MATTERS

From the reports of the various officers the Governor found that there was a strong dislike among the distressed in villages to removal to relief camps which were provided for their use at convenient centers. The Governor also feared that under the existing system of relief, it would render the distressed more difficult to detect and more costly to relieve. As result the Duke tried to introduce new arrangements as follows:

The Governor in Council authorized all Collectors that the distressed who were reluctant to leave their homes in their respective villages were to be give a daily dole of money by the village officers instead of being shifted to relief camps.

The head of the village were directed to enter the names and circumstances of all distressed persons in need of relief in a register and they were to be provided relief at the rates decided until the arrival of the village inspector After careful enquiry by the inspector who if he found a person worthy of relief, was issued a ticket authorizing him to receive from the village head the sanctioned daily money dole which was to be issued daily not later than 8.a.m

The inspector in order to satisfy himself that the dole has been properly and regularly paid and that no undeserving person has been to or allowed to remain in the register, was required to required to sing the register and the recipients tickets on each visit. The rates of money dole were decided at one-two anna for each adult male or female and zero-six annas for each child below twelve years. In case of any material change in the price of food grains the rates of money dole were increased. The Governor directed the district and divisional officers to watch the effect of the concession provide and to state their results in the fortnightly narratives.²³

Duke of Buckingham and Chandos took a genuine interest in the famine administration of the Madras Presidency and in his capacity as Governor his

best in providing relief to the distressed during the hard times of the famine thereby earning their respect and good wishes. The enormous labours he undertook and the thoughtful policies he pursued to relieve the starving and suffering masses from the hardships caused by the devastating famine made him a popular governor. No wonder he became an idol of the people.

The period of governorship of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, witnessed public construction of major and minor importance undertaken by the Public Department. The Public Work Department deals with all the engineering works undertaken by the state for any department or purpose. During the period 1875-1880 the Public Works Department was called upon to plan and execute works on behalf of all the different branches of administration either for the Government of India, for the Provincial Governments, for various Local Funds Board, for the Board of Revenue and for other departments, for the Court of Wards and not so frequently for Municipal Corporations.

The execution of the Public Works in Madras Presidency during 1875-1880 was for the most part carried out either by daily labour under the direction of the officers of the Department, or by petty contract under the supervision of the officers of the Department. A few works however after being designed by the Public Work Department were carried out under the supervision of officers of the departments directly concerned with the. In the Madras Presidency the employment of large contractors specially European contractors in the execution of works was very rare.²⁴

Among the major constructions mention may be made of the Buckingham Canal, the Madras Harbour Works and the Royapuram Auxiliary Medical College. The Buckingham Canal work, though undertaken at the beginning of the nineteenth century itself, its construction acquired greater momentum only during the time of Buckingham. He started its excavation as a famine relief work. The principal minor works executed during the period 1875-1880 under the Buildings and Road Bellary, an additional barrack accommodation at Bellary, the new barracks for the Royal, Artillery at St. Thomas Mount, barrack accommodation and a new recreation room at Bangalore, an upper storey to the fourth block of barracks at Wellington, the Madras Harbour Works, the Public Works Department Workshops and Stores at Madras the new palace for the prince of Arcot at Madras, a new library and lecture room for the Central Museum at Madras, the completion of the Council Hall at Ootacamund, the East Coast navigable Canal, the Hospital Bridge at Madras, the reclamation at the head of the Ootacamund lake and the Paumben Channel.²⁵

However in this chapter an attempt has been made to deal with only the major public works executed during Duke of Buckingham and Chandos' period namely the Madras Harbour Works, the Buckingham Canal and the Royapuram Auxiliary Medical College. To give employment to the distressed famine stricken

people of Madras during the continuance of the famine, it was resolved to set in had the long projected Junction Canal between the Cooum and the Adyar rivers, an important link in the East Coast Canal communications which could not be executed in previous years for lack of necessary funds, but the necessity of which had been strongly advocated by Sir Arthur Cotton and other able engineers. Its construction would remove the only obstruction that existed in a line of inland navigation which, when completed, would connect the Godavari, Krishna and their numerous navigable channels. With the Nellore, Madras, Chingleput and South Arcot Districts.²⁶

In 1877, a fresh impetus was given to the construction of the canal the Great Famine of that year. The completion of the canal was then taken up as a famine work and thousands of famine stricken people were employed upon the excavation and, by the end of the year, the cutting of the canal was carried to the penneru river 114 miles North of Madras. By 1878, the canal was extended to its existing northern limit, i.e., the junction of the Pedda Ganjam 196 miles north of Madras with the fresh water high level Commamur Canal of the Krishna delta system. This length of 196 miles of the canal, north of the Cooum river has since been known as the 'North Canal'. About 1877, the connecting cut, now known as the "Junction Canal", between the Cooum and the Adyar rivers in the town of Madras, was completed; and by 1882, the canal south of the Madras was cut right through from Madras to its existing southern limit in the Marakkanam backwater and several bridges, particularly on the Junction Canal were built. The 66 miles canal south of Madras came to be called 'the South Canal'.

The particular importance of the Buckingham Canal during the famine lies in the fact that it proved to be a source of income and relief to the famine stricken people. Able bodied persons who were employed in the construction of the canal were paid wages and this proved to be a dual benefit-for the government who got plenty of labour for the construction of the canal and for the people for whom wages for work done meant that they could buy food during the famine

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