

comparatively plentiful. The Government agreed to this suggestion and 9,000 persons were dispatched in parties of a thousand at a time to the Northern *Circars*, 3,000 to Ganjam and 2,000 to Vizagpatnam. They were fed by Government during their transit and provided with food or employment on their arrival. In October, Government thought it necessary to take the supply of rice and food grain into its own hands. It was decided that rice imported from Bengal would be at the rate of Pagoda 150 per grace ($1\frac{1}{4}$ d per lb), from Northern *Circars* at Pagoda 130 per grace ($1\frac{1}{6}$ d per lb), paddy at Pagodas 75 per grace ($\frac{5}{8}$ d per lb), *junnah* and *natcheny* at pagodas 80 per grace ($\frac{3}{4}$ d per lb). These prices were to be paid by bills on the locality from where the grain was imported.²⁰

The merchants were dissatisfied with this provision of payment by bills and the price which they considered inadequate. In their address to the Government they appealed to the Government for modification of price. The Government accepted some of their suggestions and allowed the merchants to sell on their own account at such rates as they thought proper, one sixth of their cargoes and two sixth were sold by the Grain Committee on account of their consignees at such rates as seemed desirable, the remainder $\frac{1}{2}$ of the cargo being disposed of to Government, at the fixed price on the terms above mentioned. Shortly after this modification of the original arrangement, the Government increased the price to be paid for rice to pagoda 200 per grace about ($1\frac{3}{4}$ d per lb) up to 20th December, after which date, half the cargoes were left to be disposed off by the owners, the other half being taken at the old rate, of pagodas 150 per grace (about $1\frac{1}{4}$ d per lb). The scarcity came to an end in the early months of 1783.²¹

Famine of 1790 – 92

Seven years had scarcely elapsed when another serious dearth took place in the northern districts of the Presidency. In a minute, R. Munro, member of the Ganjam Council dated May 1790 had described that the crops had been very scanty in 1789 and warned the Government not to attempt the full collection of *kist* on the *Havelly* or Government lands. When the south west monsoon rains again failed, the Government of Ganjam took most prompt measures to ward off as far as possible the misery and starvation that awaited people. As early as 7th November, a proclamation was issued suspending all import and transport duties on grain and other

20 *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

21 *Ibid.*, p.16.

edibles in the *Havelly* lands and preventing export to the south and laying an embargo on the export of grain from the seaports. The distress was further aggravated by the depreciation of the copper coin owing to large importation of Dutch dubs. The distress was severe on the estates lying around the Mohendra Malia south of Itchapore where the paddy crop entirely failed. In Pedda Kimedi lying further to the north only a half crop was reaped. In Soorangi Boodarsingi and Daracota the production was same while Borraghur only gathered a third of the usual yield.²²

Things slightly improved in the early months of 1791 in some districts south of Ganjam and the Madras Government recalled the order suspending the collection of duties and imports in Ganjam and other Northern districts. In April, it was stated that 1200 persons had died of starvation in neighbourhood of Vizagapatnam.²³ In May rice had fallen to 30 *seers* per rupee owing to large imports from Cuttack and restrictions on export. The south west monsoon having again failed the Madras authorities grew alarmed and dispatched urgent commands to the revenue authorities to reserve sufficient grain for the maintenance until a prosperous season.²⁴ Early in 1792, the district of Ganjam was in great straits for food and those of Ellore, Rajmundry and Condapilly, in serious distress. From Masulipatam, it was reported that there had been numerous deaths from starvation in all quarters of the neighbouring countries. Until June, 1792, export of rice from Tanjore was prohibited except to the distressed districts to permit 50 bags (about 7,500 lbs) of rice per *mensem* to be distributed in charity, from the Government stores at Vizagapatnam and to authorize the collector of Ganjam to feed the poorest classes upon rice and natcheny porridge at a cost of Rs. 200 to Rs.300 per *mensem*.²⁵ The pressure became at last so severe in Ganjam that Mr. Snodgrass, its resident collected local subscriptions for relief of the poor and employed 2000 of them on public works paying them their wages in grain from Government stores.²⁶

Scarcity of 1799

In the early part of 1799, there was considerable distress in the district of Dindigul in the south and the collector was permitted to purchase grain

22 *A Short Account of the Ganjam Famine of 1866 by an Officer of the District, Ganjam, 1867, p. 2*

23 *Ibid.*

24 R. A. Dalyell, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

25 *A Short Account of Ganjam Famine, op. cit.*, p.2.

26 *Ibid.*, p.18.

on Government account for the purpose of retail sale to the people. Nothing further was known of this and apparently the alarm passed off without the necessity for any measure on a large scale.²⁷

Famine of 1805 – 07

Five years later or towards the close of 1804, the season was so unfavourable as to cause severe pressure on the poorer classes in the Tanjore and South Arcot districts. The Collector of Tanjore took upon himself to purchase 70 grace of rice at 83 pagodas per grace (12½ Madras measures or 37½ lbs per rupee) for the purpose of retail sale to the people. A small profit was made on the transaction which he devoted to gratuitous support of the poorest among the sufferers. Early in 1805, the scarcity in these two districts had been so severe, the Collector of Tanjore recommended an embargo on exportation and the Collector of South Arcot suggested that the importation of rice should be undertaken on Government account, from Bengal and the northern districts to be sold by retail at depots on behalf of Government under European superintendence. The Government on the submission of these proposals expressed their objection to any interference with the grain market unless it proved absolutely necessary. They however ordered supplies of grain from the northern districts and from Bengal and left the question of putting an embargo on exports to the discretion of the Collectors. They also suggested the expediency of the advances to merchants to enable them to obtain supplies.²⁸

In 1805, there seemed to have been a widespread failure of crops but as the Famine Commission of 1898 reported, there was no record to indicate with precision over what extent or in what degree and months, the rainfall was deficient. Government still adhered to its policy of non-interference with trade. In 1806, the distress became more severe and the Board advocated the employment of the able bodied poor on public works. In December 1806, the proposal to open relief works to employ the able-bodied was approved but the Collectors were warned not to impose too heavy a burden on the treasury.²⁹ Early in 1807, the Government apprehending the danger of the situation, offered a high fixed price with a view to increasing the supply of grain. The price offered was 110 pagodas per grace (under 1d per lb) for all rice imported into Madras Presidency up to August. The

27 C. D. MacLean, *Manual of the Administration of Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1886, p. 3.

28 Dalyell, *op. cit.*, p.19.

29 C.D. MacLean, *op. cit.*, p.4.

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importer was given the option to sale to Government at fixed price or sale to public at market price. Lord W. Bentinck the Governor of Madras, had advocated the payment of a bounty on all grains imported though it was objected by his Council The distress became more severe in the districts of Nellore, North Arcot and Tanjore and in September it was suddenly found seriously pressing on Trichinopoly. Sir Thomas Munro who was then Collector of Ceded Districts advocated relief to the people near their homes on useful works such as tanks and wells to avoid long journey and the risk of disease followed.³⁰

A very considerable outlay upon public works and some advances to the people for the purpose of sinking wells were sanctioned in the three districts of Nellore, North Arcot and Madras. Some supplies of grain were also forwarded from the Presidency town by the Grain Committee, to certain districts on the requisition of the Board of Revenue. Instead of these measures of relief a large number of people perished. The Government had at first contemplated establishing great depots, but later when proposed to forward large supplies of grain from Madras, the mortality which had taken place among carriage cattle, rendered it impossible to do so.³¹

In the absence of relief measures like the distribution of food, sale of grain at low rates large number of people immigrated to Madras and besieged the gates of the Monegar Choultry. This institution did much towards the relief of the starving applicants and all the able-bodied were given employment on the public works in the neighbourhood of the Presidency town. For seven months an average of 25000 were fed gratuitously. Most of them were sick, infant, old thus unable to work. Four branch relief depots were also opened for accommodation of large number of immigrants from the provinces and in the month of August, 15000 persons were thus relieved. There was considerable mortality among numbers relieved partly from disease and partly from actual starvation. Many died almost immediately after their arrival. An expenditure of about a lakh of rupees (£ 10000) was incurred in these operations up to the month of August. About 12000 people died. By October 1807 the famine came to an end. But the Government found themselves with a large stock of grain in their hands which they thought necessary to part with at a loss of 10% on the cost price (at pagodas 100 per grace or $7\frac{1}{8}$ d per lb).³²

30 R. A. Dalyell, *op. cit.*, pp.20-21.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

32 *Ibid.*, p.24.

Scarcities in 1811, 1812 and 1814

The season of the year 1811 was unfavourable in some of the southern districts and the anticipation of famine was expressed. The principle that Government should avoid interference with trade was again and more strongly laid down and duties on imports were removed. No serious distress was generally experienced throughout the Presidency but the district of Madura suffered considerably during the period 1812-1814 and so an advance of pagodas 2000 (£ 700) to merchants was given as assistance to enable them to procure grain from elsewhere. About 42000 people were given employment at public works in that district. The expenditure incurred in giving employment was pagodas 93000 (£32550). The distress extended to Canara district in 1812 where the scarcity was due to abnormal export which raised prices.³³

Famine of 1823 – 24

The next famine in Madras presidency took place in 1824. The south west monsoon of 1823 was deficient. So the prices of grain rose. The commercial resident at Injeram, near Masulipatam, viewed the rise in prices as alarm for the coming famine. On his own responsibility, he compelled certain merchants to sell rice at fixed prices and wrote to the Bengal Government requesting that a cargo of rice should be sent to him on Government account. When his proceedings were reported to the Madras Government instead of taking the matter seriously, the latter dropped it on the ground that such proceedings were more likely to create a famine than to relieve the existing distress. They also reported to the Government of Bengal that they had no reason to apprehend a scarcity. Two months later, the Government realized the danger which the commercial resident had foreseen. Scarcity of grain was by that time severely felt in the town of Madras. There was only one warehouse open for the sale of grain. Several deaths from starvation had been reported, many children had been abandoned by their parents in despair and at the end of the month, a serious grain riot took place in the town rendering it necessary to call out the military. The crowd persistently refused to disperse, until a round of ball cartridge had been fired over the heads of the rabble.³⁴

Matter was going to be worse throughout many parts of the country, especially in the Karnatak and Western districts where as Munro had

33 *Ibid.*, p.26.

34 *Ibid.*, p.27.

reported the price of grain had doubled the usual rate. The Government accordingly published a notice admitting all grain free of import duty and permitting its free transit throughout the country. They also offered a bounty of Rs.30/- per grace (358 d per quarter) on all grains imported from Bengal, Malabar or Canara until the 7th June. All ships bringing grain to the coast were offered a cargo of salt at Rs18/- per grace instead of Rs.24/- the regular price. The Government also directed the Board of Revenue to instruct Collectors to provide labour, on usual public works for those of the people who could not obtain employment elsewhere. The distress became severe in North Arcot district and its Collector requested the Government to fix the prices of grain which the later refused on the ground of the policy of non-intervention. But the Government sanctioned a subsequent proposal received from him to advance to the cultivators of land a sum of Rs.2500/- to be expended in sinking wells and to be recovered within 3 years.³⁵

In the mean time the Board of Revenue required the Collectors of all districts of Madras Presidency to submit reports about crops, stores of food grains, import and exports in their respective districts. They were required to forward weekly returns of the state of the season and crops and likewise of the ruling prices compared with that of previous 3 years. On the basis of the report submitted by these Collectors, the Board found it necessary to give state employment to a considerable number of people in the Ceded Districts and in Guntur, Salem, Vizagapatnam, North and South Arcot, Madras and Nellore. The Labourers were paid in money. Those who were unable for labour needed feeding by Government. Their number was considerably increasing in the town of Madras and the district of North Arcot. In September, the Collector of Nellore reported that prices were still rising and the deaths from starvation were of frequent occurrence and that a Relief Depot was also opened in that district. In Vizagapatnam rice was selling at 9 *seers* per rupee in the same month and the people reported of selling their infant children.³⁶

In Madras, the Relief Depots were managed by the Committee of the Monegar Choultry to whom Government gave grant-in-aid and the Government officers managed them in the Provinces. The expenditure on relief at each depot was about one rupee per head *per mensem*. The recipients of relief were divided into two classes, those able to work and

35 *Ibid.*, pp.28-29.

36 *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

those unable to do so and each was supplied with a ticket entitling him to a sufficient dole of cooked food to preserve life. In the town of Madras, several thousand persons were fed at four separate depots for several months. In the Chingleput or Madras district about seven thousand persons were also fed on the same principle for three months and in Nellore two thousand. The funds were provided chiefly by the Government, though some subscriptions were raised in Madras. The season in October and November was propitious and Relief Depots were closed by the end of the year.³⁷

Effect on revenue

The effect of the famine of 1823-24 on land revenue can be studied by the data given below:³⁸

	Demand	Collection
Average of Preceding four years	33295000	33306500
1823-24	<u>317080100</u>	<u>31365700</u>
Decrease	1687000	1940800

This decrease in collection was due to the drought. The direct reduction due to drought in Bellary and Cuddapah was 25% on wet lands and 36% on dry lands. In North Arcot this reduction was 12½% on all lands (dry and wet).

Guntur Famine of 1833 – 34

In 1833 another great famine occurred in the southern part of Hyderabad and Deccan districts of Bombay Presidency. But it was more severe in Guntur district of Madras Presidency for which the famine of 1833-34 is also known as Guntur famine. The old Guntur district consisted of 14 *taluks*³⁹ and remained independent till 1859, when it was divided between Rajmundry and Masulipatam then renamed as Godavery and Kistna.⁴⁰ The present Guntur district which is in Andhra Pradesh came into existence

37 *Ibid.*, p.32.

38 *Report of Indian Famine Commission, 1878, op. cit.*, p.6.

39 14 taluks- (1) Dacheppally (2) Timmercottgah (3) Prattepad (4) Mortoor (5) Mangalgherry (6) Bapatlah (7) Porinur (8) Repully (9) Tennally (10) Guntur (11) Gorapaud (12) Codaveedu (13) Narasorowpet (14) Innacondah.

40 M.V. Rajgopal, *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteer, Hyderabad*, 1977, p.2.