CHAPTER IV

THE EVOLUTION OF A FAMINE POLICY 1860 - 1895

Famines were a repeated occurrence in India throughout the nineteenth century. Still the government did not develop a consistent famine policy up to the mid-nineteenth century to fight its ravages and to mitigate the sufferings of famine-stricken people. Whenever a famine occurred relief measures were hurriedly improvised on a small scale and strictly on a local basis. The able-bodied persons were provided with some employment. The gratuitous relief was also afforded to the poor people as and when it was possible by both the government and private charitable agencies. But no properly thought-out concerted action was taken with regard to the relief measures. Only after the suppression of the Revolt of 1857, when the government became conscious of the matters affecting the welfare and consequently the loyalty of the people, did the government try to evolve a consistent policy to combat the ravages of scarcity and famine. It is the purpose of this chapter to analyse the evolution and development of such a policy from 1860 - 95.

1. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 1.
In 1860 the Government of India considered a few measures of relief which were to be adopted when a famine was imminent that year. The Supreme Government would place at the disposal of the local government sums as would be practicable and expedient to be expended for relief when drought would occur. Relief would be afforded only in return for labour to all persons capable of working. Gratuitous relief would be given only to the aged, infirm and helpless and the government would not interfere with private trade with regard to the supply of foodgrains.\(^2\)

The government appeared to be vague in its thinking. Its unwillingness to control and direct the private trade with a view to keep down the prices would make the task of relief very difficult. It appears that the government was planning to help the famine-stricken people, but it was vague as regards the steps which would be useful in combating the distress of the people.

Only a few tentative relief measures were not quite sufficient to tackle a severe distress. The severity and magnitude of problems raised by a widespread distress needed much more carefully thought out and better planned action on the part of the government.

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Then famine occurred in the northern India in 1860-61 the principles and methods to tackle it were found to be unsettled and unformed. The distress of the people underscored the need for a coherent famine policy. A Commission was set up to enquire into the famine and to suggest measures which it thought would be most suited. It was presided over by Baird Smith.³

The enquiry had educative effect on the relief policy because the foundations of the future humane policy were laid by it. Baird Smith went deeper into the causes of the famine than a mere account of the failure of rains. He made a deep study of the agriculture, agrarian system and the economic and social ills of the rural life. He toured all the affected parts, studied carefully the various problems and submitted three very useful reports.⁴

He recommended the introduction of a permanent settlement of land revenue on the Bengal model in the North Western Provinces.⁵ He stated that land revenue should be reduced and permanently settled at least in those parts which were not irrigated by canals.⁶ He

⁵ Smith’s Report on the famine in the North Western Provinces in 1861, Pt. II, 36.
⁶ Ibid., 62-63.
felt that a permanent settlement would give a stimulus to action for improvement of the land and would provide free scope for capital. It would lead to a universal increase in the wealth of the agricultural classes instead of that of the moneylenders and commercial classes. Thus, the people generally affected by famine would grow strong enough to resist the distress to be caused by the future famines. He emphasized that the land revenue on the non-irrigated land should be carefully fixed either on the basis of the then existing settlement or if necessary after revision. Later, survey of irrigated areas should be made and the land revenue of such areas should also be fixed in perpetuity.  

It was interesting to note that Smith's emphasis on a permanent settlement of land revenue was completely ignored by the contemporary authorities and wholly rejected by the Secretary of State for India in 1883 after a discussion extending over twenty-one years. It appears that there was a vital connection between the land revenue and an oppressive, defective and heavy land revenue demand tended to intensify famine conditions. But the interests of the government in obtaining its share in the produce received greater consideration than the well being of the people. A radical revision of the government's land revenue was a sure safeguard against

7. Ibid., 164.  
the widespread incidence of famine. 9

Another vital question was the condition of peasantry, permanent settlement on the Bengal model would hardly solve the problem. The landlord, the owner of the soil, would gain by the permanent fixation of the revenue. The government would not impose any limit on his demand from the ryots whose condition would remain the same. Each dose of prosperity would attract additional demands from the landlord. It is usually the class of peasants which suffered more from famines than that of the landlords; the latter had better means to combat the distress than the former. It is difficult to agree with R.C. Dutt's assertion that had the government carried out Smith's recommendations, the country would had been spared those dreadful and desolating famines which occurred in the nineteenth century. 10

With regard to the development of agriculture Smith recommended irrigation as a preventive measure against famines. He suggested that the irrigation facilities should be improved. 11

Means of internal transport such as roads and railways are very important means of keeping up supplies and thus checking price rise. Means of transport in the Central Provinces were miserable. Roads were defective and railways were almost non-existent. Therefore, Smith advocated the extension of railway lines and strongly recommended the construction of roads. 12

The report of Smith is of great importance in the development of famine policy in India. It was the first essay of its kind and Smith must be given credit for having touched on some of the fundamental issues connected with famines. His remedial measures relating to revenue, irrigation and communications were clearly suggested after careful analysis and thorough enquiry. However, the government was not yet prepared to go so far and his suggestions remained more or less in cold storage for the time being.

When famine occurred in the Orissa and the Chhattisgarh in 1866 a Commission was set up to enquire into matters relating to it. It was presided over by George Campbell. 13 The Commission visited various places, examined witnesses, and submitted its report in three parts. In the first part it discussed the details of

12. Ibid., 172-175.
the famine in Orissa and in the other two parts recommended the remedial measures. 14

With regard to the adequate data of rainfall the Commission recommended that the registers of rainfall be kept at important places under the charge of district officers. 15 They would provide useful data and help in getting an early warning of an impending scarcity.

The Commission felt that the tenure of the land was an important cause of the famine. Like Smith, Campbell also detected close connection between land revenue and the distress of the people. It strongly recommended liberal assessment of land revenue and legislation to define the interests of landlords and give certain and definite rights to tenants on land. 16 It did not favour a permanent settlement, but for immediate improvement of agriculture it recommended that the term of the then existing settlement which was expiring in near future should be extended. 17

The Commission recommended certain steps relating to the irrigation. It laid great stress on the means for artificial irrigation. It suggested that before taking up any irrigation scheme a careful enquiry

16. Ibid., 35.
17. Ibid., 16-18.
should be made as to the possibility of obtaining enough material for controlling the streams and dams and also the adequacy of rainfall. If irrigation works were to be taken up directly by the government, provincial Irrigation Department should be formed. It also recommended that a general irrigation service should be established for the supply of officers thoroughly experienced in and devoted to the department.

The Commission recommended that gratuitous relief should be given to the helpless and the government should arrange and provide works for the able-bodied. It also recommended that plans for the Public Works Department projects should be prepared and kept ready at hand to be implemented immediately after the onset of famine. This system should be spread throughout the country. The Commission felt that during the famine the Public Works Department projects which were carried out in the ordinary manner by contract or at ordinary task rates, were quite inappropriate. Therefore, it recommended to start special projects under the supervision of special officers with different standards of duty than those who usually performed their duties under the ordinary circumstances. The workers on the projects should be provided with food and shelter.

18. Ibid., 55.
19. Ibid., 57.
20. Ibid., 59.
21. Ibid., 61.
22. Ibid., 75–84.
With regard to the supply of foodgrains the Famine Commission recommended that the government should import foodgrains when the private trade did not import it. 23 For the quick supply of foodgrains during the famine it recommended extension of railway lines and double tracking the existing lines to increase their carrying capacity. 24

The Famine Commission also examined the possibility of uniform rules for famine relief in the form of special Codes. But it felt it to be impossible to have such a Code. It recommended that the most essential parts of the reports on great famines both in India, Ireland and elsewhere should be collected and circulated in an easily accessible form and reliance should be placed on intelligent officers who would be able to acquire that knowledge which would be useful in times of famines. 25

The recommendations of the Commission were adopted by the Government of India. The report was not immediately fruitful with regard to the adoption of a system of relief. However, the attention was strongly focussed on the responsibilities of the government in the period of distress. 26

23. Ibid., 59, 81.
24. Ibid., 37.
25. Ibid., 77.
An interesting report on the famine in Bihar was submitted on 15 March 1867, by F.R.Cockerell who was appointed by the Government of Bengal to review the relief measures adopted in Bihar and to recommend remedial measures. He emphasized the necessity of improving irrigation and internal transport in Bihar as preventive measures against the future famines in Bihar. He further emphasized the need for the creation of a special agency for collecting accurate information and statistics about the population, agriculture and the state of trade. He felt that delay in providing relief in Bihar was due to the lack of an adequate knowledge of these facts.

Though the measures recommended by Cockerell were very useful, they were not approved by the Government of India. Moreover, the report was overshadowed by the report of the Orissa Famine Commission of the same year and thus it had little effect upon the evolution of famine policy of the government. 27

The report of the Orissa Famine Commission was the first detailed and critical study of the famines. The report of Baird Smith on the famine of 1860–61 and that of F.R.Cockerell on the Bihar famine of 1865–67, though very useful, were based on individual judgement and lacked the advantage of a collective review such as made by a formal Commission.

In 1866 when the famine occurred in the Central Provinces the government took action on unprecedented scale to relieve the distressed people. The policy was more liberal than in the earlier famines. It was because of the fact that the painful lesson taught by the earlier calamities had sunk deep into the minds of the rulers of the country. The result of such consciousness were apparent in the famine which visited the Central Provinces in 1868-69. Every district officer in the Central Provinces was reminded that, "he would be held personally responsible, that no death should occur from starvation which could be avoided by any exertion or arrangement on his part or on the part of his subordinates!" As a result, expenditure on a very large scale was incurred in the measures adopted by the government for the employment and relief of the population. The expenditure including loans for seed, implements and cattle amounted to Rs. 10,00,000 of course it appeared to be rather high in the light of later experience. But being the first attempt of its kind some wasteful expenditure was bound to occur.

Again in 1873-74 the failure of the monsoon caused suffering to the people in Bengal and Bihar. Prudential considerations were subordinated to the paramount necessity of relieving distress and obviating

mortality. Money was spent profusely but life was preserved. 29 Though the relief measures were put into practice on a large scale, on an average about twenty six percent of the total population of the famine districts were relieved. The expenditure on relief was excessive, but it must be said to the credit of the government that apparently there was no death from starvation. 30

On considering the measures adopted for the relief it appears difficult to accept that the procedure followed in the management of anyone of the famines was altogether successful. There was no famine or even scarcity, the management of which was such as could entirely be accepted as a precedent for future guidance. The measures taken in the famine of 1873-74, though they must be recognised as successful so far as the absence of the mortality was concerned, were not comprehensive enough to tackle more acute or widespread distress. 31

However, this negative conclusion need not interfere with the practical utility of the enquiry on which the earlier Commissions were engaged. Their task was by careful consideration both of the shortcomings and successes to ascertain and lay down the general principles of a sound and efficient system of relief.

29. FCA., 1880, Pt. I, 94.
They did not find serious difficulty in coming to conclusion which they generally submitted to the government for consideration. But the inadequacy of their recommendations was highlighted by the terrible famine of 1876–78.

The famine of 1876–78 occurred in the southern India and many parts of the northern India. The Government of India instantly drew the attention of local governments and administrations towards the critical situation. Sporadic efforts were made to relieve the people. The principles and methods of relief were evaluated during the famine. The large expenditure was incurred on relief in 1876–78 though the relief measures were not adequately fruitful. Relief was also not well organized. The insufficiency in the relief measures was caused by the inability of the private trade to meet the necessities of the people. The lack of transport was also responsible for it. As a result, the heavy mortality of men and cattle occurred. It appears that the intervention of the government led to a substantial saving of the lives, but the administrative mismanagement resulted in great suffering and mortality. Many more lives might have been saved under a better management of famine relief.

32. Ibid., 102.
33. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 5.
34. Ibid., 6.
35. FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 98.
This famine underscored the absence of a comprehensive and coherent famine policy inspite of the earlier attempts by the government to formulate one. Commission under the chairmanship of Richard Strachey, with Charles Elliot as its secretary, was appointed by Lytton to investigate the causes of the famine and to advise the government on the measures to be adopted for preventing famines in future and for the relief. 36 The labours of this Commission were a significant step forward in the evolution of a famine policy. The report of the Commission had great effect on the agricultural and administrative reforms in the country. The terms of reference were very wide and covered all aspects of famine. The members proceeded to Simla, where they took up their assignment. They prepared a questionnaire which was circulated to all the local governments and administrations. They collected information by visiting various provinces and making personal enquiries. They wrote the final report in England. However, the first two parts were sent to Indian members, who did not go to England, for their opinion under the orders of the Secretary of State for India. 37

The report of the Famine Commission is divided into three parts. In the first, it had given a concise

sketch of the geography, population and climate of British India, indicating generally the degree in which each part of the country is exposed to famine. It also discussed the measures to be adopted for the famine relief. In the second part it discussed the measures for the prevention of famines, and, in third, it gave a historical review of the famines in India since the Bengal famine of 1770.  

With regard to the famine relief administration the Famine Commission considered a definite system of procedure to be embodied in a Famine Code, which each local government would prepare, subject only to financial control on the part of the Government of India. It also recommended that every government which administered relief had felt the need of issuing general orders both to secure uniformity of system and to avoid the risks that would arise from the acts of any of its officers who did not possess enough experience of this particular kind of work. Earlier orders of this kind were promulgated from time to time as occasion arose. Later there had been a tendency to collect them into the form of a permanent Code. It was done because the duties in time of famine were complicated and multifarious. Their successful performance necessitated the utilization of experience and carefully considered and prepared plan. The duties

38. Ibid., 162-163.
during the famine could not be safely left to individual
initiative, energy and resources of the district officers.
They could not be effectively dealt with by a system
which was defective. Therefore, prompt and decided action
in carrying out relief measures was of utmost importance.
The Famine Commission recommended that the Government of
India should, as soon as possible issue a set of rules
embodying the main principles that should govern the
administration of famine relief. It would be the duty of
each local government to apply them by drawing up a
Famine Code, consistent with the needs and the administra-
tive system of the province. The Famine Code would also
mention all matters falling within the scope of relief
administration. The local Codes of famine relief should
be laid before the Government of India for its approval.
After the necessary sanction was accorded the local
governments were left free to act upon them.\(^{40}\) This was
a very important recommendation. In a big country like
India with diverse conditions, a unified Code would be a
failure.

The Famine Commission considered the recurrence
of famine as an event altogether exceptional in character
which took place at irregular and often greatly prolonged
intervals. It considered that the performance of the
duties which fell upon the government in times of famine

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\(^{40}\) *Ibid.*, 113.
should be entrusted to one of the departments which would be equipped with the ordinary machinery of administration. For this purpose it thought the Agriculture Department was the most suitable. For the same reason the famine relief should mainly devolve on the ordinary establishment which carries out the normal work of the government and not on any special organization expressly created for the purpose. It appears what must be aimed at was a system which may be worked by the ordinary official staff, supplemented whenever necessary to meet the special circumstances. 41 It was a wise recommendation as duties of relief were much too important to be left to a temporary and hurriedly collected staff.

Experience had shown that the relief measures fell under various heads and required the co-operation of several officers in the different departments of the government. Much injury to the public interests was often caused by the absence of a central authority by which varied requirements of relief on a large scale could be coordinated. Therefore, the Famine Commission recommended the appointment of a Famine Commissioner when a famine on a large scale would occur. 42

It also recommended the appointment of an officer in every district to supervise the collection of

41. Ibid., 117.
42. Ibid., 118.
economic statistics and a Director of Agriculture in every province. It also felt the need for putting the village accountants on sound and satisfactory footing.\textsuperscript{43}

As regards the expenditure on famine relief the Famine Commission recommended the creation of a surplus fund, later known as Famine Insurance Fund.\textsuperscript{44}

The Famine Commission also suggested some remedial measures once the scarcity was on in the form of preventive steps. It suggested that in the times of distress it was necessary for the government to replace the ordinary employers of labour who were forced by the distress to suspend their productive activities and to furnish work and wages to the labourers.\textsuperscript{45} The recommendation was made with a view to enable the people to earn a livelihood till their ordinary occupations remained interrupted. Though such relief was to be given to the labourers who were in need, they were not permitted to leave their usual employment if they got sufficient returns from it. It must be borne in mind that this was the cardinal principle of relief policy. It strongly recommended that the relief should be administered before the labourers would ruin their health for want of food. The projects should be of permanent utility and labour-intensive, capable of employing a considerable number of

\textsuperscript{43} Shrivas\textit{ta}, H.S. : \textit{op. cit.}, 164-165.
\textsuperscript{44} FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 193.
\textsuperscript{45} Shrivas\textit{ta}, H.S. : \textit{op. cit.}, 163.
persons. Of course a large proportion of workers would necessarily be unskilled labourers for a considerable period. As regards the location of projects the Famine Commission recommended opening such projects in every sub-division of a stricken district. It was a good suggestion as it was desirable to offer everybody work close to his normal place of residence. It would be unreasonable to expect people to travel long distances for seeking relief. It was anticipated that a large number of people might come to get employment on relief works. Thus the ordinary agricultural operations and the usual employers might suffer from the lack of availability of labour. Therefore, it was recommended to adopt a test, which would curtail the numbers seeking employment in the relief works. 46

As far as the amount of foodgrains required by workers and non-workers was concerned the findings of the Famine Commission were based on the evidence of authorities in all parts of India. After a careful examination of facts it stated that, on an average a ration of about one and a half pounds or about 680 g. per diem of flour of the common coarse grain of the area was sufficient for an ordinary working adult male. In the rice-eating regions and equal weight of rice would be accepted in lieu of flour, and in any case the ration

46. FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 128.
should include a suitable proportion of pulse. A man doing light work would require about one and quarter pounds or about 570 g. per diem. The ration which consisted of one or about 450 g. of flour per diem with a little pulse have been found sufficient to support life in numerous relief houses, where no work was exacted. 

With regard to the wages the Famine Commission recommended that they should be adjusted from time to time to provide enough food for the labourers' support but it should not be high enough to tempt persons with normal and steady employment. One day's rest in a week should be allowed to him. Separate wages should be fixed for the persons of different ages and sex. Theoretically this was feasible, but something extra must be provided with a view of giving security against accidental error. The Commission recommended that the wages should be paid daily or at intervals of three or four days and the payment should be made under the supervision of a reliable officer. It also suggested the abolition of the contract system under which the labourers become the servants of contractors. A great problem was in administering relief during the relief operations free communication between the supervising authority and the labourers was not

47. Shrivastava, H.S. : op.cit., 164.
possible under this scheme, which was necessary for the effective relief. This was the source of some mismanagement and even corruption.

The Commission recommended that the course of events on relief works should be carefully watched by the officers-in-charge and be periodically reported to superior authority. Such a procedure would form one of the safest indications of the degree of the prevailing distress. If relief works were carried on under adequate care enforcing strict discipline and exacting a sufficient task and if the works were still thronged by applicants, especially those persons who belonged to other than the ordinary labouring classes, there would a strong presumption that the distress was very severe. In such a case still larger relief operations would be necessary. On the other hand, if only a few persons turned up for relief and there would be nothing in the management of the relief works to explain their necessity, it would be accepted as an indication that the distress was not acute. However both of these presumptions might prove to be erroneous in certain cases. First there were certain periods of year, such as May and June, when agricultural operations normally were at a standstill. A large number of persons would eagerly wait for work

49. Ibid., 135.
during such periods even though they would not be in great distress. Secondly, there were seasons which preceded sowing or harvesting when the people could hardly be induced by any pressure of want to go to work at a distance from their villages. Finally there were classes with whom apathy or ignorance would produce the same result. Therefore, conclusions founded on such evidence must be drawn with much caution and with a reference to the habits of the people.

The Commission recommended that the scale on which employment should be provided would vary according to the extent of the calamity. The intensity of distress should be ascertained as early as possible. If the failure of crops amounts to scarcity the government would commonly find it sufficient to enlarge ordinary works. This step would render employment in greater number than usual; however, there would be no change in the system. Such measures would enable the villagers to tide over the season of distress. If scarcity develops into famine employment must be afforded on a much larger scale on special famine works such as construction of roads and embankment of railway lines.50

With regard to the distribution of gratuitous relief the Famine Commission recommended that two systems of distribution might be followed. Under the first system,

50. Ibid., 136.
the relief would be provided in the form of distribution of raw grains or money at the homes or in the villages of the recipients. Under the second system, the people would have to come to relief centres where it was given to them in the form of cooked food. In fact many people did not go to relief centres because of a high sense of self-respect. The people of higher castes did not take the food if it was prepared by the people of lower castes. In a society sharply divided on caste and religious lines, community kitchens would never be very popular. Moreover the purdanashin ladies of respectable families did not prefer to go to such centres. Thus, though, this system was good, and perhaps more economical it would fail to attract and relieve the majority of the community.

The Commission also suggested relief to the purdanashin women and their children in the form of doles of grains. It recommended that relief houses should be opened for these persons who had no fixed homes or who were cut off from their families. The old and infirm, who were not able to work on relief works, and the beggars were also relieved there.

As to the class of applicants for relief consisting of small artisans, who in times of famine

52. FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 144-145.
could not get employment and found no market for their
produce, the question arose whether and how far was it
possible to afford employment to them in their own tradeS.
The Commission felt that if the number of artisans was
small and relief could be administered conveniently they
should be employed on their own trades. If the time and
labour necessary for making arrangements for their
employment in special trades would be better spent on
matters affecting mass of people, the interests of
majority should be taken into consideration. The
blacksmiths, carpenters, bricklayers, masons and artisans
in other trades would find employment on Public Works
Department projects because they supply instruments
necessary for those projects. The weavers were the most
numerous class among artisans who often required relief,
and much employment had in many instances been given to
them in their own tradeS. The Commission suggested that
spun thread could be given to weavers to be turn into
cloth at rates corresponding to those prevailing in the
market. The cloth, thus, woven could generally be disposed
of in the relief-houses and hospitals. If there would be
any surplus cloth after the return of normalcy, the same
should be sent for sale to some distant market, so as not
to interfere with the normal local sales, as it would
deprive the weavers of work when situation begun to
improve. The Commission also suggested that the other artisans such as potters and tanners were too few and they could not be employed in their own trades. With a view to relieve them it was advisable to bring them on relief works. It was anticipated, however, that in exceptional cases such works would be inappropriate to their ordinary habits. 53

As regards the agricultural condition of the Central Provinces particularly the availability of the irrigation facilities it was a sad commentary on the state of affairs that there were only a few tanks in some of the eastern districts, where the paddy was chief staple. 54 The province as a whole, sadly lacked in the facilities for artificial irrigation. The harvests generally depended on rainfall. The Famine Commission stated that only 77,50,000 acres, or about five percent, of the cultivated area were under irrigation. No part of the province was free from apprehensions of occasional distress. The Commission urged the government to provide for more irrigation facilities to meet the scarcity of water when the monsoon failed. 55

Problems relating to the lack of irrigation facilities bring out the fact that the ryots were poor.

53. Ibid., 185.
54. FCR, 1880, Pt. II, 3.
55. Ibid., 16.
The Famine Commission pointed out the deplorable condition of the tenants. It failed to find any evidence that they had enough financial resources for supporting themselves in times of famine. It recommended that in order to increase their power of resistance to distress it was necessary to revise the tenure of land revenue. It expressed this view because the landless classes were the most liable to be affected by the famine.\textsuperscript{56} The unprivileged tenants—at will in the province were in the same position as those in Bengal and the North Western Provinces. The privileged or occupancy-tenants consisted of two classes—absolute occupancy tenants and conditional occupancy-tenants. The rents of the former were fixed by the settlement officer for the term of the settlement. They could mortgage holdings subject to the landlord's right of pre-emption and transfer them; conditional occupancy-tenants were not, entitled in the absence of special custom, to mortgage or sale their holdings. There was a class of old and well-established tenants. They possessed a right mostly equivalent to proprietary right. However, it was confined on the plot which was cultivated by them. They numbered about 15,000. Their average holding was 19.5 acres. The conditional occupants were 1,21,807 whose average holding was 15.5 acres. The last class was that of tenants—at-will

\textsuperscript{56. Ibid., 5.}
number was 4,69,034 whose average holding was 14 acres.\textsuperscript{57} The tenants-at-will were the most hard pressed and obliged to borrow money for their support, and the high rate of interest made repayment difficult.

The Commission stated that the duties devolving on the government in relation to the classes of landholders were of a different character from those that attached to it in its relation to the other classes connected with land. Whenever their ordinary means of employment failed they would be in the grip of starvation. However, those who possessed beneficial interests in the land did not suffer much from the extremity of want even in times of famine. It was, therefore, the government which could have assisted such classes by one of the two ways—either by abstaining from collecting the ordinary instalments of the land revenue, the payment of which must have caused suffering to them, or by lending sums at low rate of interest to them which they required for their existence and cultivation.\textsuperscript{58}

As regards the construction of railway lines, the Commission recommended that a length of 20,000 miles or about 32,000 Km. would be sufficient to protect the country from famines.\textsuperscript{59} There was a length of only 618 miles or about 990 Km. of railway lines in the Central Provinces.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{58} FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 166.
\textsuperscript{59} FCR, 1880, Pt. II, 1.
in 1877.  

The Commission felt that in case of the influx of immigrants from the princely states all applicants applying for relief should be treated on equal basis. The government should induce the Indian Princes to help their poor subjects.  

Aidless wandering and immigration from one part of the country to another, would be checked by village inspection.  

The Famine Commission stated that enough surplus grain was produced in the country to meet the needs of the people even when there was a setback in some areas. In its opinion, therefore, famine in India, in those days did not actually involve a food problem; it was more a problem of distribution of food.  

But two members of the Commission James Caird and H.E. Sullivan were unable to place confidence in the statement that there was an estimated yield of 50 lakh tons of foodgrains in the country. Moreover, there is evidence to believe that, in or about 1880, India was normally surplus in foodgrains including rice and wheat, and the surplus amounted to nearly 12 lakh tons.  

It appears that the conclusions of the Famine Commission of 1880 were based on statistical data.  

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60. Viceroy's speech in the Legislative Council, 15.10.1896, F Pr, December 1896, Progs No. 14, NA.  
61. FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 189.  
62. Ibid., 191-192.  
63. Ibid., 156.  
64. CR, 1951, Pt. I, 164.
whose accuracy was not beyond doubt and it ignored the existence of chronic hunger of the poor people in arriving at its estimates of requirements of foodgrains in the country. Two members stated that though the principles laid down in regard to the action of the government in relation to the food supply had their general concurrence, they were unable to adopt the views in totality. The evidence which they collected had led them to form the opinion that, under those conditions, it might not only be expedient, but absolutely necessary, for the government to make provisions in the manner condemned by their colleagues. Fluctuations in the prices of foodgrains, which were caused by the climatic factors pointed to the need for evolving a policy of price stabilization through storage of foodgrains and regulation of grain trade by the government. In the opinion of these two members, there were certain localities in southern, western and central India which were then, and would remain for some time, distant from railway lines and these remote regions were especially liable to visitations of famine. For these comparatively inaccessible tracts, they suggested a plan of storage of foodgrains. They further stated that the matter was not of financial impossibility. They said if the government was willing to accept their views, the measure should be adopted tentatively on a limited scale, so that the extent of the operation would be decided by the success or otherwise of the experiment. 65

The Government of India largely accepted the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880. The report is regarded as a landmark in the development of the famine policy of India. The famine policy which was adopted in the following years was either based on these recommendations or was greatly influenced by them.

The government adopted some measures to give effect to the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880. It decided to improve the conditions of the tenants and to extend irrigation facilities for reducing the dependence of crops on the rainfall.

Though the Government of India had issued many orders connected with famine relief between 1858 and 1878; there was no standing Code of instructions which could enable the authorities to undertake proper relief measures on the occurrence of famines right from the start. The problem of making such uniform rules came before the Orissa Famine Commission in 1867 but it did not consider it feasible to have such a Code. The Famine Commission of 1880, was, however, convinced of the necessity of Famine Codes and recommended to the Government of India to issue a set of authoritative rules for all parts of British India, embodying the main principles for the administration of famine relief. A model draft of Famine Code was drawn

66. Circular SCI to CC, 14.3.1881, F Pr, March 1881, Progs. No. 24, NA.
up by C.A. Elliot, secretary to the Commission, and was circulated to the local governments and administrations for their opinion. Meanwhile, the Famine Commission was dissolved and no final shape could be given by it to the proposed Code. 68

The two underlying principles of famine relief policy embodied in the draft Code were that the state could not undertake to interfere in every individual and isolated case of distress but it would apply its resources only when a natural calamity affecting a substantial portion of the population of a locality occurred. Famine in India, being a problem of temporary lack of employment for the mass of agricultural population, the principal form of relief needed was the opening of relief works for offering employment to those who needed it. It was only in the exceptional cases of non-working dependents and others unable to work, either due to physical disability and incapacity or due to social compulsions, that the relief was to take the form of gratuitous distribution of doles in the villages and feeding of destitutes in free kitchens especially set up for the purpose. 69

The Provisional Famine Code included instructions and rules for the guidance of the provincial administrations

68. Circular SG I to CC, 18.11.1880, F Pr, June 1880, Progs. No. 31B, S.A.
69. Circular SG I to CC, 9.6.1883, F Pr, June 1883, Progs. No. 51, S.A.
in the matter of dealing with a famine. It consisted of eleven chapters dealing with organization of village relief, duties of the officers of the Public Works Department, civil agency works, professional agency works, poor-houses, measures for the protection of cattle, duties of police and medical officers, wages and rations and accounts. It entrusted the responsibility for famine administration to the Commissioners of divisions, district officers and revenue staff. It contemplated the assistance by non-officials of the districts in preliminary enquiries and also in supervising the administration of charitable relief. 70

The Provisional Code laid emphasis on village organisation. 71 Each district was to be divided into circles with circle inspectors, who were to visit every village at least once a week and arrange and report about the steps required for administration of the relief measures. The headman of the village or a local committee or a government officer was to be appointed as the 'local officer'. He would also be responsible for organizing relief to starving wanderers, children and others. He had to organize private charity and children's kitchens. The Code also made recommendations for the relief of respectable men, purdahshin women, artisans, weavers and also for the opening of the poor-houses. 72

70. Provisional Famine Code, 1883, 26.
71. Ibid., 1.
72. Ibid., 1, 80–88.
The police would be responsible for the protection of foodgrains against possible riots. They were to patrol cities, towns, villages and to send all starving wanderers to relief centres. They had also to remove unclaimed dead bodies. Every police officer-in-charge of a police station or an outpost was furnished with a sum of money to arrange for relief in urgent cases.\textsuperscript{73} The Superintendent of Police was to be entrusted with the duty of reporting crime, migration and mortality. The medical officer of the province, and medical officer in civil charge of districts were made responsible for medical problems during the relief operations. In addition to these officers, a medical officer was to be attached to each big relief work and poor-house.\textsuperscript{74} The Code detailed the organization and implementation of relief works.\textsuperscript{75} The relief works were to be of two kinds - civil agency works which were to be carried out under the supervision of district authority for the weak and unskilled labourers and the professional agency works which were to be directly controlled by the Public Works Department for the able-bodies and skilled workers. The professional agency works were to be the backbone of the famine relief administration. The Chief Engineer in charge of the Public Works Department was to be responsible

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 114-126.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 27-79, 127-134.
for the preparation of a programme of such works in consultation with the Commissioner and the district authorities and the works were to be planned in such a manner that the relief would be afforded at least for six months.

The Code also mentioned the planning of supplementary works under the control of landholders or village committees through recoverable advances. These were to be the works of agricultural utility like the construction or repair of tanks and wells. There would be no distance test or legislation to compel the people to work on these works. The Code mentioned the need for the preservation of cattle and maintenance of government pasture lands. The latter were to be utilized for grazing of cattle in times of famine. Trees in forests could be cut for fodder and measures were to be undertaken for the supply of fodder.76

With regard to the food supply and storage of grain the government believed that sufficient foodgrains in the unaffected or little affected tracts would always be available in India to feed the inhabitants of the famine-stricken area, provided that the state of transport admits of such foodgrains being transported. The prohibition of exports under normal circumstances could scarcely be justified.77 But government intervention in particular localities where access was difficult, or where dealers

76. Ibid., 99-106.
combined to withhold foodgrains from sale or where arrangements were needed for the supply of foodgrains to the relief workers, was to be permitted. The Code permitted the appointment of contractors for the supply of foodgrains. But such interference was to be only temporary and treated as exception to the general rule of not interfering with trade.\textsuperscript{78}

The policy enunciated in 1861 in favour of non-intervention in private trade in foodgrains and in 1874 against prohibition of exports was thus to continue in spite of the sad experience of the past.\textsuperscript{79} The government was not prepared to give up its policy of \textit{laissez faire}. During the periods of scarcity and famine which occurred over the years under study this policy was rigidly followed. Only in the case of the inaccessible regions the government permitted the import and distribution of foodgrains by the local authorities. The policy of non-intervention with trade seemed to work well. The expanding railway system had considerably lessened the danger of famine of foodgrains in any major region of the country. But considerable pockets of inaccessible tracts still remained. Famines did worst ravages in such tracts.

The Madras Government was the first to act on the suggestion and drew up a detailed Code for the

\textsuperscript{78} Provisional Famine Code, 1883, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{79} Bhatia,B.M. : \textit{Famines in India A Study in some aspects of the Economic History of India}, Bombay, 1963, 183.
Presidency. The Government of India asked other provincial
governments in 1883 to follow the example of Madras and
frame their own Codes. But pending that, they were advised
to follow the Provisional Code. They were told not to depart
in any way from the principles laid therein. The formulat-
tion and adoption of the Famine Codes in all the provinces
were soon completed. 80

In the Central Provinces the draft Code was
circulated to the Judicial Commissioner and all the
Commissioners of the divisions, who were asked to submit
any remarks that they thought necessary. C.H.T.Crosthwaite,
the Judicial Commissioner remarked that 'the Code contained
as perfect and as humane a set of rules as could be drawn
up for administering famine works on principles advocated
by the Famine Commission of 1880! However, he favoured a
much more extended use of village agency. He suggested
that rules should provide for advances to landowners and
occupants of the land for useful works with interest.
He thought that the opinion of the majority of the Famine
Commissioners was against the system of village works, and
perhaps that was why the Code omitted to provide for them.
He also said that the facilities might be given to all
the owners of the land who wished to employ labour on
these works. Had the loans been granted on security of the
land government would have greatly benefitted from every
such work that would have been started.

80. Circular SGI to CC, 3.6.1883, F Pr, June 1883, Progs. No. 51.
J.W.Neill the Commissioner of the Nagpur division thought that it touched upon the points which must not be overlooked when the government would undertake the task of opening relief works over a large tract of the province. He also said that the Provisional Code laid down certain general principles which should readily be admitted as sound. However, he did not think that this Code, or for that matter any Code, could prove to be anything more. No number of rules and principles would ensure adequate relief to the distressed. Therefore, he was inclined to think the less a local government and the chief local officers were hampered by rules and tied down to fixed modes of procedure the better. He might be quite wrong, but, he could not help looking on the whole system of Famine Commissioners and Famine Departments as a mistake. He was afraid that 'famines would increase in frequency because a new department of famine would have to justify its raison d'etre'. He further stated that provincial Director of Agriculture would be constantly on the look out for failure of crops; and unfortunately the cry of 'wolf, wolf' would be raised often without justification. He considered the agriculture department would find it hard to obtain relief when the famine would actually be imminent. Therefore, he strongly recommended that the money which was proposed to be spent on a department whose duty was to combat famines, could be much more usefully employed in preventing famines by improving transport between one part of the province and other! 84 The criticism offered by

84. Sec to SCI,5.9.1883,F Pr, June 1883,Progs.No. 42,NA.
Neill contained some valid objection.

The Chief Commissioner stated that the Provisional Code was framed on the largest and the most comprehensive basis. But in order to judge the suitability of any fixed scheme to particular province, it would be necessary to take into consideration the probable nature and extent of famine which might occur there and of population which might be affected. He further said that in case scarcity like that of 1868-69 would occur after the formulation of the Famine Code, the provisions of the Code would be brought into operation. During the relief operation the duties were performed by the ordinary district staff under the supervision of the Commissioners of the divisions. The Chief Commissioner assumed the duties of general direction. Therefore, the Chief Commissioner was not inclined to agree with those who apparently held that the appointment of an officer either as a Famine Commissioner or a Director of Agriculture would have any effect in increasing the efficiency of famine relief. He did not share the opinion that in times of famine it was desirable to virtually supersede Commissioner of the division by the appointment of a Famine Commissioner. Thus the Chief Commissioner would prefer to undertake the extra work with his Secretary in the Central Provinces, whose experience and knowledge of the province would otherwise be lost to the administration. Moreover, a Secretary might more quickly acquire such knowledge than a Famine Commissioner. 83

82. Ibid., 5.
83. Ibid., 9.
However, the Chief Commissioner did not desire to deprecate the value of the draft Code. It appeared to him that no government could fail to derive advantage from the recorded experience of the past and its practical utility to the future. But normally two failures would not occur under precisely the same conditions. Moreover, the Chief Commissioner did not think that a fixed procedure could be laid down as an infallible guide to the future action. Some elasticity must be allowed and individual discretion must not be too rigidly restricted. He further stated that the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880 might be amplified so as to lay down somewhat wider principles than the draft Code contained; and it would always be of use as indicating the form which procedure should take and course which the earlier experience dictated. The Chief Commissioner thought to go beyond this would be to go too far. He admitted that in times of famine great responsibilities would be attached to the officers who had to combat them. But their functions and duties could not be regulated by hard and fast rules. It would be unwise to prescribe a Code of rules and to permit the officers to be satisfied if they would act upon them. 84

The draft Code was generally found to be well suited to the conditions of the Central Provinces. The only point on which the Chief Commissioner was uncertain related

84. Ibid., 10.
to the duties which the Code laid down upon 'local officers'. The Government of India was quite aware that mukaddams had then been appointed in all villages of the province. At first sight it would appear that these were the persons exactly qualified to assume the position of 'local officers' in accordance with the provisions of the Code. However, the duties which the Code imposed upon these officers were apparently beyond their capacity. Therefore, in the opinion of the Chief Commissioner it was a wise decision to distribute those duties between the mukaddams and patwaris, leaving the mukaddams only with those duties which would involve practical dealings with the people during the relief operations. This distribution of work could be done under section 16 of the draft Code. No alterations of its provisions were deemed necessary.85

The draft Code, and consequently the provincial Code, made a material departure in one matter from the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880. The Commission had recommended that the Agriculture Department should be organized in every province. It was to be made responsible for the collection of facts relating to the condition of the agricultural community, agricultural produce of the country and for the relief operations in times of famine.86 But in 1883, when the Provisional Code

85. SCC to SGI, 2 Apr. 1884, F Pr, May 1884, Progr. No. 1, NA.
was framed, this duty was entrusted to the revenue staff and the district administration. The Government of India justified this departure on two grounds. First Agriculture Department did not exist in all the provinces. Secondly the creation of Agriculture Department should not affect the then existing administrative arrangements; moreover the Agriculture Department could not be made exclusively responsible for relief operations.  

However, nine years later, in September 1891, the provincial governments were advised that, save for exceptional reasons, no rules were needed to be laid down requiring the submission by the Department of Agriculture of special reports on the menaced tracts. They were also instructed that the responsibility of keeping the government informed must rest primarily on the district and the divisional officers.  

As experience proved, this was an unwise decision. In the zamindari areas, of the province such as in the Chhatteagarh, the revenue staff envisaged in the circular of the Supreme Government did not exist and it could not be created quickly.  

In 1889, the Government of India considered it convenient to reconsider the matter on this subject. Accordingly, in the Central Provinces the duties of the patwaris were extended. They were asked to

88. Circular SCI to CC, 10.9.1891, F Pr, November 1891, Progs. No. 32, NA.  
89. Circular SCI to CC, 9.6.1883, F Pr, June 1883, Progs. No. 51.  
90. Circular SCI to CC, 19.12.1889, F Pr, February 1890, Progs. No. 8, NA.
submit agricultural reports. The revenue inspectors were required to visit every village in their circle at least once a month. In addition to the ordinary monthly reports, the revenue inspectors were required to send special reports on the occurrences of any serious damage from hail, locusts, frost and any other natural calamity. Thus the government imposed on district officers the responsibility of keeping themselves informed of the agricultural conditions of their districts, without providing any rules for making it a normal duty of the subordinate staff to submit periodical reports. It was anticipated by the senior officers of the Supreme Government that these measures were sufficient to keep the administration warned of any impending scarcity. The Deputy Commissioners were also required to submit explanations for any significant variation in the prices of foodgrains. However, the remaining part of the Code related to the technical details of relief operations. In the absence of the occurrence of famine for more than a decade there were no sufficient reasons to revise the Famine Code.

The Government of India instructed the provincial governments to send weekly information in times of famine telegraphically. In case of serious apprehension of

91. SCC to SGI, 27.1.1891, F Pr, May 1891, Progs. No. 100, NA.
92. Ibid., 6.
93. Ibid., 15.
calamity, written monthly reports containing details about the crops, economic condition of the region, prices, suspensions and remissions of the land revenue were to be sent to the Supreme Government. The state of affairs deteriorated seriously and the opening of test or regular relief works appeared a necessity, the matter was to be reported instantly in the weekly telegraphic reports. Similar information under detailed heads was also to be sent to the Secretary of State for India for information. These monthly despatches would be published in the Gazette of India and the Provincial Gazettes.

The Provisional Code did not make any reference to the utilization of the forest produce for personal consumption. Therefore, the Government of India desired the inclusion of such rules in the Famine Codes which might provide for the utilization of suitable forest products for human food when distress occurred.

The Government emphasized the necessity of maintaining and annually revising a list of suitable projects for relief work in every district. A set of rules

94. Circular SGI to CC, 23.6.1885, F Pr, June 1885, Progs. No. 1, NA.
96. Circular SGI to CC, 10.3.1892, F Pr, March 1892, Progs. No. 58, NA.
97. Circular SGI to CC, 6.7.1892, F Pr, August 1892, Progs. No. 24.
98. Circular SGI to CC, 10.9.1891, F Pr, November 1891, Progs. No. 32.
for the preparation of these lists in ordinary times and
times of famine were prepared by the Government of India
and the provincial governments were asked to lay down
precise rules for the purpose. 99

Division of workers into classes, as provided
in the draft Code resulted in a variety of practices in
the various provinces. It was partly due to the differences
in the scale of famine rations and wages payable to various
classes of labourers and partly owing to the differences
in the staple food in various parts of the country.
Therefore, the Government made some suggestions
to the provincial governments in 1893. 100 It recommended
changes in the system of relief work for inclusion in the
Famine Codes. The government considered the division of
relief work into civil and professional agency works
defective. It directed the provincial governments that all
relief works, whether civil or professional in the times
of famine would be classed as ordinary. These relief works
were to be divided into two classes, small and large, with
reference to the number of relief workers employed on
them. Those works which provided work for 1,000 workers or
more for a minimum period of three months were to be

99. Circular SGI to CC, 21.3.1892, F Pr, March 1892,
Progs. No. 43, NAG Circular SGI to CC, 10.9.1891,
F Pr, November 1891, Progs. No. 32.
100. Circular SGI to CC, 17.3.1892, F Pr, April 1892,
Progs. No. 16, NAG Circular SGI to CC, 24.8.1893,
F Pr, September 1893, Progs. No. 14, NA.
categorised as large. While others were to be called small works. 101

The Supreme Government had already announced its policy that in case of widespread and severe famine, any material departure from the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880 would lead to financial embarrassment. Therefore, it refused to entertain any modification of provisions of the Famine Codes relating to the classification of labourers, and the rates and the system of payment of their wages. The only modification accepted was the change with regard to the nature of relief works. The government refused to treat relief works as ordinary Public Works Department projects. It emphasized that the relief works were meant for the purpose of relief. Admission to them and wage rates admissible were to be governed by this single consideration. 102

With regard to the wages on the relief works, they would be fixed according to the quantity of good grains commonly consumed by the workers. 103 However, the Supreme Government argued that the scale of wages on the famine relief works could not be fixed so high as to allow a margin to the workers to support their dependents, as this would lead to irregularity and wasteful expenditure. 104

102. Circular SGI to CC, 17.3.1892, F Pr, April 1892, Progs. No. 16.
104. Circular SGI to CC, 17.3.1892, F Pr, April 1892, Progs. No. 16.
It appears that the government did not yet have a well thought out scheme of relief operations. Once the scarcity was on, and the people began to come to the relief works, it was not only desirable but essential that the provision should be made for the dependents, especially weak and infirm ones, also. Because the wages were to be paid only for the support of the workers, their helpless dependents would suffer from want. The government was not yet prepared to recognise this fact. The wages were to be fixed in accordance with the following table.

Table 4.1 scale of wages admissible to workers on relief.\(^{105}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum for adults</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Professional labourers</td>
<td>Money value of 21 chhataks or about 595 g. of grain.</td>
<td>Money value of 19 chhataks or about 539 g. of grain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Labourers but not professional</td>
<td>Money value of 19 chhataks or about 539 g. of grain.</td>
<td>Money value of 17 chhataks or about 481 g. of grain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Able-bodied but not labourers</td>
<td>Money value of 16 chhataks or about 454 g. of grain.</td>
<td>Money value of 15 chhataks or about 425 g. of grain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Weak persons</td>
<td>Money value of 14 chhataks or about 397 g. of grain.</td>
<td>Money value of 13 chhataks or about 369 g. of grain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{105}\) Circular No. 581 to C.C., 24th August 1893, F Pr., September 1893, Progs. No. 14.
Table 4.1 Contd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum for adults</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum for all classes</td>
<td>Money value of 14 chhataks or about 397 g.</td>
<td>Money value of 12 chhataks or about 340 g.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wages and allowances for the children were to be determined in consideration of their age, outturn of their work and requirements. The wages or allowances were not to be less than one-quarter or more than three-quarter of the wages allowed to the adult.

The circular mentioned the task of class A labourers would be equal to the amount of work usually performed by the able-bodied labourers on ordinary works. It would rest with the local authorities to determine the ordinary work. The task of class B would be from ten to fifteen percent, and that for class C about twenty five percent below the task expected of the class A. The task for class D would be determined by the local authorities according to the circumstances. But a reasonable amount of healthy employment must be afforded to the weak. However, at the discretion of the officer-in-charge a relief worker could be transferred from one class to another. 106

106. Ibid., 7.
Provision was also to be made for forming relief workers into gangs. Relief workers after being classified into different classes, were to be formed into gangs. A task was then to be prescribed for each gang. On the performance of it in whole or in part, each member of the gang would be entitled for wages prescribed for his class in whole or in part in proportion to the amount of the task performed by the whole gang. 

The above mentioned changes were designed to improve the administration of relief. But the basic principles of relief remained unchanged. Any suggestion for their modification was categorically rejected on 'policy and financial grounds.' It appears that Famine Codes, became an instrument for the imposition of the will of the Supreme Government on the local governments in a field in which the latter had the primary administrative responsibility as well as the special knowledge of the local conditions and needs. What had been decentralized in the field of famine administration was responsibility and not the financial power and power of policy-making. Both of which continued to be vested in the Supreme Government. This led to great difficulty when the provincial government was put to a real test.

107. Ibid., .
The Central Provinces Famine Code, 1894, contained detailed instructions and rules for the guidance of the district administration in the matter of dealing with a famine. It included the establishment of a system for continuous flow of information, bearing on the onset of scarcity or famine. It mentioned the type and nature of relief works to be undertaken as relief measures, the classification of relief workers and the scale of wages to be paid. It laid down the organization of gratuitous relief and the establishment of a system of village inspection for effective administration of gratuitous relief. Provisions were also made for the suspensions of land revenue, grant of takavi loans, opening of government forests and protection of cattle. 109

The Code consisted of fifteen chapters. The first chapter was prepratory and mentioned the duties of officers before the commencement of famine, so as to make efficient and permanent arrangement for the detection of the first signals of a famine. The second chapter dealt with duties of officers when serious scarcity was imminent. The other thirteen chapters dealt with the duties of officers and circle organisations in times of famine. They contained the details of the manner and the form in which relief was to be provided. 110

109. SCC to CC, 5.8.1895, F Pr, August 1895, Progs. No. 23, NA.
110. SCC to SCI, 3.7.1896, F Pr, July 1896, Progs. No. 9-11, NA.
The Famine Code was not a sudden development but was the result of a long evolutionary process. It represented the culmination of the process of devising a relief policy that had been initiated after the famine of 1861 in the North Western Provinces. It may be regarded as a significant step of administrative achievement with the adoption of the Code, the system and machinery for relief were put on a definitive footing, and the old vacillations that had marked the administrative actions of the provincial government during the past famines, were eliminated.111

The Famine Code, was based on the experience of earlier famines and the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880. It codified all the lessons of earlier famines and placed in the hands of the officers a document for their guidance which they could use in times of distress. It was exhaustive and touched upon all important aspects of famines. It was elastic in the sense that, though based on an all-India policy, it left room for modifications with reference to the local needs and administrative problems. However, the Code was to be brought into operation only when there were apprehensions of a famine or when famine was declared. In fact it did not touch upon the real problem, the removal of the

factors that caused famines. Very detailed provisions were made for starting relief works. But there was equal insistence on the principles of non-interference with private trade of foodgrains. It indicated government's awareness that the severity of famines was caused more because of the lack of power of resistance of the people than absolute lack of foodgrains in the country. 112

With regard to the extent of liability of provincial revenues to meet famine expenditure considerable changes were made after 1881 in the terms of the contracts with local governments. With a view to enable the provincial revenues to meet exceptional demands like famine relief charges, it was decided in December 1883 that the minimum balance of 80,000 rupees should be maintained in the Central Provinces in preparing its estimates. This minimum amount was determined with reference to the size, revenue, circumstances of the province and frequency of famine there. Under the terms of the contract, the incidence of expenditure depended upon its classification under various heads of account. Moreover, all expenditure directly in relief was wholly provincial. No request for aid from Imperial revenues to meet expenditure on occurrence of distress would be complied with until the provincial resources had been exhausted. Thus the liability of provincial revenues to meet famine expenditure

was enforced to the full extent of their capacity to bear such expenditure. 113

The relief of small proprietors and cultivators presented a different set of problems and required measures of different type from those that were needed in the case of the labouring classes. The peasant proprietors and the occupancy-tenants did not ordinarily go to relief camps to seek relief in times of scarcity because their distress was comparatively less than that of the labouring classes. They had to resort to borrowing to pull through the period of distress. As regards the poor peasant the Famine Commission of 1880 urged that it was the duty of the government to make the law more effectual for the protection of the cultivators' rights. It recommended enlargement and strengthening of the occupancy rights, alterations in the law for checking enhancement of rent. It desired reversion to the old principle of fixing rents for the term of settlement. It also recommended alterations in the definition of continuous occupations. It favoured a declaration that all tenants who had been resident and had cultivated a piece of land in the village for twelve years were entitled to occupancy-right. The Commission also expressed the view that the tenants—at—will should not be evicted without notice and prevention of abuses connected with payment of

113. Circular SGI to CC, 3.1.1894, F Pr, January 1894, Progs. No. 26, NA.
rent in kind should be strictly checked. 114

The Tenancy law in the Central Provinces was amended in 1883. It was the only province in which the recommendations of the Famine Commissions of 1880 to fix rents for the term of the settlement had been followed. In other respects, except subletting, the law had been based on the principles recommended by the Commission. 115

In the Central Provinces there were three classes of tenants, absolute-occupancy-tenants, occupancy or conditional occupancy-tenants and ordinary tenants not protected by any special provision of the law or entry on the village papers. The last were in fact tenants-at-will and could be deprived of their fields whenever the landlords so desired. 116 They constituted the majority of the agriculturists in the province. The bill moved by Ilbert proposed to add another class to the existing three, that of sub-tenants. 117 About thirty seven percent of the total number of tenants were to have occupancy rights, and about fifty eight percent of the total acreage under cultivation would be held either by absolute or by conditional occupancy tenants. 118

114. Ibid., 8.
115. Ibid., 11.
117. Ibid., 454.
118. Ibid., 452.
early as in 1873 the need for legislation was recognised for framing a suitable law for regulating the relations of the landlords and ryots. It was considered necessary that while giving the proprietary or tenancy-right to one class, the government should not ignore the status or privileges of another, especially the larger class consisting of the tenants—at—will. Still it was evident that the government policies had always ignored the interests of that class. Ilbert admitted that the object of the government should be to protect the tenant, as far as it was practicable by legislation and the only question was what form that protection should take.\(^{119}\)

Tenants—at—will had no rights in land. If they remained in occupation of a piece land for twelve years they rose to the status of occupancy—tenants.\(^{120}\) But this twelve—year rule was never actually introduced into the Central Provinces; it had never become in the province the part of the established law. Because of these defects in twelve—year rule he stated that the government had decided to abandon it, except so far as rights had already grown up under it, and to stop the further growth of occupancy—rights by lapse of time.\(^{121}\) However, the bill provided the tenant with a means of acquiring the status of the occupancy—tenant if he so

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119. Ibid., 454.
120. Ibid., 459.
121. Ibid., 461.
desired. It gave him the right of purchasing the status of the occupancy-tenant by the payment of a fixed sum equal to two-and-a-half years' rent. This proposal was in accordance with the views of the Famine Commission, and may be fairly regarded as a proper and necessary consequence of the abolition of the twelve-year rule. Indeed the landlords had considered this provision as an injury and infringement of their rights. But this provision would not do any injury to that class, because it was provided that before a tenant could claim to complete the purchase of an occupancy right, his rents may be raised to the full average ordinary standard rent. But the provision relating to the price to be paid was harsh. Poor tenants, who could never make both ends meet, could not have mustered enough resources to secure occupancy rights. Indeed such a provision would, as it actually did, help very few of the mass of tenants—at-will.

It was a good suggestion to fix the rents of all classes of tenants for a term, and give them all occupancy rights. It was the only remedy against rack-renting. But official interference was there and it was considered a long process. However, the government anticipated that the time had not come for imposing such a heavy burden on an already over-tasked administration.

122. Ibid., 464.
Obviously, the government was not prepared to go far enough against the influential class of landlords; it had not shed its elitist bias which it had acquired after the suppression of the Revolt of 1857.

The regulations acted prejudicially against the tenants without rights of occupancy. While general recognition of their rights in their holdings was not to be disturbed, so long as they were willing to pay a fair rent. The small exactions, however, were most likely to be attempted when the landlord believed that he was entitled to a small cess which had been usually levied in the neighbouring area. Such exactions would not be a part of the rent, and the tenant would naturally refuse to pay such unusual cess. But heavy cost would deter him from going to a court. No court would award him five hundred rupees as costs if he preferred to sue. The landlord would also do his utmost, both legally and illegally to prevent him from seeking redress in a court.

The man who cultivated landlord's air land was not considered a permanent tenant of that land. The tenant was practically employed as a labour by the landlord. The latter used to give the former his share in the shape of produce. The tenants were engaged from

123. Speech of Barkley; Ibid., 473.
124. Ibid., 476.
year to year but the landlord's interest was permanent. Thus the tenant had no durable interest. It was suggested that he should be able to create it by making an improvement whether the landlord was willing or not. The motion was accepted. However, the President stated that it was possible that this measure would not afford sufficient protection for the rights of ordinary tenants. If their circumstances changed, it would be the duty of the Government of India to consider what legislative arrangements should be necessary to meet their altered condition. In fact, existing provisions were found inadequate and it was only the government which could apply a better remedy. The government misunderstood that its bill would operate to strengthen the position of the cultivating tenants. As a matter of fact, the condition of the Central Provinces was different from the others and the position of tenants was complicated. The bill required several amendments. Still the government did not know how to deal with them.

The Act suffered from serious defects, which reduced its usefulness considerably. It afforded only a limited degree of protection to tenants. There were several difficulties in enforcing it. The cultivator was often ignorant of his position under the Act which

125. Speech of Quinton; Ibid., 480.
126. Ibid., 481.
127. Ibid., 521-522.
was passed for his protection. Even when he knew his rights, he found himself economically not in strong position to oppose the enhanced rents imposed by the landlord. The landlord possessed great economic and social authority over him. Moreover, the landlord overlooked the provisions of the Act while levying cesses and exacting from the tenants several kinds in payments in kind and in cash which were besides the rents. Ultimately the Act led to further friction in the landlord-tenant relations, resulting in a substantial increase in litigation.

Thus, this Act failed in achieving its objects. As a matter of fact the government could do little to meet the pressing needs of the tenants. Instead of extending occupancy rights to all resident tenants thus law tried the experiment of allowing the occupancy tenant to purchase the right. The device was not successful. 129 Throughout the period under study the problem remained unsolved.

The indebtedness of tenants was another pressing problem. They were obliged to borrow money in order to pay their and inelastic rents. However, practically it was not possible to reduce the burden of rent without bringing about an increase in their income. Moreover, a drastic reform of land revenue system was required for improving their deplorable condition.

Certain steps were taken by the government in this direction. The government passed the Land Improvement Act in 1883 and the Agriculturists' Loan Act in 1884. The former Act was beneficial in as much as it aimed to provide loans for encouraging the improvement of agricultural land. Under it loans could also be granted for the construction and repair of village tanks and the embankment of fields. Under the Agriculturists' Loan Act loans could be granted primarily for relieving distress and assisting the agriculturists in their agricultural operations. The loans under these Acts were to be given by the government at a fair rate of interest. They were to be repaid in instalments along with the rent. These Acts generally followed the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880. However, advantage on a wide scale was not taken of the provisions of the Acts. The manner in which the Acts were administered was defective. The success of the system depended on the initiative energy and the interest of a single person, Deputy Commissioner of the district. In fact even they were not always aware of the terms of the Acts.130

It appears it was not the policy of the government to finance agricultural operations in normal times. The basic economic ills of the villages were left untouched. As a result, the village moneylenders continued to play their part in financing the agriculture without serious restrictions.

These Acts did not benefit the small agriculturists. He found himself without the necessary means of subsistence and working capital even in the ordinary times. A period of scarcity would completely prostrate him. Because of the absence of any credit agency in rural areas the advances by the government were the only alternative to the moneylender's loans. But neither the government had desire nor it had sufficient resources to set itself up in competition with the moneylenders. From the very beginning it appears that it was intended that agriculturists should depend upon moneylenders for their ordinary needs, but provision should be made for the grant of loans by the government for meeting extraordinary needs both in normal times and in years of scarcity. 131 The government took hesitating steps which did not improve the situation. Of course, the government action was limited in intent as well as in practice.

Famines had taught the lesson that the principle of collecting the fixed demand of land revenue in good and bad years alike, could not be applied without causing great hardship to the small peasants in times of scarcity. At the same time, it was difficult to lay down any precise conditions under which land revenue demand could remitted or its collection would be suspended. 132 The

132. Ibid., 189.
suspensions and remissions in times of distress always remained unequal to the needs of the people.

It appears that the government had all along taken the stand that the land revenue settlement was a contract between the government and the occupant and that the assessment was fixed on the basis of income representing the average of good and bad years. Therefore, speaking strictly from the legal point of view, the loss of crops in any year did not absolve the peasant of the responsibility to pay land revenue.

The Famine Commission hit upon an ingenious formula, 'we consider' the Famine Commissioners wrote; 'that the true principle on which leniency should be shown was this: that no body should be forced in such seasons as these to borrow in order to pay the land revenue, but that all who could pay it without borrowing should do so.'

The principle was vague and could not be applied in practice without an intimate knowledge on the part of the officers of the actual economic position of the concerned tenants, or without careful enquiry into the economic circumstances of each revenue payer. Thus both the conditions were not likely to be fulfilled in actual practice in a short time when the famine was already at its worst.

This recommendation of the Commission and its acceptance by the Supreme Government failed to prevent the use of coercive measures for the collection of land revenue. The provincial government obviously in anxiety to give a satisfactory account of its work in the Revenue Department, continued to exercise coercion.

Table 4.2 shows the suspensions of land revenue in the Central Provinces (1881-82 to 1890-91)\textsuperscript{134}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average annual land revenue demand (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Average amount suspended annually (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Average amount remitted annually (in lakhs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62.76</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be observed from table 4.2 that both the suspensions and remissions were insignificant and nominal. The amount found unrealizable, after all methods available to the government for its realization had failed, was treated as 'remitted'. Remission, in this case, was, therefore, more a measure of the intolerable incidence of assessment than of the generosity of the government towards the ryots. As far the Commission's recommendations of allowing suspension when land revenue could not be paid by landholder without resort to borrowing, could not be put in practice. Financial

\textsuperscript{134} Circular SGI to CC, 3.1.1894, F Pr, January 1894, Progs. No. 26.
considerations led the provincial government, which derived its inspiration from the Supreme Government, to ignore it. As late as in 1894, there was strong evidence to show that 'rigidity of collection of land revenue' was among the 'primary causes of indebtedness'.

Some efforts were made to extend the means of transport which would be invaluable at the time of distress for importing foodgrains in the affected areas. Undoubtedly the construction of railway lines helped to reduce the effects of famine. The Famine Commission of 1880 also stated when it had compared the mortality statistics that the majority of the people died in those tracts where transport facilities failed to combat the famine. It was especially true in the Chattisgarh; it was not reached by the railways fill the 'eighites'. The extraordinary effects of the lack of proper means of transport on prices and nature of scarcity had become apparent in earlier famines. On the whole, the extension of railways was quite quick in India and the most important centres were connected together early.

In the Central Provinces, some railway lines were constructed. Still they were not enough. Some more railway lines were badly needed and attention must have been devoted towards the construction of roads and canals.

Construction of the means of artificial means of irrigation was indispensable to minimise the ill effects of drought. But the progress upto 1880 had not been good. Moreover, no definite policy with regard to irrigation had been worked out. Through the Famine Commission of 1880 recommended a definite programme of work, nothing could be done in the province. in this direction. Even till the end of the nineteenth century the irrigation policy of the government of the Central Provinces bore no relation to the requirements of the province.

The famine relief policy of the government between 1860 and 1896 remained experimental. In every famine the policy was reexamined, redeclared, reiterated, improved upon and instructions were issued accordingly. However, the systems of collection of statistics and sending information to local or Government were found to be defective. The formation and adoption of the Famine Codes was an important advance in the development of the famine policy. The Codes were still not the complete answer to the recurring problems of famines. The policy had yet to go further revision. But the Codes formed a good base to be improved upon in the light of experience gained later during the occurrence of the two of the worst famines of the period under study.

138. Ibid., 129.