CHAPTER - II

THE CAUSES OF SCARCITY AND FAMINE

Famines constitute a calamity in an agricultural country and become a serious problem to be dealt with effectively. They occur mainly in the countries whose economy is based on agriculture dependent upon natural irrigation. In such countries famine is not a recurring phenomenon. Numerous factors are responsible for the recurrence of famines in such countries. In the Central Provinces the population was almost entirely agricultural in the nineteenth century. There was hardly any other industry from which any considerable part of the community could derive its sustenance. The failure of rains would thus deprive the labouring class, as a whole, not only of the ordinary supplies of food obtainable at prices within their reach, but also of the sole employment by which they could earn the means of procuring it. In the times of drought all agricultural operations ceased, and there would be no demand for labour. Furthermore, no alternative means were there to employ them. It is intended to analyse various causes responsible for the occurrence of the famines in the Central Provinces in the following pages.

The people of the province largely subsist on vegetarian food, consisting of cereals, grains, pulses and

1. Lytten to James Caird, 1 March 1879, Lytton Collection, N.A.
vegetables. It is supplemented sometimes with the dairy products. The grain crops, therefore, are of crucial importance. However, there are wide variations in the types of foodgrains produced and consumed in the different regions. The two main harvests are known as the Kharif and the Rabi. The former consists of paddy, millets and maize. They are sown in June and July and reaped between September and December. Rice was the principal food staple in the Chhattisgarh. The average precipitation of the Chhattisgarh was forty-nine inches which was favourable for the growth of the paddy. The paddy covered the great part of that region and occupied fifty percent of the gross cultivated area.\(^2\) The paddy was also grown in the Mahanadi and Wainganga valleys where the average precipitation was forty-nine inches.\(^3\) The Rabi consists of wheat, barley and oats. They are sown in October and November and harvested in March and April. Wheat was the principal food staple in the Malwa plateau. It covered thirty-three percent of the cultivated area in Sagar and Damoh districts. It was largely grown in the rest of the province also.\(^4\) However, the Rabi crops require less rainfall than the Kharif crops.

An adequate precipitation in June and July is essential for the cultivation of the autumn crops. During these months the seed is sown in the moistened soil, and in paddy tracts transplantation is carried out. But to bring

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3. Ibid., 20.
4. Ibid., 11.
these crops to maturity, it is the precipitation in September and October which is the most important. The pattern of the harvest largely depends upon it. Moreover, the character of the precipitation in these two months determines the successful sowing and germination of the cold weather crops. Therefore, the rainfall during these months is the most critical of the year. The Rabi crops are dependent upon the moisture remaining in the ground after the south-west monsoon and the winter showers which are usually received in the months of December and January.

To ensure the normal cropping it is important that the seasonal distribution of the precipitation should always be well spaced. It must occur at the appropriate periods and be well distributed, with properly interspersed intervals of the fine weather. Moreover, it should not be concentrated within a few weeks only. Disturbance in the usual course of the rainfall between June and October had always been the immediate cause of the famines.

6. Ibid., 12.
<table>
<thead>
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7. The data for the table have been compiled from the AAR 1861-62 et seq. 1909-10.
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</table>

Average rainfall for the province 48.15

It would be observed from Table 2.1 that in 1864-65 the average precipitation was twenty-eight percent below the normal. As a result the year's harvest was generally poor in the province except in the Chhattisgarh division. The wheat crop in the Narmada valley and the cotton of the Nagpur region were hardly upto the average. Millet also did not give a good yield in Nagpur. Consequently, throughout the year the prices of all the agricultural produce had ruled high and thus caused suffering to the agricultural community. Again in 1865-66 the precipitation was not on the whole, seasonable. It was less in volume also;

8. RAR, 1864-65, 130.
it was sixteen percent less than the normal and it was not well distributed. Its unfavourable character greatly affected the crops. Consequently, the prices of food grains rose to famine proportions and it caused suffering to the agriculturists and the common people. The savana crop also failed entirely throughout the province, which caused suffering to the poor section of the society who depended on its produce for a large part of the year. In 1867-68 the precipitation was twenty-seven percent above the normal. The rainfall was almost unprecedented in copiousness. The cotton crop suffered severely. But in many places the destruction was compensated by the excellent paddy crop. In 1868-69 the failure of the rains caused great scarcity in the province. The precipitation of the year was forty-two percent below the normal. It adversely affected the various parts of the province and thus generally caused great distress. The low agricultural production caused suffering to the people. The prices ruled higher than the usual as a consequence of the ill effects of the low precipitation.

In 1873-74 the monsoon commenced late and ceased early. The rainfall was twenty-one percent below the average. It happened that in most districts there were insufficient rains till July 1873. The rainfall was generally too deficient in quantity for the paddy crop, whatever the rainfall was adequate it was unfavourably distributed. As a result, the crops failed to a considerable extent. Luckily the pressure on prices was not

9. RAR, 1865-66, 82.
11. SCC to BG1, 25.10.1892, F Fr, December 1892, Progs. No. 2, NA.
12. AAR, 1873-74, 133.
so. Speaking generally, in the majority of the districts, the prices of foodgrains were such as to place them generally within the reach of all. In 1875-76 the rainfall was thirteen percent above the normal. The rainfall was heavy and continuous during the middle of June and the whole of July 1875. Again heavy falls occurred in September 1875. However, inspite of the injury done to the harvest in some places, prices ruled low in most districts. It was because the excess rainfall did not cause injury to the paddy and jwan which were largely sown. They generally fared well. In 1876-77 the rainfall was favourable but the prices which were low till the December 1876 rose in March 1877 because of the great demand for grain and the briskness of trade resultant upon the scarcity in the south India. In the districts nearer the railway lines, this was especially the case. Despite the existence of the exceptional demand, however, prices did not rise to considerable extent as the harvests were generally good. In 1877-78 generally the rainfall throughout the province was well upto average. The high prices of the year ruled because of the large exports to famine districts in the southern India. In 1878-79 the rainfall was satisfactory.

13. Ibid., 1-2.
15. AAR, 1875-76, 1-2.
16. AAR, 1876-77, 18.
17. Ibid., 31.
18. AAR, 1877-78, 13.
19. Ibid., 34.
20. AAR, 1878-79, 6.
The decade of the 'eighties was comparatively free from scarcity but the excessive precipitation played havoc with the crops. In 1884-85 the precipitation amounted to twenty-nine percent above the normal, the rainfall was remarkable for the absence of any long break from the first burst of the monsoon till the September 1884. The incessant fall was prejudicial to all the autumn crops except paddy and prevented the usual preparation of the land for the spring sowings. However, this excessive rainfall did not cause any rise in prices.\(^{21}\) In fact the excessive rainfall is rarely as harmful as deficient one; atleast something can be grown. The prices also do not rise to any considerable extent. The cattle mortality is not very high in such cases because there is an ample crop of fodder. Thus the wet season is not so damaging to crops, as a drought is. Over precipitation rarely causes famine.

The last decade of the century had been an especially unlucky one for the province. The year 1890-91 was marked by an excessive precipitation. The following two years, 1891-92 and 1892-93 were also too wet for the crops. Fortunately neither year was really a bad one. In fact the series of wet years began with 1889-90 in that year the precipitation was eleven percent above the normal. The series reached its climax in the year 1894-95. In that year the precipitation was twenty-five percent above the normal. In each of these three years i.e. 1891-92, 1892-93 and 1894-95 several crops suffered

\(^{21}\) AAR, 1884-85, 1.
from excessive rains and protracted autumn rains. The moist and unseasonable weather in the winter destroyed the spring crops.

It is interesting to note that the scarcities that the province experienced during the years 1890 to 1895 were of local nature and confined to limited areas. They did not lead to any considerable and widespread misery. Though the prices rose, however, the food was available to the people in the market.

In 1895-96 began a cycle of dry years. The crops suffered very greatly and the prices were already ruling high. Famine conditions developed in 1896-97. It affected the province very severely. Though the total precipitation was twelve percent above the normal, it was scanty in the later half of the year. Moreover, it was not well distributed. As a result crops withered and there was famine. The famine caused enormous suffering to the people. Prices, mortality and crime rose considerably. It was then anticipated that this was the greatest famine of the country but the famine of 1899-1900 put it into shade. The people of the province then suffered from a famine, which was more acute and intense than any earlier one. In 1899-1900 the precipitation was fortytwo percent below the normal.\(^{22}\) The effects of the famine were noticeable in the high mortality rate, emigration pattern and market conditions. It affected men and cattle equally.

\(^{22}\) CPFR, 1899-1900, Vol. I, 18.
The early years twentieth century were also marked by distress among the agricultural classes. Before the problem could recover from the ill effects of the famine of 1899-1900, the precipitation was again deficient by twenty-two percent in 1902-03. The paddy crop failed in the paddy producing areas. Raipur district was declared to be a famine hit area. Again in 1904-05 the precipitation was twenty-two percent below the normal and there was a poor yield of paddy in the Wainganga valley. 1905 was also a year of low precipitation. The paddy crop suffered in Bilaspur. Finally in 1907-08 the precipitation was twenty-two percent below the normal, which caused acute suffering to the people. The onset of famine had to be declared. It affected the people severely.23

The areas of the province where the crops were especially prone to failure were the areas producing the millet in the Vindhyas and the Satpura hills, the paddy lands of the Damoh, Jabalpur and the Chhattisgarh plains, the paddy lands of the Sorni and the Wainganga valley, the jwar tract of the Nimar district and other areas of the province where both the wheat and the paddy were largely grown.24

It would be observed that the rice tracts usually suffered the most; they were of course the localities where the cultivation required more rain and where a low or uneven precipitation affected the agriculture most injuriously. In the wheat lands of the Narmada valley and Nagpur, crops had

24. SCC to SGI, 25.10.1892, P Fr, December 1892, Progs. No. 2.
never entirely failed. But for wheat, too, productivity was dependent upon rains and if there was no or insufficient rainfall the crops would wither seriously. The same may be said of the cotton lands in the Nagpur plains. The above remarks applied to the open region. The millet cultivation of the hills tracts was, owing to the poverty of the soil very sensitive to any shortfall in rainfall. Thus it was liable to failure when crops on better lands, whether paddy, cotton or wheat were only slightly affected.

Thus it is evident that deficiency or excess in rainfall invariably cause suffering. The erratic monsoon was, and still is, the greatest single cause of scarcity and the resultant famine.

The only possible insurance against an unfavourable monsoon can be a widespread network of the means of artificial irrigation. Canals, wells and tanks can be made to supply the need for water during lean periods. But unfortunately the Central Provinces in the nineteenth century was extremely ill equipped in this respect. The available means of artificial irrigation were negligible.

The geology of the province is a great hurdle in the way of artificial irrigation. Large scale well irrigation is not feasible in the Central Provinces mainly because of the geological features. The entire area is

25. Ibid., 3.
26. Ibid., 4.
comprised of the following broad litho-units, Bundelkhand Granite, the Vindhyan, the Cuddapaha, the Gondwana, the Deccan Traps and the Alluvium. The areas containing Bundelkhand granite, the Vindhyan and the Cuddapaha systems contain poor aquifers as they are relatively impermeable. Water is found only in weathered zones, shear zones and zones of unconformity. Gondwana sandstones could be poor to good aquifers and thus the areas containing these formations such as Hoshangabad and Jabalpur may have medium yielding wells. But since a large portion of this formation is covered by the Deccan trap, the yield is rather poor. The Deccan trap are poor aquifers and limited amount of groundwater can be expected in the permeable zones of weathering, the zones of individuals flow contact, the inter-trapcan areas, joints and fissures. Only low yielding wells are possible in this area. The alluvium areas have great groundwater potential as the unconsolidated sands and gravels are best aquifers. But their extent is limited to small portions of Narmada valley from near Jabalpur to Hoshangabad and portions of Tapti valley.

However, the area is not entirely deprived of water. It is to be found in relatively greater depths. They only apt rocks which hold a considerable quantity of water are those of Gondwana system. The sequence of rock types in the area clearly unfolds that such rocks are buried beneath the Cuddapaha.

Furthermore, the cost of constructing wells in the Central Provinces is excessive and is beyond the means of most of the agriculturists. The rocks lying on and beneath the surface are of hard nature and have thick deposition. It, therefore, takes long time and high cost in digging a well. The area capable of yielding water often does it only during some months of the year i.e. in the monsoon months and period immediately following it. During the dry weather the wells dry up. The problem becomes much more acute during a year of low rainfall; it is during such years that the artificial irrigation is needed most.

Last but not the least there is problem of locating the exact site for a well where water would be struck. Quite after a large expenditure and weeks of labour the site has to be abandoned as a non water yielding one.

It is thus clear that in the Central Provinces construction of wells was very expensive as well as brought with the danger of failure. Consequently, well irrigation was little resorted to. In the absence of irrigation dam area was of small advantage. 30

Another peculiarity of the province was that in no place the irrigation was available on a large scale from the sources which were not dependent on precipitation. 31

31. CGO to SGI, 25.10.1892, F/P, December 1892, Progs.No. 2.
Tanks, wells and hill streams and rivulets dried up if rains failed. The province entirely lacks in snow fed rivers. Technically speaking, no part of the province could be described as secure against drought, even when the means of artificial irrigation were available.

The Central Provinces was intersected by two main mountain ranges of the Central India - the Vindhyas and the Satpura. In the eastern portion of the province there are Chhota Nagpur hills. A very large portion of the province is situated on a table land. The rocky nature of the soil and the hilly terrain was a great deterrent against the construction of a canal system. Even to this day most of the copious rainfall of the region is drained into the sea unused. As a result, the agriculture in the province could not have the benefit of canal irrigation.

In the Chhattingarh there were few tanks. Due to a lack of capital and enterprise few of them were of a large size. The water supply was frittered away in a number of small reservoirs, which were not capable of holding a large amount of water and would dry up during a prolonged drought. Well irrigation also was practised to a small extent. Paddy was irrigated when, there was a failure in the rainfall. But the means of distribution of water were not perfect. There

32. SR, Raipur, 1869, 29.
was no system of sluices and fields would be irrigated by cutting store bund. To cut a wide channel through the bund would destroy the tank. Therefore, the cuts were necessarily narrow sufficient to irrigate only a small portion of land. In 1868, when a large portion of the crops had been lost for want of rain, the efforts to save it by letting the tank water into the fields had, in every instance been almost entirely abortive.33

Thus facilities for irrigation were undoubtedly small in the province. In a normal year the area under irrigation was only about 77,50,000 acres or five percent of the cultivated area.34 Of this a very large portion was in the eastern districts of the province, where the paddy was the chief staple. The rest of the province was sadly lacking in the facilities of artificial irrigation. However, there was a great scope for the development and extension of irrigation facilities through the state agency or by the state loans given to private parties.35 But there is little evidence to show that the administration was seriously concerned in this matter.

Curiously the senior officers of the Supreme Government thought that irrigation was not much required in the Central Provinces.36 Actually the need of

33. Ibid., 171.
34. IRC, 1903, Pt.II, 312.
35. Circular SGI to CC, 27.11.1893, F Pr, December 1893, Progs.No. 2, MA.
36. Ibid., 9.
irrigation for protective purposes was never forced upon their notice.\textsuperscript{37} Between 1862 and the last years of the 'nineties such a widespread and an almost complete failure of the rains was practically unknown. This had made them complacent.

The intensity and the frequency of famines were greatly due to the lack of resources and chronic poverty of the cultivators. The peasantry was in perpetual poverty. Only the moneylender came to their rescue in times of difficulties. But it was also the moneylender who got a firm grip over their land and property. They could save nothing in good years of harvest because of the exactions of landlords and moneylenders and consequently every year of drought was a year of famine for them.\textsuperscript{38}

It was estimated that the tenants - at-will who numbered 44, 33, 579 or about a fourth of the whole were either deeply involved in debt or lived precariously by labour as well as little cultivation; a vast majority of remainder, about half of the whole were also in a state of constant indebtedness carrying on their agriculture on borrowed capital.\textsuperscript{39}

Thus the cultivating classes showed the existence of a frightening amount of indebtedness. A considerable

\textsuperscript{37} ICR, 1903, Pt.II, 327.
\textsuperscript{38} Dutt, B.C. : \textit{Famines and land assessment in India}, London, 1900, 17-18.
number of the petty tenants were reported to be in perpetual debt. Moreover, there is evidence that the position of a large proportion of them was one of hopeless insolvency. Very often the failure of crops would involve the tenants in debt from which they or their descendents could never manage to escape.

It was the change in the land revenue system which was largely responsible for the indebtedness among the cultivators. A change in land revenue policy at a new settlement is often more dangerous than the settlement itself. It upsets the old village customs, dislocates the established relations between the government and the land holding classes and the later and cultivators engendering a feeling of general insecurity it unsettles people's minds. It has a great bearing on country's progress.

There were two main principles of the settlement of 1865-67. (A) The recognition of proprietary rights of the malgaisas and tenancy rights of old cultivators. (B) The land revenue demand was limited to one-half of the rental of assets. But the second principle was not implemented. The Settlement Department fixed an ideal rental which the tenants should pay and the malgaisas were expected to realize it. These supposed rents were not based on the actual rents paid by tenants.

40. SCC to SCI, 25.7.1888, f Pr, December 1888, Progs.No. 15, NA.

They were obtained by an assessment of soil values.\footnote{Land revenue policy in the Central Provinces of India, Jabalpur, 1906, 35.} The rents had risen largely in some places under this process. The revenue was enhanced and the landlords and tenants were compelled to accept the enhanced revenue. This was carried on with the help of subordinate revenue officers.\footnote{Ibid., 36.} As a result, rents were increased because of the new settlement of land revenue. In most districts it was more than half the rental assets. The following table shows to what extent the half-assets rule was violated:–

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<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average of assets taken as revenue</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average of assets taken as revenue</th>
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<td>Chhindwara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jabalpur</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Betul</td>
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<td>51</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wardha</td>
<td>79</td>
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\footnote{CC's letter No. 1862, 11.4.1901, Ibid., 36.}
It will be observed that only in four districts, Seoni, Narsinghpur, Hoshangabad and Jabalpur the revenue demand was limited up to 50 percent of the net assets; in seven others it remained 60 percent or below while it was between 60 and 70 percent in three districts. In remaining three districts, Nagpur, Wardha and Sambalpur it exceeded three fourths of the net assets.

It would thus appear that the principle of keeping revenue demand at fair level was ignored in most of the districts. It is because the officers who were engaged in the assessment were not well qualified, and they arbitrarily fixed the demand at a higher proportion than fifty percent. Perhaps they were more interested in pushing up the government's share.

It is thus evident that the settlement officers did not accept the actual rental of assets. The landlords were left free to collect as much as they could from the cultivators.

Because of high land revenue paid by malguzars, there was no protection for tenants-at-will who were charged exorbitant rents. As a result, often the cultivators could get back barely the cost of their

45. Ibid., 39.
labour. Rack-renting was the constant aim of the landlord. Rack-renting and frequent evictions were the two ills which destroyed the peasants' industry. Malguzars realised rent and various cesses from the helpless peasants. 47 It was a common practice to take half the rent at the time of the harvest of the autumn crops, before the spring crops were ready even though the prescribed instalment was only one-fourth of the total rental. The procedure compelled the tenant to pledge spring harvest and led him deeper into debt. 48

Since the instalments were not judiciously fixed a large instalment was demanded in February, so that the collection may be completed within the financial year. In order to pay the revenue in February the malguzars collected rents in January. The crops were not harvested in January and the tenants had to mortgage standing crops much below their fair value to moneylenders to pay rents. 49

Besides getting into debts for paying rent on fixed date, the cultivators often did not have resources to buy seeds manure and other things necessary for agriculture. This would involve them in further debts. A death or a marriage in their family would drive them

47. M. inn, C.W.; Famine truths, halftruths, untruths. Calcutta, 1902, 421.
49. Dutt, A.C.: 22, 487.
to moneylender's door. Once they were in the clutches of the moneylender they could never shake them off. They could never accumulate any reserve as every single rupee they could spare would go to moneylender.

Most often the cultivators had to pledge the crop to moneylenders much before they were ready. They were not thus able to take full advantage of the benefits resulting from the opening up of the country by roads and railways. They needed cash immediately for paying rents on fixed dates and so could not afford to wait till the prices would rise. They seldom had means to take their produce to the best markets. Moreover, the roads were difficult to traverse during the rains. Only from the end of October to the middle of June were they available for traffic. At the time of its formation the province was particularly inaccessible for outside traffic, and there were no large towns to provide a local market for surplus produce. The means of communication throughout the province were generally

51. Ibid., 103.
52. Fuller's report: On progress of the Central Provinces during past thirty years and of the present and past condition of the people, Nagpur, 1892, 18.
poor. The rocky nature of the province did not permit construction of network of passable tracks. However, every village and town was connected with its neighbours by tracks, on which only the small cart of the region could travel for eight months of the year. Very large portions of the province were covered with deep and inaccessible forests which obstructed free flow of goods.

The food-stocks of the province were generally as a rule more than sufficient to mitigate the difficulties of the famine-stricken people. But the want of roads was a great obstacle to traffic. Ordinarily, therefore there was little trade and machinery for supplying a sudden deficiency of food did not exist. During the famine of 1899-1900 the administration had experienced great difficulties in the interior parts and hilly tracts of the province especially in the Chanda and the Betul districts in providing supplies. The lack of facilities also caused heavy cost of transport and delay in taking the supplies to the famine-hit area. The development of the means of transport certainly did not keep pace with the requirements of the province.

53. SR, Betul, 1866, 21.
54. SR, Nimar, 1895-99, 17.
55. Sr, Bhandara, 1869, 27.
56. SCC to SGI, 17.11.1868, H (P) Rr, 5.12.1868, Progs. No. 74-79A, NA.
57. SCC to SGI, 17.8.1900, E I (F) Vol. I, British districts, NA.
58. Fuller's report: op.cit. 19.
It is indeed asserted that the opening up of the province and the export of its produce had been of positive advantage to the staying power of the people. But such a view is not substantiated by facts. The roads and railways, where available depleted the local stocks which increased the distress in times of famine. In fact, before the means of transport, especially the railways carried away the surplus produce, the people had always more than sufficient stocks to tide them over a period of scarcity.

There were many factors which operated to reduce the profits of cultivators. The various indigenous crafts were in a more or less flourishing condition upto the 'sixties. Later either they wholly disappeared or were reduced to a moribund condition under unrestricted competition. The government fully backed such competition as a matter of policy.

Prior to the construction of roads and railways local needs were met by local manufactures. Oil for lighting was extracted from linseed and castor by the local oilpresses. A considerable area was devoted to the cultivation of sugarcane from which jow and sugar were manufactured. The iron mines produced ore which was smelted and manufactured into iron implements by

60. Ibid., 222.
61. SR, Narasinghpur, 1923–26, 96.
local blacksmiths. Every village had a number of weavers and dyers who manufactured coarse cloth from local cotton. There were (indigenous liquor manufacturers) kalars, whose vocation was distilling and retailing the common spirit made from mahua flower. Such handicrafts provided vocations to the farmers in their spare hours and gave them additional source of livelihood which they could either spend on purchasing the foodgrains when their prices were high or to enable them to improve their agriculture and increase production.

The opening up of the province by means of transport provided employment to unskilled labour while the construction of roads and rail tracks went on. But it at the same time inevitably struck a severe blow at cottage industries. As machine made goods entered the market they gradually became popular because of their low prices and this adversely affected the local industries. Kerosene oil slowly universally replaced locally manufactured oil for lighting purposes, even in temples. Large number of persons was employed in cleaning cotton. The opening of ginning factories and the increasing improvement of mill made cloth removed this source of livelihood. The kalars suffered due to the establishment of government distilleries on

62. SR, Betul, 1866, 66.
monopoly basis. The people who lived by cart and the transport of grain had also suffered from the extension of railways. 63 The basket-makers and makers of cheap jewellery and bangles also suffered. The former suffered owing to the small intrinsic value of the goods which they made and the latter suffered because of the import of cheap trinkets from outside. 64 Industries like weaving, spinning and dying had been killed by the foreign competition. 65 The artisans, weavers and the spinners suffered the most. Their businesses had decayed due to the foreign competition and the introduction of machinery. The majority of them was in normal times in a depressed condition. 66 They were at once thrown into distress when the prices rose. The condition of the weavers was the most unsatisfactory. There is evidence to show that the weavers had extremely suffered from the import of Lancashire cloth, and they were one of the most distressed sections of the community. Enquiries made in 1898 showed that in Jabalpur they earned on an average two annas or twelve np. per day. In Bhandara, where the weavers were numerous they were found to earn from three to four annas per day, thus

63. Fuller's report: op. cit., 44.
64. CPFR, 1896-97, Vol. 1, 8.
they could not have the means to have the bare necessities of life. Formerly their profits were much larger but they had been considerably reduced because of the introduction of foreign cloth. 67

It is thus clear that the Indian handicrafts suffered in competition with the British manufacturers. They failed to adopt new techniques of production. 68 As a result, quite a large number of artisans gave up its traditional occupations and fell back upon agriculture. In 1872 in the province as a whole, 64 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture. 69 There were no larger industries to absorb those who gave up their occupations and the whole province was practically supported by the agriculture. 70

Since the pressure of population on land increased considerably, the petty cultivators could not derive the benefit which could otherwise have resulted from a rise in the prices of the agricultural produce. In other words, that part of the peasantry which was in excess of the requirements of agriculture ate up the profits that would have sprung from the industry of the community. 71

67. Fuller's report: 92 cit., 43; SCC to SGL, 25.7.1888, F Pr, December 1888, Progs. No. 15 NA.
68. Fuller's report: 92 cit., 44.
69. CR, 1872, Pt.I, 34.
70. SR, Hoshangabad, 1891-96, 10.
71. FCR, 1880, Pt. I, 103.
The aboriginal tribes were numerous in the Satpura hills, Belaghat and the Chhattisgarh. They were the most hard pressed for bare subsistence during the famines. Their condition might be described as precarious. They depended for their subsistence upon the millet cultivation. In ordinary times they found it difficult to make both the ends meet. Most of them wandered almost naked through the forest gathering its produce for their food, and shifting their abode from time to time as the fancy took them. The Commissioner of the Narmada division Ricketts wrote that they had a hand to mouth existence and if there was the slightest failure of the harvest they had to live on her fruits and roots of trees and anything they could pick-up.

Some natural calamities such as hailstorms frost and pests are liable to destroy the crops. The hailstorms may cause very serious damage. They are of annual occurrence but the damage done by them extend over a small area. Once a village was visited by any one of these and the crops were destroyed, it might take many years to recover. In 1862 the gram crop in Wardha was attacked by insects which caused serious

72. SCC to SGI, 25.7.1888, F Pr, December 1888, Progs. No. 15, NA.
73. SCC to SGI, 25.10.1892, F Pr, December 1892, Progs. No. 2, NA.
74. Ibid., 14.
75. Ibid., 15.
76. CFPR, Vol. I, 1899-1900, 16.
injury everywhere and, in certain areas, destroyed
the crops entirely. The tur was also almost destroyed
in the same manner. 77 In 1894 the wheat crop in Sagar
and Damoh was almost totally destroyed by rust. Again
in 1895 the rust attacked and partially ruined the wheat
and almost destroyed the linseed crop over the great
part of the province. 78 In 1904-05, the rabi crop of
northern districts was very seriously damaged by frost.
The damage caused was considerable over some areas and
necessitated remissions of revenue in several districts. 79

Thus it is evident that the failure of
monsoon was always accompanied by widespread distress
and often famine. The people could not resort to
artificial irrigation the facilities for which almost
non existent. This was the most neglected aspect of
agriculture of the Central Provinces. The common
peasant was hard pressed by the agrarian system introduced
in the first settlement. The force of circumstances
drove him within the clutches of the moneylender. The
decline of handicraft weakened his resistance to
distress still further. As a result, an average peasant
could never build up any reserve to help him out in
difficult days. Consequently, whenever his crops received
even a small set back, starvation stared him in his face.

77. RAR, 1862-63, 7.
78. CPFR, 1899-1900, Pt. I, 16.
79. CPFR, 1907-1908, Pt. II, 2; RAR, 1903-1904, 2.