CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A drought and the consequent famine had always been the greatest dread for the Indian farmer since ages. In provinces it was all the more so since its economy was almost entirely agricultural which was exclusively dependent on the rains for irrigation. There were hardly any facilities for the artificial irrigation. The occurrence of famines, it appears, became more frequent in the last quarter of the last century. It is the purpose of the present study to focus attention on this most serious problem of the agriculture in the province during a period of half a century following its formation in 1861.

Formerly the region that was to constitute the Central Provinces in 1861 formed a part of the Territory belonging to the Bhonsla rulers of Nagpur. As a result of the second Anglo-Maratha war in 1803, Raghují ceded Cuttack, Sambalpur and part of Berar. When Raghují was defeated in the third Anglo-Maratha war in 1817, Appa Sahib ceded the rest of Berar to the Nizam and the territories in the Narmada valley to the British.¹

¹ Khan, M.A. : History of British administrative system in India, Raipur, 1979, 7.
great portion of the Sagar and Narmada Territories was ceded by an agreement made by Appa Sahib in January 1818. It included the districts of Jabalpur (less the Bijoragogarh pargana) Mandla, Seoni, Balaghat (Northern part), Narsinghpur (less the Chawarpatha and Tendukheda parganas), Hoshangabad (less the Harda-Hindia pargana), Betul and the Dhamoni pargana of Sagar. The cession of these territories was confirmed by Raghjui III in the treaty of 1826. Peshwa Bajirao II ceded in 1817 the Province of Bundelkhand, this region consisted of the Sagar and Damoh districts excluding some parganas which were added later on. Some parts of the territories in Sagar, Narsinghpur, Hoshangabad and Nimar districts were obtained from Sindhia following the treaty of 1818. However, the management of some of the parganas was assumed by the British during the period of 1820-1823. Full sovereignty over them was established only in 1860. These tracts included the parganas of Rahatgarh, Garahakota, Gourjhamar and Naharmau of the Sagar district and the parganas of Chawarpatha and Tendukheda of the Narsinghpur district. The Harda-Hindia pargana of the Hoshangabad district was made over for management in 1844 and ceded with full sovereignty in 1860. All these acquisitions were organized as an administrative unit with the name of Sagar and Narmada Territories.

2. Ibid., 8.
As regards the early history of the Nagpur Province, it was somewhat different from that of the Sagar and Narmada Territories. After the death of Raja Raghuji III, one of his widows adopted a young kinsman, which was valid in accordance with the Hindu law. But like some other states the province was annexed and came under the direct control of the British administration on 28 January 1854. Thus the Bhonsala Kingdom became finally extinct. The Nagpur Province comprised the present districts of Nagpur, Wardha, Chanda, Chhindwara, Bhandara, Balaghat (southern part), Raipur, Durg and Bilaspur with dependencies of Baster, Kanker and Karsanda. The taluqs on the Godavari river, which were obtained from the Nizam in 1860 were also added to the Nagpur Province. These territories were formed into a new province which was to be administered by a Chief Commissioner under the direct control of the Supreme Government.  

After the suppression of the Revolt of 1857 it was realized that the Sagar and Narmada Territories could not be properly managed by the Lieutenant-Governor of the North Western Provinces. It had different character than the rest of the province. The Nagpur Territory, too, was small and rather inconvenient to be maintained as a separate province. By the resolution of 2 November 1861, therefore, the Province of Nagpur

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3. Ibid., 13–14.
THE CENTRAL PROVINCES
AND BERAR AND ITS
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION,
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and its dependencies and the Sagar and Narmada Territories were integrated under one administration. The newly formed province was named as the Central Provinces. By the resolution of 30 April 1862 Sambalpur and its dependencies were added to the Central Provinces.

The Central Provinces was divided for administrative purposes, in 1861, into four divisions. But the addition of the six districts of Berar in 1903 which were administered by the Commissioner of Berar under the control of the Resident at Hyderabad, placed a fifth administrative division under Administration of Nagpur. The number of districts rose from eighteen to twenty four. The six districts of Berar were, however, reduced to four in 1905 by a redistribution of taluks. The transfer of the Sambalpur district from the Central Provinces to Bengal in 1905, was followed in 1906 by a redistribution of areas in the Raipur and Bilaspur districts. These two were vast districts with a very large area. A new district, Durg, was created. In the following year a small gomindari tract from the neighbouring district of Chanda was also added to Durg. The remaining redistributions of areas in the province during the period under study were confined to small transfers between districts or divisions.

4. AAR, 1861-62, 1.
5. Ibid., 2.
The province was ordered to be administered under the non-regulation system. The administration was conducted by a Chief Commissioner with the usual Secretariat Staff; subordinate to him. There was a Judicial Commissioner, who was to be the Chief Judge in all branches. Four Commissioners were appointed, each being Judge of the Appeal and Sessions and Superintendent of Police of a circle of districts. There were eighteen Deputy Commissioners, each being Judge of Civil cases, Magistrate and Collector of a district. Fifteen Assistant Commissioners and eighteen Extra Assistant Commissioners were appointed to assist Deputy Commissioners in the management of the districts.7

From the geographical point of view the province could be divided into four broad divisions. The Narmada valley including Sagar, Damoh, Jabalpur, Narsinghpur, Hoshangabad and Nimar districts. Sagar and Damoh, the two northern districts lie on the south-east portion of the Vindhyan or Malwa plateau at an average elevation of 2,000 feet. The region was uneven in the north-west portion broken by bare flat-topped hills, while on its eastern extremity in Damoh district the table-land descended to the low tract by a series of valleys lying between broken chains of hills. The six towns, of which Sagar with a population of 46,000 persons was the largest, formed centres of exchange and mart. The valley of the

7. AAR, 1861-62, 17.
Soner river which flows from the south-west to the north-east of the tract contains fine black soil only slightly inferior to that of the Narmada valley, and here, where the population was concentrated in its greatest density, practically all the best land was in occupation. It was interesting to note that the fallow land, however, was used for grazing, an industry which has attained considerable importance, especially in connection with the sale of ghi and the export, chiefly to the Chhattisgarh, of buffaloes. The population, except in the large town of Sagar where there were some industries, was almost entirely agricultural. Wheat was the principal crop of the tract which occupied nearly thirty three percent of the cropped area in the Sagar and Damoh districts. As regards Jabalpur district, the tract was broken and uneven and the sandy soil was chiefly cultivated with rice and other autumn crops. Following west down the Narmada river, the districts of Narsinghpur and Hoshangabad have the typical heavy black soil of that valley. The cultivation was intense, practically every acre of good land was being taken up. It was satisfactory to note that the methods of wheat cultivation as practised in the province required little permanent labour. The amount of ploughing done was less than in the cotton tracts, and in the embanked areas the cultivator would sometimes content himself with putting the seed into the furrows made by the bekhar as he sows

8. CR, 1911, Pt, I, 11.
9. Ibid., 12.
without previous preparation of the ground. Again the crop was neither manured, irrigated nor weeded. Moreover, the only considerable labour connected with it after sowing was at harvest time when, during the month of March, there was a temporary influx of labourers from the hilly region on each side to cut the crops. 10

In Nimar, the most easterly of the districts included in this tract, the valley of Narmada narrows between the covering slopes of the Vindhyan and Satpura ranges and flows through broken and hilly region where the soil lies in a thin layer over a sheet of trap. Here the cotton was the principal crop. It was chiefly grown in the Tapti valley in the south of the district. Jwar was the principal food staple. The district has a large percentage of forest land and unculturable waste. Owing partly to the poor nature of the soil which required rest and partly to the demand for grazing land, the proportion of fallow land in holdings was very high. 11

The plateau division was formed by the districts of Mandla, Seoni, Chhindwara and Betul, which occupied the hilly regions of the Satpura range. The rainfall was the highest in Mandla on the east of the tract and varied from fifty one to thirty nine inches in Chhindwara. Wheat and rice were largely grown in the region. Especially the Wainganga valley comprising of Seoni, Mandla and

10. Ibid., 13.
11. Ibid., 14.
Balaghat were noted for their paddy cultivation. A large part of the region consists of rugged forest-clad hills, but the more open tracts contain narrow fertile tracts divided by bare stony ridges. The soil on the hills and ridges is thin and poor, but the valleys contain a rich brown alluvial soil, and most of the better land had been taken up and put under cultivation. Double cropping was not resorted to. Irrigation, was not, as a rule, attempted except for sugarcane. The population was almost entirely agricultural and pastoral.\textsuperscript{12}

The Maratha plain division comprised of the whole of Barar and five districts of the Nagpur division, Nagpur, Bhandara, Balaghat, Wardha and Chanda. It has shallow black soil and light rainfall varying from thirty two to forty six inches. This was the most important cotton-growing region not only in the province but in the country. This division contain the wealthiest and the most progressive section of the population. In the districts of Balaghat and Bhandara and the north-east portion of Chanda, where the average rainfall amounted to fifty five inches, the cultivation of paddy and sugarcane under irrigation had been brought to a high stage of development. The rapid progress of this tract was due directly to the enormous development of the cotton cultivation and of the industries and trade connected with it.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12. Ibid., 15.}
\textsuperscript{13. Ibid., 16.}
Lastly, the Chhattisgarh division included the districts of Bilaspur, Durg and Raipur. The average rainfall of the Chhattisgarh plain was forty nine inches which was favourable for the growth of paddy. The paddy was largely grown in the region and it comprised of the rice bowl of the province.

The regions comprising the province were comparatively free from famines prior to the period under study. It was generally well endowed with adequate rainfall and the population was industrious. It was generally surplus in agricultural production and food reserves were often sufficient to tide over minor scarcities. Still it was not free from the visitations of major droughts and consequent famines though widely spaced they were.

The agricultural economy of the Central Provinces has always been at the mercy of the monsoon. Even a year of less than normal precipitation creates scarcity conditions. As a result scarcity, occasionally developing into famine, has been a periodic feature of the economic life of the province. Famine is a very complex socio-economic phenomenon. Its causation, though usually determined by the annual precipitation is a very complex affair. For instance, famine conditions in some distant part of India may cause scarcity conditions inspite of average rainfall in the province because of the heavy export of foodgrains from it.

One such period occurred in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The scarcity of 1803–04 seemed rather to have skirted the province than to have made any real impression on it. In fact, there was no failure of crop except in Nimar and part of Hoshangabad. In the neighbouring Narsinghpur there was no scarcity. The district actually profited in consequence of the influx of hardy cultivators from the famine-stricken tracts westwards. In Nimar the famine was called 'mahakal of samvat 1860', when the grain was sold half a seer to a rupee.\(^{15}\) The only other point in the province touched by this famine was Chanda. There was a failure of rainfall; but the scarcity was more generally attributed to incursions of starving agriculturists from the Berar, where war and drought were then inflicting simultaneous ravages.\(^{16}\)

The famine of 1818–1819 had much more serious effects. It occurred in the large portions of the Nagpur region and in the northern portion of the Narmada division. The Chhattisgarh escaped this famine. The table-land dividing the Nagpur Province from Sagar and Narmada Territories appeared to have been escaped almost altogether. No portion of it was described as having suffered, except the district of Chhindwara, which had always been so much connected with Nagpur that it would

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15. SCC to SOI, 27.7.1868, F Pr, January 1869, Progs. Nos. 115–127B, NA.
16. Ibid., 4.
probably have been more affected by a scarcity in that
direction than the other hill districts. The major cause
of the famine both in the Nagpur and Jabalpur divisions
was the disturbed stage of the region resultant upon
the hostilities between the English and the Raja of
Nagpur. Indeed the government was scarcely established
at that time. The Nagpur dynasty was tottering in its
seat. This weakness of the constituted authority did
much to aggravate what would not have been a very
serious scarcity in the Nagpur division. In ordinary
seasons of scarcity it was the custom of the princely
governments to take active, if not very prominent steps
of immediate relief. Export was prohibited, shopkeepers
were ordered by them to sell grain at fixed-rates and
the state granaries were opened to the people, on
condition, however, of repayment of the grain with
twenty five percent interest. At that time the
administration was, perhaps, too much engaged in the
affairs of its survival to attend to the condition of
the people. Undoubtedly other causes were also at work
to diminish the harvests. But from the general disagree-
ment regarding their exact nature and from the
comparative immunity from their effects enjoyed by the
hill districts, it appears that obviously they were not
of themselves sufficient enough to cause a famine. In the
Nagpur Province the crops suffered from drought following

17. Ibid. 5.
18. Ibid. 6.
excessive rains. In the Jabalpur division the damage was done by excessive rains too. The distress severely affected the region. It caused heavy mortality. The parents were reported to have sold their children at the rate of four annas per head. A large number of wage earners and poor section of the society was driven to subsist on the bark of trees, mango-stones, ground to flour and kodon straw. The price of wheat rose to four seers to a rupee. No measures of relief were adopted by the government that hardly existed.\textsuperscript{19}

The famine which extended more or less from 1832 to 1834 was the most serious that was experienced in the province prior to the period under study, its effects were universal. However, it appears that they were more slowly felt in the Jabalpur division than in other parts of the province.\textsuperscript{20} It was also stated that there were two famines about this time. One in the Nagpur Province in 1832-33 followed by another in the Sagar and Narmada Territories in 1833-34. They have been closely connected with each other. Indeed, there had been a general disturbance of the seasons about this time. It extended for some five years. The first indication of it was in Jabalpur, where it became necessary to suspend Rs.1,99,000 on account of shortfall in the harvests of 1831-32. During the next year, there was a general failure of crops on the Satpura table-land and the western portions of the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 8.
Narmada valley. The accounts derived from other provinces would perhaps throw more light on the connection between this series of adverse years. The thought was felt not only in this province but throughout the Deccan and the North Western Provinces. The Commissioner of the Cuddapah division stated from his own experience that he saw the effects of famine in 1835, when marching from Bangalore to Madras, and, thence, to Nagpur via Hyderabad. It then the traces of distress were visible in the Deccan so late as in 1835, it appears hardly probable that the famine could have ceased so early. Thus this would be an additional reason for connecting the events of 1832–33 with those of 1833–34. It was estimated that nearly 5,000 people died of starvation in the Nagpur city alone. Certain measures of relief were adopted to relieve the distressed people. The state grain-stores were thrown open. The government sent its agents to the north to buy-up the foodgrains. All transit duties on foodgrains were suspended. Private charity also helped in rescuing the famine-stricken people. The Rani of Nagpur fed nearly 5,000 persons daily at her own expense. The famine did not appear to have been so severely felt in the Jabalpur division as that of 1818–19 though it was more universal in its effects. The prices of foodgrains did

22. Ibid., 10.
23. Ibid., 11.
not fall below eight seers to a rupee, which though very low, was twice as cheap as the recorded minimum rate in 1818-19. Grain was largely imported by the government which was to be repaid in kind. Considerable remissions of revenue were made. However, the government did not consider more measures necessary to mitigate the people.

The next scarcity ranged from 1844 to 1846. It affected the Chhattisgarh division and Chhindwara and Nimar districts of the Narmada division. During the distress certain relief measures were adopted in Nimar. It was estimated that more than one hundred tanks and weirs were constructed for the purpose of irrigation by the government at a cost of nearly Rs. 70,000.

Another period of scarcity occurred in 1854-55. It overspread from Jaloun in the north to Betul in the south. In the Jabalpur division the Rabi crops were severely injured by excessive and unseasonable showers. The prices of foodgrains did not fall below twelve seers to a rupee, the wages of the labourers were considerably low. As a result, there was terrible distress among the poor people. Considerable distress was experienced by the people of Sagar and Damoh districts. A local committee was organized in Jabalpur which relieved some thousands of people. The government liberally remitted large part of its land revenue. It was interesting to

24. Ibid., 12.
25. Ibid., 13-14.
note that in Seoni district, the export of grain was forbidden by the district administration. The government was asked by the Commissioner of the Jabalpur division to purchase and advance foodgrains to the cultivators; but the proposal was negatived on the grounds that the State would serious and permanent harm, by interfering with the ordinary course of trade transactions, through which advances of foodgrains were procured by the cultivators. The Deputy Commissioner of Jabalpur wrote that, 'a noteworthy result of this famine was extensive transfers of the possession of landed property and innumerable summary suits for rent in the Revenue Courts.'

For purpose of intensive study the period 1860-1910, it has been divided into two subperiods viz. 1860-1895, and 1896-1910. Scarcities and famines in each of these subperiods have been studied closely. An attempt has also been made to delineate the extent, nature and effects of famines during the period.

The policy of the government with regard to the prevention of famine have been studied. It was hesitant and insufficient at the initial stage. However, the government tried to concentrate its attention towards the problem. It has been one of the purposes of the work to trace the origine and development of a

26. Ibid., 15.
famine policy by the government with a particular reference to the Central Provinces. The adequacy of the government policy to reduce the distress has been evaluated. The success of the government in this regard has been assessed while its lapses have been recognised.

It is a pity that very little attention had been paid by scholars in India to this subject and but for B.M. Bhatia and that of H.S. Shrivastava's work there is not much by way of history of famines and relief organizations. Bhatia's book is more in the nature of an analysis of conditions which produced famines and is an economic rather than a historical survey. Shrivastava's book is a skilled survey of the famines and measures adopted. Since both the author studied the problems of the whole of India, the study of famines in the Central Provinces could not adequately take notice of. However, the province was severely affected by the distress many times during the period under this study.

An attempt has been made in this thesis to analyse in depth the causes that gave rise to recurring periods of famine in the Central Provinces. Apart from the vagaries of monsoon, attention has been focussed on the condition of the peasants, the land system of the province, the economic condition of the artisans and the tribals. It has been endeavoured to unravel the complex factors that caused extreme misery of the people.
The present study is based mainly on official records preserved in the National Archives of India, New Delhi, the State Archives of Madhya Pradesh at Nagpur and Bhopal and the Secretariat Library, Bhopal. Fortunately the National Archives has requisitioned and preserved the microfilm copies of the private papers of some leading Statesmen. The private papers of Lytton, Elgin and Curzon have been particularly useful for this study. On the basis of such documents it has been possible to make a coherent study of the problem of scarcity and famine in the Central Provinces.