ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the influence of certain British reformist ideologies on the scarcity-relief policies of the British colonial Government of Bombay from 1820 to 1840. It outlines the *laissez-faire* and utilitarian ideologies of relevance to scarcity-relief and assesses the extent to which these ideologies influenced Bombay’s policies toward the grain trade, charity, public works, agricultural loans, land revenue, and grain duties, during the 1823-5, 1831-5, and 1838-9 droughts. The thesis demonstrates that ideological debate and policy formation engaged officials at various levels within the colonial administration, and was not simply the concern of the Bombay Council. The thesis argues that while reformist ideologies had a genuine effect on the stated beliefs of many of Bombay’s officials, fiscal expediency and, to a lesser extent, humanitarian concern, also contributed to the formation of Bombay policy. It contends that these other factors were sometimes in harmony, and other times at odds, with the new ideologies coming from Britain. It finds that each of Bombay’s scarcity-relief policies was shaped by reformist ideology, but to a varying degree, and at different times, depending on the resistance to changes in policy from conservatives within the administration. This resistance, it argues, was in turn determined by the extent to which officials perceived each policy to be a foundation of the Government’s financial well-being. The findings of this thesis support the consensus among most historians of Indian subsistence crises that reformist ideologies of Britain began to influence the scarcity-relief policies of British Indian administrations in the early nineteenth century.