

Mapping The Need For Pro-Poor Interventions From A Pluralist Perspective

(A Study on the Food Policy of Colonial Madras: A Prelude to Understanding the Tamil Nadu Food Grain Economy)

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Abstract :The present paper posits the need to examine the success of welfare policy interventions based on an empirical reading of its origin and growth. The pro-poor interventions which saw their evolution in British India were extended plan after plan with fiscal subventions. There is no second opinion on the need for championing the cause of downtrodden. However, the development rationale of the subventions spanning decades invite an exploration to substantiate its pro-poor cause. This paper attempts to unravel the underpinnings of Public Distribution System [PDS] in Tamil Nadu, a Colonial legacy, based on archival sources. In essence, the plea of the paper is to read the need and significance of welfare policy intervention from a pluralist plank transcending the rhetoric frame.

I. INTRODUCTION

The present engagement attempts to map the trajectory of food policies in India. Essentially, state intervention in the food economy is an imperialist legacy. The 20 major famines during 1866-1910 1 that plundered the nation called for statutory rationing as an emergency measure. Following the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 and II World War, government regulation of the food grain market saw operationalisation. To facilitate this explorative study on the welfare provisioning for the vulnerable in the empirical context of food problem of the state of Tamil Nadu, sources dating back to pre-independent famine like Report of the Indian Famine Commission, Review of the Madras famine, have been consulted. The ensuing summary is an elucidation of the same.

A glimpse into food security issues of the then Madras Presidency vividly presents a case for a holistic framework towards mitigation of food problem. Varied contexts and cases could be sifted out from the ensuing compilation that posits the need for critical analysis including issues of governance.

The **core quest of this review** thus is to invite a re-thinking on food subventions beyond the conventional mode of fiscal policy debates.

1.1 Famine code – Food security system of the Madras Presidency:

A brief interception² at this juncture on the 1st ever officially witnessed “famine” in the then TN is essential as it historically traces the “government approach” to food poverty - the spill over of which dominated the state food policy in the post independent plans³. As per the report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, the great famine of 1876-78 (the predecessor of state food problem) occurred mainly due to failure of rainfall and

¹ Pg. 26, Majumder, Bhaskar.

² The information on the score of food scarcity in the then Madras state is gathered from the Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, (first reprint 1979) New Delhi, Review of the Madras famine, 1876-1878, Madras Government Press.

³ We refer to the pre-independence Madras famine as a situation of chronic food poverty and not as a natural calamity owing to the identified causes of its aggravation namely,

- a. solutions in accordance with political interests
- b. Sustainable development strategies verily needed to combat economic pressures like galloping inflation were called upon a sporadic basis.
- c. Technocratic and professional interests dominated the state food agenda where the ambit of people’s participation was thoroughly limited.
- d. Local structures of government like civil agencies were not decentralized forms as it had virtually no discussion with famine hit residents of the community; Rather these structures were an operandi team at district and lower levels of provincial territory. A summary on pre-independent food scenario reflects that imprints of colonial legacy could be evinced during the era of democratic planning.

consequent crop failure; some of the districts of Madras Presidency that suffered were Chingleput, North Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore and Tirunelveli. However, when initial causes were left unattended the famine culminated into a devastation claiming lives and livelihood led by spiraling food prices and stagnation of other sectors of the economy, including “a cessation of the ordinary work on which bulk of the people are employed” as the 1898 report⁴ puts forth.

Counting on this argument it may be noted that famine is both the cause and consequence of low purchasing power; in policy parlance, demand factor comprising of employment, income and entitlement is as significant as supply factor for food security of the people. It therefore may be argued that touting one component as significant over the other is a policy disjuncture resulting in the aggravation of the problem. It has been the practice of political bureaucracy to prioritize one component – supply or demand factors - each plan which is easily dismantled in the ensuing plan calling attention towards another component of threat. Further, very little is known about the previous factor – whether the problem continues or is contained in the present period, though some statistical estimations may be produced. The present and the ensuing sections attempt to grapple with the issue of consistency in policy making. An appraisal of policy practices of colonial Madras government is a beginning on the score of critical policy musing of the present dissertation.

To tackle the food problem in provincial Madras, relief operations were initiated in full vigour by public authorities. It is interesting to learn from the report the institutions that played a commanding role in mitigating the distress of famine were:

- State Bureaucracy (provincial head)
- Local Municipalities (decentralized structure)
- Private Charitable Organisations

While the state PWD (Public Works Department) was credited with the task of controlling the negative spill over and deployment of anti-food poverty measures, the local regimes had discretionary powers in selecting the formal squad – government agency or a civil agency or a collaboration - as far as the relief operations of their area were concerned. It may be noted that “professional control”⁵ was the code pursued in implementation of mitigation programmes. Further, the voluntary support offered by informal philanthropic agencies was accepted as “auxiliary”⁶ to state provisioning.

Coming to the issue of the measures that were taken to handle crisis, the following classification of state intervention may be noted from archival evidence.

- Gratuitous Assistance
- Relief Works
- Other measures

There seemed a clear cut demarcation of beneficiaries based on their destitution on the score of their eligibility to access doles. Livelihood strategies and employment options were generated concomitant to gratuitous support exclusively for the vulnerable.

Gratuitous support was meant for the destitute, the sick, the infirm, the old and those who necessarily have to stay at home to attend to infants and sick. To cope up with the food crisis, poor houses and central kitchens were made available as adhoc arrangements to facilitate people who were debilitated by the crisis- financially, physically and psychologically. Poor houses accommodated those

- who had no shelter
- who cannot be sent to their homes due to illness or such other reasons
- who became temporarily dysfunctional
- who were mentally distressed to take up jobs

The central kitchens were convened by the provincial government of Madras to provide cooked food to those:

- who were not identified /enrolled as eligible for relief work

⁴ Chapter V, Pg 176

⁵ Pg. 250 Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, (first reprint 1979) New Delhi,

⁶ Pg 307 Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, (first reprint 1979) New Delhi,

- who were employed in large works and had to support non-working children
- who were temporarily disqualified to take up any work.

Relief measures covered large and small works that provide job opportunities more or less respectively @ 90,000 day units of labour; In other words 1000 workers for 3 months were assured of employment. It is the number of day units that a job would absorb that defines the largeness or smallness of the initiative. More important than the seeming classification of large works and small works was the difference between public works and village works. The former implied state sponsored initiative –central, provincial or local, while the latter denoted those on going works taken over by the state from the private segments-individuals / communities – exclusively during the period of crisis to meet the specific demands of the local area. The public work programmes covered development of agriculture including irrigation and promotion of infrastructure like rail, road, seed and fertilizer support etc.

The component of other measures included specific programmes for the targeted vulnerable. The crew included Support to weavers⁷. Support to the tribes in the hilly regions of Madras.

The support to these targeted groups was mainly through means facilitating their traditional occupation which was hit hard during the crisis period. For instance weavers accepted help in the form of loans and advances, job opportunities in their own trade through government intervention, etc. Relief to famine affected subsistence occupational groups like weavers, marginal farmers and tribal people was in the form of cash and kind (grain) support, seed advances during the sowing season to commence farm operation, offer of food grain at subsidized rates to the needy. In fact an import of cheaper varieties was resorted to for the said cause. It was hard for the authorities to attract them to the relief works or even take food from the central kitchens. The component of other measures emphasized indirect support mainly intended to peasant community through loans for land improvement, advances towards fodder, seed and cattle purchases, remission and suspension of land revenue. It is vivid from the review reports that members of the traditional occupational groups though hailing from poor socio-economic backgrounds were claiming employment support from the government during crisis period; on the other hand, it seems that government was promoting food subvention prognosing these groups as vulnerable segments

Of the three approaches towards the cause of food problem, relief works merit detailed study in the context of the present dissertation as it sheds light on three aspects of the issue of food problem viz.,

- Mechanisms at work – level of participation
- Issues under consideration – measures for sustenance (immediate in nature) and sustainable measures (long term developmental in nature)
- Mode of implementation

Segment 1.2 renders a summary of the public intervention as a means of strengthening the accessibility of the people towards their basic food needs.

1.2 Food for Work: Employment assurances of the mitigation mission

Relief Works which included both public works as planned by the state authorities and village works corresponding to the needs of the locality, assured employment and means of livelihood during the period of scarcity when all classes of people were hit hard. While producers sought subvention to meet the rising cost of farm operation, the consumers were unable to meet their rising food budget; the labour force were in dire need of farm and non farm income and wage support. Under such circumstances, the relief programmes assured support to all groups of population in accordance with their requisites. The twin goals of public and village relief programmes were:

- Provision of gainful employment opportunities
- Production of durable community assets

Regarding relief employment all those who apply for work were registered after stipulating them the conditions of works. The wages were fixed bearing in mind the individual's age, sex, class etc. to ensure his basic needs.

⁷ Aside farming and tribal communities, we include weaving class also as they constituted 4-8% of population in Madras

Similarly work allotted was in tune with the capacity of the individual. Based on the ability to work, they were classified under professional / civil agency work thus:

Chart 1: Relief Employment Classification

Class	Civil Agency works	Professional Agency works
A	Able bodied persons accustomed to work	Able bodied persons accustomed to labour of the kind required of the works
B	Able bodied not so accustomed	Able bodied persons not so accustomed
C	Persons not able bodied but fit for light employment of the kind required at the work	Persons not able bodied who demand employment at the works

Source: Pg 256, Chapter VI, Indian Famine Commission, 1898.

It was left to state specification regarding who suited which class of work. As already mentioned, professional agency works were under the control of PWD, the civil agency works were managed by district authorities taking into consideration the needs and capacity of locale – agricultural or non-agricultural.

It is important to note that wages in kind (grain) was an important component of famine programmes. The famine code of India pronounced the ration items to be provided to labourers and their family; the imperial code was meticulously observed in Madras and other provinces. The first official ‘food for work’ ration chart is presented below:

Chart 2: ‘FOOD FOR WORK’ Ration Chart

Description of ration	For a man 1b oz	For a women 1b oz	For children
Full			
Floor of the common grain used in the country, or cleaned rice	18	14	$\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ & $\frac{1}{4}$
Pulse	04	04	According to age and requirements
Salt	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	
Ghee or Oil	01	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	
Condiments & Vegetables	01	01	
Minimum			
Flour of the common grain used in the country, or			$\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ & $\frac{1}{4}$
Cleaned rice	10	014	According to age and requirements
Pulse	02	02	
Salt	0 $\frac{1}{3}$	0 $\frac{1}{3}$	
Ghee or Oil	0 $\frac{1}{3}$	0 $\frac{1}{3}$	
Condiments & Vegetables	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	
Penal 89			
Flour, grain or rice	014	012	
Pulse	01	01	Not stated
Salt	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	

Source Pg 256, Chapter VI, Indian Famine Commission, 1898

It is important to note that the essential food items were covered under the famine subvention. Minimum and regular requirements were worked out so as to ensure that the food ration allotted per worker never went below the minimum needs. Interestingly, the component of penal ration was to dissuade able-bodied from accessing the subvention. Everybody was assured of minimum ration; those who contributed to the best of their ability were guaranteed full ration. The two-tier system of food subvention has influenced the contemporary package of APL-BPL system of rationing. In case of relief operations where wages were given in cash, the payment was made with an allowance over and above the cost of flour (or rice) to cover the charges on condiments and firewood.

⁹ Penal ration refers to food items allotted for labourers who had disinclination to work and sent to poor houses.

An exhaustive summary has been rendered on the Great Madras Famine (1876 -78, 1884-1885, 1891-1892 – 1897-1898) as till the imperial rule the famine code was meticulously observed; further in the post independent era, the policy spill over was and is visible even as state and central ministries of independent India are conjecturing food security mechanisms plan after plan in pursuit of their touted mission – eradication of food poverty. Stemming form the above summary on Madras famine and mitigation measures, the critical issues that merit attention in the contemporary context are discussed in the segment 1.3

1.3 Addressing food scarcity in the state of Madras - Lessons from colonial policy intervention

a. Food problem: A glimpse into its cause: Famine is seen as an acute stage of food problem triggered by culmination of food scarcity. The most imminent cause of food scarcity is the demand-supply mismatch. The inadequate increase in crop output due to failure of monsoon and the serious lack of supportive infrastructure (like irrigation, R & D extension to wet and dry land farming, financial support to farmers in the form of advances towards purchase of seed, fertilizer and land improvements) invites immediate redressal by the state authorities; in the absence of public intervention on the said cause, the shortages of supply lead to a situation of state wide famine and consequent hunger deaths.

With limited availability of food grains, their prices inflate alongside the cost of inputs. This leads to further deterioration of the situation. On the demand side, the consumers are unable to purchase their ration requirements, In course of time, with the increase in population, the situation become chronic. Thus a situation of acute food poverty indicates the apathy of the state towards checking the spiral rise in prices. In the context of the discussion on Madras food policy intervention, Table 1 indicates the rapid rise in price of grains like rice and ragi within a period of five months between May and October 1876.

Table 1: Trends in the prices of rice and ragi within a six month span between May 1876 – Oct 1876 in Selected Districts Of Madras Presidency¹⁰

Districts	May 1876		Commodities		June 1876		July 1876	
	Rice	Ragi	Rice	Ragi	Rice	Ragi	Rice	Ragi
Chingelpet	15.9	22.6	15.2	21.1	15.4	21.1	15.4	21.1
N.A.	14.5	23.1	13.6	21.3	13.2	21.3	13.2	21.3
S.A.	15.4	23.9	15.5	24.2	14.9	24.2	14.9	24.2
Madurai	14.7	30.8	14.3	29.0	13.0	29.0	13.0	29.0
Nilgiris	10.4	16.6	9.8	16.4	9.5	16.4	9.5	16.4
Salem	18.2	23.5	12.9	22.8	12.4	22.8	12.4	22.8
Madras	11.7	19.3	11.5	18.6	11.3	18.6	8.6	12.8
Districts	July 1876		Aug 1876		Sep 1876		Oct 1876	
	Rice	Ragi	Rice	Ragi	Rice	Ragi	Rice	Ragi
Chingelpet	15.4	20.5	14.1	21.0	13.9	20.1	11.6	17.0
N.A.	13.2	21.5	12.7	19.4	12.2	12.4	9.8	14.6
S.A.	14.9	23.3	14.5	23.4	14.2	24.5	12.7	22.6
Madurai	13.0	27.0	12.6	26.5	12.6	26.3	11.9	23.5
Nilgiris	9.5	14.2	9.1	14.9	8.7	13.9	7.8	12.2
Salem	12.4	20.7	12.0	20.1	11.3	18.3	10.1	14.6
Madras	11.3	19.3	11.4	19.3	10.8	17.1	9.4	12.8

Source: Pg 12, Review of the Madras Famine 1876 – 1878, Madras 1881.

As could be inferred from the self explanatory table 1, for instance, rice which could be obtained at 11.7 seers / Re. dwindled to 9.4 seers/ Re. and that of ragi from 19.3 seers / Re. to 12.8 seers/ Re. in Madras district as between May and October 1876. Further, it is significant to store in mind that ragi was as much an intake of Madras presidency as that of rice¹¹. But the trade logistics – internally with northern regions of country like Punjab and Hariyana and internationally with Burma and America – mandated the provincial government to confine to rice. In addition the production enhancement programmes (later referred to as HYVP strategy) were experimented with preference to rice and wheat vis-à-vis other cereals. So, the importance attributed to rice/wheat continued in the post independent period. In fact the PDS laid emphasis on these two cereals as essential ration.

¹⁰ * The first indication of a major famine in Madras.

** The figures represent measures of rice and ragi for in terms of seers per rupee.

¹¹ Archival sources have been helpful in understanding the food preferences of the people of Madras state hitherto unknown and not available in the food policy documents of the state.

The spiraling rise in the price of food grains with price of rice inflating by 1.2 times and that of ragi by 1.5 times, made the government come out with a schematic approach to redress the crisis:

- Procurement of food grains
- Maintenance of buffer stock
- Intervention in private food grain trade on emergency concerns
- Payment of wages in kind (grains) during times of crisis

The anti-inflationary stake of PDS was proclaimed upon these integrated set of measures. It may be recounted that present day PDS refers to monopoly procurement of food grains and scheduled distribution by the government based on its plan proposals. However, the rudiments of PDS origin connote public intervention of a different pedagogy; in other words, the integrated measures resonate with the explicit statement of intention with no sublimation to political lobbying or kulak power.

It is crucial to understand that public intervention in the food market has to cater to the long term development considerations as follows:

Division of state resources between production and distribution strategies

Establishing forward and backward linkages to strengthen the food grain economy.

Thus, as understood from the above summary, food problem mandates a holistic approach which is highlighted below:

- Major and minor works of irrigation to combat – agricultural distress due to weather inclemency
- Infrastructural arrangements and investments on programmes of agricultural development
- Public Intervention in food grain trade with the objective of regulating food prices and input costs
- Effective PDS to ensure accessibility of ration to all particularly vulnerable.
- Employment openings through public works programmes to enhance the purchasing power of the people and enable them to access their entitlements.
- Fostering livelihood options through expansion of employment openings
- Ensuring the access of the benefits of the intervention – production and distribution - by economically and socially backward sections of the society.

The pre-independence food poverty measures were essentially a crisis -induced approach. Interestingly it had an inbuilt long term investment agenda. (Annexure 1) It is critical to note that the investment in irrigation was classified as: 1. Productive Works 2. Protective Works

While productive works had a long term purpose of promoting agricultural development, the protective works ensured timely assistance during crisis. The expenditure on the cause was met out of a special grant. Along side the two systems towards development of irrigation, minor works were undertaken admittedly not out of famine grant but from ordinary revenue. Though the gestation of productive works of irrigation was long, it was a remunerative investment towards agricultural development. Productive works were mainly supported through loans. On the other hand protective works were initiated to manage the crisis and by definition required no stipulation on margin of returns. However, the provincial government spared no efforts in realizing returns almost equivalent to that from productive works.

What merits attention in the said context is the effective intervention of the government that could be evinced in the classification of tasks to arrest immediate casualty (protective works) and to contribute to long term food security mission (productive works), and systematic funding of the same. Also, the returns from the investments were determined in tune with the objective of the proposed programme. Unraveling the government approach during the great famine of colonial times in Madras presidency, the following synopsis is worth considering:

Chart 3: Government Approach To Chronic Food Scarcity

1.	Long term Issues	Productive works	Development project	Remunerative returns	Loan allowance
2.	Immediate concerns	Protective works	Mitigation programme	Contingency returns	Crisis-grant allocation
3.	Sustained works	Minor works	Maintenance/improvement works	Complexities in returns assessment	Annual budgetary allotment

But in post independent era the dissonance of the governments - state and central - in addressing long term development needs is often justified by the fiscal inexpediency of agricultural, infrastructural and employment investments and logistical hurdles in the implementation of development programmes of long term nature.

b. Institutional role: Contemplating on the magnitude of food problem it is important that both the public and private mechanisms share the onus in the food security mission. It is important to mark that even in the grips of severe famine the state regulated (voluntary) private participation to financial contribution. Though today we have the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation and Registered Cooperative Societies along with Self Help Groups administering the PDS throughout the state, they are under state regulation.

Another important aspect to be noted is that private charity was to be utilized for purposes which the Madras government may not foray such as the following:

- For provisioning essential items of consumption over and above the subsistence towards a better living conditions.
- As a support to orphanages in meeting their minimum needs
- Relief to respectable persons who despite their poor condition were unwilling to accept government doles.
- Assisting the crisis- afflicted to get back to their normal living conditions as the crisis is being arrested.

While the government envisaged an active role for political bureaucracy in the mitigation of food poverty, through the public and village works programme, food and shelter aid, it was apparent that government subventions were to fulfil the subsistence needs of the poor people. (This imperial legacy dominates the public interventions of the developing economies till today.) The assiduous implication of the argument is that “public intervention” which is nothing but state support to citizens was tagged a pejorative sense; only the socially and economically deprived were to be the recipients of the welfare programmes and even the marginally better off stayed away from the support as could be read from the report.

In addition, the demands of the famine stricken people were not heard as it was believed that the crisis had to be handled with expertise and so the two cadres were established - the professional and civil - to look into the issue and deliver the packages. The Annexure 2 is an approximation on the mitigation programmes as executed by the expert team to control the 1891-1892 hunger epidemia.

3. Cost benefit study of the mitigation process:

Table 2 indicates the type of support rendered to the people during food crisis and amount spent by the state on the score

Table 2: Madras – Nature And Cost Of Subventions

	Deccan ¹²	Rest	Total
1. Affected area in Sq. miles	14743	8603	23351
2. Population (in 1000s)	2005	3043	5048
3. Duration of relief operation	300	180	
4. Average daily numbers of			
Persons relieved	260000	89000	349000
5. % of average daily number			
Relieved to population	12.9	2.9	6.9
6. Direct state expenditure on	8151162	1676475	9827637
Relief including establishment			
And incidental charges			
7. Average cost of relief per 1000 uni			
relieved	105	105	105
8. Loans & Advances			
a. Total amount	1599093	256244	1855337
b. Amt per 1000 of			

¹² Deccan regions of Madras includes the present day Andhra Pradesh districts and the Rest of Madras refers to districts of Tamil Nadu exclusively as it stands today.

population of affected area	798	84	
9. Suspensions & Remissions			
a. Total amount	2945000	425000	3370000
b. Amt per 1000 of			
population of affected area	1468	140	
10. Charitable Source			
a. Total amount			1425412
b. Amt per 1000 of			
population of affected area			282

Source : Data from the report of Indian Famine Commission Pg.235

From the data of Table 2, certain questions come to surface in the context of public intervention during food crisis. The insights are highlighted as they seem to have relevance in the contemporary context of food poverty. The relief component is discussed separately as it includes destitute allowance and employment allowance. Firstly the state support in the mitigation may take various forms as financial assistance towards agricultural development expenditure, suspensions and concessions in land revenue charges, employment generating public work programmes. In the case of Madras food crisis, development loans constituted a small share of the direct state expenditure viz., 18.87% (.1855337/9827637), while revenue suspensions constitute 34.29% of the direct state expenditure (3370000/9827637). Social interventions like CDPs that enhance the capability of the people and utilize their potential are crucial investments in the place of doles which register them permanently as weaker sections of the society. Thus, loans and advances to farmers, weavers and tribal people for the purpose of developing their primary occupation was placed secondary to support in the form of concessions and suspensions.

Further, to compensate the revenue loss to the state and devote greater resources for agricultural development programmes of farmers, private flows were encourage; but the Madras government retained it as an auxiliary source to state relief meant for defined clauses of objectives – 1, 11, 111, 1V, as already given in the annexure. The Table 4 shows the amount from the voluntary source spent on the touted objectives.

Table 3: Contribution From Private Source Towards The Cause Of Famine Allotted Under The 4 Objects Of Expenditure (In Rs.).

Object I	36349
Object II	20495
Object III	117134
Object IV	1244088
Miscellaneous	7344
Total	1425412

Source: Pg 312, Indian Famine Commission, 1898.

While total support from private source was substantial amounting to 14.5% i.e. (private expenditure / state expenditure X 100 = 1425412/9827637 X 100 = 14.5) a public private partnership would have facilitated a grass root approach in tackling food poverty rather than top down approach. To this day, citing financial crunch as raison d etre the public investment in agriculture development is inadequate.

At this juncture it is significant to reflect upon the role of three main agencies namely the government, the market forces and the civil societies. In the promotion of food security the private organizations and local public do share an onus along the state agencies. In an interesting engagement titled, “Ensuring Food Security: The State, Market and Civil Society”¹³, V.S. Vyas, points out the strengths of each of these agencies in championing the cause. Evidently government intervention ensures growth-mediated security (as its generates massive infrastructural support, launches institutional changes and renders constitutional and legal support) and exercises a direct impact through trade and price policies and equitable rationing of essential items.; yet it is the market mechanism that ensures food grains supply throughout the year curtailing the imbalances in the prices. It is the market which can maintain the prices during different seasons and at different places. In economic parlance, market agencies add time, place and form utilities to goods and services. It is been empirically proved that where markets are not organized or developed, people particularly the vulnerable are subjected to price

¹³ Perspectives, EPW, December 9, 2000, Vol.XXXV No.50, pp.4402-4406.

discrimination. In fact, these studies point out the stark reality that while there is greater degree of market integration and increasing support for the same in case of cereals like rice and wheat, what are designated as inferior cereals or poor man's crop like jowar, sorghum, witness little or no market arrangements. Equally and if not more is the role of voluntary community participation which is more than but charitable contribution of money. Alongside, reducing the transaction costs and strengthening their bargaining power as producers or consumers, the civic forums go a long way in dispensing with bureaucratic ills and assure effective service delivery as agencies in close quarters with the grass root functioning.

Considering the issue of condescence of the three institutional agencies in strengthening the food security, it may be highlighted that the government assumed a monopolist charge in the colonial and contemporary periods. While the pre-independence provincial Madras government solicited private participation for funding purposes as discussed above, the food policy proposals of Five Year Plan decades brought the associated agencies like cooperatives, civil supply units, SHGs, redressal forums, consumer organizations under government vigilance. It would not be an exaggeration to state by adjuncting the voluntary groups and corporation units, PDS became a massive network with sizeable establishment cost.

In the said context a seemingly vital issue is the resources expended on establishment and incidental charges. This was unavoidable but needed containment. The table 4 highlights the amount spent on relief component with the incidental charges on the same in the Madras province.

Table 4: Total Resources Expended In The Anti-Famine Drive Of The Madras State

A. Units relieved (1000s)	
1. Relief works	66350
2. Gratuitous relief & Weavers, etc.	27370

Total	93720
B. Amount Expended in direct relief (Rs.)	
1. Relief Works	6055444
2. Gratuitous relief & Weavers	2544562

Total	8600006
C. Cost per 1000 units relieved Rs.	86
d. Average wage basis in lbs per rupee	24
e. Incidental Charges	
1. Establishment	Rs. 416712
2. Tools & Plants	Rs. 362396
3. Other Items	Rs. 448523
Total	Rs.1227631
f. Establishment rate	
1. On total direct relief %	5
2. Per 1000 units relieved Rs.	4
g. Total incidental change rate	
1. On total direct relief %	14
2. Per 1000 units relieved Rs.	13

Source:Pg 238, Indian Famine Commission, 1898.

As could be inferred from the table 4, nearly 70% (66350/93720 X100) were covered under employment relief and the remaining 30% (27370/93720 X100) sought destitute allowance. Evidently, employment relief commanded greater allocation which stood at 70% of the total state expenditure and rest 30% towards destitute allowance. However, the entire fund did not flow to the people as incidental and establishment charges were to be met. For every 1000 units relieved at a sum of Rs. 86, Rs. 4 was spent towards establishment charges and Rs. 13 towards incidental charges. The size of state administrative expenditure on public intervention seems one of

the major barriers till today in assuring percolation of total benefits towards the touted cause. A decomposition of state intervention be it anti-food poverty or otherwise under various heads of expenditure and the unit of coverage, may be pursued, to sift out its beneficial impact on the vulnerable population. The table 4 indicates the method of record maintenance, a merit of imperial government.

A crucial argument stemming from the current discussion on volume of public spending is that decentralization may be advocated as tool of downsizing the administrative charges rather than an official posting of personnel at varied levels-district / taluks / towns / panchayats.

In its anti-famine drive, aside the relief strategies – public works programme, village works, indirect support, in the form of loans and advances, suspension, remissions - remains a vital component viz, the gratuitous relief. The allowances under gratuitous relief were meant for destitute population. The table 6 shows the units (number of people) covered under the scheme in Madras Province.

Table 5: Gratuitous Relief In Madras Province.

	Total Expenditure	No. of units	Proportions			Cost	Per	Avg. grain Rate / Re Lbs
			M	W	Ch	Unit	Adult	
1.Home relief	931717	13578	19	41	40	1.10	1.37	24
2. Kitchens	463750	6390	8	16	76	1.16	1.87	-
3. Weavers	1149095	6100	50	43	5	1.55	1.54	-
Total	2544562	26068						
		Cost per adult unit on a wage basis of 20 lbs / Re.					Corresponding grain wage in ounces	
1. Home Relief		1.65					33	
2. Kitchen		2.25					45	
3. Weavers		1.85					37	
Total		1.82					37	

Source: Pg 236, 237, Indian Famine Commission, 1898.

It is important to note from the table 5 that gratuitous relief implies subventions to destitute population who do not have capacity to work and hence cannot be absorbed into relief employment and targeted groups like weaver community and tribal community. The segmentation of households into BPL & APL seems to have its roots in gratuitous relief system of imperial Madras. However, in case of gratuitous relief the component attends to a decisive proportion of deserving population (27370 / 66350 X 100) that approximated to 41.25% of the state subvention. It is significant that gratuitous relief went to those underprivileged among the “distressed” that cannot be fitted under other modems. In the present food security system of universal PDS, the undeserving APL has access to subsidized grain ration. That apart, though BPL segment includes classification like AAY, Annapoorna schemes, error of exclusion is not uncommon. The reasons are often attributed to corruption, red tapism, bureaucratic delays and leakages like diversion of grains, black marketing, artificial scarcity aside implementation hassle. The two systems are compared - the GR (gratuitous relief) & the BPL – to tell the complexity of identification of beneficiaries and therefore the responsibility of the political bureaucracy in addressing the issue.

A point to be assiduously understood from a careful perusal of archival records is that the government was focused on addressing the problem of food crisis through promotion of agricultural prosperity and strengthening people’s purchasing power; welfare subventions were used as supplementary measures. The exercise not only facilitated curtailing fiscal inexpediency but also proved developmental. It may be noted that of the total population hit by famine only 30% came under destitute relief; around 70% were absorbed under component of relief employment. The table 7 given below presents the details on the score.

Table 6: Intervening Measures In Madras Province During The Great Famine Period.

1. No. of Units (Millions)	
Relief workers	67
Otherwise relieved	27
Total	94
% of units relieved by relief works	71.0

2. % of Units relieved gratuitously		
Central Kitchens	7.2	}
Poor houses	Nil	
Home relief	15.0	
% of units specially Relieved through their		
Trade	6.8	

Source: Pg 205, Indian Famine Commission, 1898.

What captures our contemplation from the famine report on the state situation is that central kitchens and poor houses were only last resorts whereas employment and wage support were the crucial form of assistance even during peak-crisis periods. Taking into consideration the severity of the food threat, it is important to acknowledge the role of state during food crisis. Public intervention is useful to:

- Support to the distressed sections through gratuitous relief and employment relief
- Disbursement of funds to enable the farmers and assistance to continue their respective pursuits.
- Reduction of the financial obligation on the part of the distressed groups.
- Channelising private voluntary funds to the distressed groups towards the cause of insecurity.

The provisional Madras extended the support of above forms to arrest the demand-supply mismatch. The details on the score are as follows¹⁴:

- % of average number daily relieved of the affected population -6.9%
- Direct expenditure on relief excluding establishment – Rs. 860,00,006
- Incidental charges
- Loans and advances - Rs. 18,55,337
- Suspensions - Rs. 10,09,000
- Remissions - Rs. 23,61,000
- Indian charitable relief fund - Rs. 14,25,412

It is not merely the sum expended towards the cause of food security which is of considerable significance; rather the way it is administered is of utmost concern. Lapses evinced during the great famine imparted a lesson that top-down engineering may not assure benefit percolation to grassroots; the scope for malpractices is wide if representations from below are inadequate at various levels. As could be traced from government records malafides were observed on the following score

Mis-utilisation of loans and advances granted for major works at agricultural development by landowners towards “the employment of labour that would otherwise have come on to relief” (Pg 204)

Indiscriminate remissions and revenue suspensions consuming 50% of resource allocation and “in some cases the amount shown as remitted is also included in the amount shown as suspended”.

Voluntary contribution treated as an auxiliary source of lending; as a financial agency the private sector was disqualified to assume any other responsibility during periods of food crisis.

Having understood that employment relief was a vital source of government strategy towards mitigation of food scarcity, vis-à-vis destitute relief in the form of poor houses etc a critical insight into fixation of wage component-cash/ grain is seems beneficial. The minimum wages for each category was determined based on ‘task’ allotted to a particular category. Invariably the ‘task’ refers to ‘maximum amount of work allotted’ (Pg 111) to each category of workers. It is significant to note that the minimum wages corresponds to that sum of money sufficient at current rates to purchase:

- Minimum ration
- Grain equivalent of the minimum ration

During the food crisis the minimum ration wage stood at 28 ounces for a male and 26 ounces for a female. The ration chart given below depicts the minimum wages in terms of grain ounces for each class of workers.

¹⁴ Pg.207, Indian Famine Commission, 1898.

Chart 4: Ration Chart With The Minimum Wages In Terms Of Grain Ounces¹⁵

Class	Wages in Ounces
A. Professional labourers	42
B. Labourers but not professional	38
C. Able bodied, not labourers	32
D. Weakly	28

As is evident from the ration chart, the wage support is in linear proportion to the quality of work force. Though the government stipulation may be seen as an incentive to work and bring in better output – both quantitatively and qualitatively - it is apparent that the criteria for fixation of grain wage is efficiency / experience based vis-à-vis need based. It may be noted that unskilled / untrained / inexperienced form a destitute group who deserve the assistance of the state. That apart while fixing the wage rates, it is not enough if prevailing market rate of ration alone is considered; the household size, other sources of income, no. of dependents in the family need examination. Hence fixation of minimum wages of based on work output perse particularly during food crisis is inadequate. However, in the present day food security system – both state and central – such details are gathered while fixing subsidized ration to the vulnerable sections of the society. Yet the system cannot be construed as need based owing to leakages that cause exclusion of lower income segments and inclusion of upper income segments.

1.4 Concluding Observations: Locating The Rudiments Of Colonial Legacy

The efforts taken by the provincial Madras government to arrest food scarcity in concrescence with the imperial code is replete with store of merits and demerits as already analysed.

The elucidation purports to unravel the proverbial claim that the present food security system, PDS and its elaborate arrangement is an off shoot of the colonial system. Though the famine of pre independent times may be referred as a natural calamity that is different from food problems in the contemporary context, the study is useful to learn about the rudiments of the problem and public intervention on the score.

Further, our study is based on the economic supposition that aggravation of food problem is essentially due to a demand-supply mismatch on a large scale, this being the cause and consequence of state complacency, public intervention is seen as mandatory to contain the food crisis through:

- Short term projects where Marginal Fiscal Cost, MFC would be high to reap Marginal Social Benefit, MSB.
- Sustained development programs where long gestation is required to equate MFC with MSB.

In both the cases, government support is vital as private units may not volunteer. Through various strategies the provisional Madras government attempted not only to manage but also mitigate the crisis. The destitute relief methods, provisioning of gainful employment opportunities, fixation of minimum wages in parity with prevailing minimum rate of essential items, investment in agricultural and public infrastructure, financial and technical support etc have been effective in curtailing the problem of scarcity and restoring normalcy. Primarily the investments in agriculture and public infrastructure have enabled farm producers to augment the cereal output and create bumper harvest.

Table 7: Surplus Availability Of Food Grains In The Provincial Madras

I Trends in production	
1. Population	28,415,000
2. Food crop Area Acres	21,696,000
3. Out turn of food tons	8,043,000
4. Area under non food crops Acres	5,746,000
II Trends in consumption	
1. Food Tons	5,771,000
2. Seed Tons	363,573
3. Cattle food tons	402,970
4. Wastage Tons	356,457
5. Total tons	6,925,200
Surplus	1,117,800

Source: Pg. 357, Data gathered from the Report of the Indian Famine commission, 1898.

¹⁵ Pg.111, Data gathered from the Report of the Indian Famine commission, 1898.

As could be noted from the table 7, production of food grains exceeded the consumption requirement including food and fodder amounting to 1117800 tons (8043000-6925200). This was seen as the effectiveness of state intervention, primarily as a result of the long term development investments in every province. It should be noted that surplus creation was at a rate of 13.8% and the food outturn stood @ 37%. Thus, creation of surplus grains was recommended as a strategy to arrest the threat in the food frontiers. More importantly, the provincial heads supposed that “the surplus produce of India, taken as a whole, still furnishes ample means of meeting the demands of any part of the country likely to suffer from famine at any one time,…” Pg. 358. Therefore, the government of the Madras Presidency resolved to address the issue through distribution strategies as well. It may be seen that creation of buffer surplus entailed the state to bear the responsibility of buffer management; further, the states were equally keen in facilitating inter and intra state grain transfers from regions of surplus yields to those of lean output.

Apparently, the state started trading in food grains which earlier was under the monopoly control of private dealers. This could be traced as the origin of PDS network in the state of TN which saw periods of surplus and slack yields necessitating public intervention in ensuring physical and economic accessibility to all people at all times.

The surplus states like Madras realized the power of government intervention in food grain economy as production and distribution logistics commanded infrastructural and financial support. Beginning from production plans including selection of cultivable sites and seed varieties and environment resistant crops to warehousing and transportation of stocks, state intervention saw subsequent extension over the decades; the proposed expansion was meant to gain foray into grain trade breaking the monopoly of merchant dealers and curbing the profiteering practices with regard to basic food items. The intervention of the government during food crisis in the pre-independent times took official attire in the independent India. The Madras food grains licensing orders, the state food grains enquiry commissions and price committees, to mention a few, could be traced as a prelude to a statutory intervention of the state in food grain economy. The TNPDS which came into vogue in mid 1960’s (1964-1967) was primarily built upon the hunger episodes of the pre-independent times and experiences there of in tackling the crisis.

Hence it is proposed that the above compilation would open up radical vistas of research in food economics transcending statistical summaries and fiscal debates. Albeit these are mandated, an inclusive policy invites a pluralist thinking. Hence, critical study of multi-dimensional factors including issues of governance, civic empowerment coupled with a detailed perusal of the socio-political (non-economic factors) contexts of conventional approaches is proposed in the making of economic policies based on pro-poor slogans. The underlying development rationale in welfare policies of the sort invites empirical understanding of the trajectory of the policies to understand its need and significance from a pluralist perspective.



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