CHAPTER VI

THE FINAL SHAPING OF THE FAMINE POLICY 1896–1910

The period of nearly two decades of comparative prosperity and good monsoon came to an end in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The famines struck the province with exceptional virulence during the late nineties. Two severe famines followed each other swiftly and made the closing years of the decade one of the worst periods in the history of the Central Provinces.

The famine of 1896–97 and 1899–1900 affected almost the entire Central Provinces. After the famines the relief policy and attitude of the government towards the question of prevention of famine underwent considerable modifications. The recommendations of the two Famine Commissions, paved the way for the necessary amendments of the Famine Code. They also necessitated the adoption of progressive and concerted policy with regard to the prevention of famine. It is the purpose of this chapter to focus attention on the report of the two Famine Commissions and the final formulation of the famine policy.
It appears that it had taken two devastating famines to demonstrate to the government the inadequacy of relief system and of the policy laid down in Famine Code adopted in 1883 and amended in 1893.¹ In fact the Code of 1883 was framed on the basis of the findings of Strachey Commission which enquired into the famine of much smaller extent and magnitude than those experienced off the end of the century. As such the measures of relief and modes of administering them were very inadequate to combat the virulent distress when it struck in 1896. The apprehensions of the officers, who had criticised the Code in the early 'eighties, about the element of inelasticity in the provisions of the Code came true. The administration of relief of intensive as well as extensive character was at once beset with great difficulties which caused unnecessary delays in opening works. The relief took time to reach down to the people who needed it most.²

To start with, stress was laid on that part of the plan which anticipated taking in hand, 'whenever this might be possible, village works such as the deepening of existing tanks, excavation of new tanks, construction of field embankments and eradication of kana grass' but such works were practicable to a

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¹. Higham's report : Revision of Famine Codes, 1897, 15.
². See chapter IV su1py.
considerable extent only in the Chhattisgarh division. Only a limited number of such works was possible or even practicable in other districts.\(^3\)

It was satisfactory to note that there was no considerable delay in setting the relief agency in motion throughout the province when the distress commenced in 1896. But soon it was clear that the calamity was much too big for such small works, so quite early large relief works had to be resorted to. But often the commencement of the large works was delayed because of the unavoidable difficulties in obtaining necessary grant for the proposed projects. The large relief works ultimately formed the backbone of relief operations.

Undoubtedly the government made great efforts to relieve distress. It also assisted distressed people by giving out loans and advances and by suspensions and remissions of land revenue. But the government did not or could not, undertake to prevent all suffering or privation or to replace or replenish in each individual case the resources exhausted by famine.

The relief measures were hesitant and insufficient. They were adopted on a small scale as

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3. SCC to SGI, 25\#1\#1898, F Pr, February 1898, Progs., Nos. 5-6A, NA.
compared to the magnitude of distress. The distress speedily outran the relief provided by the village works and the poor-houses on which great reliance was placed. The number of persons, gratuitously relieved rose significantly. The relief had been administered effectively where village works and large relief works were opened at an early date. Considerable delay occurred in the publication of departmental programmes and the organization of the works establishment. Village relief could not be effectively administered by the overburdened district staff. They had to be reinforced by the military officers, who were deputed to supervise relief operations. The order in which the districts were graded with reference to the degree of distress in each one of them had proved generally to be correct, except that as the time passed the centre of distress shifted from the Narmada valley to the districts of Bilaspur and Raipur in the Chhattisgarh division and the plateau districts of Betul, Mandla and Seoni in the Satpura range. 4

The Supreme Government considered that officers-in-charge of relief works, when the relief works were first opened, were often inclined to be rather liberal with regard to the wages. It felt that in this early stage firmness in this respect was perhaps even more important than later on; otherwise the relief

works would fail to measure correctly the extent and character of prevailing distress. It was natural that a large number of labourers would come on relief works, where remunerative employment was offered to them. The labourers intended to stay on relief works even after the actual necessity which brought them to the relief works had ceased. The government considered that in the initial stage the officers-in-charge of relief works must remember that his object was not to relieve famine but to test its pressure. He was not to appease hunger, but to find out whether people were hungry. It was anticipated that a man, who was out of employment and pinched for food, would readily accept work at long distance. Only by offering the employment at a distance could the existence of the imminent distress be known. When the relief works were first opened low wages should be paid as a test; as soon as it was certain that there was scarcity, the usual famine rates were to be paid.  

The famine of 1896-97 was the first of magnitude after the formulation of the Famine Code. It provided an opportunity to examine it critically. The defects which were found in the working of the Famine Code were mostly in matters of detail. On the whole, the Famine Code worked fairly successfully but

neither widespread suffering nor a high mortality could be effectively prevented.

It was decided with the approval of the Secretary of State for India, to appoint a small Commission to formulate the policies for further guidance in the light of the famine experience of 1896–97. The Commission was to examine the manner in which the provisions of the Famine Codes of the several provinces differed and in which their prescriptions had been departed from. It was also to enquire into the degree of success which had in each case attended the measures. This was to be considered primarily with reference to the alleviation of distress, and the saving of human lives and secondly, with reference to the cost of the efforts. It was asked to advise as to the measures and methods of working which were likely to prove most effective and to make any enquiries and record any recommendations or opinions which, in its opinion would prove useful in times of future famines. It was to be understood that the primary object of the enquiry was to provide guidance for the future.

The Commission consisted of six members with J.B. Lyall as its Chairman. Though it had no provincial representatives, but each local government was directed

5. Elgin to CC, 16.11.1897, Elgin Collection, NA.
6. Circular SDI to CC, 23.12.1897, F Pr, December 1897, Progs. No. 23, NA.
to depute a person as a temporary member. His duty was to see that the local questions were carefully looked into. The Commission met on 10 January 1898 at Calcutta. It visited various parts of the country which were affected by the famine. It examined 258 witnesses took 110 written statements and submitted report in October 1898.

The Commission remarked that while the areas over which intense and severe distress prevailed in the famine of 1896-97 were greater than any earlier famines, the success actually attained in the relief of distress and saving of human lives were if not complete, far greater than any that had till then been recorded in famines of comparable severity and duration. It further remarked that this result had been achieved at a cost which, when compared with the expenditure in earlier famines, could not be regarded as very moderate. In 1896-97 the officers-in-charge of relief had the benefit of the guidance of the findings of the Famine Commission of 1880 which were found to have been worked generally satisfactorily in the famine of 1896-97. Therefore, the Famine Commission of 1898 recommended only minor alterations, chiefly in the direction of a more liberal treatment of the relief workers.

8. FCR, 1898, Pt.I, 3.
9. Ibid., 7.
10. Ibid., 404.
With regard to the relief works and organization of relief operations, the Commission recommended a change from four-fold classification of famine labour, which was based on the assumed difference in the efficiency of different classes of workers. It recommended a simpler classification which would be based on the work to be performed by a worker. New three-fold classification consisted of three classes viz. class A(special), class B(diggers) and class C(carriers). Children below the age of twelve years were to be treated as a special class by itself.

In the matter of nature and size of relief works, the Commission expressed the view that, 'while large works should ordinarily be regarded as the mainstay of relief operations, there were occasions when small works must be resorted to. They were to be carried out either by professional or civil agency, according to the circumstances.' This opinion was in conformity with the view expressed by the Famine Commission of 1880. The Commission justified the policy on the ground that large relief works had the advantage of effective supervision and vigorous enforcement of discipline which could be possible only on large undertakings.

15. FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 177.
However, the experience of the famine of 1896–97, proved that the advantages claimed for the large work had been overestimated and the distance test was not necessary to enforce economy in expenditure. The Commission refused to accept the plea. It recommended that the works should not be started at a distance from the villages only for the sake of instituting a distance test. Such works would have a utility of their own. They would be more useful than the works nearer the villages. They would relieve the pressure on such works as may be opened for relief of those who could not leave their homes. The Commission was in favour of opening, 'large and useful works where such works were available.'

On the basic question of food supply and control of foodgrains during the famine, the government continued to toe its old line of *laissez faire*. In 1896–97 there was a shortfall of 1.8 crore to 1.9 crore tons in the output of foodgrains. This deficit caused a serious danger to the food supply of the country and there was an obvious case for State intervention. But the government refused to face the facts and continued to base its policy on the recommendations of the Strachey Commission of 1893. The Strachey Commission itself had qualified the statement by the use of the

phrase 'at present' and had also sounded the warning that, 'the present estimated surplus would soon be all consumed by the increase in population which it was reasonable to anticipate in the future, unless the production should keep pace with that increase.'

The Strachey Commission had anticipated a maximum shortfall of 47.5 lakh tons in the annual production of the country under the worst circumstances. But in 1896-97 the loss in production was of the order of 1.8 crore to 1.9 crore tons or nearly four times of the figure assumed by the Commission in 1880. Even if one were to accept the policy laid down in 1880 as right for the circumstances of that year and under the assumptions made by the Commission, it could hardly be regarded to be so under the altogether different conditions of 1896-97. The government took pride in the fact that it had rigidly adhered to the principles laid down by the Commission of 1880 and there was a general consensus of opinion among the provincial governments that this policy was right. But a strict adherence to the outdated principles based on different circumstances could only result in an imperfect famine relief administration.

18. FCR, 1880, Pt.I, 158.
19. Ibid., 156.
The policy pursued during the famine was stated by the Famine Commission of 1898 to be: 'with the object of encouraging trade, the Government of India placed at the disposal of public freely, fully and promptly all the information which it possessed. So as to assist the mercantile community as far as possible in verifying the facts on which their action must depend. It guaranteed that in the distressed regions the demand for food should have been an effective one, that is to say, that those who required food should have enough money to pay for it. The guarantee being provided by the government undertaking to find work for all who were in danger of starvation. The government would pay the wages to the relief workers sufficient to buy a subsistence ration, whatever the local current prices of food might be. It took care that every possible facility was given for the free action of private trade, and that all obstacles, material or fiscal were as far as practicable removed.'

Commenting on the food situation in the country during the period of famine, the Famine Commission of 1898 stated that there had been no absolute dearth of food. The private trade was quite successful in distributing existing stocks so as to make good the deficiency in the production of the affected regions. Food always remained available, though at high, and in some remote places, excessively high, prices. There were very few exceptional cases in which the intervention of

22. Ibid., 584–585.
the government was considered necessary. It appears that the problem of food supply during a period of distress appeared to the Government of India and Famine Commission of 1896 to be merely one of ensuring supplies in the market.

The important question of prices at which the food was to be sold in times of famine did not receive attention. The availability of food stocks in market during distress was not by itself a proof of supplies being sufficient to feed the entire population. In a country where considerable portion of the agricultural population lived on a subsistence level even in ordinary times, a rise in prices would tempt the poor producers to unload supplies on the market at higher prices. So that stocks otherwise meant for the farmer's own consumption would tend to be depleted and he would face actual starvation in course of time. Malnutrition and consequent high mortality were direct indications of food supply being inadequate to sustain the population. The so-called 'famine of purchasing power' was really a famine of food. The only remedy was increasing food supplies by imports, checking profiteering and hoarding of foodgrains and making supplies available at prices which the poor could pay. Unfortunately, the government failed to look at the problem from this angle. Obviously,

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23. Ibid., 585.
by tenaciously adhering to the principles of *laissez faire*, the Supreme Government went beyond what even the most ardent believer in that philosophy would have advocated.

The Famine Commission of 1898 was more limited in the scope of its enquiry than the Famine Commission of 1880. In its recommendations, however, it adhered very closely to the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1880. Its recommendations were more in the nature of an elaboration of the principles laid down in 1880 than of modifying them. Its chief merit was in the thorough examination of the principles of famine relief in detail.

The report of the Famine Commission was submitted to the Government of India who circulated it to the local governments for their opinion.  

Before the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1898 could be implemented, another severe famine struck the country in 1899. Many of the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1898 were acted upon in the famine of 1899-1900. Later, with necessary modifications, they were either incorporated in the Famine Codes or were adopted by the Supreme Government as protective measures against famines. Thus, the recommendations of

the Famine Commission of 1898 influenced the famine policy.

The famine of 1899–1900 followed so closely on the heels of that of 1896–97 that both the government and the people were stunned. It caused intense suffering and heavy mortality of both men and cattle. 26

The relief policy during the famine of 1899–1900 was primarily based on the Famine Code but the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1898, which though not yet implemented, influenced the relief measures. The general principles of relief operations hitherto evolved were reaffirmed.

The famine of 1896–97 had bequeathed experiences and lessons of the utmost value, which were carefully collected and discussed by the Famine Commission of 1898. They vividly coloured the famine policy during 1899–1900. The stress was laid by the Commission on starting relief operations before the people had begun to starve; its approval of small or village relief works supplemented in special circumstances by large works had influenced the relief measures in 1899 and shaped the relief policy throughout the famine. The recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1898 were rightly in favour of greater flexibility in methods and greater liberality in quantum. The Commission had found that in the famine of 1896–97 the government had not succeeded in preventing substantial

26. See chapter V, supra.
mortality and suffering inspite of high expenditure. It anticipated that better results could be attained by a little more expenditure and a somewhat greater regard to the circumstances of special localities or special classes. It suggested that if it was good policy to combat a famine, it was good policy to combat it effectively. 27

With regard to nature of the relief operations in the Central Provinces in 1899-1900, the methods of relief had been more flexible in 1899-1900 than in 1896-97. On the whole, the relief was certainly more liberal than that of 1896-97. 28

As regards the working of relief measures, in 1899-1900, the Chief Commissioner considered that the time had come for a change in policy. Events develop in the rains, and no work of any kind was available for a week or two after the commencement of the monsoon. This was followed by a small demand for labour while rapidly increased. 29

The growing political consciousness in the country resulted in severe criticism of the government in the press. Curzon appointed a Commission under A.P. MacDonell to go into whole question of famine

28. Ibid., 7.
29. CC to Curzon, 16.8.1900, Curzon Collection, NA.
administration in the famine of 1899-1900. It was directed to suggest amendments in the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1898. It was also required to deal with the question of the collection of land revenue and grant of advances to agriculturists. Its mandate was wide. However, it was limited in two important respects. First, all questions of technical character related with the Public Works Department projects, which were implemented during the famine, and their utility were excluded from the enquiry. These problems were reserved for a separate enquiry. Secondly, it was not allowed to make any enquiry into the relief administration in the princely states, though it was directed to report on 'the extent, nature, and general causes of immigration from the princely states into British districts, its effects upon relief measures and the method to deal with them. It was also to recommend better arrangements for concerted action between British and states' authorities.' The reservation prevented the Commission from dealing thoroughly with the question of immigration into British districts. 

The Commission submitted its report in May 1901. With regard to the commencement of the relief works the Famine Commission recommended that relief

30. SOI to SSI, 25.12.1900, F Pr, December 1900, Progs. No. 59 and Circular SOI to CC, 26.8.1901, F Pr, October 1901, Progs. Nos. 54-58B, NA.
32. Ibid., 12.
should not be offered until concrete signs were forthcoming of the existence of distress. The Supreme Government accepted this recommendation as a security against the waste of the public funds. The acceptance of this recommendation was, however, strictly conditional on the existence of the preparation upon which the Commission laid so much stress. As regards the collection of statistical information the Supreme Government considered arrangements satisfactory in the Central Provinces.

The Commission strongly recommended a more extended use of village works. It was urged that the village works were generally more economical and useful than the Public Works Department projects. The Supreme Government accepted the recommendation and considered that village works should form a more prominent feature of famine relief programme than had hitherto been the case.

The Commission recommended that as the hot weather draws to its close, the people, if employed on large Public Works Department projects should be dispersed over small Public Works Department projects near their homes and village works. If the State had

34. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 37.
35. Circular SGI to CC, 26.8.1901, F Pr, September 1901, Progs. No. 23, NA.
36. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 56.
38. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 144.
looked after the labouring classes through the hot weather months and kept them in fair working condition, the government might reasonably look to private employers to support them when the commencement of the rains opened employment in the fields. The Government of India agreed with the Commission that in the rainy season the able-bodied labourers should be induced to return to their ordinary avocations.

It was also considered expedient to offer gratuitous relief to the able-bodied. However, in view of the reduced purchasing-power, the Supreme Government considered that during the rains labourers of the poorest classes who were supporting themselves should not be held prima facie capable of supporting themselves. The children of the poor labourers or a certain proportion of the poor labourers should be admitted to gratuitous relief till the harvesting, of the earliest principal crops following the famine would bring about a substantial increase in their earnings and fall in prices.\(^{39}\)

Relief works were to be generally managed in accordance with the principles laid down in 1893 and 1895 in the Famine Code. The system envisaged the payment of a wage to workers on relief works that should be the lowest amount sufficient to maintain health under given conditions.

\(^{39}\) Circular No. 21 to CG, 26.8.1901, F Pr, September 1901, Progs. No. 23.
circumstances. In return, a fair amount of work was to be exacted from the workers. In view of the deterioration of health and stamina of workers that reduced diet during the famine was bound to produce, the task for earning full wage was fixed at 75 percent of a day's work in the normal times. A shortfall in the daily work from the fixed task was to be punished by fines provided that the wage actually paid did not fall below a certain minimum level of bare subsistence. If, however, these were continuous and wilful default on the part of a worker, wages could be reduced further to the level of the penal minimum wage, which, was inadequate to maintain a worker in health for any considerable length of time.\textsuperscript{40} In the Central Provinces, the wages fixed for performing the full task was less than what was recommended by the Famine Commission of 1880 as the standard wage for the future. The local government in actual working, found it to be excessive.\textsuperscript{41} Free but not full resort was made to the device of the lowering wages by the adoption of fictitious prices, and the net result of both this device and fines for short work was that diggers earned on an average something above a carrier's wage, while carriers earned little over a minimum wage.

It appears that over the whole province 89 percent of

\textsuperscript{40} Circular SGI to CC, 9.6.1883, F Pr, June 1883, Progs. No. 51.

\textsuperscript{41} Circular SGI to CC, 26.8.1901, F Pr, September 1901, Progs. No. 23.
the full task was performed and that the wage actually earned was the equivalent of 15.5 chhataks or 82.6 percent only of the full wages adopted viz. 19 chhataks and only 77.5 percent of 20 chhataks recommended by the Famine Commission of 1898 as remuneration. Even then, mortality on the relief works in the Central Provinces, during the whole period of famine, was only 21.6 per thousand of the average numbers attending the relief works. The Famine Commission remarked that this figure was considerably below death-rate obtaining in other provinces.42

The Commission recommended that the minimum wages for the able-bodied should be abolished. It stated that the relief workers should not be exempted from the ordinary rule that the wages should be proportionate to the work. It further stated that the offer by the government of a certain fixed wage irrespective of the amount of work done had led to demoralization and serious scandals. The fixed wages were not adopted in 1899–1900 in the Central Provinces. The Commission carefully safeguarded its recommendation by insisting on an exception being made for the benefit of the physically weak persons, who were to be ganged separately. They were to be assigned easy tasks, and were to be never paid less than that was allowed for adult non-workers.43

Subject to this exception and provided always that care

42. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 100.
43. Ibid., 79.
was taken to limit tasks to the capacity of the workers, the Supreme Government was disposed to consider that fixed payments irrespective of work done might be safely abolished. In doing so the Government would run no risk by abandoning a rule which actually encouraged idleness on relief works. 44

The Commission advocated the full use of non-official agency at all the stages of the relief administration. In those provinces in which there were influential landowners it was most important to associate them from the outset with the administration, in forecasting the probable degree of distress, in making preparations to face it and in implementing relief measures. It strongly recommended the policy of administering relief as far as possible through private agency. For the success of such a policy, it suggested that it was essential to have a detailed plan of private relief works made out from the beginning and to have secured, in advance, the consent of landowners and men of local influence to take upon themselves the responsibility for controlling and executing relief works. It was also important to associate the landowners with the government in financial responsibility for the works calculated to be locally productive, and with this object schemes should be prepared in advance. The schemes should clearly mention the extent to which the landowners would

44. Circular SGI to CC, 26.8.1901, F Pr, September 1901, Progs. No. 23.
voluntarily undertake the construction of such works, either at their own expense, or aided by advances, partly or wholly recoverable, made by the government. Such advances were to be made to landowners on their own security or, in the case of village communities, on the joint security of their principal members.

The Commission anticipated that it would be possible for officers of tact and personal influence to induce the landowners or village communities to undertake, on receipt of reasonable contributions from the government, the entire administration of relief in their estates, or in their villages. The Commission was struck by the little use made of non-official agency in every province in the famine of 1899-1900. This was also the impression, that was left upon the public mind. The Supreme Government considered that it was desirable in the administration of State charity that the government should make every possible use of the knowledge of the local conditions which could be gained only by enlisting the local agency. It further stated that in the distribution of gratuitous relief in towns the government officials should invariably associate with private agency. A committee of town-people, and the heads of village society should be referred to for their advice in admitting their fellow villages to relief.

45. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 34.
The Government of India was highly impressed by the Commission's emphasis on the importance of increasing the demand for labour, especially at the commencement of a famine, by encouraging the initiative of the private landholders to initiate works for the improvement of their properties. The Supreme Government also agreed with the Famine Commission that the landholders should be induced, after getting their consent, to confirm to the conditions laid down by the government with a view to ensure that the money would be spent for relieving the destitute.46

The Commission also recommended the appointment of a Famine Commissioner. This recommendation was made by the Famine Commission of 1880. The chief advantages of such an appointment were ensuring uniformity of procedure, promptitude in action, the reduction of correspondence by frequent personal conferences, and the speedy removal of any bottlenecks or of any misunderstanding of orders. With a view to secure these advantages it was necessary that the Famine Commissioner should constantly move about, supervising operations and giving advice and instructions on the spot, with the authority of the local government. The Commission also emphasized that it was essential to keep distinct the functions of a Famine Commissioner, who should be a high executive officer exercising ad-hoc the powers of the local government and such functions of

a Famine Secretary, which were in no way executive. 47

The Supreme Government accepted this recommendation as one of the most likely to be fruitful. It agreed that a Famine Commissioner should be appointed for the executive control of relief measures whenever relief operations had attained considerable extent or it was evident that a serious famine was impending. The government was impressed by the value of the services which a chief inspecting authority would render in the formulation in details of adequate schemes of relief. The Famine Commissioner would also help in safeguarding the interests of the government from default by inattention or misappropriation. He would also ensure the uniformity between one district and another. The Government of India anticipated that there may be occasions when the head of a local government would itself be able to act as, Famine Commissioner, but the government was convinced that such occasions would be rare, and that the appointment of a Famine Commissioner should be a normal feature of famine policy whenever famine operations were on a considerable scale. 48

With regard to the announcement of suspensions of land revenue, the Commission strongly recommended that the grant of liberal advances in the earliest stages

47. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 35.
and of early action in regard to the suspension of revenue. It stated that the importance of suspensions and remissions of land revenue as a palliative in times of famine was recognized by the Famine Commissions of 1860 and 1898. It fully concurred with their views. It went still further to emphasize the great value of suspensions and remissions of land revenue as a preventive measure of constant application in adverse years. It noted that considerable advance, in this direction had been made, during the preceding twenty years in every province. But, while there was much agreement as to the general policy which should be pursued in this connection, practice varied greatly in the different provinces.

In the Central Provinces the rules were both less liberal and less elaborate. No action by way of the suspension or remission of land revenue was contemplated if there was a loss of less than three-quarters of the crop. No scale of relief was laid down. But the Deputy Commissioners had power to suspend for a month, and the Commissioners had power to suspend without a time limit up to five thousand rupees. Suspensions of revenue were made conditional on the suspension of rent. This was a vital point. Until the benefits of the suspension were passed on to the poor ryot it would not alleviate the suffering.

49. FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 30.
50. FCR, 1901, Pt. III, 270.
51. Ibid., 271.
The conditions in zemindari and ryotwari tracts were different, but a careful examination of the rules and of their working in the famine of 1899–1900 showed that, in essentials, the underlying principles were the same. The government desired to lay down special emphasis on two conclusions. It was of the opinion that it was of cardinal importance to relieve the cultivator, whether he had been the revenue payer himself, as in ryotwari tracts, or, a tenant of the revenue payer as in zemindari tracts. In zemindari tracts it was not, in its opinion, sufficient to make the suspension on remission of revenue conditional upon a suspension or remission of rent. The government should have, in all cases, authority to order suspension or remission of rent. In some provinces legislation to this end would be required, and it strongly recommended it. The Commission further suggested that in zemindari tracts the wealth or the poverty of the revenue payer, who was a rent receiver, should not influence the question of suspension or remission of land revenue; it was necessary to give relief to him in order to relieve the cultivator. But in ryotwari tracts the differential treatment of rich and poor ryots was undoubtedly a practical question which gave rise to considerable discussion.52

It was, therefore, strongly of opinion that in cases of suspension of revenue differential treatment

52. Ibid., 278.
between the rich and the poor should not be attempted. Differentiating between them would be bad in policy and difficult in practice because it would overlook the needs of the tenants in zamindari tracts. It would involve delay when promptitude would be essential to relief. It would also open the door to favouritism and corruption, as the differentiation would be made in practice, on the recommendations of unreliable subordinates.

The Famine Commission recommended that it was necessary to lay down the degree of calamity, which called for relief and the degree of relief needed. It was also desirable to fix the point where relief is necessary. In order to ensure that enquiry was to be made in all cases of extensive crop failure. It expressed the view that ordinarily relief would not be required when there was half a normal crop.\(^5\) As regards suspension of revenue the case of widespread crop failure should proceed from the general to particular. In such a case, general estimates about homogeneous tracts or groups of villages or large territorial areas should be made; and upon these estimates uniform suspension of revenue in ryotwadi tracts, and of rent in zamindari tracts should be worked out. If the calamity was local and isolated, relief should proceed, on the other hand, from the particular to the general. Field to field enquiry should be made, and suspensions should follow the result of

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 280-281.
such enquiries. If a revenue payer was himself the cultivator in zemindari tracts the consideration which applied to a suspension of rent should determine his case for suspension. But, if he was a rent receiver, the suspension of revenue should be proportionate to the suspension of rent.

The Commission recommended that it was essential that an early decision should be reached as to the amount of suspended revenue which should at once be implemented. The balance should be spread over two or three years for collection. It was strongly of the opinion that instalments should be fixed, and that the whole amount should not be left over from harvest to harvest at the discretion of local officers. It may not be possible to collect the instalments fixed; but even so, uncertainty in collection was less oppressive and demoralizing than uncertainty in demand. It recommended that remission, not less than suspension, should start with the actual cultivators i.e. the ryots in ryotwadi tracts and the tenants in zemindari tracts. If the calamity had been widespread, remission should be uniform. If the calamity had been local and isolated, remissions should follow individual enquiries about the circumstances of the cultivators. In zemindari tracts, if the revenue payer was himself the cultivator, the

54. Ibid., 262-263.
55. Ibid., 284-285.
considerations of remission which applied to a remission of rent should determine the remission of revenue in his case. But if he was a rent receiver, the remission of revenue should be proportionate to the remission of rent. But there may be cases when a liberal policy may require a remission of revenue of a poor proprietor more in proportion to the remission of rent. In such exceptional cases only it recommended different treatment in favour of the proprietors.

Thus the policy of remissions and suspensions did not seek to penalize the rich, it desired to help the poor in the fuller measure. It believed that in this matter, a general policy was the wise policy; and that to have preferences, but no exclusions, was the best working rule. 56

The Supreme Government willingly accepted the recommendation of the Famine Commission with regard to the suspensions and remissions of land revenue. It agreed that when people were stricken with calamity, it was of the utmost importance that they should be assured without delay of the resources which the government was prepared to afford to them. It was impossible to give such an assurance if preliminary and detailed enquiry into the circumstances of each individual was dispensed with. 57

56. Ibid., 286-287.
As regards the incidence of land revenue on the produce of the land the Famine Commission stated that in the Central Provinces the average yield per acre of staple food crops was shown as 595 lbs., and the average value as Rs. 15.50.

The incidence of the land revenue on the gross produce did not reach 7 percent in any district of the province, but in only two districts it exceeded 5 percent. Even if the variable factors in the preceding calculation, namely the rates of crop yield and the money commutation rates, were reduced by 25 percent i.e. to 447 lbs. and Rs. 11.8.0, respectively, the proportion of the land revenue to gross produce would still be under 5 percent, or, if cesses were to be added, slightly over 5 percent. The Commission considered that upon the basis of these figures it was clear that the incidence of the land revenue on the produce assessed in the Central Provinces were moderate. 58

The Government of India agreed with the Famine Commission on this point. But the government stated that the levy of the land revenue in cash in seasons of deficient crops undoubtedly strained the resources of those who had spent the income in favourable seasons as it occurred to them; and to a people who had still to learn the value of thrift, there was an occasional need of borrowing which in a succession of bad years may end

58. FCR, 1901, Pt.II, 261.
in heavy indebtedness.\textsuperscript{59}

With regard to the utility of railways the Commission stated that the Famine Commission of 1880 anticipated that with the growth of the railway system the quantity of rolling-stock would increase in proportion, and that the needs of the country would be met with the least possible burden on its resources. Whether the rolling-stock was sufficient for the business of the country in ordinary times was a matter of dispute, with which the Famine Commission of 1901 had no concern; it was enough for its purpose that it proved insufficient for the requirements of a widespread famine. The Famine Commission of 1901 was convinced that the inability of the railways to carry all the foodgrains that were offered affected the prices in the famine-stricken regions; and that the failure to carry fodder, in anything like the required quantity, resulted in the loss of large number of cattle, which took long to replace. Therefore, it strongly recommended that increase in the rolling-stock would be one of the most urgent steps of famine insurance.\textsuperscript{60} The Supreme Government accepted this recommendation and admitted that it was necessary to increase the rolling-stock for meeting the needs of the people in times of drought.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Circular SGI to CC, 26.8.1901, F Pr, September 1901, Progs. No. 23.

\textsuperscript{60} FCR, 1901, Pt. II, 224.

\textsuperscript{61} Circular SGI to CC, 26.8.1901, F Pr, September 1901, Progs. No. 23.
The recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1901 were noteworthy for their emphasis on several aspects of famine relief operations which had not been given due attention either by the earlier Commissions or by the government. It urged that the government should be ever in readiness to face such calamities and keep definite plans of relief works ready for the purpose. It pointed out such defects in the administrative machinery as had been noticed again and again and never entirely removed. The government's policy in regard to remissions and suspensions of land revenue and the timing of its announcement of such concessions, were all reviewed by the Commission and proper advice recorded. Its emphasis on extension of railways was equally important. All these were to receive increased attention from the government.

Curzon had already vigorously refuted with thundering 'imperialist' logic the contention of civilian memorialists who had pleaded that overassessment of the land revenue was the basic cause of these recurring and increasingly severe famines in India. It must, therefore, be pointed out that even this Commission entirely failed to emphasize those factors which were basically and primarily responsible for the universal tragedies that Indian famines had then become. Even it did not see the need of a basic change in the land system of the country. Its recommendations were in the nature of palliatives after the calamities. They had little prophylactic value.

Famine policy during 1901–1910 was mostly guided by the Famine Code and the recommendations of the Famine Commissions of 1901, which had since been embodied in the Provincial Famine Code.  

The development of grant-in-aid village works was another prominent feature of the famine policy in the early years of the twentieth century. The advantages of loans to landlords for the digging of wells and carrying out improvements on land proved successful in the province. But it was not till the famine of 1907–08 that private works started in the villages by landlords and others, with the help of loans from the government, came to have a definite and significant place in the system of relief. During the famine of 1907–08 the projects under the system of grant-in-aid proved exceedingly popular. As early as in 1883 senior officers of the Supreme Government had anticipated that 'these works were of the special utility in the summer months as they provide work for a number of persons near their homes after the breaking up of the large Public Works Department projects. They would thus be supplementary to the civil works, while the management, which was entirely non-official, was allowed to work with as much freedom as compatible with general supervision.  

63. SCC to SOI, 16.5.1904, F Pr, December 1904, Progs. No. 33, NA and SGI to CC, 20.12.1904, F Pr, February 1904, Progs. No. 35, NA.  
64. Circular SGI to CC, 9.6.1883, F Pr, June 1883, Progs. No. 51.
Thus, the process of the evolution of famine policy, which had started in the early 'sixties was completed at the turn of the current century. It took four decades and a series of dreadful famines which inflicted terrible miseries on the people of the province, to evolve a workable policy. But the policy though late in its formulation proved fairly practical and effective and the province did not undergo such intense sufferings by famines in the twentieth century as it did in the period 1896– to 1900.