CHAPTER III

PERIODS OF SCARCITY AND FAMINE 1861-1895

During the period between 1861-95 there were several periods when scarcities occurred in different parts of the Central Provinces. Some scarcities were very grave due to acute scarcity of food while the others were minor famines causing less distress. It is intended to analyse the causes, extent and effects of these famines in the following pages.

In 1861-62 the precipitation was sixteen percent above the normal.\(^1\) The rains commenced in May, nearly a month earlier than usual and continued almost without break till the end of August. After August there were no rains. The rainfall affected the Kharif crops in two ways—first from the early and unexpected setting in of the monsoon. It prevented the usual preparation of the soil for proper reception of the seed. Secondly from the heavy and incessant nature of the rains, which made the seeds sown to rot. It also prevented the young plants from attaining maturity.

As a result, the Kharif crop was almost a total failure.\(^2\) The untimely stoppage of rains affected the Rabi crop also, however, it was on the whole well.\(^3\)

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1. See Table 2.1.
2. RAR, 1861-62, 8.
3. Ibid., 135.
Because of the low agricultural production, the prices of grains ruled higher than usual. It was partly because the province supplied grain in great quantities to the famine-stricken regions of the North-Western Provinces and partly because of the low agricultural production in the province itself. The prices, however, did not rise to any great extent in the Chhattisgarh, because, it was not connected by the railway lines. The export from there was not much.

Luckily, the people did not suffer much by the price rise. They were able to face the difficulties without any unusual distress. In 1864–65 the average precipitation was twentyeight percent below the normal. The monsoon set in during the first week of May 1864, which was a month before the normal, and ceased in the middle of August though some showers were received until the middle of September. But the rainfall was slight and it was not continuous. As a result, both the Kharif and Rabi crops suffered seriously. The outturn of both the seasons was less than the average. Senior officers anticipated than the ill effects of the bad season would not be generally felt. They believed that the profits of the former good seasons, the high prices of

5. See Table 2.1.
7. AAR, 1864–65, 4.
agricultural produce, and the ample employment afforded by the Railway construction, would enable the agriculturists to compensate their losses. The partial failure of the crops, coupled with the steady and increasing demand for the agricultural produce from outside had pushed up the prices of foodgrains. As a result, the prices were then more than they were ever before. However, the rise in prices was beneficial to the agriculturists. 8 Naturally, the rise in prices was seriously felt by the labourers and wage earners. But the continued demand for labour and the high wages which were paid lessened the distress of the labouring classes. Moreover, the price rise did not appear to be caused by the scarcity. The prices rose sharply because the demand for foodgrains from other provinces greatly increased. It was also the result of the displacement of grain by the cotton in the agriculture of the province. 9 There is evidence that despite the failure of the crops, the completeness with which the land revenue had been realized in the province, showed that the agriculturists would soon be well off and that such occasional bad harvests would neither ruin nor impoverish them. 10 It might also indicate that the agriculturists were not yet so impoverished as to be prostrated by one

8. Ibid., 30.
9. Ibid., 97.
10. Ibid., 132.
lean year as was the case later in the century.

In the following year the precipitation was sixteen percent less than the normal.\(^\text{11}\) As a result, the agricultural production fell considerably. The low production again affected the prices of foodgrains materially.\(^\text{12}\) In some places the rise in prices had been so great that the people had taken to eating oil-cakes to sustain life. On the other hand, it was also a notable fact that in several places the *mahua* was being used considerably as a principal article of food. This happened because of the high prices of foodgrains.\(^\text{13}\) It is interesting to note that though the crops failed, there had not been in any district of the province anything approaching to starvation or acute want. As a result, the rise in prices did not cause any considerable rise in crime.\(^\text{14}\) It was the unanimous testimony of the senior officers that the principal classes of the population were well off. They also believed that the rise in prices had fully compensated farmers for the shortness of their crops.\(^\text{15}\)

Another period of acute scarcity and the resultant famine, occurred in 1868–69 when the rainfall was considerably less; it was twenty/two percent below the normal.\(^\text{16}\) The rainfall began lightly in June 1868,

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11. See Table 2.1. and  
13. RAR, 1865–66, 35.  
14. PAR, 1865–66, 70.  
15. RAR, 1865–66, 82.  
16. See Table 2.1.
and then held off till the middle of July. The situation deteriorated considerably by August, and as a result the autumn crop was nearly lost. But a heavy fall in September saved a good deal of it. However, in Raipur and other eastern districts where the rainfall had been very heavy in July there were no September rains. Consequently the paddy crop was lost. The rainfall in some of the northern districts was recorded less than half the normal. The northern and eastern districts had been affected by the failure of rain in 1865, which had occasioned the Orissa famine, and these were the parts which suffered the most in 1868–69 also.

The scarcity extended over an area of 41,500 square miles, and affected a population of 44,00,000 people. The official reports stated that the famine was experienced in Sagar, Damoh, Jabalpur, Bhandara, Balaghat, Raipur and Bilaspur districts. There was considerable scarcity in Mandle, Seoni, Chhindwara, Nagpur, Chanda and Sambalpur.

Prior to the famine the prices were already ruling high because the province supplied grain in great quantities to the famine-stricken districts of other provinces. It was also because the purchasing power of the people had fallen greatly. In the year

1867–68 which preceded the famine the outturn of the crops was on the whole fair. However, the wheat stood at 30 seers to a rupee in the Chhattisgarh in April 1868 and rice stood at 24 to 40 seers to a rupee. The low range of the prices was remarkable in the Chhattisgarh and arose from the isolation of that fertile region and its seclusion from markets. The region had not yet been opened up well by rail and roads. As a result of the failure of crops in 1868 amounting to nearly 50 percent, high prices ruled the markets.

When the rains set in, an epidemic of cholera broke out, which was especially severe in the eastern districts. In several cases it attacked and disposed off the gangs of relief workers. Very little is known about the extent of mortality caused by this famine because the details of the measures of relief in many places are not available. It was believed to have been very severe in the northern parts of Jabalpur and Sagar. Registration of mortality was then just beginning to be worked. The population under registration was about 47.5 lakhs, and in 1868 the deaths of 77,058 persons or 16.5 per thousand was recorded. In 1869 the rate of

24. AAR, 1868–69, 184.
25. FCR, 1880, Pt. II 440.
mortality rose to 35.9 per thousand and in 1870 it was about 25 per thousand. During these two years an excess mortality of 1,50,000 above that of 1868 was registered.\textsuperscript{27} Responsible officers thought that only half the total number of deaths had been registered in 1868 and it was probable that the official records of 1869 and 1870 were equally defective. It may therefore be reasonably concluded that the real excess of mortality of these two years was in the range of 2,50,000.\textsuperscript{28}

The cattle, too suffered from murraín and besides they were so weakened from starvation that they were unable to drag themselves through the deep mud and from pastures and often fell down and died. When the rains in 1869 were over, a great outbreak of fever followed in the autumn. But all direct famine relief had ceased by that time.\textsuperscript{29}

Wandering or very often the migration of people from the famine-stricken places was the immediate result of the scarcity. Consequently in the northern districts the number of immigrants was very large, both in the relief works and in poor-houses. Many of them came from the British districts of Jhansi division and the Bundelkhand states. The people's own account of themselves could not be trusted, as the immigrants from

\textsuperscript{27} FCR, 1880, Pt. III, 100.
\textsuperscript{28} AAR, 1868-69, 195.
\textsuperscript{29} FCR, 1880, Pt. III, 100.
the princely states, apprehending that they would be refused relief if they told the truth, often asserted that they came from the British territory.\textsuperscript{30} Out of 1,500 persons relieved daily for thirteen months in Sagar, only one-eighths were residents of that district, and of the rest about three-fifths stated to have come from the princely states, and two-fifths from Lalitpur, Jhansi etc. In Jabalpur in July 1869, half the paupers came from Maihar, Rewa, Panna, Nagod, and other states, and were to a great extent induced to crowd into Jabalpur by the news of dole of grain being given out there. At last when their number rose to an intolerable extent, an effort was made to get rid of them, and six hundred were sent back to Maihar by train. As it was doubtful if proper arrangements were made for their support, this practice was soon discontinued. Many of them were sent by train to Narsingapur to work on the Railway construction. Most of them, however, refused to work and after arriving there and started to beg.\textsuperscript{31}

The failure of crops resulted in the rise in crime and the accounts of the occasional grain riots reached the Officiating Chief Commissioner.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} AAR, 1868-69, 195.
\textsuperscript{31} FCR, 1880, Pt. III, 101.
\textsuperscript{32} SCC to SGI, 21.9.1870, HP Pr, 10.10.1868, 35-37 NA.
aggregate of crime for 1868 was 37,768 as compared with
31,740 in 1867. Nearly all the officers considered
high prices and scarcity which prevailed in many distr-
icts of the province to be the cause of the abnormal
rise in crime.

The drought was unequal in severity. Though
scarcity was experienced everywhere it was acute only
at few places. Distress in the various parts of the
province was such that in the opinion of the Chief
Commissioner it became necessary to take steps to
alleviate the suffering. Accordingly in September 1868
relief works were opened in Damoh and Sagar, in November
in Balaghat and Bhandara, and in January and February
in Raipur and Bilaspur respectively. But, when the
relief works were first opened they failed to attract
the labouring classes. As soon as the works were opened
near or in the suffering tracts the number of the
workers on relief rose rapidly.

When the distress deepened in the Chhattisgarh,
owing to the failure of the rainfall, a brief report
was laid before the local government. It also mentioned
the various difficulties which were expected to arise

33. AAR, 1868-69, 14.
34. Statistical Abstract of British India, 1868-72, 1.
35. SCC to SGI, 16.1.1869, HP Pr, 6.2.1869, Progs. No. 100,
NA.
36. FCR, 1880, Pt. III, 100.
37. SCC to SGI, 28.5.1869, HP Pr, 12.1.1869,
Progs. No. 105, NA.
while providing the relief. After examining the report, the government sanctioned the construction of one road and railway lines. The road would connect Raipur with Bilaspur. A railway line was projected to provide an outlet for the produce of the Chhattisgarh by constructing a line running through Raipur and Bilaspur to the foot of the range of hills which separated that region from the railway terminus at Jabalpur. 38

A provision had to be made to meet the distress in the Jabalpur division. Accordingly, eleven relief centres were opened where the needy were directed to report. For the able-bodied work was provided on a system of railway feeders. Provision was made in the poor-houses for old and infirm. Those people, who temporarily lost their strength from the insufficiency of food, light labour was provided on tanks, and other useful works in the places which were near the relief centres. 39

In Nagpur division, particularly in Bhandara, where the paddy crop had failed, irrigation works were required. Therefore, opportunity was taken by the landlords to apply for takavi advances for the purposes of repairing and digging tanks. 40

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38. SC to SCI, 9.3.1869, HP Pr, 27.3.1869, Progs. No. 98-99, NA.
39. SCC to SHD, 9.10.1869, BC, GD, 14, 1869, NPA Nagpur.
40. RAR, 1868-69, 107.
division too the attention of all the Deputy Commissioners was drawn to this aspect so that the agriculturists might have this opportunity of constructing new tanks. 41

The total sum spent on relief works was Rs. 3,39,365. In addition to this Public Works Department spent Rs. 4,89,255 on the construction of roads. The government advanced Rs. 2,29,746 as loans to agriculturists and a sum of about Rs. 1,80,000 was spent by private persons in the improvement of their lands by famine labour. 42

In fact the measures adopted to mitigate the suffering of the people were part of the new policy. Formerly the assistance given by the state was limited to time honored method of remission of land revenue. Another object which may be regarded as the chief feature of the policy adopted was to support the old and infirm by the state. Moreover, the government then admitted the responsibility of saving the life by taking every possible step. 43 Thenceforth it became an important ingredient of the famine policy.

There are certain points on which the policy of the government is open to criticism. First, its policy about land revenue was inexplicable. The land

41. Ibid., 40.
42. Fuller's report; op.cit., 6.
43. Statistical Abstract of British India, 1868-72, 1.
revenue was collected with surprising ease and completeness. Very little remissions were granted. There is evidence that the number of land sales and mortgages increased because of the pressure of land revenue and non-remittence of the same. The landlords must have pressed their tenants hard in order to pay the rents. It is thus clear that the government tried to take its share even when the agriculturists were in distress.

With regard to the attendance of the recipients of the gratuitous relief in relief camps, it is estimated that in Jabalpur district, which was one of those which suffered the most, the number of persons in the receipt of gratuitous relief never exceeded 3,325 and the average population of the poor-houses for the eight months of the worst scarcity was only 1,400. In Damoh district the number of persons who received gratuitous relief did not exceed 2,760, a large portion of whom were immigrants from princely states. The number is very small and the relief only touched the periphery of the population.

Though the government came forward to reduce the suffering of the people its steps were still hesitant, halting and insufficient.

44. Ibid. 40.
45. Fuller's report: op.cit. 6.
After a five year period of plenty, the average precipitation in 1873–74 was twenty-one percent blow the normal. The monsoon ceased earlier than usual. Timely showers late in the year were received in some tracts. It enabled the agriculturists to complete Rabi sowing timely. As a result there was an average outturn of the Rabi crops. Owing to the failure of the paddy, the prices ruled high in the paddy producing areas. But in almost all other districts they had been much lower than before. In some districts of the Nagpur division prices had indeed been lower than they had been known for the past many years. This was because of the ample production of Jwar which was principal article of food. Jwar does not thrive in a wet season.

In 1874–75 the average precipitation was fourteen percent above the normal. It did not have any considerable effect upon the prices as the excessive precipitation rarely causes scarcity. Again in 1875–76 the average precipitation was thirteen percent above the normal. The monsoon commenced in the second week of June and south western winds prevailed over the southern and eastern parts of the Satpura which resulted

46. See Table 2.1.
47. AAR, 1873–74, 61.
48. Ibid., 5.
49. See Table 2.1.
50. Ibid.
in heavy rains. The northern districts also received ample rainfall. But the excessive rainfall did not lead to any widespread suffering. In the following year the average precipitation was three percent below the normal. The showers in June were light and irregular over most of the districts. The rainfall was not satisfactory even up to the first week of July. However, it was fairly copious and seasonable in latter part of July and August. There were heavy September rains in most of the districts. In the following cold season continuous showers accompanied by hail occurred in certain places. As a result in some areas yield of both Kharif and Rabi crops was not good enough. Still on the whole food production was fair. The prices were lower but they rose because the grain was sent out of the province to the areas which suffered a severe famine in that year. In 1877-78 the precipitation was six percent below the normal. The chief feature of the precipitation was that it was above normal in the Nagpur division and average in Satpura districts. In the rest of the province it was deficient. It was not well distributed over the year. As a result the crops were damaged seriously.

52. See Table 2.1.
53. A.A.R., 1876-77, 1.
54. Ibid., 2.
55. Ibid., 3.
56. A severe famine raged in Bengal, Bihar and the North Western Provinces.
57. See Table 2.1.
Generally the Kharif crops has been fairly good, but they suffered to a certain extent from the untimely rainfall in certain areas. The abnormal weather was also responsible for this damage. The unfavourable characteristics of the season also caused serious and extensive injury to the Rabi crops and disappointed the farmers. 59 Consequently the prices of foodgrains rose to famine proportions. The price rise was much more than what the actual deficiency in production would warrant. Partially such a rise in prices was caused by the continued export of grain to the other famine-stricken provinces. 60 Moreover the province had suffered a bad season in the preceding year. It is evident that the poor classes must have had hard times because the petty thefts rose slightly. 61 In some districts the people had to take off their children from schools so that the latter may work as labourers and thus help them in tiding over the distress. 62 The senior officers anticipated no great or widespread distress sufficient to call for government interference by way of instituting relief works. 63

In the following year the average precipitation was two percent below the normal. 64 It was not well

59. Ibid., 33.
60. Ibid., 34.
61. PAH, 1877-78, 40.
62. AAR, 1878-79, 2.
63. AAR, 1877-78, 34.
64. See Table 2.1.
distributed. It generally approached to or exceeded the average except in the north of the province where it was less than the usual. The rainfall was confined mainly to months of July, August and the first half of September. This excessive rainfall injured the Kharif crops in some places. The absence of showers in the cold weather damaged the Rabi crops which were everywhere poor.\(^65\) The principal agricultural population was well off and the measures of relief were not required.\(^66\) But the labouring classes must necessarily have suffered considerably from high prices and hard times.

The 'eighties of the last century were comparatively easy time for the agriculture in the province. Rainfall had been normal or near normal and people did not suffer much difficulties. However there were one or two unfavourable years.

The average precipitation in 1883–84 was eleven percent above the normal.\(^67\) It was marked by a long break in rains in July and August. The rainfall was above the average in most of the southern districts and below the average in the northern districts. The low precipitation resulted in the poor Kharif production which was considerably below the normal. But the moisture

\(^65\) AAR, 1878–79, 6.
\(^66\) Ibid, 34.
\(^67\) See Table 2.1.
that was stored in the ground in the cold weather months was especially beneficial to the *Rabi* crops. The ill effects of the rainfall were noticeable in the price rise. Rice was cheap in March 1884 everywhere except Hoshangabad and Betul. The price of *Jwar* had already risen because there was poor yield in 1882. The price of wheat remained low because the export demand fell off.

In the following year the average precipitation was forty percent above the normal. As a result the autumn crop was seriously damaged. Due to excessive moisture in the soil there was a contraction of the area sown for the spring crops. However, the prices did not rise.

There was a threatened scarcity in 1886-87. It was more serious in the Chhattisgarh than elsewhere. The average precipitation was twenty percent less than the normal. The rainfall was fairly favourable in the northern and the Narmada valley districts in July. There was a long break in the latter part of August and middle of September. However, a heavy

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68. *AAR*, 1883-84, 2.  
70. See Table 2.1.  
71. *AAR*, 1884-85, 2.  
73. See Table 2.1 and *AAR*, 1884, Pt. I, 24.  
74. *AAR*, 1886-87, 5.
rainfall in mid-September altered the prospects.\footnote{75}

There was again a heavy rainfall in October.\footnote{76} It removed immediate danger.\footnote{77} The October rains might have been more beneficial to Rabi sowing had they been less heavy.\footnote{78} The heavy fall of October was followed by another fall towards the end of November.\footnote{79} The prospects however, continued fluctuating until January.\footnote{80} But the rainfall in the first week of January altered the situation materially and upto certain extent obviated the apprehension of severe distress.\footnote{81}

Owing to abnormally long break of the rains paddy crop in the Chhattisgarh showed the signs of considerable injury at the end of August.\footnote{82} Some anxiety was also felt for Jwar but the timely rains placed it out of danger.\footnote{83} In the Chhattisgarh the paddy crop failed entirely.\footnote{84} The outbreak but was generally below the normal elsewhere. The Rabi crops, however, fared better which compensated the failure of paddy upto some extent.\footnote{85}

\begin{flushleft}
75. SCC to SGL, 16.10.1886, F Pr, December 1886, Progs. No. 5 NA.
76. SCC to SGL, 19.2.1887, F Pr, March 1887, Progs. No. 1 NA.
77. Telegram SCC to SRD, 8.10.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 3 NA.
78. AAR, 1886-87, 5.
79. SCC to SGL, 19.2.1887, F Pr, March 1887, Progs. No. 1.
80. AAR, 1886-87, 5.
81. SCC to SGL, 19.2.1887, F Pr, March 1887, Progs. No. 1.
82. SCC to SGL, 16.10.1886, F Pr, December 1886, Progs. No. 5.
83. AAR, 1886-87, 6.
84. SCC to SGL, 19.2.1887, F Pr, March 1887, Progs. No. 1\textsuperscript{nd}
    Telegram SCC to SAD, 29.10.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 6, NA.
85. AAR, 1886-87, 7.
\end{flushleft}
The low agricultural production resulted in price rise. The prices were higher than those in the preceding year. Consequently, there was a good deal of distress among the labouring classes.\textsuperscript{86}

The anticipated famine did not take place and the province bore the disastrous season of 1886 without undue distress. It strongly corroborated the often expressed opinion as to the great resources of the province. Earlier seasons had been good. There were ample stocks of food in the villages.\textsuperscript{87} Though the prices had gone up higher than usual they never reached famine level.\textsuperscript{88}

Still in spite of the fact that the distress was not acute the rise in prices caused difficulties to the poor people. There was a sudden spurt in crimes against property as is evident from the following table:-

\textbf{T A B L E - 3.}\textsuperscript{89}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>1886</th>
<th>1887</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dacoity</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lurking house trespass with violence</td>
<td>5,095</td>
<td>6,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle theft</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>1,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>10,017</td>
<td>12,981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{86} CR, 1891, Pt.I, 24.  
\textsuperscript{87} Fuller's report, \textit{op.cit.}, 6.  
\textsuperscript{88} FCR, 1898, Pt.I, 12.  
\textsuperscript{89} CC to SI, 4.7.1888 H(Police), Pr, August 1888, Progs. No. 13-15, NA.
It will be noted from table 3.1 that chief increase in crimes occurred in cases of petty thefts and bulgaries. It shows that the poor people were more affected by the distress.

The want suffered by the people also affected their physical condition. Cholera broke out in the province and 16,679 persons died. It was very severe in districts Balaghat, Bilaspur and Raipur. Fever was also more rampant and fatal.90

The Officiating Chief Commissioner visited Raipur and Bilaspur. He did not find any serious signs of distress there. Some relief works were opened but they attracted few workers. It was then anticipated that the number might increase later as the distress would deepen.91 When it was apprehended that the scarcity was likely to be felt it was reported to the Government of India that the relief works must be started as and when they were required. However, the officers did not plan in details because it was probable that the scarcity would not be felt severely.92 Similar reports were received from Bhandara and Balaghat in the Nagpur division.93 The local administration thought the situation sufficiently

91. SCC to SDL, 19.2.1887; F Pr, March 1887, Progs. No. 1.
92. Telegram CC to SPW, 2.10.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 1, RA.
93. SCC to SDL, 16.10.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 5.
gloomy to have been reported to the Government of India and asked permission to start earthwork on Raipur-Bilaspur railway line.\textsuperscript{94} Again the Officiating Chief Commissioner reported to the Government of India that distress was imminent and strongly recommended to make arrangements for relief work on the Raipur-Bilaspur railway line.\textsuperscript{95} But the Government of India was not prepared, except in case of extreme necessity, authorise work on the proposed line.\textsuperscript{96}

When the relief works were opened at some places by the government they never attracted labouring classes to any great extent. The private persons also spent much money in construction of tanks. Thus the extra employment was afforded to the labouring classes. However, it seemed to have been quite sufficient to tide over the difficulties of the poor people.

The distress was not acute because the timely rainfall in the autumn of 1886 saved the province from severe drought. The rainfall also enabled the spring crops to be sown under favourable conditions. It also gradually relieved all congestion in the labour market. It is remarkable that so large a diminution of crops had been met without any material inconvenience.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{94} FCR, 1893, Pt. I, 12.
\textsuperscript{95} Telegram SCC to S.O, 9.10.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 6, NA.
\textsuperscript{96} SGI to CC, 3.11.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 7, NA.
\textsuperscript{97} Fuller's report : \textit{op. cit.}, 6.
There are certain points on which the policy of the government is open to criticism. First, its policy about the cadastral survey, preceding the revenue settlement, was not flexible. When the crisis deepened it was reported to the Government of India. It was proposed to postpone the cadastral survey operations so that the patwars and other officials who were engaged in the settlement operations could be made free to work on the famine relief agency. But the government did not consider it necessary because the large enhancement of land revenue were expected after its completion.  

Obviously the government was more concerned with the prospects of an early increase in land revenue than relieving the distress of its subjects.

It is clear that a detailed programme of relief works was neither prepared nor maintained by the government. Moreover, at that time the railways had not been opened in the Chhattisgarh. Food was not scarce, because there were large stocks. The only question was the ability of poor people to procure it. The distribution of food stocks could never be smooth in the absence of railway lines or a network of roads.

98. SCC to CR, Chhattisgarh Division, 4.10.1886, Appendix to SCC to SGI, 16.10.1886, F Pr, November 1886, Progs. No. 5.  
99. Circular SGI to CC, 1.10.1886, F Pr, October 1886, Progs. No. 1.  
Two years later in 1887-88 the average precipitation was thirty percent above the normal. 101 The rainfall was abnormally heavy over most of districts. 102 The excess was mainly due to the large amount of rain which fell in August. Showers were received in October also which were of immense value in facilitating the autumn sowings. Unfortunately the Chhattisgarh division did not receive October rains. 103 The paddy crop there was an excellent one. However, owing to the excessive rainfall cotton crop in the province failed entirely. The jwar and other autumn crops did not fair well. 104 The spring crops were on the whole satisfactory. 105 As a result the people did not face much scarcity though some of the crops did turn out rather badly.

In 1890-91 the average precipitation was ten percent above the normal. 106 Though the monsoon rains were very favourable for paddy, but the cold weather season was characterised by heavy rainfall in the south of the province. However, the wheat crop on the whole was a fair one. 107

In the following year the average precipitation was twentyeight percent above the normal. 108 Though the monsoon commenced late, the fall of rain from July to

101. See Table 2.1.
102. AAR, 1887-88, 3.
103. Ibid., 5.
104. Ibid., 3.
105. Ibid., 7.
106. See Table 2.1.
107. AAR, 1890-91, 6.
108. See Table 2.1.
September was greatly in excess. There was very little rain fell during the cold weather, and it was very late too. The paddy crop fared well. The wheat was also satisfactory. The kutki crop was deficient. It was a principal staple food of the aboriginals.\footnote{109} It was reported to the government that the tribal people suffered considerably. Moreover, they resorted, as usual, to forest fruits and roots. Accordingly they were granted the concession of free gathering of mahua and other forest produce.\footnote{110}

The ill effects of the abnormal weather were noticeable in the price\footnote{rise. There was a marked rise in the prices of agricultural produce and they ruled higher than in the preceding year.\footnote{111} Despite the fact that the prices rose higher, the crime in province did not show any tendency of marked increase during the year.\footnote{112}}

In 1892-93 the precipitation was twenty\footnote{113} percent above the normal. The monsoon promised at first to be an excellent one. But the rainfall of August and September was heavy. It was favourable for paddy but decidedly damaging for the other crops such as cotton, millet and til which require a light rainfall with breaks

\footnotetext[109]{A.R., 1891-92, 3.}
\footnotetext[110]{Ibid., 8.}
\footnotetext[111]{Ibid., 9.}
\footnotetext[112]{FAR, 1891-92, 17.}
\footnotetext[113]{See Table 2.1.}
for weeding. In October heavy rainfall occurred in most of northern districts. It was of great benefit to the Rabi sowing. But the wheat seeds which were sown earlier were ruined by swamping and therefore the fields required fresh sowing. The paddy crop was good and the autumn millets yielded considerably below the normal. The wheat crop was about ten percent below the normal. Though the agricultural production was deficient, the prices of food grains did not rise to any considerable extent.

In the following year the precipitation was thirteen percent above the average. The rainfall was not well distributed. The monsoon commenced in the second week of June, a little earlier than usual. Upto the end of June the rainfall was light. The heavy rainfall occurred in the following two months. The September rains were satisfactory. The monsoon ceased in September. The October rains, which were of utmost importance for the preparation of the ground for the Rabi sowing, were generally sufficient everywhere. The Rabi crops were sown under favourable circumstances and the prospects were excellent upto January. But the weather suddenly became abnormal. Heavy rains fell from February to April.

114. AAR, 1892-93, 8.
115. Ibid., 9.
116. See Table 2.1.
reains were accompanied by occasional hailstorms which caused extensive damage to the ripening plants. As a result though the paddy crop was on the whole fair the wheat crop was below the normal. 117 In Sagar and Damoh the wheat crop was completely destroyed by the heavy rains of February and March and necessitated the relief measures. 118

It was reported to the Chief Commissioner in March 1894 that the wheat crop in Sagar and Damoh had been destroyed by excessive rains and that serious distress was apprehended. 119 It began to be felt in April. 120 It was caused by the fact that the outturn of wheat in both the districts was far below the normal. 121 It was estimated that the actual outturn of wheat would be about 45 lakh maunds as against an average of 56 lakh maunds. 122

The poorer section of population was the worst affected. 123 Petty tenants and labouring classes had been more or less pinched for food. 124

117. AAR, 1893-94, 15.
119. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1, NA.
120. Telegram RSI to SSI, 1.5.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 7, NA.
121. Cr, Jabalpur Division to DCS of Sagar and Damoh, 2.4.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 5, NA.
122. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
123. SCC to SGI, 22.11.1894, F Pr, December 1894, Progs. No. 1, NA.
124. SCC to SGI, 11.6.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 12, NA; SCC to SGI, 14.7.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 33, NA; SCC to SGI, 16.6.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 1, NA; SCC to SGI, 20.7.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 36, NA.
With a view to test the acuteness of the distress the Chief Commissioner arrived in Sagar on 23 June 1894. There he was told that the tenants were unable to support their families. Most of them were keen to work on the relief works though they had to go for a long distance for it. They were eagerly waiting for the relief works and the works were really needed. 125

The government decided to open relief works. But initially the minimum wages prescribed by the Famine Code were to be paid, so that the severity of the distress could be tested. 126 It was thought that these wages were sufficient to support the indigent but were not enough to attract people, who were not suffering from starvation. It was also intended that these wages were to be paid until it should be clearly shown that the relief works were really needed. 127 However, even the low wages resulted in attracting considerable number of workers. As soon as it became clear that relief works were really needed, full wages were introduced, and definite tasks were fixed. Its completion, as far as practicable was also insisted upon. 128

The relief measures consisted of various works.

The distress was earlier mitigated by ordering the

125. SCC to SCI, 2.7.1894, F Pr, October 1894, Progs. No. 2, NA.
126. SCC to SCI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
127. SCC to SCI, 21.6.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 20, NA.
128. SCC to SCI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
collection of metal for Sagar-Kareli road at a cost of Rs. 27,500. For the purpose of facilitating import and export of grain from Sagar to Damoh, the metalling of Sagar-Garnakota road was also taken up and satisfactorily completed at a cost of Rs. 13,300. In addition to this all ferry tolls on Damoh-Jabalpur and Sagar-Damoh roads were remitted with effect from July 1894 with a view to remove hindrance for the easy transport of grain. 129

The state of affairs in Sagar and Damoh was really alarming. Large number of relief works was needed. The road building schemes of the two districts would provide for employment of not more than 10,000 persons while at least 1,00,000 people required help. Therefore, additional avenues of employment were urgently required. The Indian Midland Railway had already completed survey of the extension of railway line from Sagar to Damoh. The construction of embankment on this railway line would provide the required employment and the expenditure would be useful. Therefore, the matter was reported to the government of India and the sanction was urged. 130 The government sanctioned the proposal. 131

It was also reported to the Government of India that the only way in which adequate relief could be provided to the people suffering from distress was by

129. Ibid., 3.
130. Telegram CC to SRI, 5.4.1894, F Pr June 1894, Progs. No. 2, NA.
131. Telegram ASI to CC, 6.4.1894, F Pr June 1894, Progs. No. 3, NA.
constructing the projected railway line from Sagar to Katni. It would connect Damoh and Sagar with the fertile regions of the Chhattisgarh. On the other hand it would link it to Upper India and the Punjab. The Government of India, therefore sanctioned the construction of Sagar-Katni extension.

The peculiarity of these two districts was that very often they suffered from excessive rainfall and rarely from drought. It was, therefore, considered to be useless to set the people on digging tanks. The ordinary and a very advantageous plan of employing skilled and unskilled labour in the drought affected tracts was to employ them on the construction of railway lines.

The poor tenants, daily wage earners and artisans came on the relief works. They brought their families too. It was often asserted that the number of women and children was more than the men. It was perhaps because of the fact that the men could be employed by private persons on better wages.

In October 1894 the daily average number on relief works showed no tendency to increase as the autumn

132. SCC to SGI, 18.5.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 12, NA.
133. SSI to Viceroy, 19.5.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 14, NAG, H to CC, 9.6.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 15, NA.
134. SCC to SGI, 18.5.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 12.
135. SCC to SGI, 16.6.1894, F Pr, May 1894, Progs. No. 9, NA.
136. SCC to SGI, 8.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
crops began to be reaped. It became obvious that the labouring classes would be employed in agricultural operations and the relief measures would no longer be necessary. After a careful enquiry and consideration all works were closed in Sagar on 28 October 1894 and in Damoh on 21 November 1894 respectively. However, before the works were closed, it was intended that these works should be completed as far as possible and thus leave a definite and useful result in each case. For the purpose of their completion they were given out on contract.

With regard to the question of takavi, the object of the government was to insist that the landlords should help their tenantry. To meet the immediate needs the usual takavi allotment to Sagar and Damoh was increased to Rs. 81,000. It was considered that an additional grant of five lakh rupees would suffice for the purpose of takavi. The Government of India sanctioned the proposal in July 1894. The government helped the agriculturists as far as possible with takavi advances. It also sanctioned considerable

137. SGI to CC, 11.9.1894, F Pr, September 1894, Progs. No. 2, NA.
138. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
139. Ibid., 6.
140. SCC to SGI, 2.7.1894, F Pr, October 1894, Progs. No. 2; SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1; SFC to CC, 19.7.1894, F, Pr, October 1894, Progs. No. 3, NA and SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
amount to tenants for purchasing the necessary seed
grain required by them. The whole grant was rapidly
distributed, and the districts were put in a good
position for recovery of their normal prosperity.

Under the Land Improvement Loans Act and the
Agriculturists' Loans Act Rs. 61,000 were granted to the
districts of Sagar and Damoh. This amount was increased
by re-appropriation from other districts to Rs. 81,000.
The land revenue remitted under the orders from
Calcutta amounted to Rs. 1,27,520.

It was proposed to alleviate the sufferings
of the poor by allowing them to gather forest fruits
and roots for personal consumption. The government
sanctioned the proposal. A further concession was
made to the agriculturists by permitting them to graze
their cattle free in all government forests. Initially
this concession was granted from 1 June 1894 to
15 September 1894, but later on it was extended upto
15 October 1894. The total expenditure on relief
amounted to Rs. 1,03,000.

141. SCC to SGI, 11.9.1894, F Pr, September 1894, Progs. No. 1, NA.
142. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
143. SCC to SGI, 21.6.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 21, NA.
144. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
145. SCC to SGI, 16.5.1894, F Pr, May 1894, Progs. No. 5; SGI to CC, 11.5.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 8, NA and SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
146. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
some aspects of the measures of the government are open to some criticism. First, its policy with regard to the advances under the Agriculturists' Loans Act and Land Improvement Loans Act was faulty. The government advanced the sum under these Acts which it considered sufficient. But advances on a more extensive scale for the purpose of seed grain and agricultural equipments were required. There is evidence to show that the government delayed to grants up to September and October 1894. It considered that it was the time when the sowing was near at hand, and there was less risk of loans being diverted to other purposes. Curiously the government overlooked the fact that before the sowing would take place the preparation of the land was necessary and the agriculturists needed financial help for this purpose much earlier than October. It is clear that the matter was unnecessarily deferred and it caused difficulties to the poor agriculturists. 147

The daily number of workers on relief works never exceeded 11,583 in Sagar and 4,145 in Damoh. The average daily number was 5,102 in Sagar and 2,244 in Damoh respectively. 148 The figures clearly show that the number was considerably small. Moreover, men

148. SCC to SGL, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
constituted only twenty percent of the total attendance, the rest were women and children. It appears that the men were employed by private persons, who provided them with higher wages than those paid on relief works. 149 There were certain other causes for the low attendance on the relief works. First, the minimum wages were paid there, which were really insufficient to men in good health and strength. They were less than those paid by private persons, so the men sent their families to relief works while they themselves went to private works. Secondly, the wages have been calculated on the price of wheat. But the labouring classes used a large proportion of staple other than wheat. 150

Insipite of such acute conditions it was neither found necessary nor advisable to open poorhouses or to arrange for gratuitous relief. Such arrangements were really needed. However, though the government did not make any arrangement for the poor people, the rich classes in Sagar and Damoh generously came forward. They provided free rations for two months to those who were unable to work. 151

150. SCC to SGL, 21.6.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 20.
151. SCC to SGL, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
Proper sanitary arrangements were also not made. In Damoh, the death-rate in May 1894 was 49.89 per thousand; it was only 25.51 per thousand in May 1893. The death-rate was as low as 28.25 per thousand in May 1892 which was a year of sporadic cholera. Failure of the crops often leads to the scarcity of fodder. The fodder was becoming scarce and dear in June 1894. Its scarcity began to be felt severely in August 1894. But the government failed to make an adequate arrangement for the cattle.

On close analysis it would appear that the expenditure on the relief works was indeed greater in proportion to the relief actually afforded. It is satisfactory to note, however, that the works were of permanent utility. The improvement in the system of transport was of great benefit to the people.

The government made genuine efforts to save the people, though the measures were not sufficient. The calamity caused enormous suffering to the people of Sagar and Damoh, it also brought out the fact that the

152. SCC to SGI, 14.7.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 33.
154. SCC to SGI, 16.6.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 1.
155. SCC to SGI, 11.8.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 12.
156. SCC to SGI, 6.2.1895, F Pr, February 1895, Progs. No. 1.
condition of the agriculturists of the province was precaurios. This fact was made more painfully clear in the next five years.

The availability of food was not a problem because the failure of the crops affected only two districts. But its price was too high. The agriculturists and the labouring classes had hardly any purchasing power. The crops had been bad over the preceding three or four years. The agriculturists, large and small, were in debt. The landlords in both the districts, as was the case everywhere in the province, had brought their tenants within their control by loans of grains and money. They used their power to strip the tenants of nearly the whole of their surplus produce and left them with what was needed for a bare subsistence. 157

The general opinion of local officers, and the Chief Commissioner was that such accumulation of wealth as might have occurred during the last thirty years of a very lenient assessment of land revenue had gone to the moneylenders and landlords. 158 The tenants, therefore, did not possess any reserve to meet even a partial failure of crops without the help of landlords or the government.

As regards the landless population, it led a hand-to-mouth existence under the best of circumstances. It generally depended upon the produce of forests. When

157. SCC to SG1, 16, 4, 1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 5, NA. 158. Ibid., 3.
they did not find employment they carried loads of grass and firewood for sale in the villages and thus earned their livelihood.  

With regard to the causes responsible for the deterioration of the conditions of the people, and especially those of tenants, Deputy Commissioner of Damoh wrote: 'I was much struck with the deterioration of certain villages which I visited. Two years earlier, in 1891–92 when the wheat crop was damaged by the hail, the landlords did not apply for the suspensions of land revenue. Even those whose business was to report the matter to the government did not do it. However, the landlords made every effort to collect the rents and seed grain which they had advanced to their tenants. The tenants sold all their cattle and property and got rid of it. The villages were then completely deserted and hundreds of acres of rich land were a sea of khas grass.'

In 1894–95 the precipitation was five percent above the average. The rainfall was not well distributed. The rains continued to fall in excessive quantity of the outbreak of the monsoon.

159. Note by F.J. Crooke, Deputy Commissioners of Damoh, Appendix to SCC to SGI, 16.4.1894, F Pr, June 1894, Progs. No. 5.
160. Ibid., 6.
161. See Table 2.1.
162. RMMP, 1894–95, 79.
163. Viceroy to SSI, 24.7.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 38, NA.
rains throughout July played havoc with the Kharif prospects. It rendered the preparation of land for
Rabi sowing impracticable. However, more rains in
the late autumn of the year were required for
agricultural operations. Though the rains which fell
in August, September and October were beneficial for
the sowing of the Rabi crop, the rainfall in November
was extremely unseasonable. General depression began to
be felt by the people after November rains which were
injurious and which threw back Rabi sowing unduly. They
thus rendered the prospects still more gloomy. The
unseasonable character of the rainfall affected the
Kharif crop. In certain places it also affected the
early Rabi sowing, as a result the seed which had been
sown earlier was spoilt and fresh sowing became
necessary.

Because of the unfavourable rainfall the area
under crop fell from 1,63,16,904 acres in 1893-94 to
1,60,64,101 acres in 1894-95. The area under paddy declin-
ed in Seoni and Balaghat districts. The area under
wheat decreased considerably over a large part of the
province.

164. SCC to SCI, 11.8.1894, F Pr, July 1894, Progs. No. 12.
165. Telegram Viceroy to SCI, 28.7.1894, F Pr, July 1894,
Progs. No. 40, NA.
166. SCC to SCI, 22.11.1894, F Pr, December 1894, Progs. No. 1.
167. RMNP, 1894-95, 73.
168. SCC to SCI, 22.11.1894, F Pr, December 1894, Progs. No. 1.
169. AAR, 1894-95, 3.
The low agricultural production resulted in the rise of prices. For the province as a whole during 1894–95 the prices of wheat, millet, gram and pulses rose by about ten percent. The daily wage earners and labouring classes must have had hard times because of the high prices.

The year was the most unhealthy one. As a result, an excessive mortality occurred in every district. Total number of deaths registered was 3,53,606 which was 90,463 in excess of that of preceding year. It was considered that this was the greatest number recorded for many past years. The lowest death-rate was 23.37 per thousand in Bilaspur and the highest was 48.34 per thousand in Nimar.

The poor people were severely affected by the failure of crops. Consequently, the number of cognizable offences rose from 22,231 in 1893–94 to 25,089 in 1894–95.

The unfavourable weather and the damage caused to the crops seriously affected the land revenue. The total land revenue collection amounted to Rs. 65,83,884 in 1894–95 as against Rs. 69,22,222 in 1893–94. The land revenue suspensions were granted in

170. Ibid., 30.
171. Ibid., 77.
172. HR, 1894–95, 25.
Though the crops of the major portion of the province were seriously affected, the government could do nothing more than allowing the cattle to graze in the forests. The value of grazing concession amounted to Rs. 3,500.\textsuperscript{174}

Though many parts of the province suffered due to the failure of the crops, the government did not look into the matter promptly and carefully. There is evidence to show that the people suffered because of the low agricultural production and price rise. Inspite of the low outturn the export of the foodgrains from the province rose from 2.5 lakh maunds in 1893–94 to 4.75 lakh maunds in 1894–95.\textsuperscript{175} It clearly shows that the government blindly supported free-trade policy and it was less interested in the welfare of the local people.

The precipitation in 1895–96 was fourteen percent below the normal.\textsuperscript{176} Upto August the rainfall was heavier than usual. It hindered the proper weeding operations. Cotton and jwar suffered because of the continuous and heavy rains and began to turn yellow. The showers which were received later on altered the situation. The September rains were beneficial for the

\textsuperscript{173} A.A.R., 1894–95, 52.
\textsuperscript{174} RMNP, 1894–95, 87.
\textsuperscript{175} A.A.R., 1894–95, 48.
\textsuperscript{176} See Table 2.1.
agricultural operations, but the rains which fell in October played havoc with the crops. The crops were spoilt by the untimely November rains. The paddy crop was two-thirds of the average. The wheat crop was nearly average. 177

The prices rose slightly but they did not reach any remarkably high level. 178 The poor people were not pinched for the food.

The period between 1861-95 was a period of comparative prosperity for the agriculturists because there was no severe famine to set back the economic conditions. Though several minor famines and local scarcities occurred during the period which affected the different parts of the province but they were not widespread. The suffering of the people, too, was not as intense as in some later famines.

These famines and scarcities provided opportunities to remove the defects in the Famine Code which was revised accordingly. Even after the revision of the Famine Code the officers who were engaged in the relief measures deliberately overlooked many facts. This negligence caused enormous suffering to the people. The deficiency of fodder was a recurring feature of these droughts. Because of it heavy mortality among the

177. AAR, 1895-96, 7.
cattle occurred. The aboriginals also suffered frequently from the distress. These two difficulties appeared to be caused because of adoption of new forest laws. Under their provisions the government had closed government forests for grazing and utilisation of forest produce. 179 However, in the opinion of the Famine Commission, the experience gained during these famines, made it clear, 'that scarcities occurring over limited areas while the rest of the Indian Continent was prosperous, could be successfully dealt with by a very moderate expenditure of money and without disturbing the ordinary administration.' 180 But, as the later events proved, it was only a period of preparation. When the terrible famines struck the province in the coming years, the government was caught napping.