CHAPTER V

PERIODS OF SCARCITY AND FAMINE 1896-1910

The period between 1896-1910 was one long spell of misfortune for the Central Provinces. Famine or scarcity conditions prevailed in one part of the province or the other during the period. Apart from local failure of crops and scarcities limited in extent and nature, three major famines were experienced during the period and two Famine Commission were appointed to enquire into the relief measures. An attempt at analysing the famines and their effects is made in this chapter.

In 1896-97 an acute famine occurred in the Central Provinces which was more severe and widespread than any other which it had experienced before. It was described by the local administration as one of the most disastrous famines of the century.1 The progress and prosperity of the province was materially affected by it. It affected the province very severely.2 The calamity in respect of its intensity and of the area and population which it affected, though fortunately not in respect of its duration, had been more severe than other famines of the century.3

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1. Later on, the famine of 1899-1900 was described as worst of the nineteenth century.
3. Circular SGI to CC, 30.12.1897, F Pr, December 1897, Progs.No. 28, NA.
Moreover, the distress caused by it appeared to be much in excess of any which had previously been experienced in the province.  

Because of the formation of Famine Code, extension of irrigation facilities and railway lines, better arrangement for providing loans and a period of comparative prosperity for the preceding two decades, the administration was better prepared to face the calamity in 1896 than in the earlier famines. But the severity of the famine was such that the government was caught unawares and it could be of a limited help.

The precipitation in 1896-97 was twelve percent above the normal. The rainfall was excessive and unseasonable. In June and July there were ample rains in most of the districts. In August too, there were heavy rains though there were sufficient breaks which permitted the sowing and weeding operations. August rains, however, damaged the paddy in certain places, it being too heavy to benefit the crop. Still there was a prospect of an abundant autumn crop. However, in the last week of August the monsoon

4. SCC to SGI, 23.10.1896, F Pr, January 1896, Progs. No. 35, NA.
5. See Table 2.1.
ceased abruptly. September was practically rainless. The showers were received in certain places, but were often practical benefit to the crops. This adversely affected the autumn crop which had started well. Owing to the failure of the rains there was a prospect of serious scarcity which needed to be dealt with effectively and speedily.

The famine affected an area of 52,915 square miles in the province having a population of 64,62,000 people.

The yield on the unirrigated lands varied from almost nothing to half the average. The agricultural production for the year was estimated at 45 percent of the normal. Because of the short crops in the preceding

8. SCC to SGI, 16.12. 1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 43.
14. Elgin to the Queen 2.1.1897, Elgin Collection, NA; SCC to SGI, 23.10.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 35; SCC to SGI, 16.12.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 43; Telegram RSJ to RSCC, 9.2.1897, F Pr, March 1897, Progs. No. 10, NA; Telegram CC to RSJ, 11.2.1897, F Pr, February 1897, Progs. No. 11, NA; SCC to SGI, 20.2.1897, F Pr, February 1897, Progs. No. 12, NA; SAC to SCC, 4.6.1897, Rev. and Agr. Dept., Minor Head No. 8, 1897, File Nos. 3-4, 11-12, NPA; RMMP, 1896-97, 107, and Holderness: Famine of 1896-97, 26.
one or two years, food stock in the province were naturally low at the time when the famine struck. 15

The depth and intensity of the famine varied in different regions. Some of the districts suffered more severely than the others. 16 In thirteen out of eighteen districts there was severe distress; relief had to be commenced from October 1896 which continued upto December 1897. 17

With regard to the area under crop, there had been, as a whole, little deterioration. 18 The area under cultivation had declined only by two percent. 19

Because of the deficient rainfall, there was very little water in the catchment areas. Consequently, the area under irrigation fell from 7.5 lakh acres in 1895-96 to 5.65 lakh acres in 1896-97. 20

The outturn of the agricultural production had fallen below the actual requirements of the province. The deficiency had, therefore, to be met from food stocks which already existed in the province. The imports from

16. Ibid., 107.
17. Ibid., 107.
19. Ibid., 230.
20. ICR, 1901-03, Pt. II, 312.
outside had not been large because almost every part of the country was suffering from scarcity. The grain was transported within the province from the less distressed districts to the more distressed districts. Great economy in the consumption had to be practised under the stress of scarcity.  

It was the 'stay-at-homes' in the remote villages, where grain was dearer and scarce, who felt the privations most. The small tenants and field labourers everywhere showed the signs of sufferings. It was evident quite early that distress was going to be severe and widespread and the people would be pinched for food.  

Prices are generally the barometer of scarcity. They rose because of the failure of the crops. They generally mark the beginning of pressure on the landless classes and the daily wage earners.  

Upto September 1896 the rise in price was gradual. But the failure of September rains led to the large exports to other parts of the country which had the apprehensions of the famine. The prices of foodgrains rose by about 20 percent in October as a result of the extensive export and steadily rose in the course of next few months.  

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25. RMIP, 1896-97, 95.
noticeable in all but a few localities. The excessively high prices ruled in the centres of trade accessible by railways. From such places foodgrains were sent to the North Western Provinces and the Punjab where scarcity was believed to be imminent. In the remote districts also which were not connected by railway lines prices were far above the average. 26 When the local shopkeepers began to take unfair advantage of the hardships of the people, the government took an effective step and empowered the Deputy Commissioners to control the situation. For instance in Chanda many village dealers were compelled to sell foodgrains at a slightly lower rate to persons who were really suffering. In accordance with the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880 the government opened cheap grain shops in certain places. 27 The government made an effort to reduce the high prices, however, the price rise still pressed heavily on the great mass of the population.

The Famine Commission of 1880 had noted that in times of very great scarcity prices of foodgrains rise to three times their ordinary amount, so that whereas in ordinary years the prices of foodgrains may be from 20 to 30 seers to a rupee, in times of great scarcity, it would rise to 8 to 10 seers to a rupee or even higher. The course

26. SCC to SCI, 23.10.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 35 and Circular SCI to CC, 15.10.1896, F Pr, December 1896, Progs. No. 74, NA.
of prices in 1896–97 was in accordance with the past experience. The cheapest grain over the great part of the province had ranged from 8 to 10 seers to a rupee or even higher during the critical period. Foodgrains were cheaper in 1880 than in 1896. Since the Famine Commission wrote their recommendations the prices of foodgrains had risen considerably. The rate of 30 seers to a rupee could be maintained only in exceptionally good years. The price-rise since 1881 was especially noticeable in the tracts which were connected by railway lines. During 1880–84 the price of rice in the Chhattisgarh division varied from 30 to 50 seers to a rupee. Later on, the prices rose to 20 seers to a rupee. These facts had to be taken into consideration before applying the relief formula of the Famine Commission. Actually the prices rose by 300 percent of the normal. The prices rose sharply, since the very beginning of the famine and in the time of the greatest distress they reached well beyond the levels recorded during former famines. Prices of foodgrains rose to 5.5 seers to a rupee in July 1897 in Mandla. 28 It was because the local stocks were exhausted and the poor people must have had very hard times.

The want suffered by the people also affected their physical condition. The trouble was aggravated by serious outbreaks of cholera and epidemics of high fever. 29

As a result, there was excessive mortality. The total number of deaths due to famine and diseases associated with it were estimated at 91,397. There is enough reason to believe that during the acute stage of famine the official returns of deaths were much below the actuals. No efforts were made by the government to maintain the register of deaths carefully and accurately.

Table 5.1 shows the total number of deaths for 1896 and 1897, as compared with the decennial mean of 1881-1890.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Decennial 1881-90 Mean number of deaths</th>
<th>Deaths in 1896</th>
<th>Deaths in 1897</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>18,487</td>
<td>31,076</td>
<td>36,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>16,939</td>
<td>33,035</td>
<td>33,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>19,107</td>
<td>33,594</td>
<td>36,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>21,498</td>
<td>38,257</td>
<td>38,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>24,683</td>
<td>44,046</td>
<td>56,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>22,198</td>
<td>38,394</td>
<td>71,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>24,041</td>
<td>35,258</td>
<td>61,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>30,221</td>
<td>50,098</td>
<td>60,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>29,988</td>
<td>47,196</td>
<td>81,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>28,914</td>
<td>46,190</td>
<td>72,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>26,351</td>
<td>35,977</td>
<td>52,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>23,563</td>
<td>35,348</td>
<td>37,158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total  2,855,990  4,684,469  6,588,822

32. FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 298.
It is very evident from above table that death rate in the famine years was significantly higher than the decennial mean. Especially the death rate in 1897 was double or more of the decennial mean in almost every month.

The famine and distress caused an increase in crime. The severity of the sufferings of the people was especially reflected in the role of crimes against property. In several cases of theft, all property other than foodgrains was left untouched. Grain robberies were sometimes organized by the whole village. In Raipur 53 percent of the offenders punished for thefts were the tenants of the villages. The most serious outbreak of lawlessness occurred in Nagpur in September 1896, owing to the rapid rise in the prices of foodgrains. The grain riots were quelled with great difficulties. However, though the prices were considerably, the total crime did not rise to any great extent. Taking into consideration the fact that the police had nearly 9,000 more persons than in the preceding year the results of their exertions were fairly satisfactory.

37. Ibid., 224.
38. Elgin to the Queen, 2.10.1896, Elgin Collection, NA, and RMPP, 1896-97, 35.
39. RMPP, 1896-97, 35.
The cumulative forces of circumstances made the situation one of great gravity. With the exhausted stocks, deficient harvests and the pressure of a load of debt which had steadily grown because of the succession of unfavourable years, the poverty among the agriculturists rose considerably. The people could face the famine with very little resources of their own. There were certain localities in which cultivation had been materially thrown back. Inferior proprietors gave up their rights to the superior proprietors and tenants gave up their rights to the landlords in return of help. In some cases, the tenants left the distressed tracts when their landlords did not afford adequate help to them. In some villages which formerly consisted of 40 or 50 tenants, their number was reduced to hardly 2 or 3. A number of villages were wholly deserted and drifted back to forest.

The distress often leads to movement of the people from more affected areas to less affected ones. It was estimated that nearly 25,000 persons left the province for Assam.

The famine also caused high mortality among the cattle. The amount of the fodder was considerably less than the usual requirements because of the inadequate rainfall.

40. SCC to SCI, 23.10.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 35.
42. Ibid., 224.
43. Ibid., 60.
The districts which suffered from the scarcity of fodder most were Betul, Hoshangabad, Nagpur and Wardha. In Nagpur and Wardha especially grazing grounds for cattle were the most scarce. The price of stalk fodder rose steadily. The jwar stalk fodder was sold at Rs. 60 per 1,000 bundles, which was double the ordinary rates. Nagpur lost about 75 percent of its cattle because of the shortage of fodder. Mortality among the cattle was also high in Betul and Hoshangabad; Scarcity of water for cattle was also felt in Betul. The poor tenants sold their cattle at nominal prices owing to the non-availability of fodder.

In the latter half of September 1896 threats of the failure of rains began to appear. On 1 October 1896 in view of grave apprehensions of scarcity all the Commissioners of the divisions were asked to report on the situation, stating the areas where distress was most likely to occur and measures which were necessary to alleviate the suffering.

In October the government considered the situation carefully and made preparations for meeting the distress in several ways prescribed by the Famine Code. When distress began in October and November test relief works were opened. With the deepening of distress the relief organization was extended. Relief was afforded for the

44. Ibid., 64.
47. SSI to SGI, 15.1.1897, F Pr, May 1897, Progs. Nos. 139-148.
most part either as wages for the work done, or gratuitously to those who were unable to work or were infirm and old. The wages of workers were paid daily or weekly at such rates as would supply him or her with sufficient food at the market rates. The provisions of the Famine Code framed in the 'eighties were invoked. In fact the Code was put to first real test in 1896–97. 48

The scheme of relief works detailed in the Famine Code also contemplated the opening of village works under the supervision of the Public Works Department in the villages where scope for such works existed. It was designed to keep the people in their villages and to provide adequate employment near their homes. The aim was that the people should not leave their villages if it can be helped. In case of the deepened distress large road construction projects were to be carried out under the supervision of the Public Works Department. 49 The scheme on which it was proposed to afford relief to the people may be described as the provision of work for those who were able to perform it and a gratuitous relief to those who were suffering from the Starvation and the helpless people who were unable to leave their homes. 50

The Government of India sanctioned a provisional grant of five lakh rupees to start relief operation in

50. SCC to SGI, 36.12.1896,F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 43.
November 1896. In the month a further grant of ten lakh rupees was sanctioned by the Government of India. From this amount, grants were to be given to agriculturists for constructing irrigation tanks and other works of improvement in certain districts, especially in the paddy region of the Chhattisgarh, such works would provide employment to the people in the neighbourhood of their homes. The advances were to be recovered later with interest. The people would be prevented from wandering about in search of bread. The villages would be held together and cultivation after the return of normalcy would be rendered secure. Meantime, it was explained to the Chief Commissioner that in times of financial pressure the Government of India could not find funds for advances with the object of land improvements, except when the sanctioned amount would give relief to persons who really required it in the affected areas. Similar instructions were sent to all the local administrations throughout the famine-stricken regions. The Chief Commissioner also considered that there was little scope for much employment on useful works of agricultural nature. He hoped that under normal conditions in the black soil tracts of the Narmada valley, Narsinghpur and Hoshangabad irrigation was useless or even harmful.

51. SCC to SGI, 23.10.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 35.
52. Holodeness: Famine of 1896-97, 36.
53. SCC to SGI, 26.41.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 38, NA.
Of all the affected tracts in the country the Central Provinces had the highest proportion on relief. It did not indicate the liberality of the government. In fact part of the province had suffered severely in the preceding two or three years. The famine conditions were not experienced in those years because the area of damage was limited to only a few districts. At the same time the senior officers anticipated that if the losses were equally distributed and foodstocks were normal, the output of agricultural production did not fall below 40 percent, the misery in the area of the scarcity would not be acute and it would not extend to large tracts of the surrounding regions. 54

However, the resources of the people were already exhausted when the famine was under way. Inspite of the fact that 7.4 percent of the affected population was afforded relief, the mortality in the province was the highest in India. On the part of the government, the officers blamed the people of the province that they were not accustomed to the idea and methods of official charity. 55

There is evidence to show that relief afforded was neither timely nor sufficient. Famine Commission of 1898 expressed its regret at the inadequacy of relief and lack of promptitude in organizing it at the earlier stages. 56

55. Ibid., 189.
56. FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 276.
Famine Commission also stated that the degree of success in saving lives and relieving distress was not all that it should or might have been.  

When the relief works were opened at some places by the government they never attracted labouring classes to any great extent and had to be closed. Later on, when they were reopened some thousands of people came on/relief the works because of the increased pressure of distress.

The number of persons relieved when the famine was the most acute in May 1897 was 5,67,000. This was the highest number of persons relieved at any given time during the famine. The number of relief workers showed the tendency to fall gradually after the rains set in 1897. It fell from 4,33,827 in September 1897 to 1,60,490 in October 1897. All relief works had been closed by the end of the October in all districts except in Balaghat, Betul, Bilaspur, Nagpur, Narsinghpur and Raipur districts. In these districts it was anticipated that a small measure of village relief might be necessary even after October.

Measures of relief also included remissions and suspensions of land revenue. In order to relieve the pressure

57. Ibid., 275.
60. SCC to SGI, 20.12.1897, P Pr, January 1898, Progs. No. 2, NA.
61. SCC to SGI, 25.1.1898, P Pr, February 1898, Progs. No. 40, NA.
on classes connected with the land the land revenue amounting to Rs. 1,39,000 was suspended. 62 Though the amount was large, it was insufficient. It was characterised by the Famine Commission of 1896 as inadequate. 63 It was because under the orders from Calcutta suspensions of land revenue were restricted to tracts in which relief was required. 64

The loans and advances for the improvement of agriculture amounting to Rs. 15,43,540 were also granted to the agriculturists. 65 It is difficult to form an idea about the extent of advantage to the agriculturists. First, because these loans were to be recovered with interest. Secondly, as was the case in announcing the suspensions of land revenue, the senior officers did not dispose of the cases promptly and carefully. As a result, the loans being great in amount, the people could not have the advantage which they would otherwise have taken.

Relief to dependents of workers was provided in cash or in the form of food. Initially, cash doles were given and later on, after March 1897, the children were fed in kitchens because they were often neglected by the parents. 66

63. FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 292.
64. Circular SGI to CC, 8.2.1897, F Pr, February 1897, Progs. No. 24, NA.
Poor-houses were also opened. However, they were not popular, because the people feared that they would be converted to Christianity. Thus the poor-houses were a refuge of the homeless, infirm, emaciated people, beggars, the destitute and the sick. Moreover, the food which was provided there was not sufficient to maintain health and strength. There were three kinds of kitchens. First, those which were attached to large relief works for feeding dependents. Secondly, some were attached to police posts for travellers and wanderers. Finally, many were meant for village relief. The kitchens proved very useful in the province.

The inmates of the poor-houses were not looked after carefully. In severe cold proper arrangements to protect them from cold were not made. When a visitor went to the Nagpur poor-house, he saw that the people were shivering. When he enquired into the matter he was told that the warm clothes would be supplied to the inmates in the due course of time. This shows the government did not take proper care and the people suffered because of the fault of the administration. It appears that the minor government functionaries were often negligent of their duties.

67. Ibid., 89-90.
68. FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 369.
70. Merevether, A Tour through the Famine Districts of India, London, 1898, 99.
The village relief was started in January 1897. Under the organization of village relief, villages were grouped into circles and lists of those eligible for relief were prepared with the help of village and other officers, who, in their turn were assisted by the non-official committees in accordance with the provisions of the Famine Code. Allowances were distributed in cash either weekly or fortnightly. The relief was often provided in the form of grain doles. Doles were provided by the municipalities.

Allowances to kotwara and other village servants were given in cash. The government servants whose salaries were less than sixteen rupees per month were given the amount which varied from one to one and half rupees, the kotwara were given two to three rupees per month. However, the gratuitous relief began quite late, it ought to have been started at the time when the distress began to be felt by the people.

For the first time government realized that the weavers greatly suffered because of the distress. The relief to weavers was provided during the famine. The system under which the relief was afforded was managed by a special committee constituted for the purpose. The committee consisted of the merchants of the town.

73. Kotwara were the village watchmen who were maintained by the village committees by contributions in the form of shares of the produce.
vice-president of the municipality of the concerned town and an officer who was deputed by the government as secretary of the committee. Under the system of relief the weavers were selected by the officer-in-charge of the relief and middlemen were asked to employ at rates fixed by the committee. The manufactured cloth was purchased from middlemen at a reasonable price fixed by the committee leaving them a fair margin. 75

In addition to this Rs. 2,188 were spent to relieve iron smelters in Jabalpur, who were asked to make tools for famine works. 76

The aboriginals suffered very severely. But the government did not take adequate and sufficient measures to relieve these people. 77

The famine was one of the most acute. The government showed greater liberality than ever before. The officers of the government made every possible effort to relieve the people. The total expenditure on relief amounted to Rs. 1,30,60,599. In addition Rs. 83,71,908 were spent on loans, advances, remissions and suspensions of land revenue; the total sum would amount to above Rs. 2,14,32,507. 78 But this expenditure was not excessive.

75. FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 503.
77. FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 482.
78. Ibid., 349.
It was justified because the distress was without a parallel in the memory of the living men. The famine was also noticeable because it affected the population which was already reduced in resources and staying power because of the short harvests of the preceding years. 79

The relief operations continued for several months and the efforts were made by the government to save as many human lives as possible. But during such large scale operations mistakes were inevitable. The Supreme Government asserted that the mistakes were seldom serious, either in their nature or in their extent and that in all cases they were promptly detected and remedied. 80 It appears that the government often tried to ignore the facts. Actually there were certain special difficulties. To overlook them was to misunderstand the position. 81

The policy of the government was open to criticism on several points. The Governor-General later admitted that the report of the Famine Commission of 1898 was critical on several points connected with the administration of relief. Moreover, there were more aspects than one in which the relief measures fell short in mitigating the sufferings of the people. 82 It shows that the relief measures were half-hearted and did not satisfy the needs of the people during the period of acute distress. The

81. Elgin to CC, 10.6.1898, Elgin Collection, NA.
82. ASI to Elgin, 11.11.1898, Elgin Collection, NA.
difficulties of the people were not reduced to any great extent.

When the famine occurred the financial position of the government was extremely poor. Moreover, the provincial finances were not such as to enable the administration to meet any considerable expenditure upon relief. Some money had already been spent in the districts of the Jabalpur division on relief works in preceding years. Land revenue collections were still considerably in arrears in several districts because of the short crops. As a result, relief measures were necessarily delayed and administration faced difficulties in opening the relief works because of the lack of money. When relief works were opened senior officers anticipated that relief works at earlier stage would attract a large number of workers. Therefore, it was assumed that the object of the earlier relief measures was not to relieve famine as such but to test the pressure of distress. The relief workers, therefore, were paid low wages. The workers went on the relief works solely because they were suffering. Consequently, their physical condition deteriorated. The Governor-General admitted that cases of emaciation were due to the imperfect working of the system. Elgin himself noticed some cases of emaciation in the poor-houses at Jabalpur.

83. SCCto SGI, 23.10.1896, F Pr, January 1897, Progs. No. 35.
84. Circular SGI to CC, 24.12.1896, F Pr, December 1896, Progs. No. 144, NA.
85. Elgin to SSI, 7.2.1897, Elgin Collection, NA.
86. Elgin to the Queen, 2.1.1897, Elgin Collection, NA.
With regard to the closing of the relief works it must have been kept in mind that while dealing with a population generally impoverished and debilitated people, living under conditions the most adverse to health, great caution was necessary. Even with the abundant harvest then in view, it was a mistake to bring relief operations to a premature close. 87 The labouring classes would not obtain immediate agricultural employment and sufficient wages if all of them would seek employment in agricultural operations all at once. It was, therefore, necessary that the relief should have been continued for a fortnight or a month longer. 88 This would make transition from relief works to their normal callings gradual and more gainful.

As regarded the food stocks when the famine came the Chief Commissioner was mistaken in estimating their amount. He reported that though the foodstocks were considerably less than the preceding year, the sufficient reserves still existed in the province and it was well supplied with grain. Moreover, he estimated that the foodstocks would be adequately supplied to the people for the next three months. 89 It appears that the calculations of the administration were based on inadequate or even incorrect data. As result, the people suffered severely

87. SCC to SGI, 15.10.1897, F Pr, November 1897, Progs. No. 10, NA.
88. SCC to SGI, 27.10.1897, F Pr, November 1897, Progs. No. 24, NA.
89. CSI to SGI, 15.1.1897, F Pr, May 1897, Progs. No. 139–148.
because of the non-availability of foodgrains. Moreover, the government supported the free trade policy during the famine. The foodgrains were neither purchased nor distributed by the government. The Famine Code contained provisions which enabled the administration to intervene and to purchase foodgrains if private trade was not coming forward. ⁹⁰ The only exception to the general policy was the importation of grain on government account in remote areas such as Mandla and Balaghat. ⁹¹

In 1897–98, the monsoon promised well and there was a prospect of excellent crop. The disappearance of famine was then a question of weeks. ⁹² The worst was over by then.

It was decided with the approval of the Secretary of State for India to appoint a small Commission to formulate the policies for the future guidance in the light of the famine experience of 1896–97. ⁹³ It submitted its report in October 1898. Unfortunately, before its report could be thoroughly digested and acted upon the country was overtaken by a famine more frightful in extent and more disastrous in its results.

⁹⁰ Elgin to S&I, 7.2.1897, Elgin Collection, NA.
⁹³ Elgin to CC, 13.9.1897, Elgin Collection, NA; Circular SGI to CC, 23.12.1897, F Pr, February 1898, Progs.No.23, NA and Circular SGI to CC, 23.12.1897, Rev. and Agr. Deptt. File No.II/23/1898, MPU.
The ill effects of the famine of 1896-97 continued in 1897-98 which was in itself a normal year. The precipitation in 1897-98 was one percent below the normal. The monsoon was weak when it commenced and it temporarily ceased in the last week of June. But the situation improved later on. All autumn crops were good. Though the paddy nurseries and other crops which were sown earlier suffered considerably, the damage was counterbalanced by the rainfall of August, September and October. The Rabi crops also fared well.

Prices of foodgrains had already reached to famine level in March 1897, the prices further rose slightly in June. It was because of the abnormal character of the monsoon in that month. For instance wheat which varied from 7 seers to 10 seers to a rupee over the great part of the province, rose to 6.25 seers to a rupee in Betul and 6.20 seers to a rupee in Damoh. The lowest price of wheat was 8.25 seers to a rupee in Jabalpur. The prices showed tendency to decrease in December when the average price of wheat varied from 9 seers to 11 seers to a rupee. The highest price of wheat was 7.25 seers to a rupee in Balaghat. In Mandla the price was as low as

94. See Table 2.1.
95. AAR, 1897-98, 16.
96. CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 16.
97. AAR, 1897-98, 16.
12 seers to a rupee. The prices again fell in March 1898 when the harvesting of the spring crop commenced. The highest price of wheat in that month was 10 seers to a rupee in Dhamoh. The lowest price was 15 seers to a rupee in Mandla and Chandwara. The prices of other foodgrains also followed similar pattern. The price of rice did not fall below 8.25 seers to a rupee in the Chhattisgarh. 99

The precipitation in 1898-99 was three percent above the normal. 100 The rainfall from July to August was heavy and continuous. The September rains were normal. From October to February no rains were received. As a result, though the autumn crops were generally fair the spring crops were much below average.

In spite of such setback the two years 1897-98 and 1898-99 had started the process of recovery. 101 Normal conditions began to be established after the abundant Kharif harvest of 1897 and a fair Rabi crop of 1898. There was also fair Kharif crop in 1898. These crops led to a fall in the prices of foodgrains. The price of wheat varied from 10.25 seers to 16 seers to a rupee in June 1898 fell in March 1899 to between 12.5 seers to 18.5 seers to a rupee. The prices of other foodgrains also followed the same course. 102 Because of the cheap food supply the

99. AsR, 1897-98, 8.
100. See Table 2.1.
102. AsR, 1898-99, 10.
purchasing power of the people in general recovered though the recovery was gradual.

But then followed a year of terrible drought and the resultant famine. The famine of 1899-1900 was one of the worst that the country had experienced. It was unprecedented in its severity and intensity. Curzon described the famine as the most severe of all the famines that had occurred during the nineteenth century. 103

The precipitation in 1899-1900 was forty-seven percent below the normal. 104 Moreover, throughout the year the pattern of rainfall was abnormal. In June the rainfall was deficient. The July rains were excellent in Sambalpur and Northern parts of the Jabalpur division. But the promise of an abundant harvest was belied soon and the distress began to be felt by the people. August went almost dry. The showers were received in the second week in September, but it was too late. 105 A prospect of severe

103. CC to Curzon, 19.12.1899, Curzon Collection, NA; Viceroy's speech in the Legislative Council, 19.10.1899, PRO. 1899-1900, Vol.II, 469, NA and SCC to SGI, 15.1.1900, FPR, February 1900, Progs. No. 48, NA.

104. See Table 2.1.

105. CC to SGI, 14.9.1899, F Pr, September 1899, Progs. No. 10, NA; Circular SCC to Crs. of the Chhattisgarh and the Nagpur divisions, 17.8.1899, F Pr, August 1899, Progs. No. 3, NA; Telegram RSI to CC, 22.8.1899, F Pr, August 1899, and Progs. No. 4, NA; Telegram RSI to SGI, 23.8.1899, F Pr, August 1899, Progs. No. 5, NA; SCC to SGI, 7.10.1899, F Pr, October 1899, Progs. No. 18, NA; Circular SGI to CC, 27.12.1899, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 10, NA; Telegram, Viceroy to SSI, 2.1.1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 61, NA; Telegram, Viceroy to SSI, 9.1.1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 62, NA; Telegram Viceroy to SSI, 13.1.1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 63, NA; Telegram Viceroy to SSI, 22.1.1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 64, NA; Telegram, Viceroy to SSI, 27.1.1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 65, NA; Circular SGI to CC, 19.12.1899, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 37, NA; SCC to SGI, 15.1.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 59, NA; AAR, 1899-1900, 17.
and widespread distress loomed large over the province.\footnote{106}

The distress affected a very extensive tract. During the height of distress the famine affected an area of 77,800 square miles in the province having a population of 92,65,000. people.\footnote{107}

With regard to the field of the year the Chief Commissioner reported to the Government of India that, 'the area and extent of the failure of the crops have been more complete than that was the case in 1896-97!'\footnote{108}

The paddy crop had almost totally failed, except in a few localities in Damoh, Mandla and in the east of Sambalpur, where the rainfall was more favourable. In parts of Bilaspur whatever was spared by the drought was eaten up by the grasshoppers. In the Wainganga valley and the Chhattisgarh paddy was saved only in the areas where irrigation facilities were available.\footnote{109} With regard to

\footnotesize{
106. SCC to SGI, 19.12.1899, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 30, NA; CC to SGI, 14.9.1899, F Pr, September 1899, Progs. No. 10; SCC to SGI, 15.2.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 59, NA; and Telegram CC to SGI, 23.8.1899, F Pr, August 1899, Progs. No. 5.


108. SCC to SGI, 13.1.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 48, and Holderness: Famine of 1899-1900, 4.

}
Rabi crops the land had been prepared for the sowing as most of it remained fallow during rainy season. Inspect of the fact that the autumn crops had totally failed, the cultivators hoped for a good Rabi crop. But the cessation of the rains in the middle of September cast a widespread gloom. In most of the districts large areas were left unsown. Even in fields that were sown seed failed to germinate or the seedlings withered after germination. As a result, the Rabi crops also a failure. 110

The failure of the rain reduced cropping to a figure which was the lowest on record. The area under crops was decreased by thirteen percent. The deterioration had been substantial in most of the districts. 111

Because of the deficient rainfall the tanks did not fill up. Consequently, area under irrigation dropped to 3.5 lakh acres whereas in the famine year of 1897-98 the area under irrigation was 5.65 lakh acres. 112

110. SCC to SGI, 23.5.1900, FRO, 1899-1900, Vol.I, 26; Circular SGI to CC, 19.12.1899, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 37; SCC to SGI, 13.1.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 48; Telegram Viceroy to SSI, 19.2.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 95, NA; Telegram Viceroy to SSI, 19.3.1900, F Pr, April 1900, Progs. No. 98, NA; SCC to SGI, 23.5.1900, F Pr, June 1900, Progs. No. 7, NA; and CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol.I, 24.


The famine conditions appeared much earlier than they did in 1896. The moneylenders and landlords restricted credit and employment and wages were curtailed. The owners hoarded their stocks of grains tightly and private charity dried up. Moreover, the harvest of maize and the early millets, which generally helped the people so greatly in September and October before the main staples ripened, were expected to be much inferior, though they did not fail altogether. The alarm was felt early and very keenly and the people had learnt by bitter earlier experience all that famine meant. They looked to the government to assist them in a way which they had never done in the famine of 1896-97. 113

Because of the none too plentiful crops in the preceding three or four years, food stocks in the province were naturally low at the time when the province came under the grip of the famine. The poor people faced great hardships and sufferings because the prices rose considerably from the very beginning of the famine.

The prices of foodgrains began to rise rapidly in September 1899. 114 They steadily rose in the course of next few months. 115 The failure of the autumn crop and

114. CC to SCI, 14. 9. 1899, F Pr, September 1899, Progs. No. 10.
115. Telegram Viceroy to SCI, 9. 1. 1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 62; Telegram Viceroy to SCI, 3. 2. 1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 92; Telegram Viceroy to SCI, 19. 3. 1900, F Pr, April 1900, Progs. No. 3; SCC to SCI, 23. 5. 1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 7; SCC to SCI, 25. 5. 1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 7, FRO, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 29; SCC to SCI, 16. 6. 1900, F Pr, June 1900 Progs. No. 4, FRO, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 33.
unthoughtful export of grains from the province affected the prices.\textsuperscript{116} The autumn harvest was gathered a month earlier than usual. It came to maturity earlier because of the abnormal weather.\textsuperscript{117} But this did not have any effect upon prices till the rice began to come in from Bengal and Burma.\textsuperscript{118} Like the autumn crop, the spring harvest was also gathered earlier than usual.\textsuperscript{119} It, too, had hardly any impact upon the prices, even where the crop was considerable.\textsuperscript{120} The price rise was the most marked in the districts which were not connected by the railway. The grains could not be supplied to remote areas in the interior due to the lack of adequate means of transport.

In June 1900 the lowest price of rice was 10.75 seers to a rupee in Bilsapur. In Betul and Chhindwara it was 8 seers and 7.5 seers to a rupee respectively.\textsuperscript{121} In the headquarters of the districts which were connected by the railway the price of rice varied from 9 seers to 10 seers to a rupee, and in the districts which were not connected by the railway the price of rice varied from 7 seers to 8 seers to a rupee.\textsuperscript{122} In August the prices ruled stationary.

\textsuperscript{116} SCC to SGI, 7.10.1899, F Pr, October 1899, Progs. No. 18, NA.
\textsuperscript{117} SCC to SGI, 15.12.1899, F Pr, March 1900, Progs. No. 77; Circular SGI to CC, 19.12.1899, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 37; SCC to SGI, 13.1.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 48.
\textsuperscript{118} CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 16.
\textsuperscript{119} SCC to SGI, 17.7.1900, F Pr, May 1900, Progs. No. 1, NA.
\textsuperscript{120} CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 16.
\textsuperscript{121} SCC to SGI, 17.7.1900, FRO, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 37.
\textsuperscript{122} SCC to SGI, 17.8.1900, FRO, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 44.
the except in Jabalpur division and Sambalpur where they actually decreased. 123

The want suffered by the people also affected their physical conditions. As a result, there was an excessive mortality from May to July 1899. Cholera raged during the period. From August to October 1899 the high incidence of fever took a heavy toll. 124 From November 1899 to October 1900 the death-rate was 54.37 per thousand as against a decennial average 34.50 per thousand. 125 The highest death-rate in 1900 was 105 per thousand in Nimar and the lowest death-rate was 81.42 per thousand in Betul. Nimar suffered severely from water famine and much of the sickness was due to this cause. But its incidence which rose from 4.98 per thousand in December 1899 to 16.42 per thousand in August 1900 was based on incorrect data. 126 Since the census of 1891 new areas in Nimar had been populated. Some immigrants had settled there in large numbers during 1900. And the census figure of 1901 showed that instead of decreasing, the population had increased by 14.37 percent. It was believed that the death-rates were reported in Nimar had been calculated on figures much below those of the actual population both resident and immigrants in 1900. 127 Thus it can be assumed that

124. Telegram Viceroy to SCI, 26.7.1900, F Pr, August 1900, Progs. No. 30, NA and SCI to SCI, 16.6.1900, F Pr, June 1900, Progs. No. 91, NA.
125. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 183.
126. Ibid., 185.
127. Ibid., 184.
the death-rates which were calculated were somewhat exaggerated. Still, actual mortality was high and was of famine proportions. In other districts immigration had no effect upon death-rates. Some officers expressed the views that the wholesale distribution of ill-cooked food at the kitchens added to the exposure involved in going to and from them, contributed to swell the death-rates. The Medical Officer in his evidence before the Famine Commission of 1901 appeared to attach some weight to this cause.

It was satisfactory that while the famine was considerably more severe than that of 1896–97 the incidence of crime was less than in 1896–97. The most noticeable feature was the abnormal increase in offences against property. This was to be expected during such a severe famine. The rise in crime was shared by every district. Crimes connected with foodgrains also increased. The total number of offences rose from 13,536 to 19,031; and offences connected with foodgrains from 4,130 to 14,123.

The distress often leads to movement of people in search of food, but surprisingly there was no considerable movement of the people from the Central Provinces to

129. FCR, 1901, Pt. 1284.
other neighbouring areas. It appears that people were able to seek employment in the adjacent areas. Moreover, the famine was so widespread that one place was as bad as another and there was little point in going from place to place.

One unhappy feature distinguished the famine of 1899-1900 from other famines. It was the destruction of cattle. It was estimated that nearly twenty lakhs cattle, local and immigrant combined died, in the Central Provinces and neighbouring Princely states. The mortality was not confined to useless cattle; even valuable bullocks and breeding cattle perished in thousands. This was a great loss for the agriculturists. Even with liberal assistance of the government, it must have taken many years to recover from the loss.

Strangely the Supreme Government was under the impression that loss of cattle was not severe. No adequate measures for the protection of cattle were adopted. Because of this fault of the government agriculturists had experienced great difficulties in resuming their agricultural operations after the return of normalcy. Cattle were the backbone of the Indian agriculture.

133. FCR, 1901, Pt.I, 205.
134. Honorary Joint Secretary Indian Famine Union to Under Secretary of State for India, 10.1.1902, F Pr, February 1902, Progs. No. 6, NA.
135. SGI to CC, 4.5.1900, F Pr, May 1900, Progs. No. 94, NA; SGI to SCC, 9.1.1900, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 18, NA and Circular SCC to All Commissioners of the Divisions, 13.9.1899, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 19, NA.
The circumstances of the famine of 1899-1900 were in many ways peculiar. The Government of India wrote, 'since famine began to be administered according to a methodical system, there has been no instance of a province being severely affected by drought in so short a interval as three years! Moreover, there is no instance of such widespread mortality of cattle as in famine of 1899-1900 has occurred. 136

The failure of monsoon and consequent misery began to be apprehended in the middle of July 1899, but at first anxiety was confined to the rice districts and Wardha. As anxiety deepened towards the end of July, detailed weekly notes on the conditions of the crops were called for from all districts; they were scrutinized and circulated for general information till the declaration of the outset of the famine. The Chief Commissioner convened a conference of the officers of the Nagpur division at Nagpur on 10 August 1899 and that of the officers of the Chhattisgarh division at Raipur on 11 August 1899 respectively. The situation in each district was minutely examined. Subsequently orders were issued about the steps to be taken to combat distress. In the meantime the situation improved marginally by rainfall. But the period which followed was one of alternating hopes and fears. 137

136. Circular SGI to CC, 27.12.1899, F Pr, January 1900, Progs. No. 10, NA.
137. CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol.I, 70.
With regard to the policy to be adopted the Government of India declared that, 'the State did not undertake to secure the people from suffering in the event of failure of crops but only to protect them from starvation. The conditions of relief should impair as little as possible the traditional and family obligations of the social system of the country.'\textsuperscript{138}

The Provincial Famine Code had been revised in 1896; and the experience of the famine of 1896–97 had demonstrated the need of some important modifications. But the report of the Famine Commission\textsuperscript{1} was submitted in 1898 and there had been no time to formally revise the Famine Code in the light of the local experience and the Famine Commission's recommendations, before the famine struck. In September 1899 a Committee of experienced officers submitted a report to the Government of India with regard to the amendment of the Famine Code. Before these recommendations could be evaluated by the Government, the province was in the grip of the fresh famine. There was no comprehensively updated Code to guide the officers in the conduct of famine relief. Instructions were issued by a series of circular letters containing precisely the findings of the Famine Commission of 1898, and the details of experience gained in the famine of 1896–97.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{138} Circular SCI to CC, 27.12.1899, F Pr, January 1900, Progs, No. 10.
\textsuperscript{139} CPRR, 1899–1900, Vol. I, 71.
The basis of relief administration was defined in these terms: 'the relief would be given to all who would perform a certain task; relief would also be given to those persons who were unable to work and would starve or suffer serious privations if not relieved.'

About the persons capable of labour, the government declared that, there were two principles on which emphasis was laid down. First, the terms of the task on which employment was offered, secondly that the wages would not be paid more than what would be sufficient for the subsistence of the workers.

Owing to great reduction in agricultural operations during July and August 1899, there were many able-bodied persons unable to support themselves for the lack of employment. For this class relief works were of course the most suitable from of assistance but before these were opened doles had to be given for sometime to some of this class also to tide over immediate difficulties.

The underlying principle of the famine relief policy was that large Public Works projects, as recommended by the Famine Commission of 1880 should form the backbone of the relief operations. However, small works

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140. Ibid., 79.
142. CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 82.
would also be carried out under certain circumstances.
As regards the wages on relief works, the local
governments were authorized to reconsider the wage scale
when it was necessary to do so. 143

The number of workers who came on relief works
at the early stages of famine was so large and unprecedented that it surpassed all previous estimates and
calculations of the proportion of affected population
likely to seek relief in severe famine. 144 Famine
that Commission of 1880 had estimated/in a severe distress the
proportion of the total population likely to be on relief
in the worst period would not exceed 15 percent and for
the whole period would be 7 to 8 percent. In the famine
of 1896-97 these standards were on the whole not exceeded.
The Supreme Government was alarmed at the large number of
relief workers. The government considered that the large
number of relief workers was noticeable because the aid
was freely given and tests and precautions were not
sufficiently observed. Provincial government was advised
to practise strict economy and to consider whether the
principles or practise of famine relief have in any
particular or particulars, been unduly relaxed and whether
the extreme readiness which the people have shown to
throw themselves upon the assistance of the government and

143. Circular SGI to CC, 27.12.1899, F Pr, January 1900,
Progs. No. 10.
144. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 16.
to avail themselves upon every form of relief did not require a corresponding strictness on the part of those who were held responsible for the duty of administering relief.\textsuperscript{145}

Table 5.2 shows the extent of relief afforded during the famine of 1899-1900.\textsuperscript{146}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relieved as workers in\textsuperscript{a} (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Relieved by gratuitous relief (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Total (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Percentage of persons grateuiously relieved to total number of persons relieved.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25.30</td>
<td>30.28</td>
<td>55.58</td>
<td>54.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be observed from table 5.2 that relief was more generous than in 1896-97. The percentage of gratuitously relieved in 1896-97 was 44 percent whereas in 1899-1900 it was worked out at 54.48 percent.\textsuperscript{147} On the part of the local government it was stated that the tragedy of 1896-97 had taught a lesson both to the government and the people of the province. The people were too willing to receive help and government was ready to relieve the people. In February 1900 the Chief Commissioner wrote that, the one disadvantage of the long

\textsuperscript{145} Circular SGX to CC, 27, 12. 1899, F Pr, January 1900, Prgs. No. 10. 1901

\textsuperscript{146} CPRR, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 242 and FCR, Pt. I, 125.

\textsuperscript{147} FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 21.
interval which usually intervened between the two famines in the same province, was that the lessons of the past were apt to be forgotten. Another generation would have arisen. The people would not know where to look for relief and would be shy in receiving assistance from the government. Moreover, the officers who administered relief operations in 1896–97 were not fully prepared. In the famine of 1899–1900 this disadvantage had disappeared.\(^{148}\)

There is evidence that show that the large number of persons seeking relief was not the result of liberal policy of the government. In fact the government reduced the wages considerably, but the number of relief workers did not decrease in response. The Famine Commission of 1898 had suggested that the 'full wages' for an adult worker should be fixed at 20 ehhataks\(^{149}\) or 1.17 Kg. of grain\(^{150}\). But in the early period of the famine the undue liberality of the wage scale attracted the attention of the Chief Commissioner. As a result of his enquiries, he came to the conclusion that 18 ehhataks or 1.05 Kg. were sufficient.\(^{151}\) However, in the whole period of the famine the 'full wages' averaged 15.5 ehhataks or .90 Kg. which

\(^{148}\) SCC to SCI, 3.2.1900, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 75, NA.
\(^{149}\) The value of ehhatak in gram was nearly 58.31 g.
\(^{150}\) FCR, 1898, Pt. I, 452.
\(^{151}\) Circular SCC to All Commissioners of Divisions, 14.12.1899, F Pr, February 1900, Progs. No. 76, NA.
was 82.6 percent of the 'full wages' approved by the Chief Commissioner and only 77.5 percent of the wages recommended by the Famine Commission of 1898.  

Measures of relief also included the remissions and suspensions of land revenue. The land revenue amounting to Rs. 60,25,000 was suspended. But at the time of announcement of the amount suspended to the agriculturists at several places it was found that more rents had already been collected than were compatible with the full concessions sanctioned. The suspensions were liberal, but were altogether insufficient because of the failure of both Kharif and Rabi crops. The delay in the announcement of suspensions also caused hardships. The object of suspensions of land revenue was to assist the cultivators, but under the Tenancy Law of the Central Provinces it could only be reached through the landowners. Very often the landowners were not interested in the well-being of their tenants and they might have collected the due rents from tenants inspite of the remissions. Famine Commission of 1901 regretted that the policy was liberal

155. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 238.
but there was no general declaration for suspensions and agriculturists did not know the amount actually suspended till late in the year. It further stated that much misunderstanding and much harassment and loss to the tenants would have been avoided had the government taken a definite decision about the amount of suspension at an early date. It appears that distress was much too acute and the relief afforded by suspensions and remissions of land revenue was only marginal.

The loans and advances for the improvement of agriculture amounting to ₹. 38,15,886 were granted to agriculturists. It appears that the sums loaned were small. In the opinion of the Chief Commissioner the landowning classes were not in a position to take loans for private works; private works and non-departmental projects could not have been carried on side by side. Famine Commission of 1901 did not accept the view, it stated that in the earlier stages of the famine, when the usefulness of private works was the greatest the non-departmental projects had not been completed. Moreover, the loans were not given in 1899 to purchase seed for the Rabi crops, in the belief that if sown, it would not germinate.

Undoubtedly these advances did immense good to the

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156. Ibid., 242.
157. Ibid., 249.
158. Circular SGI to CC, 21.5.1900, F Pr, June 1900, Progs, No. 103, NA; SCI to SSI, 14.6.1900, F Pr, June 1900, Progs, No. 116, NA; CPPR, 1899-1900, Vol. 1, 265; FCR, 1901, Pt. 1, 250 and Holderness: Famine of 1899-1900, 2.
159. FCR, 1901, Pt. 1, 251.
distressed people. But a considerable proportion of the money advanced was not agriculturally utilized because of its untimely distribution. Though these advances were not misused or misappropriated to any large extent. The Chief Commissioner said, 'the proportion wasted was very small.'

Gratuitous relief was also provided to certain categories of people affected by the famine. Relief to dependents of workers was provided in cash or in the form of food. Poor-houses were opened. However, they were needed only in a few places. Poor-houses were only to be opened in large towns if the congregation of beggars, the indigent, or the wanderers necessitated this step. But from the first it was contemplated that efficient village relief organization would prevent an influx of wanderers in towns and would render poor-houses unnecessary. This belief was fully justified by the developments which later took place.

Village relief had been a special feature of the relief measures. Village relief was organized on the basis of the Famine Code. Doles were mostly given in cash, though the Famine Commission of 1898 had recommended

160. Ibid., 256.
163. Ibid., 82.
distribution of grain doles.\(^\text{165}\) Village works were to be a form of relief under two circumstances. First, it was to afford a stop-gap arrangement while large works were being organized and to this extent they fulfilled the functions of test works. Secondly, village relief was to take the place of Public Works Department projects in tracts where large projects were impossible or were more than fifteen to twenty miles away from the distressed area.\(^\text{166}\) With regard to the utility of these works it was thought that the village works secured adequate tasking of workers.\(^\text{167}\)

Kitchens were opened in villages. They passed through three stages. First, in the early period kitchen relief fulfilled test or subsidiary functions of gauging the extent of distress. Secondly, kitchen relief was substituted as far as possible for village cash doles and, finally, kitchen relief began to supersede work relief and attained unprecedented dimensions.\(^\text{168}\) In the less acutely distressed regions such as the Jabalpur division, Narsinghpur and Nagpur, kitchens at selected centres were opened in the early phase of the famine. They served as test of distress and served this purpose well. But in those areas which were severely distressed they existed as means of relieving distress. As the famine intensified the number of kitchens

\(^{165}\) CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol.I, 93.
\(^{166}\) Ibid., 82.
\(^{167}\) Holderness: Famine of 1899-1900, 15th FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 83.
were also increased and efforts were made to transfer to them even those persons who were being given doles in cash. This was done in Raipur, Bhandara and Belaghat districts. In Sambalpur the gratuitous relief was started late. There, too, the experience suggested more reliance on kitchens to the exclusion of cash doles. It is interesting to note that in the opinion of the Famine Commission of 1901, 'the word kitchen appeared to have been adopted into the vernacular; and certainly in no previous famine were kitchens employed in anything like the same degree. They rose into favour as imposing a test of distress and, when in the Central Provinces, the test completely failed, they still remained in favour, or at least in prominence, by stress of the inexorable law of famine administration that a fundamental error, once made, could never be retrived.' There were two classes of kitchens—those on the works, and those in the villages, but the management in both cases was essentially the same. As a means of affording relief to dependents, and when not allowed to become in effect poor-houses, kitchens on the works, where they were generally in the charge of a special civil officer, were, the Commission thought, attended with a fair measure of success. But when they supplanted or collided with gratuitous relief and when they generated into ill-regulated poor-houses,

169. Ibid., 226.
they departed from their purpose with unfortunate results. 170

Relief to inferior village servants such as kotwas was also required. They were put on village relief or fed in the kitchens. In some districts families of kotwas were relieved; in others the kotwas themselves, and in still others both were put on relief. But this step was not taken in the case of kotwas who could have collected a part of their share of produce or who were otherwise well off. 171 It was interesting to note that for many kotwas the famine actually proved to be a blessing. The abnormal mortality of the cattle then in several districts increased their income by the sale of hides. However, they did not get all the hides in every district.

Patwas also needed special allowances. The whole of the salaries of these employees were paid in Mandla and the Chhattisgarh. In Bilaspur and Raipur a regular additional allowance was given to those who were low paid. No allowances were necessary in Mandla and Sambalpur. In the remaining parts of the province, where Patwas received the part of their salaries in cash from the Treasury and part in local customary dues. Sufficient

170. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 139.
amount was given to raise their Treasury receipts to
the level of 100 rupees or 72 rupees per annum depending
on partial or total realizability of their local
custodial dues. Those who received cash salaries of this
amount, or who could be expected to collect a substantial
share of their local customary dues were given no extra
allowance. The total sum given to 4,197 patwaris amounted
to Rs. 58,609. 172

With regard to relief to weavers, the system
of 1896–97 was adopted. The Central Provinces Famine
Report stated that the relief to weavers was anticipated
to involve heavy initial expenditure but it proved to
be the least expensive in the end. 173

Relief was also provided to basket-makers. They
were supplied with material free from the forests and
bamboo mates and screens required for the relief camps
and shelters were purchased from them. 174

During the famine of 1896–97 the effective relief
to aboriginals was regarded as an insoluble problem. They
suffered and died in their forests. In the famine of 1899–
1900 the problem was solved by the methods indicated by

172. Ibid., 247.
173. Ibid., 82.
174. Ibid., 80.
the Famine Commission of 1898. Congenial works were undertaken in the forests and extensive relief was afforded to these people. Consequently, they could face the famine with no exceptional mortality. 175

The total expenditure on famine was estimated to be Rs. 4,37,06,715 including remissions and suspensions of land revenue. 176 The Famine Commission of 1901 remarked that this expenditure far exceeded that incurred in any preceding famine. It did not for a moment advocate a departure from the humane policy of famine relief laid down by the Government of India; but experience had shown that the object in view could be attained at a more moderate cost and with less demoralization, had prudence and foresight been duly exercised and had the means been properly adjusted to ends. 177 But in the matter of saving lives and relieving distress the results achieved were not satisfactory. A famine which involved a heavy loss of life, inspite of a heavy expenditure of Rs. 4,37,06,715 on relief could hardly be described as having been managed successfully. The conclusion is not materially modified even when allowance is made for the fact that the famine was accompanied by certain special circumstances which increased the incidence of mortality. These circumstances

177. FCR, 1901, Pt. I, 22.
were, the extreme and unusual rigour of the winter of 1899–1900. In some regions, the acute shortage of water led to its pollution. Finally, the virulent epidemic of malaria in the autumn of 1900, affected the rich as well as the poor. 178

The quantum of relief afforded by the government was not sufficient. To a certain extent it was the result of the fact that the report of the Famine Commission of 1898 was still under consideration, when the famine broke out. Though there were some defects in the relief administration, the famine marked some improvement over the earlier famines. For example, the relief to the aboriginal tribes was more successful in 1899–1900 than in the famine of 1896–97. The expenditure also exceeded that incurred on the preceding famines. 179 It resulted in more lives being saved. The mortality in 1899–1900 was less than in 1896–97 though the conditions were more acute in the former. 180

In 1900–1901 the monsoon promised well and there was a prospect of abundant crops. The prices showed the tendency to return to their normal level only in September 1900 when a fair autumn harvest was gathered.

178. Ibid., 182.
180. Ibid., 473.
In the Chhattisgarh the price of rice came down by two to three seers. In the Nagpur division the price fluctuated slightly. The effect of the autumn harvest was the most marked in the Jabalpur and Narmada divisions. For instance, in Chhindwara the price of rice and wheat had decreased from 7.25 seers and 6.75 seers to 12.25 seers and 8.75 seers to a rupee respectively.181

The distress was a passing away. October 1900 was a month of general curtailment of relief. Relief works were closed, kitchens were reduced in number and the persons fed at kitchens decreased considerably. By the end of the month relief had been almost totally closed in Damoh, Mandla, Seoni, Narsinghpur, Nimar and Chhindwara districts. The distress was slowly disappearing in paddy producing areas, Sagar and Wardha which depended almost entirely upon the jwar crop. In these regions relief continued up to 25 November 1900.182

It was decided with the approval of the Secretary of State of India to appoint a Commission to make broad based study of the recurrence of famines and formulation of a realistic and effective policy for their prevention. They were directed to formulate the policies for future guidance in the light of the experience of 1899–1900. 183

182. SCC to SGI, 19.11.1900, F Pr, May 1900, Progs. No.4.
183. SGI to SSI, 25.12.1900, F Pr, December 1900, Progs. No. 59, NA.
The early years of the twentieth century were marked by recovery among the agricultural classes though it was gradual. There were two fair seasons after the famine of 1899-1900. Trade and commerce also had a marked recovery during the period. 184

But unfavourable conditions returned after two years. The precipitation in 1902-03 was twenty-two percent below the normal. 185 The rainfall was unseasonable. In June and July there were ample rains in most of the districts. 186 In August too, showers were received in certain places. 187 However, in the first week of September the monsoon ceased abruptly. 188 The cessation of the rains adversely affected both Kharif and Rabi crops. 189 Because of the sudden cessation of the rains, situation became grave suddenly. The Officiating Chief Commissioner thought it was necessary to be prepared at once with the works for employing people needing relief. Consequently, arrangements were made to meet the distress on a famine scale. 190

185. See Table 2, 1.
186. RMFP, 1902-03, 102.
187. AAR, 1902-03, 22, 110.
188. SCC to SCI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 6, NA.
189. SCC to SCI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2, NA.
190. SCC to SCI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8.
The scarcity affected an area of 14,344 square miles in the province having a population of 25,29,000 people. 191 The agricultural production for 1902-03 was estimated at 82 percent of the normal. 192

With regard to the area under cultivation, there had been, as a whole, little deterioration. In the paddy regions of the Wainganga valley and the Chhattisgarh the area under Kharif crops decreased by eight percent and that of Rabi crop by four percent. 193

Owing to the short rainfall the tanks did not fill up. Consequently, the area under irrigation fell from 7.4 lakh acres in 1901-02 to 5.48 lakh acres in 1902-03. 194

The distress was felt keenly by the poor people. The employers anticipating poor outturn, commenced to dismiss labourers and had restricted credit. 195 The agriculturists had small reserves owing to the earlier unfavourable seasons. 196

It was interesting to note that the failure of rains was not accompanied by a significant price rise.

191 SCC to SCI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
192 SCC to SCI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8; RMMF, 1902-03, 102 and AAR, 1902-03, 112-113.
193 RMMF, 1902-03, 102.
194 SCC to SCI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8; RMMF, 1902-03, 102 and AAR, 1902-03, 157.
195 SCC to SCI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8 and SCC to SCI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
196 SCC to SCI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8.
The prices of foodgrains rose slightly. Throughout the period, owing to good harvest in some parts of the province, prices of foodgrains remained low. The highest price of rice was 12.5 seers to a rupee in Bhandara and 12 seers to a rupee in Balaghat. The lowest price of rice was 14 seers to a rupee in Raipur and Bhandara.

The government decided to open relief works to meet the calamity. The relief measures consisted of various works. The distress was earlier mitigated by ordering the collection of metal for Balaghat and Baihar road at a cost of two lakh rupees. There were two other roads, Bhatapara-Loan road and Sehoramaghouli-Singrampur road, which were taken up as famine works.

It was also reported to the government of India that only way in which adequate relief could be provided to the people suffering from distress was by the projected railway line from Gondia to Chanda. The construction of embankment on this line would provide the required employment and the expenditure would be productive in the long run. The government sanctioned the proposal.

197. SCC to SGI, 25.4.1903, F Pr, May 1903, Progs. No. 7, NA &
    SCC to SGI, 25.5.1903, F Pr, June 1903, Progs. No. 1, NA.
198. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
199. AAR, 1902-03, 153.
200. SCC to SGI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8.
201. TelegramRSI to CC, 26.11.1902, F Pr, January 1903,
    Progs. No. 6.
The number of persons relieved, when the distress was the most acute in April 1903, was 44,600. This was the highest number of persons relieved during the distress. 202

Measures of relief also included the remissions and suspensions of land revenue. Land revenue amounting to Rs. 34,000 was suspended. The loans and advances for the improvement of agriculture amounting to Rs. 16,00,000 were also granted to agriculturists. 203

It was proposed to alleviate the sufferings of the poor by allowing them to gather forest produce for personal consumption. The government sanctioned the proposal. A further concession was made to the agriculturists by permitting them to graze their cattle free of charge in all the government forests. 204 The total expenditure on relief amounted to Rs. 31,64,000 including remissions and suspensions of land revenue. 205 It was satisfactory to note that prompt suspensions and remissions of a large amount of land revenue undoubtedly saved the much larger expenditure on direct measures of relief, which would otherwise have been necessary. The low prices of foodgrains due to good harvests in some

202. SCC to SGI, 23.5.1903, F Pr, June 1903, Progs. No. 1 & 6
203. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
204. SCC to SGI, 17.10.1902, F Pr, October 1902, Progs. No. 8.
205. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
districts, and the excellent cotton crop, which caused an extraordinary demand for labour in the cotton-growing regions, combined to confine a state of famine to a comparatively small tract. 206

The want suffered by the people did not affect their physical conditions much. The total number of deaths rose slightly from 2,27,853 in 1901–02 to 2,52,273 in 1902–03. 207 The average monthly death-rate in the worst scarcity hit district Raipur during the height of distress from December 1902 to September 1903 was 1.95 per thousand as against the normal death-rate of 1.81 per thousand. 208

The distress did not cause any spurt in crime. It shows that the distress was not very acute. 209

The prolonged drought very often forces thousands of labourers to migrate to neighbouring areas in search of employment. It was estimated that 6,709 immigrants and 8,580 dependents were relieved in the Chhattisgarh, where the distress was the worst and certain relief works had been opened. It was interesting to note that practically whole labouring population of

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206. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, Progs. No. 2.
207. AAR, 1902-03, 42.
208. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, Progs. No. 2.
Chanda emigrated for a time to Berar, from where the people returned with money in their pockets in April 1903. An excellent mahua crop in Berar had proved a boon to them. 210

Despite of the fact that there was some scarcity of water in the summer of 1903, there was no general want of fodder. Moreover, no abnormal mortality among the cattle had occurred. 211

In 1903-04 ample rains fell throughout the province. There was an excellent paddy crop. Agricultural prospects were good. The prices had begun to fall. 212 The distress began to ease as soon as the monsoon of 1903 started. The number of relief workers showed the tendency to fall gradually. It fell from 11,800 in August 1903 to 8,800 in September 1903. All relief works were closed by the end of the September in all districts except in Balaghat and Bhandara districts. In these districts it was anticipated that a small measure of continued relief might be necessary. 213

In the following year the precipitation was twenty two percent below the normal. 214 Fortunately, the

210. AAR, 1902-03, 185 and SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
211. SCC to SGI, 10.5.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2.
212. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, April 1904, Progs. No. 2;
213. SCC to SGI, 10.3.1904, F Pr, October 1903, Progs. No. 1, NA and SCC to SGI, 2.10.1903, F Pr, October 1903, Progs. No. 7.
214. See Table 2.1.
distribution of the rainfall was favourable for the crops. There was a poor yield of paddy in the Wainganga region and in the northern districts. The Rabi crop was seriously damaged by frost also. 215

In 1905–06 again the precipitation was eleven percent below the normal. 216 The rainfall was adequately distributed. The harvests were fairly good but paddy crop suffered in Bilaspur. The government, considering the situation serious enough, opened ordinary relief works there, but they failed to attract labourers. Obviously distress was not acute. 217

The precipitation in 1907–08 was twentytwo percent below the normal. 218 The monsoon arrived in the third week of June or a week later than usual. 219 The rainfall in June was deficient in the province by about thirteen percent on an average. 220 It was particularly low in northern districts and Narmada valley. 221 However, Kharif sowing was completed timely at few places. The rainfall was irregular when July commenced, but in the end of the month and upto the middle of August it was heavy and well distributed. The September

216. See Table 2.1.
218. See Table 2.1.
220. Telegram Circular SGI to CC, 24.7.1907, F Pr, August 1907, Progs. No. 32, NA.
221. Telegram Circular SGI to CC, 21.9.1907, F Pr, October 1907, Progs. No. 17, NA.
was rainless and the monsoon receded.  

The failure of the rainfall was the most serious in the northern half of the province. The affected area may be put roughly at 6,600 square miles and the affected population at 4,70,000 peoples.  

There were other tracts where the failure of the *Kharif* crop had not been so serious. The area comprising such tracts was about 16,000 square miles and the population about 13,00,000 persons. In the wheat areas of the Jabalpur and Narmada divisions, the cotton tract of Nimar and practically the whole of the Nagpur and Chhattisgarh divisions, there was little cause for apprehension. These tracts represented nearly four-fifths of the total area of the province and included more than four-fifths of the population.  

Owing to unfavourable conditions at sowing time the area under *Kharif* crops was thirty percent of the normal in the northern part of the province. It was between thirty to forty-five percent in Mandla, Balaghat, Sagar and Satpura districts. In the rest of the province it was sixty percent of the normal. The area under Rabi crop also decreased by 22,77,000 acres

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222. *RMP*, 1907-08, 39.
224. Ibid., 10.
225. Ibid., 11.
226. *RMP*, 1907-08, 39.
or by twenty eight percent. The shrinkage being
especially marked in the Chhattisgarh where the lack
of moisture in soil rendered it impossible to sow the
usual crop of linseed and pulses. 227 Though the area
under cultivation decreased the outturn was fair or
even better than expected, especially in those districts
where the distress was the most anticipated. Gram did
almost well. However, the linseed suffered the most. 228

Since 1903-04, when harvest all over the
northern India reduced prices of foodgrains to a level
somewhat below that of the years immediately before
the famine of 1896-97, the tendency of prices, owing
to poor harvests in the United Provinces and Oudh and
Bengal had been generally upwards. In September 1907
even before any extensive failure could be anticipated
in the Central Provinces, the reports of impending
scarcity in the United Provinces and Oudh began to
have their effect on the market and in September 1907
the prices rose considerably. 229 The year 1907-08
followed the years of fair harvests. 230 The prices of
foodgrains were low in the province. 231 So far as the
agricultural classes were concerned they could dispose

227. AAR, 1907-08, 24-25 and SCC to SGI, 15.2.1908, F Pr,
March 1908, Progs. No. 17, NA.
228. SCC to SGI, 15.2.1908, F Pr, March 1908, Progs. No. 17.
229. CPPR, 1907-08, Vol. I, 18; SCC to SGI, 29.10.1907, F Pr,
December 1907, Progs. No. 50, NA; SCC to SGI, 16.1.1908,
F Pr, January 1908, Progs. No. 39, NA and RMMP, 1907-08,
125, 128.
230. RMMP, 1907-08, 125.
231. Ibid., 128.
of their produce at higher prices. When the province came under the grip of famine in 1907 the prices rose to a higher level than that of 1896 and the position would had been equally alarming if the circumstances in 1907 had been similar. In the northern district and the Chhattisgarh the price rise was not so remarkable, but it was great everywhere and in Nagpur region it was even higher.

A preliminary report was submitted to the Government of India on 29 October 1907, in which the situation was reviewed and prospects were assessed. On 27 November, another report was submitted in which the Chief Commissioner stated that in some respects owing to the continued failure of rains, the situation had become worse. There were no signs of distress in the areas which were not so severely affected. The people had not yet started emigrating in search of employment and the petty crime had not risen significantly. It was considered that the district officers had somewhat overestimated the Kharif failure.

232. SCC to SGI, 24.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 22, NA and RMP, 1907-08, 125.
233. SCC to SGI, 16.1.1908, F Pr, January 1908, Progs. No. 39, NA; AAR, 1907-08, 115 and SCC to SGI, 9.3.1909, F Pr, July 1909, Progs. No. 8, NA.
234. SCC to SGI, 24.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 22.
235. CPFR, 1907-08, Vol. I, 28 and Telegram Circular SGI to CC, 11.10.1907, F Pr, Bengal 1907, Progs. No. 22, NA.
In several respects the condition of the province in 1907 was better than in 1896. The population, also, which decreased considerably at the census of 1901 was obviously less than in 1896. Therefore, while framing the policy to meet the distress there were three main objectives. First, it was planned to employ fewer people than in 1896; Secondly, the proportion of commercial to agricultural employment was to be more than in 1896 because it was anticipated that the reduction of agricultural employment in the occurrence of a crop failure must be less than in 1896; and finally, since the agricultural employer was much better off than in 1896, the fall even in agricultural employment would be less.

Greater reliance was placed on extension of ordinary contract works, supplemented, whenever necessary, by gratuitous relief and village works, managed in accordance with the provisions of the Famine Code. Fortunately, it was never necessary to convert a contract work into a famine-work, and the less efficient labourers were fully provided for on village works. However, gratuitous relief was given to the dependents, where the wage earners could not support them. Mostly the

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236. SCC to SGI, 29.10.1907, F Pr, December 1907, Progs. No. 50, NA.
237. SCC to SGI, 15.11.1907, F Pr, December 1907, Progs. No. 55, NA.
supervision of the works was carried on by Ameni and not on the malguzari system. It was entrusted to salaried manayed and not to volunteer landlords or other non-officials. 239

In connection with the policy of relying on ordinary contract work; mention may be made of the construction of Itarsi-Nagpur railway line. 240 This line would pass through those portions of Betul and Hoshangabad which were suffering from its distress. It was, therefore, asserted that any expenditure on the project would be useful. 241 Actually the work on the railway line began in June 1908, and throughout the rainy season employment was afforded to large number of labourers seeking relief. In August 9,000 workers were employed on the construction of the railway line. 242

Construction of certain roads was taken up under the relief measures. In Damoh district Abhana-Tejgarh and Batiagarh-Bawana roads were taken up. Bhatagaon-Shearinayyan road in Raipur and Champa-Korba road in Bilaspur were also constructed during the period. Some

239. CPFR, 1907-08, Vol. I, 49.
240. SCC to SGI, 27.11.1907, F Pr, December 1907, Progs. No. 52, NA.
241. SCC to SGI, 4.1.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 32, NA; Telegram RSI to CC, 6.2.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 33, NA; Telegram CC to RSI, 7.2.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 34, NA; SGI to CC, 25.5.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 37, NA; SCC to SGI, 6.3.1908, F Pr, March 1908, Progs. No. 24, NA; SGI to CC, 11.3.1908, F Pr, March 1908, Progs. No. 25, NA and SGI to CC, 23.3.1908, F Pr, March 1908, Progs. No. 26, NA.
242. SGE to SGI, 1.7.1908, F Pr, July 1908, Progs. No. 47, NA.
important roads were extended. Extension was carried on in Jabalpur - Kundam road in Jabalpur district, Damoh-Batiagarh and Tendukheda - Patan road in Damoh district, the old Bombay road in Harda tahsil of Hoshangabad district, and Raipur-Bilaspur road. Work was intensified on some roads which were in progress such as Badnur-Ellichpur road and Burhanpur-Dhertali road. There were few roads on which large amounts of reserve metal were collected. They were the Great Northern Road in Seoni, Sagar-Whanai road, Jabalpur-Damoh road, Itarsi-Dhar road and Chhindwara-Narsinghpur road. 243

In August 1908 the relief operations reached their highest point. The total number of persons on relief then was 51,161. This was the highest number relieved during the famine. 244

Measures of relief also included the remissions and suspensions of land revenue. The land revenue amounting to Rs. 13,01,000 was suspended. 245 The loans and advances for the improvement of agriculture amounting to Rs. 17,44,000 were also granted to the farmers. 246

243. CPFR, 1907-08, Vol. I, 60.
244. SCC to SCI, 24.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 22, NA.
245. SCC to SCI, 24.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 22, NA.
246. Telegram CC to SCI, 29.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 5, NA; Telegram RSI to CC, 5.11.1907, F Pr, October 1907, Progs. No. 3, NA; Telegram RSI to CC, 5.11.1907, F Pr, October 1907, Progs. No. 4, NA.
An important feature of the relief measures was the relief of weavers. It was estimated that 9,000 weavers were relieved at a cost of Rs. 29,000.\textsuperscript{247}

Except for a little kitchen relief for a short period, gratuitous relief consisted of the grant of cash dole to persons. When the relief operations commenced in September 1907 the number of persons who were on gratuitous relief exceeded the number of persons who laboured on relief works. In May 1908, 20,385 persons were afforded gratuitous relief, whereas, the number of persons who worked for their relief including the weavers was 20,205. However, the excess was foreseen earlier, it was an important feature of the relief measures. Its aim was to avoid large famine-work and to rely on extension of ordinary employment, supplemented by village-works, whenever necessary, and by the grant of gratuitous relief to dependants of the workers who could not support them.\textsuperscript{248} Therefore, the number of persons on gratuitous relief appeared to be comparatively large. However, it

\textsuperscript{247} CC to SGI, 17.5.1910, F Pr, June 1910, Progs. No. 7, NA; SCC to SGI, 23.10.1908, F Pr, November 1908, Progs. No. 2, NA; SGI to CC, 5.11.1908, F Pr, November 1908, Progs. No. 3, NA; SCC to SGI, 16.1.1908, F Pr, January 1908, Progs. No. 39, NA; SCC to SGI, 15.2.1908, F Pr, March 1908, Progs. No. 17; SCC to SGI, 24.4.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 1, NA; SCC to SGI, 27.5.1908, F Pr, June 1908, Progs. No. 17, NA; SCC to SGI, 25.8.1908, F Pr, September 1908, Progs. No. 8, NA; SCC to SGI, 1.7.1908, F Pr, July 1908, Progs. No. 47, NA; SCC to CC, 29.6.1910, F Pr, June 1910, Progs. No. 8, NA; SGI to CC, 9.3.1909, F Pr, March 1909, Progs. No. 9, NA; SCC to SGI, 1.3.1909, F Pr, March 1909, Progs. No. 10, NA, and SCC to SGI, 24.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 22, NA.

\textsuperscript{248} SCC to SGI, 16.1.1908, F Pr, January 1908, Progs. No. 39.
must be remembered that gratuitous relief was also given to kotwars whose number was considerable. They were useful servants of the village and government. They were given work in return for wages, while performing their duties of reporting crime and vital statistics. The only difference was that the relief amounts were paid by the government and not by the villagers. They were nearly one-third of persons on gratuitous relief in May and June 1908.

Three kitchens were opened in Betul and continued to function till September 1907. The attendance in the kitchens mostly consisted of children. The attendance reached its maximum in the first week of July when the number was 317. The kitchen at Panagar in the Jabalpur district was opened for twenty four days in March 1908. One hundred fourteen persons were fed there. Most of them were dependents of labourers who came from the Central princely states for Rabi harvesting. In Damoh the kitchen relief started on 10 January 1908. The children were admitted there.

249. SCC to SGI, 24.4.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 11; SCC to SGI, 27.7.1908, F Pr, August 1908, Progs. No. 15; NA and SCC to SGI, 15.2.1908, F Pr, March 1908, Progs. No. 17.
251. SCC to SGI, 24.4.1908, F Pr, May 1908, Progs. No. 1, and SCC to SGI, 27.5.1908, F Pr, June 1908 Progs. No. 17.
liberally. However, the Deputy Commissioner thought it necessary to close this relief when the Rabi harvesting commenced. The attendance reached its maximum in the last week of February 1908, when the number was 716.\textsuperscript{252}

The want suffered by the people did not affect their physical condition. The average death-rate for the province during the height of the distress from October 1907 to September 1908 was 36.25 per thousand as against the normal death-rate of 38.36 per thousand.\textsuperscript{253} It appears that the province enjoyed a remarkably healthy year. Cholera which usually accompanies famine, and plague were both present in the province, but they left the province comparatively unaffected.\textsuperscript{254} Though the poor people were severely affected by the famine. There was no serious spurt in crime.\textsuperscript{255} It appears that the relief measures were timely and adequate.

It was believed that emigration to places outside the province was small. But nearly all the registration of recruits for Assam was done at Jabalpur and Bilsapur. At Jabalpur out of 3,928 persons who were enrolled during the period from October 1907 to September 1908, 1,991 belonged to Rewa and other Central princely states. From Bilsapur, during the year ending on June 1908,

\textsuperscript{252} CPF\&R, 1907-08, Vol. I, 54.
\textsuperscript{253} AAR, 1907-08, 163.
\textsuperscript{254} SCC to SGI, 27.7.1908, F Pr, August 1908, Progs. No. 15, NA.
\textsuperscript{255} PAR, 1907-08, 27.
1905, labourers and 1,375 dependents were sent, as against 330 labourers and 86 dependents in the preceding year. Most of them were from Rewa state, where distress was severe. The extra stimulus to recruitment was partly provided by a reduction in the registration fees and also by a relaxation in certain provisions of the Assam Labour Act. But the large increase in recruitment was undoubtedly caused by the conditions of scarcity.

The cattle mortality was not high in the open tracts. There was no unusual cattle mortality in the plains of the Chhattisgarh, though the cattle of that region had been miserably poor in health even in the best of times. In the wheat plains of Hoshangabad and Narsinghpur, the cattle escaped lightly. Nor again was it in the areas where the people were the most distressed that cattle suffered most. In the northern districts the loss of cattle was less, and in Mandla the cattle mortality was confined to a small area in the north of the district, while in Chanda where the failure of the crops was less than anywhere else, the mortality was very high. In Chhindwara, Bhandara, Seoni, Betul, and Balaghat districts, the cattle suffered very severely. The failure of the crops was serious here but not so intense as in the northern districts and Mandla. From the middle of the hot weather in 1908 the cattle suffered, as

256. SCC to SGI, 25.8.1908, F Pr, September 1908, Progs. No. 8.
257. AAR, 1907-08, 166.
258. SCC to SGI, 27.7.1908, F Pr, August 1908, Progs. No. 15.
259. SCC to SGI, 24.9.1908, F Pr, October 1908, Progs. No. 22.
they always did at that time of the year, and in the months of July and August there was heavy mortality among them in Chanda, Bhandara, Balaghat, Seoni, Satul, Chhindwara and Nimar districts. In the meantime a plague of caterpillars devoured the new grass. Many of the deaths which occurred in Balaghat and Bhandara were ascribed to the presence of these insects in the pastures where the cattle grazed. It was estimated that Seoni lost 30 percent of its cattle, while Balaghat lost 15 percent. 260

The Kharif crops in 1908–09 had been a fair one. The paddy crop was average or even better in certain places. 261 The Rabi crop was sown in soil well moistened by the continuous rains of September and promised well. 262 The prices began to fall considerably. The distress began to ease as soon as the monsoon of 1908 started. The number of relief workers began to fall gradually. It fell from 36,906 in September 1908 to 21,286 in October. All relief works were closed by the end of the October in all districts. 263 The total expenditure on famine was estimated to be Rs. 1,20,00,000 including remissions and suspensions of land revenue. 264

261. RMPF, 1907–08, 125, and SCC to SGI, 27.7.1908, F Pr, August 1908, Progs. No. 15.
262. SCC to SGI, 25.8.1908, F Pr, September 1908, Progs. No. 8 and SCC to SGI, 22.10.1908, F Pr, November 1908, Progs. No. 8, NA.
263. SCC to SGI, 22.10.1908, F Pr, November 1908, Progs. No. 8.
The famine severely affected many parts of the province, but its extent was less than in the earlier famines. Because of the improved transport facilities and alertness of the government, the famine management was met with considerable success.

There was no further period of scarcity or famine during the period under study. On review it would appear that the two famines in the last few years of the nineteenth century were the worst that were experienced in the Central Provinces. The government tried to meet the situation squarely but it was hamstrung by the inexperience of its officers and the lack of resources to finance the adequate measures to ward off the disaster of gigantic proportions. The famines, however, taught valuable lessons. The management of the relief measures was much better in the twentieth century. Moreover, in the years which followed the famine of 1899-1900, though the periods of scarcity occurred occasionally in some district, there were generally fair harvests.