

CHAPTER XIII.

NATURAL CALAMITIES.

DISTRESS OF 1874, 1897 AND 1908.

In spite of the recent partial industrialisation in Hazaribagh district, the activities of Damodar Valley Corporation, the exploitation of the mineral and forest resources, the economy of the district mainly remains agricultural as it was when the last District Gazetteer was published in 1917. Mica, coal and other minerals provide occupation for a comparatively small percentage of the population although the mineral resources of this district are unique. Details of agricultural statistics will be found in the chapter on Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation. For purposes of this chapter it will be adequate to mention that since Lister wrote in the last District Gazetteer in 1917 that agriculture depends in Hazaribagh district absolutely on the rainfall there have been little changes.

After a survey of the resources of the cultivating and landless classes Lister mentioned in the last District Gazetteer as follows:—

“This survey of the resources of the cultivating and landless classes discloses an excessive dependence in all but a few areas on the outturn of the crop of rice grown on the terraced lands. In the comparatively small valleys of the Lalajan and Sakri rivers the *rahi* crops are perhaps of more importance than the rice; and the mica industry affords protection to the remainder of Gawan and to north Kodarma; but the rest of the district must have recourse to temporary emigration in case the rice crop fails and this step is practically restricted to male adults. Irrigation is confined to about 14,000 acres and the outturn of the terraced lands is annually dependent on the amount and distribution of the rains. These lands are either sown broadcast, or are planted from seed grown in nurseries. The former lands should, if possible, be ploughed in January or February; but the latter can wait until they are wet or even submerged, immediately before transplantation. With the rising of Rohan towards the end of May the broadcast rice must be sown in the terraces and the nurseries must be planted and if there is rain the maize and *marua* are also sown. Light rains and an early and light monsoon favour these latter and other *bhadai* crops and a heavy downpour is not needed till the middle of July or even the end of that month. When it arrives transplantation of the *marua* and rice seedlings is pushed on and as the plants are weak from that operation they are in special need of good rain for a few days after. Right through September rain should fall at such intervals and in such quantities that the terraces will remain submerged, yet not so

heavily and continuously as to break the *añs* or prevent the pollination of the *bhadai* crops and later on their harvesting. If, after this, the Hathiya rains fall in the first week in October and then cease, the maize and *marua* and other *bhadai* crops will be good, the rice crop will be full and the soil will be fit to cultivate for the sowing of the *rabi* crops.

" From this perfect programme the departure which causes most serious loss is the postponement of transplantation till the end of August and the cessation of the rains early in September. A break at that precise stage cannot be remedied for the third class rice by subsequent rainfall. The *bhadai* crops, on the other hand, require light but fairly frequent rain in Rohan, sowings are delayed and heavy rain in July will cause very great loss. A poor *bhadai* harvest is usually due to excessive rain in July.

" The *rabi* crops are sown in October or early November and rain continued till the end of October prevents the proper cultivation of the soil and sowings cannot be made in sodden ground. They require one or two showers in the interval between the blade and the ear, but rain during flowering is very injurious."

The vagaries of rainfall have caused in the past distress in the District. In the last District Gazetteer there is mention of three years of distress, namely, 1874, 1897 and 1908. Regarding the distress of 1874 the following was mentioned in the last District Gazetteer :—

" The information about the distress of 1874 is meagre. The rainfall of 1873 was as follows :—

April	May.	June.	July.	August.	September.	October.
0.50	0.46	3.35	22.80	17.85	9.06	0.0

In the absence of more definite information about the distribution of the rain weekly periods it is impossible to explain what happened. The *bhadai* crops must have failed, as they would be drowned out in July. The outturn is said to have been 4 annas. The rice crop is said to have been 8 annas, and this indicates an early cessation in September. *Rabi* was from 3 to 8 annas. The *mahua* crop was very good in 1874. No gratuitous relief was given. The highest number of workers was 16,303. The cash expenditure locally was Rs. 1,69,210 and in addition 1,261 tons of grain were imported at a cost of Rs. 1,70,235."

About the distress of 1897 the following was mentioned in the last Gazetteer:—

“The rainfall at the Sadar station in 1896-97 was as follows:—

April.	May.	June.	July.	August.	September.	October.	November.
.45	1.80	11.00	13.12	9.39	8.10	0	0.25
December.	January.	February.	March.				
0.59	0.28	2.16	2.01				

The excessive rain in June was harmful to the *bhadai* crops and the rather heavy rain in July increased the damage. The rice crop was injured by the insufficient fall in August and the cessation of the monsoon by the middle of September made a poor outturn inevitable and as it followed on a 10-anna crop in the previous year, local stocks of rice were very deficient. The absence of rain in October prevented the sowing of the *rabi* crop and storms in March severely damaged the *mahua*. Finally the lac crop was poor and prices unduly low. The tracts most seriously affected were Chauparan, Barhi, Bagodar, Kodarma, Gumia, Mandu and Hazaribagh. The price of rice rose to 6 seers a rupee against a normal price of 17 seers. The maximum number of workers was 2,152 and of gratuitous recipients 7,815 and expenditure was Rs. 73,000 from Government funds and Rs. 39,000 from charitable funds. Rs. 51,000 were advanced as *taccavi* loans. The birth and death rates were both adversely affected to a serious extent.”

The famine and scarcity of 1908 was particularly bad. The following paragraph is quoted from the last District Gazetteer regarding the distress of 1908:—

“The rainfall in 1908 was as follows:—

April.	May.	June.	July.	August.	September.	October.
.66	.60	14.14	6.35	13.36	9.16	Nil.

It will be obvious that transplantation was very late and as the rains stopped abruptly after the first week of September the plants in their new soil never had a chance of thriving except in the lowest fields. The *bhadai* crops were drowned by the excessive rain of June and the *rabi* crops could not be sown for lack of moisture. The *mahua* crop did badly and whilst the local outturn of lac was poor prices were very low. The worst tracts were thanas Barkagaon, Simaria, Chatra and Hazaribagh. The maximum number of test-works was about 1,000 and on gratuitous relief 5,000. Expenditure from public funds was: works—Rs. 10,400, food—Rs. 39,800 and *taccavi* loans—Rs. 3,53,800. That in spite of these figures there was very real distress is proved by

the vital statistics. The average death rate is 32 per 1,000 and the average birth rate is 47 per 1,000. In 1908 these rates were 53.8 and 37.1 respectively or, in other words, an average gain of 15 per thousand became a loss of 16.7 per thousand and that calculated on the population not merely of the affected tracts, but of the entire district. The diminution in the birth rate naturally continued into 1909, when it was 39.1 per thousand. Six people per thousand died of cholera."

For a comparative study of the later periods of economic distress the following paragraphs from Lister's Gazetteer under the heading "Present conditions" (1917) are reproduced:—

"Since 1908 communications have been improved in the south of the district by the opening of the Ramgarh-Bokaro Railway, the building of the Damodar bridge at Ramgarh and the improvement of the Gola-Jhalda road. Between Chatra and the Railway the road has now only one gap unbridged and is metalled throughout. No tract is now liable to serious danger of isolation for more than a day or two. Local prices of food-grains are no longer determined by purely local conditions. Temporary emigration is on the increase and local scarcity will doubtless swell its volume even more than on past occasions, with a consequent difficulty in gauging distress by test-works. Probably *taccari* loans coupled with a small amount of gratuitous relief will be sufficient to cope with the modified scarcity which alone is to be expected. The period of distribution should, however, be carefully selected. For buying plough bullocks February is the latest opportunity and for seed the end of April. The cattle must do much of their ploughing, if possible, in February, and most of the seed must be sown in Rohan (May-June).

"Elaborate programmes of famine relief works are in readiness; but it is improbable that they will ever be used. Adult male labour will wish to seek the coal-fields and private employment on productive work of that character is obviously preferable to State-managed employment on *bandhs* and roads.

"The physical configuration of Hazaribagh confers on the district immunity from floods, but makes it a source of danger to its neighbours. Excessive rain in Gawan in September, 1896, caused a flood in the Nawada subdivision of Gaya in which 34 people were drowned and 2,000 houses destroyed, while much rich land was made permanently useless by a heavy deposit of sand. Similarly, on the 8th of August, 1913, heavy rain fell in the Damodar basin and the rain gauge at Ramgarh recorded 6.12 inches. The flood exceeded all previous experiences and the design of the bridge then under construction was revised. Beyond the district this flood caused extensive

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damage in the coal-fields and lowered down its course. An arrangement has since been made for giving timely information to the District Officer at Rangarh by telegram to the Collector of Bankura in case the level is measured in one day or eight in forty-eight hours, or if the level rises to a black band on the seventh pier 16 feet above the river.

In respect of other natural calamities the district is comparatively immune. Locusts are not unknown, but they have so far done little damage. Earthquakes have been felt but buildings have not been destroyed and even forest fires are small and unimportant.

The later history of Natural Calamities also follows the course of either want of or excess of the required quantity of rain in the years following the War when there was an all-round economic distress due to wider reasons.

There was failure of rain in July and August in 1915-16 and transplantation could not be made in some places in proportion to the area. In some other areas no transplantation could be made and the yield of *bhadai* crops was said to be about twelve annas and the rice yielded about eleven annas output. The paddy output in the 3 class of lands was very poor and in some areas it was a complete failure. The same features were observed in the following year and on the whole there were twelve-anna crops. The prevailing price of almost all the necessaries of life, especially sugar and rice, was rather high.

But the year 1918-19 was worse. There was a long period of no rains in July followed by heavy rains in August as a result of which the *bhadai* crop was a partial failure. To make matters worse there was a complete cessation of the rains about the middle of September and a failure of the paddy crop. The poorer classes usually fall back on the *mahua* crop for the month of scarcity but in this year the *mahua* also had a failure owing to cloud, rains and hail-storm in the months of March and April. It was estimated that there was an eight-anna yield of *mahua* crop. The prices rose abnormally and there was an acute economic distress particularly in the areas of Peterbar and Kharagdiha.

The prices of cloth and kerosene oil rose abnormally and the Government had to intervene. The local Marwaris are reported to have raised the prices of rice and other food-stuffs. To make matters worse there was a large number of deaths. The virulent epidemic of influenza followed by a smaller outbreak of pneumonia in the months of September and October and took a heavy toll of life. The epidemic was so widely prevalent that the best efforts of the District Board

Municipalities could only touch the fringe of the problem. Cholera was also bad in Chatra Subdivision and there were the usual cases of malaria and small-pox.

The acute economic distress was met by the Government by the provision of the construction of several new roads in the reserved forests. In the Kodarma estate the people found employment in the mica factories. Test-works were not opened as there was no indication that they would be successful. Land improvement loans and *taccaci* loans were widely distributed. Steps were also taken to stimulate public charity and circles were formed for the distribution of gratuitous relief through non-official agency. These steps were calculated to avoid widespread economic distress.

In the following year (1919-20) conditions did not improve. Owing to lower produce of the crops, high prices, outbreak of cholera the people suffered and Government continued the distribution of land improvement loans and *taccaci* loans.

EARTHQUAKE OF 1934.

There were no abnormal natural calamities in the years following 1920. The Great Bihar Earthquake of 1934 was felt in the different parts of the district. The earthquake, however, did not have any disastrous effect in this district as in some other parts of Bihar. After an interval of semi-normal years irregular rainfall was again responsible for a certain amount of economic distress in the years 1935-38. There was a failure of both winter and *rabi* crops. The yield of sugarcane crops was also below normal.

In 1943 there was a cholera epidemic taking the toll of 3,633 lives. The epidemic broke out suddenly and in spite of prompt measures there was a heavy casualty.

The rain-god gave a cruel deal to Hazaribagh district in 1946 when there was an unprecedented rainfall as a result of which the river Barakar was in spate. The Barakar bridge on the Grand Trunk Road near Barhi collapsed and about a dozen villages situated by the side of the river Barakar were submerged under water. Gratuitous relief had to be distributed by the Government and by some local private organisation to the flood-stricken people of the areas and loans were also advanced for the construction of their houses.

If rains created havoc in 1946 hail-storm did so in 1949. A severe hail-storm damaged heavily the standing paddy crop which was ripe for harvest in part of Chatra and Sadar subdivisions of the district. The worst affected areas consisted of Pratappur, Hunterganj, part of

Chatra, Mandu, Ramgarh and a portion of Barkagaon within Sadar subdivision.

The year 1951-52 showed an unprecedented failure of paddy crop in the whole of Chatra subdivision and Gawan and Satgawan in Giridih subdivision due to drought and failure of Hathiya rains. Government in their notification no. D/L-1004/51-4045-R., dated the 22nd May, 1951, declared Hazaribagh as scarcity-stricken area. Relief measures on an unprecedented scale were undertaken and the people had to be provided with both work and food. Government in the Supply and Price Control Department arranged for the distribution of food-grains through fair price shops which were started everywhere. Government also recognised that in addition to the sale of food-grains gratuitous relief was also necessary and relief works were undertaken on a large scale to save the indigent and the disabled people from starvation.

The following allotments were made to this district to combat the scarcity conditions :—

- (1) Gratuitous relief—Rs. 50,000.
- (2) Salaries and Establishment—Rs. 2,500.
- (3) Relief work involving light manual labour—Rs. 50,000.
- (4) Hard manual labour—Rs. 2,00,000.

Regarding the high price for rice it may be mentioned that the price of rice in September and October, 1950 had gone up to Rs. 32 a maund. In the predominantly paddy growing areas of Peterbar and Jaridih, it was available at the rate of Rs. 20 a maund till the month of March, 1951. As the dry months drew near, the price level had an upward tendency. In the Hazaribagh town the price had gone up from Rs. 26 a maund to Rs. 30 a maund again. The off-take of food-grains (in maunds) during the year 1951-52 is detailed below :—

Month.	Sadar.	Giridih.	Chatra.	Total.
April, 1951	8,587	1,489	688	10,734
May, 1951	21,392	4,070	5,519	30,990
June, 1951	60,691	13,210	18,129	92,030
July, 1951	88,022	25,421	23,238	1,14,681
August, 1951	40,130	12,009	18,139	70,284
September, 1951	14,054	7,980	8,128	30,142
October, 1951	10,535	3,880	4,575	18,990
November, 1951	12,570	3,133	2,432	18,135
December, 1951	13,977	6,900	3,630	24,507
January, 1952	7,138	2,260	2,459	11,857
February, 1952	5,227	3,365	2,302	10,894
March, 1952	7,479	1,157	1,185	9,821
Total	2,67,808	84,863	90,484	4,43,155

The distribution of food-grains either through fair price shops or gratuitous relief in 1951-52 in the district in general and in the deficit pockets in particular relieved the scarcity conditions. The harvest of *bhādaī* crops which was good saw to the decline in the demand for Government stock of food-grains.

Gratuitous relief was distributed in Chatra subdivision in kind through ration cards drawn from the fair price shops. Giridih subdivision did not require gratuitous relief. A sum of Rs. 13,042 was spent out of the grant placed at the disposal of the District Officer under this head.

Although provision was made for relief work involving light manual labour no amount was spent under this head as the Subdivisional Officer, Chatra, reported that the persons entitled to receive this kind of relief did not come forward for the purpose. Hence the entire allotment was surrendered to Government.

Out of the grant of Rs. 2,00,000 for hard manual labour sanctioned by the Revenue Department a sum of Rs. 85,500 was allotted to the Divisional Forest Officer, Hazaribagh and a sum of Rs. 21,000 was allotted to the Divisional Forest Officer, Giridih, for construction of roads within the scarcity pockets and houses by the Forest Department as a relief measure. A sum of Rs. 75,526-6-0 was only spent under this head.

Besides this a sum of Rs. 1,50,000 was sanctioned by the Local Self-Government Department for repairs of roads through the agency of the District Board as a relief measure. Repairs of 14 roads were sanctioned as a relief measure out of the grant of Rs. 1,50,000 for execution of relief works in the scarcity areas. The District Board, Hazaribagh, took up repairs of five roads in the worst affected areas of Chatra subdivision of the district, namely, (1) Kunda-Pratappur road, (2) Pratappur-Pandeyypura and Pandeyypura-Huntergunj road, (3) Jori-Pratappur road, (4) Simaria-Lawalong road and (5) Lawalong-Chako road on the border of the district. A sum of Rs. 23,308 was spent on these roads. Sufficient labourers were not forthcoming for these projects with the result that the progress of repair of roads undertaken by the District Board did not make much headway. Besides the execution of the roads by the Forest Department and the District Board, the Public Works Department in Chatra subdivision, where the distress was acute undertook the repairs of Dhobi-Chandwara road and employed 3,000 to 4,000 labourers a day over this work. The major portion of the labourers engaged on this road came from the neighbouring district of Gaya.

The execution of minor irrigation schemes was also intensified during the year with a view to give employment to the distressed labourers of the district. 706 minor irrigation schemes were taken up during the year 1951-52 for execution out of an allotment of Rs. 10,00,000 sanctioned by the Revenue Department. These schemes were executed through Village Panchayats under a headman. In a very few cases contractors, however, had to be engaged as other suitable agency was not available. The total amount spent was Rs. 9,75,239-10-0. Besides the minor irrigation schemes, medium irrigation projects at Dahnri and at Nagri were also taken up and executed through the agency of the District Agriculture Officer, Hazaribagh. The former lies in Chatra subdivision while the latter is situated in Giridih subdivision.

Agriculturists' loans and land improvement loans were also distributed, particularly in the worst affected areas. 23,734 persons received agriculturists' loans and Rs. 13,14,010 was distributed. A sum of about Rs. 82,109 also was distributed as land improvement loans to 301 persons.

Fortunately the district was comparatively free from any epidemic in this year 1951-52. A large quantity of multi-vitamin tablets were distributed throughout the district. Some medicine chests were also distributed as a measure of protection. A large quantity of skimmed milk was procured and distributed through 44 centres in Sadar subdivision, 34 in Chatra subdivision and 14 in Giridih subdivision to children and expectant mothers. If the year 1951-52 was bad, unfortunately the year 1952-53 was worse for Hazaribagh district. There was a complete failure of Hathiya rains with the inevitable result of a failure of the crops throughout the district. At first Government had included only the Chatra subdivision in the list of scarcity pockets. But on the representation of the local authorities, after the District Relief Advisory Committee had reviewed the situation, a number of other police-stations were also included in the list of scarcity pockets. There was frightful failure of crops in Eastern Dhanwar, Northern Jamua, Deori, Ganwan, Satgawan, Bengabad and western Nawadih police-stations of Giridih subdivision. There was also a total failure of paddy crop in a large number of villages under Barkagaon police-station in the Sadar subdivision while the produce in the other part of the Sadar subdivision was to the extent of 50 per cent of the normal. Giridih subdivision was further hard hit during the year 1952-53 because of a slump in the mica trade. So, the three subdivisions of the district, namely, Sadar, Giridih and Chatra, had acute distress in the year 1952-53.

The purchasing power of the people had gone considerably down on account of continued drought, high prices of the food-stuffs and the slump in mica trade. The lower purchasing power of the people was clearly shown when in spite of relaxation of certain rules in the distribution of food-grains the off-take in the fair price shops went down considerably. Apart from the lower purchasing power of the people the open market had other cheaper food-grains like maize, *marua* and the Government food-grains were selling at an enhanced price owing to various reasons. A percentage of the classes not usually consuming maize or *marua* normally had to fall back on them. The ruling prices of rice and wheat in the three subdivisions were as follows :—

	Rice.	Wheat.
Sadar	Rs. 27 to 32 ..	Rs. 24
Giridih.. ..	Rs. 27 to 31 ..	Rs. 23 to 25
Chatra	Rs. 26 to 30 ..	Rs. 25 to 26

Government machinery for gratuitous relief, distribution of loans, provision of projects involving heavy manual labour in the shape of repairs of forest roads, buildings, etc., were put into operation. So far as gratuitous relief is concerned there was a sharp contrast this year to the comparative apathy of the people in 1951-52 to receive gratuitous relief. A sum of Rs. 1,00,000 was allotted by Government for this purpose. There was also a heavy demand for agricultural loans and land improvement loans. Up to the 31st December, 1952, a sum of Rs. 7,13,520 as agricultural loan and Rs. 44,535 as land improvement loan had been distributed.

Repairs of forest roads and buildings within the scarcity pockets, as was done in the previous years, were also undertaken by the Forest Department to provide employment to able-bodied labourers. Some portion of the allotment was also diverted for desilting of wells. A sum of Rs. 1,18,201-15-0 appears to have been spent on these projects up to the 31st December, 1952. Government in the Local Self-Government Department had sanctioned a grant of Rs. 1,50,000 for giving relief to the distressed people within the scarcity areas of the district. The District Board spent the entire sum on the repairs of a large number of roads which gave employment to quite a number of able-bodied men.

Fortunately there was no epidemic and even the incidence of cholera and small-pox was very small in this year. Despite the scarcity conditions prevailing, the level of public health was fairly satisfactory.

There was a slight damage to the early paddy crop during 1952-53 by *gundhi* bug. Necessary steps were quickly taken by the Agriculture Department to meet the invasion by *gundhi* bug which was not very common.

Since 1917, when the last District Gazetteer was published, there has been a great development in communications, particularly, roadways. Better roads have been provided and the interior has been made more accessible by the running of daily passenger buses and private or public carriers. New townships like Ramgarh, Bokaro, Tilaiya, etc., have grown up. The Damodar Valley Corporation have thrown dams across some rivers at various points and a thermal station has been opened at Bokaro. Electricity has been made available to the country side. There is not much difficulty for getting work as a day labourer. The incidence of emigration has naturally fallen. Changes in the industrial zone in the district have come in. While the turnover in lac and catechu has fallen there has been a bigger output in coal, mica and timber business. Hazaribagh district is no longer an isolated unit.

It may not be wise to make a prophecy particularly in an area where rainfall determines the economic condition of the people. But it may be said that the rapid industrialisation that is going on within the district of Hazaribagh in various areas, the wholesome steps taken by the State for permanent measures towards the amelioration of the condition of the people and the general trends of events all indicate a definite turn for a better economic condition of the people and lesser chances for natural calamities in the district of Hazaribagh.