

CHAPTER 3
CHARITY, THE MILITARY AND MALTHUS:
BOMBAY POLICY IN THE 1820S

‘In his endeavour to provide a remedy against deficiency, in regard to subsistence, the legislator finds himself all along under the pressure of this dilemma – forbear to provide supply, and death ensues, and it has you for its author; provide supply, you establish a bounty upon idleness, and you give increase to the deficiency which it is your endeavour to exclude’. – Jeremy Bentham.¹

Much of India was reliant on the rains for its subsistence. The prolonged droughts that often visited the subcontinent destroyed people’s crops and removed their livelihoods. Previously self-reliant individuals were often forced to rely upon others for subsistence until the rains returned. Moreover, in such trying times individuals who were previously dependent on others were often cut loose by their benefactors and forced to look elsewhere for relief. Bombay’s officials of the early nineteenth century pondered how the state was to treat these economic refugees. Both groups had been divorced from their previous source of sustenance and many amongst them had reason to fear the prospect of starvation. Yet was it truly in their self-interest to receive something for nothing? By providing charitable aid was the Government merely undermining their self-reliance and magnifying the problem in the long run? Was private charity a better elixir to the sufferings of the indigent than state interference? The Bombay Government’s answers to these questions changed considerably in the early nineteenth century.

State charity under previous Indian rule.

State charity had a long tradition in western India prior to the 1820s and 1830s. The Indian rulers who preceded the British rise to power typically gave charity during droughts. They distributed money and food free of charge to relieve the suffering of

¹ Jeremy Bentham, *Constitutional Code, Works*, J. Bowring, (ed.), 1833-43, vol. IX, p. 13, cited in J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 144.

the needy. In the famine of 1630 suffering, it was said, was ‘very great’ and many people were ‘driven to cannibalism’. The ‘Badshah’ ordered his officials in Ahmedabad, Surat and Burhanpur to distribute ‘sufficient food’ to ‘meet all wants’. He also ordered the Dewan of the Soubah to distribute Rs. 50,000 from the Royal Treasury.² When famine hit Broach district in 1630 and 1681 the rulers distributed grain as charitable aid.³

The tradition continued through the eighteenth century. The ‘great famine’ of 1747 involved the ‘destruction of the lives of many men and cattle’. In Unclesir and Hansote talukas the Government ‘distributed grain free of charge’.⁴ In 1790-2 another ‘great famine’ struck much of Western India. Many people died of starvation and many people were, it was said, ‘forced to maintain themselves on roots’.⁵ The Raja of Mandvi taluka ‘displayed his liberality’ in 1790-1 by distributing ‘grain daily as an alleviation of the misery of the sufferers’.⁶ In Broach district the mujmoondars⁷ of Lalubhai and Assaram dipped into the Government’s grain stores and distributed grain ‘to poor persons in charity’.⁸ The Nawab of Surat was also reported to have helped the distressed poor.⁹ In the southern talukas of Poona district the Peshwa Government ‘distributed charities and alms’ and ‘established free mess-houses’ to relieve people’s suffering.¹⁰

The tradition continued into the nineteenth century. Western India was hit by another ‘very severe famine’ in 1801-4, in which ‘great numbers’ died.¹¹ In the Kolaba district the Peshwa Government gave food to the desperately poor.¹² In Ratnagiri district the

² Mr. Borradaile, Act Ahmedabad Cltr, 29 Feb 1868, in A. T. Etheridge, *Report on Past Famines in the Bombay Presidency*, Bombay: Education Society’s Press, 1868, pp. 39-40.

³ No name given, Deputy Broach Cltr, no day given, Oct 1867, in *ibid*, p. 56.

⁴ No name given, Deputy Surat Cltr, 30 Aug 1867, in *ibid*, p. 60.

⁵ No name given, Deputy Surat Cltr, 6 Sep 1867, in *ibid*, p. 59.

⁶ No name given, Deputy Surat Cltr, 6 Sep 1867, in *ibid*, p. 59.

⁷ Mujmoondar: ‘The district hereditary officer whose duty it was to look to the accounts and the records. – Robertson – Bombay’. *A Glossary of Vernacular Judicial and Revenue Terms, and other useful words occurring in official documents relating to the administration of the Government of British India*, Compiled in the Department of Revenue, Agriculture, and Commerce, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1874, p. 75.

⁸ No name given, Deputy Broach Cltr, no day given, Oct 1867, in Etheridge, p. 55.

⁹ No name given, Deputy Surat Cltr, 30 Aug 1867, in *ibid*, p. 61.

¹⁰ Munohur Bheorao, Khasnavis and Potnis, no date given, in *ibid*, p. 94.

¹¹ Mr. Salmon, Act Kolaba Sub-Cltr, no date given, in *ibid*, p. 117.

¹² Mr. Salmon, Act Kolaba Sub-Cltr, no date given, in *ibid*, p. 117.

Raja of Waree provided subsistence for 400 starving immigrants.¹³ Particularly in the Soverndroog taluka, the local Government established a number of “Anchutras”, or ‘food-houses’.¹⁴ In Surat district the Desai¹⁵ of Chicklee taluka gave ‘large quantities of grain to the poor’.¹⁶

Yet the aforementioned details should be viewed with a slight degree of scepticism. They were collected in A. T. Etheridge’s official report on past famines prepared for the Government in 1868. They were based on pre-British records collected mainly by Indian sub-officials, who may have had reason to emphasise the suffering experienced and the benevolence of the previous Indian rulers. Yet Habib has found further evidence that the Mughal governments that ruled prior to the rise of the British provided charity during drought. In the drought of 1596, the Mughal Emperor Akbar had free kitchens opened in every city.¹⁷ Thus while the amount of charity offered by previous Indian rulers may have been exaggerated, the existence of state charity was certainly not fabricated.

Indeed, Habib has found that the charity offered by Indian rulers was often only a token amount. It was more a gesture of concern designed to give the impression of a caring ruler than an effort to provide significant relief. He has found that this was the case during the 1630-2 great famine of Gujarat and the Deccan, in which the Mughal rulers provided token relief through establishing a few free kitchens.¹⁸ In some instances such as the 1661-2 famine, however, Habib has noted that the Mughal rulers were compelled to establish free kitchens ‘on a large scale’.¹⁹ Thus, at least to a certain degree, the Indian rulers of western India had for centuries followed the practice of giving food and money to provide charitable aid to their starving subjects.

¹³ Mr. Boswell, Ratnagiri Cltr, 20 Sep 1867, in *ibid*, p. 119.

¹⁴ Mr. Boswell, Ratnagiri Cltr, 20 Sep 1867, in *ibid*, p. 119.

¹⁵ Dessaee/Dessaye/Desai/Daiseye: ‘An Indian revenue officer or petty chief, often a hereditary office’. Ivor Lewis, *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 99.

¹⁶ Mr. Spry, 1st Asst Surat Cltr, 19 Aug 1867, in Etheridge, p. 59.

¹⁷ Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., 1999, p. 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 116.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

State charity under British rule prior to 1818.

The Company initially continued the tradition of previous Indian rulers of providing charity in times of need. Like their Indian predecessors, the British tended to give only token amounts. Ahuja has found that in Madras the Company distributed food to destitute individuals in 1686 and 1718.²⁰ Prakash has noted that during the 1769-70 Bengal famine the Company offered Rs. 100,000 in charity, which paled in comparison to the several million people who died in the famine. Thus, Prakash's assessment that the Company's effort was 'practically nil' seems reasonable.²¹ Regardless of the amount, the fact remains that the Company was not ideologically opposed to offering charity.

The Bombay Government also gave charity during drought prior to the reformers' rise to power in the 1810s. During the 1802 famine temporary hospitals were established 'for the relief of those who flocked into the towns of Bombay and Surat'.²² In the 1812-13 famine 'grain was distributed gratis' in the Ahmedabad district.²³ Yet as Rabitoy has found the Bombay Government began refusing to offer charity by the 1812-13 famine. For example, in 1812 Thomas Keate wrote from Kaira to Francis Warden in the Bombay Council requesting instructions on how to meet the needs of numerous travelling traders who were nearing starvation. He was informed that they must be left to their own devices.²⁴ The 1812-13 famine, according to Rabitoy, therefore represented a swing away from the western Indian ruler's tradition of providing at least some charity to the destitute during times of drought.

Yet when Elphinstone, as Commissioner, settled the finances and administration of the newly conquered territories of western India in 1818, he ordered the continuation

²⁰ Ravi Ahuja, 'State Formation and "Famine Policy" in Early Colonial South India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 39, no. 4, Oct-Dec, 2002, p. 362.

²¹ Om Prakash, 'The English East India Company and India', in H. V. Bowen, M. Lincoln, and N. Rigby, (eds.), *The Worlds of the East India Company*, Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002, pp. 15-6.

²² Indian Famine Commission Report, Part I, PP, 1880 Cmd. 2591, lii, pp. 9-10.

²³ Mr. Borradaile, Act Ahmedabad Cltr, 29 Feb 1868, in Etheridge, p. 42.

²⁴ Maharashtra State Archives, Public Department Diary, 339:3885-6, Keate to Warden, 26 Aug. 1812; and MSA, PDD, 339 and 340:3890, Govt. Mins of 9 Sep. 1812, cited in Neil Rabitoy, 'The Control of Fate and Fortune: The Origins of the Market Mentality in British Administrative Thought in South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1991, p. 757.

of any of the Peshwa's charities that seemed to be 'required by humanity'.²⁵ Perhaps these charities were considered acceptable in that they were budgeted for, whereas no allowance in the budget was made for the droughts that took place in the 1810s and 1820s. They may have been private pensions to state employees, or charities to temples. Regardless, this policy represents an isolated oasis in a period that was otherwise barren of state charity.

Categories of indigence.

For the purposes of this study it will be useful to take three categories of the poor that were defined in England prior to the turn of the seventeenth century and continued to be in use in the nineteenth century.²⁶ The impotent poor were those who were unable to work due to old age, sickness, or physical disability. The able-bodied poor were physically able and willing to work, but unable to find employment. Finally, the idle poor were physically able to work, but unwilling to do so. A common feature of these three categories of people is that, without some form of assistance, they would suffer from a lack of the necessities of life. This is the condition of indigence as opposed to poverty, and it is a subset of the latter. Poverty, as the grandfather of utilitarianism Jeremy Bentham defined it, was the common and 'unchangeable lot of man', whereas indigence was a less common and far deeper level of suffering.²⁷ Poverty in western India was commonplace. We are concerned primarily with the administration's policy toward the indigent during drought. This group was principally made up of people who were initially poor but were rendered indigent by the drought. Yet it also included a smaller number of people who were already indigent before the drought began.

The Poor Law, the abolitionists and the revisers.

In England, the state had technically been providing employment to the able-bodied, alms to the impotent, and correction to the idle, since these practices were enshrined

²⁵ Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Social policy and social change in Western India, 1817-1830*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 11.

²⁶ Select Committee to consider the Poor Laws, Report, PP 1817 (462), pp. 3, 16.

²⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *Essays on the Poor Laws*, 1796, box CLIIIa, Manuscript Collections, University College London, p. 21, cited in Poynter, p. 119.

in the Poor Law of 1601.²⁸ Each parish was required by law to provide relief to the destitute poor in their locality. Poor rates were raised from local property owners to fund relief. Thus charity in England was no longer strictly a private affair. The Poor Law experienced several alterations but no major changes until its reform in 1834.

The late eighteenth century witnessed a rising tide of dissatisfaction with the Poor Law in Britain. Dissatisfaction peaked in the late 1790s, from 1816 to 1819, and again from 1832 to 1834.²⁹ While some demanded its reform, others campaigned for its entire abolition. Those in favour of the latter will simply be termed ‘abolitionists’. Yet those in favour of the former will not be referred to as ‘reformers’. This term is reserved for the broader movement in Britain that included the *laissez-faire* instincts of the abolitionists as well as the interventionist leanings of other reformers such as the utilitarians. Jeremy Bentham is a case in point, for like most reformers he recognised the utility of applying *laissez-faire* ideology to trade but preferred an interventionist approach to most social issues.³⁰ Instead those people who wanted to keep, but alter, the Poor Law will be termed the ‘revisers’. The revisers represented the moderate branch of the reform movement, and the abolitionists were their more extreme cousins.

The champion of the abolitionist cause was the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, who wrote his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. He was not the first to recommend abolition, and he was indebted to the likes of Reverend Townsend for many of his premises, but he did further the cause more than any other abolitionist.³¹ He is most famous for his population theory, which will be considered in more detail later in this chapter. Malthus released several editions of his *Essay*, and hence the publication and distribution of his ideas were not restricted to 1798. He dealt most extensively with the issue of the Poor Law in the 1803 and subsequent editions of his *Essay*.³²

²⁸ Select Committee to consider the Poor Laws, Report, PP 1817 (462), pp. 3, 16.

²⁹ Poynter, pp. xxii-xxiii.

³⁰ Stephen Conway, ‘Bentham and the nineteenth-century revolution in government’, in Richard Bellamy, (ed.), *Victorian Liberalism: nineteenth-century political thought and practice*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 71, 74-5.

³¹ Poynter, pp. 39-43, 106, 326.

³² James P. Huzel, ‘Malthus, the Poor Law, and Population in Early Nineteenth-Century England’, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 22, no. 3, Dec, 1969, p. 430.

Through a succession of books and pamphlets the abolitionists gained increasing support in the late 1790s. Their position became orthodox opinion at the height of their popularity in 1817.³³ Briefly stated for the current purposes of this discussion, the abolitionists protested against the state's offer of employment to the able-bodied poor. They also challenged the state's practice of providing gratuitous relief to the impotent poor. They demanded government non-interference, and argued that employment of the able-bodied and alms for the impotent poor were best left in private hands.

Yet in the course of the 1820s the cause for abolition faded, but not completely, and the cause of the revisers gained momentum, culminating in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.³⁴ The revisers took a more moderate position than the abolitionists. They were in favour of continuing government interference on behalf of the impotent poor in most cases. They also wanted the Government to continue offering employment to the able-bodied poor. But they differed from the defenders of the Poor Law. They had heeded the abolitionists' concerns regarding state employment and recommended that this form of relief be limited. Their Amendment in 1834 made the conditions of relief harsh and unpleasant to deter all from state reliance but those who were in the most desperate of circumstances.³⁵ Thus the 1834 Amendment was the revisers' solution to the concerns raised by the abolitionists. The arguments of the abolitionists had therefore very effectively undermined the foundations of the Poor Law. Owen has noted that many Victorians perceived state relief to the poor as 'simply to pauperize'.³⁶ But as Poynter has argued, the abolitionists' solution of removing state support to the poor altogether was politically impracticable. Yet where they failed, the revisers succeeded in 1834 in finding the politically acceptable solution of a continued but limited intervention. This was despite the fact that in the eyes of diehard abolitionists these half measures did not go far enough.³⁷

³³ Poynter, pp. xxiii, xxv, 224.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 296.

³⁵ Harald Fischer-Tine, 'Britain's other civilising mission: Class prejudice, European "loaferism" and the workhouse-system in colonial India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 42, no. 3, Jul-Sep, 2005, p. 319; and Conway, p. 77.

³⁶ David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964, p. 4.

³⁷ Poynter, pp. 325-6.

The ideas of the abolitionists found expression in western India. The Bombay administration that ruled during the 1823-5 drought continued the policy that was started a decade earlier of rejecting all cries for charity. It accepted responsibility for the able-bodied poor, but only to the extent of providing them with employment on public works, which was obviously not charity but aid in exchange for labour. The impotent poor were considered entirely the responsibility of private charity. The idle poor were ignored. Thus, under no circumstances did the Bombay administration officially offer charity to any category of the indigent during the 1823-5 drought. This policy was a break with the tradition of previous western Indian rulers, and even with that of previous British governments of India. The coincidence of this change in policy in Bombay and the rise of the abolition movement in Britain is very suggestive of a causal connection. Thus this chapter will assess the degree to which contemporary British debate influenced the charity policy of the 1823-5 Bombay administration.

The cause of indolence and the promotion of self-reliance.

Fundamental to the abolitionist position was that the offer of state relief to some people merely encouraged others who were previously independent to rely on the state for their survival. The Poor Law offered state employment to tide over those people who were out of work and save them from starvation. But the abolitionists argued that the threat of starvation was the best means of motivating the poor to work hard and preserve their independence. The Reverend Joseph Townsend argued in 1786 that this guarantee of support weakened the will of the independent labourer to remain self-reliant. He argued that the threat of starvation spurred the poor to work hard.³⁸ The Reverend Malthus agreed. He proposed in 1798 that the Poor Law's guarantee of subsistence was 'strongly calculated to eradicate' the peasantry's 'spirit of independence'.³⁹ Similarly, the lawyer and scientist James Ebenezer Bicheno argued against state employment of the able-bodied poor in 1817. He argued that the relief offered by the Poor Law encouraged idleness in the independent labourer by

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 39-43.

³⁹ Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, London, 1798, pp. 84-5.

removing the natural consequences for those who were lazy.⁴⁰ The Reverend Thomas Chalmers, who began writing for the abolitionist *Edinburgh Review* in 1817, also argued that the promise of privation to the idle was the best promoter of industry amongst the able-bodied poor.⁴¹ Likewise, the Select Committee to consider the Poor Laws reported to Parliament in 1817 that its recommendations were designed to ‘revive, with habits of industry and frugality, those moral feelings in the people which are intimately connected with their self-support and independence’.⁴²

The abolitionists argued that by undermining these virtues of industry and self-reliance, the Poor Law was sowing the seeds of more widespread poverty in several ways. Firstly, they argued that as more people became dependent on the state for their survival, the poor rates levied on the remaining independent labourers would increase. This in turn would pull them down into poverty and create a vicious cycle. Secondly, they argued that couples would be encouraged to marry and have children before they were financially ready to independently ensure their subsistence. This would increase the number of children born as state dependent paupers. But these arguments will receive detailed attention later. For the current purposes of this discussion it is important to note that, broadly speaking, the abolitionists proposed that the virtues of industry and self-reliance were the only true shields between the poor and misery, and that the offer of state relief to the indigent merely encouraged others who were previously independent to sink into state dependence. Thus, the 1817 Committee argued that any increase in expenditure on poor relief would ‘only create an increased number of paupers’.⁴³ In 1817 Bicheno also argued that by demoralising the independent poor, the Poor Law was merely propagating poverty.⁴⁴ John Davidson agreed, and in 1817 he referred to the Poor Law as a ‘pressing invitation to be idle’.⁴⁵

When the Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s refused to provide charitable aid to support certain groups, they consistently referred to the abolitionist argument that state relief to some people encouraged further state dependence in others. It must be noted, however, that they did not specifically cite the abolitionists

⁴⁰ Poynter, pp. 231-2.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 234-5.

⁴² Select Committee to consider the Poor Laws, Report, PP 1817 (462), p. 5.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Poynter, p. 232.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 233-4.

themselves. Typically no further reasoning was offered as to why encouraging state dependence was considered inadvisable – the need to promote industry and self-reliance amongst the poor was considered adequate justification in itself. One of the most outspoken officials against state charity in the 1823-5 Bombay administration was the Deccan Commissioner, William Chaplin. In 1824 he warned Archibald Robertson, the Khandesh Collector, not to offer charity to the people of his district who were suffering from the effects of drought. He argued that ‘any gratuitous alms given by Government’ would have the ‘mischievous tendency of offering a premium to the indolent’ and ‘recruiting for beggars’. He argued that state charity would render the suffering of the poor ‘more certain and inevitable’ than if they were to rely on ‘their own labour’.⁴⁶ Here was the abolitionists’ warning against the perils of state interference, and the long-term benefits to be gained from fostering the industry and independence of the poor through a policy of non-intervention.

Ravinder Kumar has described Chaplin as a conservative. The conservative position was to adhere largely to western Indian tradition. Yet Kumar’s study was focused on the changes that the British introduced into the Bombay revenue settlements, and the effects of those changes on traditional western Indian society.⁴⁷ With regard to these issues, Chaplin’s policies may indeed have been conservative. Yet it has been shown in the previous chapter that Chaplin’s policy toward the grain trade was *laissez-faire* and not conservative.⁴⁸ Similarly, with regard to state charity Chaplin was most certainly a reformer. He had no qualms in breaking with the Indian rulers’ tradition of offering state charity to the needy during drought. In this regard Chaplin stood firmly next to Malthus and the other abolitionists in the *laissez-faire* camp.

Similarly, Elphinstone was a Romantic who wished to expose the social institutions of western India to only gradual change.⁴⁹ This intention, and the need to ensure political stability during the change of power, probably informed his decision to retain most of the Peshwa’s charities when the British took power in western India.⁵⁰ Yet by the time the monsoon failed in 1824, Elphinstone declared himself to be against the idea of

⁴⁶ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6995-6, APAC.

⁴⁷ Ravinder Kumar, *Western India in the nineteenth century: a study in the social history of Maharashtra*, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968, pp. 61-2.

⁴⁸ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6996-7, APAC.

⁴⁹ Kumar, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Ballhatchet, p. 11.

offering state charity to the drought-sufferers.⁵¹ Elphinstone had declared his intention to intervene in the grain trade, and in this regard he was against *laissez-faire*.⁵² Yet such was the persuasiveness of the abolitionists' argument against state charity that they found converts in the most unlikely places.

Admittedly, the emphasis on self-help in Britain and Bombay is merely a correlation, and does not prove that Britain's self-help ideology caused Bombay's policy against state charity. There is no evidence of any Bombay official making reference to any specific abolitionists in support of the policy against state charity. Yet it is very unlikely that the concept of self-help would have evolved in both Britain and Bombay independently and simultaneously. A far more convincing explanation is that most Bombay officials had been exposed before leaving home for western India to the opinions circulating in British society, and continued to be exposed to British debates whilst overseas through their numerous contacts with the mother country. Sharma has noted that in the North Indian famine of 1837-8 the attitude of British officials toward the needy had the 'definite stamp' of British debates around the 1834 Amendment Act. He has stated that the administration's charity policy was 'guided by the fear of encouraging indolence' and the need to promote industriousness amongst the destitute poor.⁵³ The doctrine of self-reliance therefore almost certainly originated in Britain and reached across the oceans to India.

Official attitudes concerning the need to correct the moral character of the poor were applied somewhat equally to both the Indian and European poor of India. Fischer-Tine has argued that the British authorities subjected idle Europeans in India to the same treatment as their Indian counterparts in the hope of reforming their moral character.⁵⁴ To this extent, official reformist attitudes toward the poor were matters of class and not race.

⁵¹ Minute by Mountstuart Elphinstone, Bombay Governor, 27 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6106, APAC.

⁵² Draft Proclamation circulated by the Sec to Govt, 30 Sep 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, pp. 6100-1, APAC; and Minute by M. Elphinstone, Bombay Governor, 27 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6105, APAC.

⁵³ Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 140-1.

⁵⁴ Fischer-Tine, p. 298.

However, broadly speaking, the social and economic policies of the reform movement were Anglicist in nature. Reformist officials believed that the introduction of English laws and ideologies to India would elevate and ‘civilize’ Indian society.⁵⁵ Counterpoised to this movement was the Orientalist nature of the conservatives, who valued and wished to preserve India’s laws and customs.⁵⁶ The reformers’ attitude specifically towards the character of the poor was indeed racially charged. Fischer-Tine has argued that the colonial authorities considered the reform of the European poor all the more necessary because their efforts to ‘civilize’ Indian society required a belief in British superiority, which was undermined by the existence of European ‘loafers’.⁵⁷ Moreover, Arnold has found that the colonial authorities of the late nineteenth century formed vagrancy legislation that applied specifically to Europeans to the exclusion of Indians and even Eurasians.⁵⁸

Indeed, Marriott has claimed that ‘racialized’ colonial attitudes toward the moral character of India’s poor even influenced the perceptions held by the British elite toward their own poor in Britain. He has contended that the various races that constituted the British Empire were ordered into a hierarchy based on ideas of ‘progress’.⁵⁹ The poor of London, he has argued, came to be described from the second half of the nineteenth century in the same ‘racialized’ language that was used by evangelicals and travel writers to describe the ‘backward savages’ of India.⁶⁰ Marriott’s argument relates to the second half of the nineteenth century, and therefore does not refute the position of this thesis. In the 1820s and 1830s, the colonial authorities of Bombay took their lead from the reformers of Britain with regard to the moral character of the poor and the need to promote their self-reliance.

⁵⁵ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, pp. 26-7.

⁵⁶ Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History*, New York: Longman, 1993, p. 149.

⁵⁷ Fischer-Tine, p. 298.

⁵⁸ David Arnold, ‘Poor Europeans in India, 1750-1947’, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 20, no. 2, Jun, 1979, p. 455.

⁵⁹ John Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India, and progress in the colonial imagination*, Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 2, 228-9.

The salvation of the impotent poor placed in the hands of private charity.

Naturally the virtues of self-reliance and industriousness could not be taught to the impotent poor, who by definition were unable to work. The defenders of the Poor Law believed that the state should provide charity to the impotent poor. So too did the revisers. The reviser-inspired 1834 Amendment was based on the findings of the 1832-4 Royal Commission. As Poynter has noted, the Commission recommended that state relief be restricted by limiting the ‘eligibility’ of the able-bodied poor, but not, generally speaking, the impotent poor.⁶¹ The ultimate author of the Commission’s ‘less eligibility principle’ was Jeremy Bentham. He argued in the late 1790s that ‘in a civilized political community’, allowing an individual to die from a lack of subsistence was not ‘consistent with common humanity’.⁶² In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* he argued that the state should accept responsibility for the sick and insane.⁶³ Yet it must be noted that Bentham considered very few of the impotent poor to be totally unable to work.⁶⁴ In Bentham’s words, ‘different species of work ought accordingly to be provided, corresponding to the different modifications of *ability* left more or less *unimpaired*’.⁶⁵ But for those who were totally unable to work, Bentham prescribed state charity.⁶⁶ This was the general position of the revisers’ movement.

The abolitionists challenged the concept of providing state charity to the impotent poor. One of the earliest abolitionists, the Reverend Thomas Alcock, recommended private charity over public in 1752 on the moral grounds that voluntary charity was a more natural bond between rich and poor.⁶⁷ Malthus argued that the impotent poor should be cared for entirely by private charity.⁶⁸ Sir Frederick Morton Eden defended the moral right of the impotent poor to subsistence in his 1797 publication *The State*

⁶¹ Poynter, p. 320.

⁶² Jeremy Bentham, ‘Essays on the Subject of the Poor Laws’, Essay II, Section I: Necessity of Relief, in Michael Quinn, (ed.), *Writings on the Poor Laws*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 10.

⁶³ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 1789, p. 262, cited in Conway, p. 76.

⁶⁴ Poynter, p. 134.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Bentham, ‘Essays on the Subject of the Poor Laws’, Essay II, Section IV: Ability as to Work, in Michael Quinn, (ed.), *Writings on the Poor Laws*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, pp. 46-7, [emphasis in original].

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Poynter, p. 40.

⁶⁸ Huzel, p. 432.

of the Poor, and stipulated that this relief was best offered from private charity.⁶⁹ Some abolitionists, such as John Davidson who believed that individuals should budget for the possibility of becoming disabled, went to the extreme of questioning the right to relief of the impotent from any source, whether public or private.⁷⁰ Yet Davidson was in a minority in this regard. The standard abolitionist position was that state dependence should not be encouraged in any category of the poor. The condition of the impotent poor entitled them to relief, but not from the state.

Bombay's charity policy toward the impotent poor adhered to the recommendations of the abolitionists. It rejected all cries for support from those who were physically incapable of working. These people were to rely on private charity for their subsistence. Governor Elphinstone himself stated for the record in 1824: 'I very much question the expediency' of the Government providing any 'direct relief to the people beyond giving employment to the poorest classes'.⁷¹ This excluded the impotent poor from relief. The conviction was held by district-level officials also. It has been shown in the previous chapter that Henry Pottinger, the Ahmednagar Collector, was against intervention in the grain trade. Similarly, he was against intervention on behalf of the impotent poor. He assured his superior that he was 'very averse to any system like gratuitous donations of grain'.⁷² This effectively excluded the impotent poor from state relief. Thus the Bombay administration's treatment of the impotent poor did not stray from abolitionist recommendations.

Bombay's officials seldom gave any clues as to the reasoning behind their rejection of the impotent poor. Yet when they did, their reasons were reminiscent of abolitionist warnings that state interference only made matters worse. Chaplin argued in 1824 that state charity only attracted the 'hungry to one focus' and made their suffering more likely than 'if they were left to disperse themselves over the face of the country, and to glean a scanty subsistence ... through ... the charity of their more substantial neighbours'.⁷³ Similarly, Council member Warden cautioned that state charity would 'slacken the zeal and humane effects of the leading Natives' 'by misleading them'

⁶⁹ Poynter, pp. 106, 112-3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 233-4.

⁷¹ Minute by Mountstuart Elphinstone, Bombay Governor, 27 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6106, APAC.

⁷² H. Pottinger, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 24 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, p. 5780, APAC.

⁷³ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6995-6, APAC.

into thinking that the Government was ‘going beyond what it is possible they’ themselves ‘can accomplish’.⁷⁴ Both Chaplin and Warden took the non-interventionist humanitarian perspective that ultimately it was better for the poor if the Government did not offer them its support. This was official orthodoxy in the administration, and it was the perspective of the abolitionists. The decision to reject the impotent poor was based on the same *laissez-faire* concern that dictated Bombay’s refusal to intervene in the grain trade.

Dissent within the ranks.

Not all district officials agreed with the Council’s policy. Robert K. Pringle, as the Assistant Collector at Poona, submitted to the Council in 1825 the findings of his investigation into the condition of several hundred people in 14 villages of Poona district. Attention had previously been called to these people by the local patels, who had described them as in ‘circumstances of urgent distress’. Of these people, Pringle found 108 to be only lacking in employment, and that a further 157 were either ‘professional beggars’ or ‘unable to work for themselves’, but received ‘a precarious maintenance from private charity’.⁷⁵ To this extent private charity had not been exhausted. Yet Pringle reported that the ‘remaining 97’ were in ‘the last stage of wretchedness, some fasting occasionally for days together, without hope of assistance from others, and incapacitated by age, weakness, or bodily infirmity, from making any exertions for themselves’. He stated that 18 people had already died of starvation and that ‘unless some assistance’ was given to the 97 people, ‘many of them must become the victims of disease and famine’. He reported having already distributed charity from his own pocket to those ‘whose wants were most pressing’, and requested reimbursement from the Government.⁷⁶ This request was counter to official policy.

Pringle represents an interesting case with regard to the administration’s charity policy. Kumar has noted that during his tutelage at Haileybury Pringle had been

⁷⁴ Minute by Mr. Warden, Bombay Council Member, in G. L. Prendergast, Cltr of Customs, to Sec to Govt, 19 Aug 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6104, APAC.

⁷⁵ R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 2 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

⁷⁶ R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 2 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

‘under the influence of Malthus’.⁷⁷ Stokes, too, has noted that Pringle was one of Malthus’ ‘best pupils’.⁷⁸ As Kumar has asserted, Pringle was very much a product of Malthus’ teachings at Haileybury when it came to his absorption of the utilitarian theory of economic rent. Pringle’s ‘net produce’ approach to the revenue settlement of Indapur in 1828 was based on this rent theory.⁷⁹ Yet with respect to the issue of state charity, Pringle was no disciple of Malthus. Pringle’s recommendation that the Government feed those in danger of starving in Poona district in 1825 would have been considered heresy in the eyes of his former teacher.

Pringle was not alone in his interventionist convictions. His superior was Henry Dundas Robertson, who to some extent shared Pringle’s views on state charity. As the Collector at Poona it was his duty to offer his opinions on Pringle’s recommendations before handing them up to the Council. Robertson had taken a non-interventionist stance toward the grain trade, and he was keenly aware of the Council’s non-interventionist views regarding public charity toward the impotent poor. Yet he recommended to the Council that Pringle ‘judiciously’ distribute ‘1,000 or 1,500 Rupees’ disguised ‘as a private charity of his own’, but in actual fact ‘coming from [the] Government’. Thus Robertson endorsed Pringle’s sentiments of wanting to intervene and help the people in distress. He expressed the view that his recommendation would ‘do much good’.⁸⁰ Yet he tailored Pringle’s interventionist recommendation as much as possible to suit the official policy of the Council.

The Council, however, was unimpressed. Its instructions studiously ignored both Pringle’s request for reimbursement and Robertson’s recommendation of further charity.⁸¹ The Council’s response therefore unfortunately lacked any explanation for its policy against state charity, ideological or otherwise. In his report Pringle had also informed the Council that his discovery of the 97 people who were nearing starvation was the result of an investigation of only 14 villages. He suspected that there might be similar cases of impotent poor people suffering elsewhere and offered to extend his

⁷⁷ Kumar, p. 85.

⁷⁸ Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, p. 99.

⁷⁹ Kumar, pp. 85-8, 97-100.

⁸⁰ H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 4 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

⁸¹ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Deccan Cmr, 13 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 79, APAC.

investigation to areas ‘in which the distress is most prevalent’.⁸² Once again the Council simply ignored his suggestion.⁸³ It evidently did not want such cases brought to its attention. It enforced the non-interventionist policy of the abolitionists by rejecting both the impotent poor and the recommendations of its officers.

The limits of state relief and private charity.

The Council’s refusal to offer charity to anyone regardless of their circumstances reduced its potential repertoire of measures for preventing starvation amongst its subjects. This break with the tradition of western Indian rulers left the offer of employment on public works as the administration’s ultimate means of preventing starvation. This was illustrated when Pottinger assured the Council that he rejected the concept of state charity, but warned that should the drought worsen the poor would have ‘no means of subsistence left’. He argued that ‘unless [the] Government is pleased to provide them with work’, they would be unable ‘to save themselves from starving’.⁸⁴

Yet relief could not be extended to the impotent poor in this form as they were unable to work. Coming back to Pringle’s investigation, he was perhaps just as aware as Robertson that the Council was unlikely to endorse his recommendation of state charity for the 97 impotent poor. He therefore proposed an alternative. He suggested that if the Government employed the impoverished locals who were still physically capable of working, they in turn might have the means of supporting the impotent poor who were nearing starvation.⁸⁵ The Council accepted the plan of employing those who were ‘distressed but able to labour’.⁸⁶ This indirect method of offering relief to the impotent poor was very unrealistic. It took time to set up public works. First a suitable site had to be surveyed.⁸⁷ Then the labourers needed to be gathered.⁸⁸

⁸² R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 2 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

⁸³ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Deccan Cmr, 13 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 79, APAC.

⁸⁴ H. Pottinger, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 24 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, p. 5780, APAC.

⁸⁵ R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 2 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

⁸⁶ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Deccan Cmr, 13 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 79, APAC.

⁸⁷ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to the Rev Surveyor, 25 Aug 1824, BGP, 25 Aug 1824, p. 4730, APAC; and Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 13 Oct 1838, BGP, 31 Oct 1838, No. 97, APAC.

⁸⁸ H. Gray, Jnr Mgst of Police, to Sec to Govt, 20 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6062, APAC.

The tools and materials, and grain or money also had to be sent to the site.⁸⁹ Time was of the essence for the 97 people who Pringle described as being in the ‘last stages of wretchedness’ and who were already ‘fasting’ for days at a time.⁹⁰ The Council’s relief therefore probably came too late for the 97. Furthermore, regardless of timing, the Government typically offered only subsistence wages to its public works labourers.⁹¹ Such meagre wages left little room for giving charity to others.

However, the administration’s faith in the ability of private charity to meet the needs of the impotent poor, even during extreme drought, was not entirely misplaced. There was a strong tradition of private charity in western India. Many private individuals came to the assistance of the poor during the ‘great famine’ of 1791-3.⁹² The tradition of giving continued into the nineteenth century with the ‘great famine’ of 1801-4 and the 1812-13 famine.⁹³ This tradition continued into the 1820s. For instance, in 1824 there was a ‘free distribution of grain by private persons’ in Purantej taluka.⁹⁴

Yet private charity had its limits. Private individuals were motivated to give aid partially from philanthropist sentiment, but also from the desire for self-preservation. David Hardiman has argued that throughout much of the pre-colonial and British colonial periods in Western India, Indian elites, particularly in the cities and towns, gave aid ‘fairly randomly’ to ‘impress the popular imagination rather than systematically alleviate the problem’.⁹⁵ In the 1803-4 famine in Ahmednagar district, it was claimed that some private individuals ‘here and there ... doled out in miserable pittance a quantity of grain’, ‘but this relief could not reach the starving masses’.⁹⁶ Indeed, the efforts of private charity in Ahmednagar district could not avert a ‘great loss of life’.⁹⁷ The 1801-4 drought was far more devastating than that of 1823-5, and

⁸⁹ G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 17 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3793, APAC; and W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Supt of Roads, Etc., 10 Nov 1838, BGP, 14 Nov 1838, No. 41, APAC.

⁹⁰ R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 2 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

⁹¹ H. Pottinger, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 24 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, p. 5781, APAC; and J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to a Bombay Engineer, 18 Oct 1824, BGP, 20 Oct 1824, pp. 5881-2, APAC.

⁹² Etheridge, pp. 61, 64, 88, 103, 105.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 43, 83-4, 100, 104, 117, 119.

⁹⁴ Sanund Mamlutdar report, 27 Sep 1824, in *ibid*, p. 44.

⁹⁵ David Hardiman, ‘Usury, dearth and famine in western India’, *Past and Present*, vol. 152, Aug, 1996, pp. 131-2.

⁹⁶ Mr. Krishnaroa Vittul Vinchoorkur, Special Officer, no date given, cited by Mr. Erskine, Ahmednagar Cltr, 30 Aug 1867, in Etheridge, p. 80.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 80.

many more people faced starvation. Thus the lighter 1823-5 drought conceivably placed less of a strain on the limits of the benefactors. Yet private charity was also exhausted in the 1823-5 drought. H. F. Dent wrote from Khandesh in 1824 that wealthy individuals had given ‘a great part of what they possessed to the poorer classes in charity but that source has now found a limit’. The grain dealers refused ‘to give further assistance’ or grain to the poor on any ‘other terms than those of immediate payment’.⁹⁸ Private charity was therefore initially forthcoming, but could not be relied upon incessantly. This was the case for Pringle’s 97, who were ‘without hope of assistance from others’. Thus the administration’s policy of abandoning the impotent poor to their fate probably spelled the death of many.

The abandoned child and Malthus’ population theory.

Impoverished children who were too young to work represented a special case in the charity debate. Technically they were impotent poor, but they were also often the offspring of able-bodied parents. Yet what was the state to do if these parents could not afford to feed their children? The one example of Bombay’s policy toward offering charity to children comes from Surat district in 1824. The district Collector, William Lumsden, informed the Bombay Council that around one and a half years earlier someone had found a female child on a local road and brought her in to Lumsden’s local representative. Since then she had been supported at Rs. 4 per month at the Government’s expense.⁹⁹ The Council, which included Elphinstone and Warden, informed him that supporting abandoned children at the public expense was ‘at variance with the course pursued by [the] Government in former instances’, and tended to ‘encourage such practices’. They instructed him to cease supporting the child.¹⁰⁰

Before Lumsden joined the Bombay civil service he attended Haileybury College in 1811, and therefore he would have received tutelage from the most forthright abolitionist Professor Malthus.¹⁰¹ Yet this did not guarantee allegiance to the

⁹⁸ H. F. Dent, Asst Khandesh Cltr, to Khandesh Cltr, 15 Nov 1824, BRP, 15 Dec 1824, p. 8021, APAC.

⁹⁹ W. J. Lumsden, Surat Mgst, to Sec to Govt, 24 May 1823, BGP, 7 Jul 1824, p. 2838, APAC.

¹⁰⁰ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Surat Mgst, 2 Jul 1824, BGP, 7 Jul 1824, pp. 2838-9, APAC.

¹⁰¹ *The East India Register and Directory for 1811*, John Mathison and Alexander Way Mason, (eds.), 2nd edn., London, 1811, p. xxxii.

abolitionist cause. The fact that Lumsden allowed the child to be supported for one and a half years demonstrates his interventionist humanitarian leanings. Moreover, Lumsden has been described by Ballhatchet as an ‘able’ administrator.¹⁰² His delay of a year and a half suggests that he knew the Council’s likely response. It has been shown in the previous chapter that Lumsden considered the Government’s policy of non-intervention in the grain trade to be based on ‘enlightened principles’.¹⁰³ Evidently his faith in the powers of non-interventionism did not extend as far as his policy toward infant children. Regardless of Lumsden’s perspective, the official policy of the Bombay administration was clear – abandoned children were not to receive state relief.

The revisers were typically in favour of state intervention to relieve the suffering of the impotent poor. Yet in this special case the revisers would have approved of Bombay’s policy. Bentham argued that children should not receive state support unless they were bound to a workhouse as apprentices until they turned twenty-one.¹⁰⁴ This naturally excluded children who were too young to work. Perhaps Bentham would have considered these infants to be squarely in the category of impotent poor who were entitled to state relief. Yet the 1832-4 Royal Commission was less ambiguous. It argued that offering allowances to large families that could not support all of their children was merely a form of charity to the able-bodied parents. It therefore argued that such state support should cease.¹⁰⁵ However, our Surat example was of an abandoned child. Supporting her would not have benefited her parents. But the Council clearly stated that it wished to avoid encouraging other parents from leaving their children at the administration’s doorstep. The revisers’ endorsed the policy of refusing to support children for precisely this reason. They wanted to encourage parents to shoulder their responsibilities independently.

The abolitionists shared the revisers’ apprehensions. Indeed, the concerns of both camps regarding the public support of children originated with the abolitionist Malthus. It was in the 1803 edition of his *Essay* that he challenged the Poor Law policy of paying allowances to large families that were otherwise too poor to feed

¹⁰² Ballhatchet, p. 113.

¹⁰³ W. J. Lumsden, Surat Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 21 Sep 1824, BGP, 29 Sep 1824, p. 5431, APAC.

¹⁰⁴ Poynter, p. 134.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 320.

every mouth. He argued that it was promoting population growth and should be abolished. He claimed that it removed the incentive of poor couples to wait until their marriage was financially viable. Not only did the subsequent growth in population translate into lower wages, which undermined the status of the independent labourer, but the children themselves would be born as paupers.¹⁰⁶

This was a specific application of the population theory for which Malthus is most famous. His theory was that while populations naturally increased at a ‘geometrical’ rate, agricultural productivity could only ever increase at an ‘arithmetical’ rate. The fertility of the general populace would always push population levels against a ceiling imposed by a limited food supply. The suffering created by a relative scarcity of food was the only effective check on the fertility of the poor. He argued that any government initiative to support the poor without also increasing agricultural productivity would merely encourage people ‘to marry from a prospect of parish provision with little or no chance of maintaining their families in independence’.¹⁰⁷ Malthus insisted in 1803 that by removing allowances for children, adults would be forced to accept their moral responsibilities of restraint.¹⁰⁸

Malthus’ proposal evoked much debate. He initially received the strongest opposition from Poor Law defenders such as Cobbett, Hazlitt, Southey and Weyland, and from the *Quarterly Review* and the *Political Register*. Yet he also had numerous supporters, and received strong backing from the *Edinburgh Review*.¹⁰⁹ But most importantly, his proposal was well-known in Britain. In fact it was taken up by the 1817 Select Committee and recommended to Parliament. The Committee argued that ‘when the public undertakes to maintain all who may be born, without charge to the parents, ... the number born will probably be greater than in the natural state’.¹¹⁰ It therefore recommended to the House that ‘no relief shall be extended to any child whose father being living, is under’ a certain age, and that this age should be periodically reduced

¹⁰⁶ Huzel, pp. 430-1.

¹⁰⁷ T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, London: Royal Economic Society facsimile of the 1798 edition, 1926, p. 85, cited in B. Stapleton, ‘Malthus: The Origins of the Principle of Population?’, in Michael Turner (ed.), *Malthus and His Time*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ Poynter, p. 157.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 177.

¹¹⁰ Select Committee to consider the Poor Laws, Report, PP 1817 (462), p. 9.

to gradually diminish the number of children receiving state support.¹¹¹ Although Parliament rejected the proposal, the fact that it went as far as being presented to the House of Commons is noteworthy. Malthus' proposal received loud attention in Britain, which was almost certainly heard in western India.

Certainly, many British Indian officials believed in Malthus' population theory *per se*. In 1829 the Board of Revenue of Madras stated that the principle that population always grew faster than productivity was "one of the best established truths of political economy".¹¹² Yet few officials were convinced that Malthus' laws were applicable to a land the size of India. Fundamental to his argument was the precondition of a labour surplus relative to the amount of land. Malthus himself recognised that the abundance of land in the early days of European settlement of the North American colonies enabled its fertile population to 'double itself' every '25 years'.¹¹³ Only once a country was full would population increases drive down real incomes and create hardship and famine. Malthus believed his arguments applied to India's situation. He argued that the Indian population had reached the ceiling imposed on its growth by the available land and food supply, and that this was demonstrated in India's frequent famines.¹¹⁴

However, as Commander has argued, few officials in India agreed with Malthus when he argued in 1798 that India had reached its population limit.¹¹⁵ Ambirajan has also argued that while 'a large body of official opinion' accepted Malthus' arguments in theory, in the first half of the nineteenth century the British Indian officials were 'more concerned with the problem of labour shortage than labour abundance' in India.¹¹⁶ Charlesworth has stated that land was 'hardly under great pressure from population in the Deccan of the early British period'. He argued that British estimates throughout the 1840s showed that 'only about half of the cultivable land in most

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 16.

¹¹² S. Ambirajan, 'Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the Nineteenth Century', *Population Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1976, p. 6.

¹¹³ T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Royal Economic Society facsimile of the 1798 edition, London, 1926, pp. 105-7, cited in E. A. Wrigley, 'Malthus's Model of a Pre-Industrial Economy', in Michael Turner (ed.), *Malthus and His Time*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Malthus, *Essay on Population*, 1798, pp. 130-1.

¹¹⁵ Simon Commander, 'Malthus and the Theory of "Unequal Powers": Population and Food Production in India, 1800-1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1986, pp. 662-3.

¹¹⁶ Ambirajan, 'Malthusian Population Theory', p. 6.

Deccan districts ... was being tilled'.¹¹⁷ Yet the lack of land under cultivation may have been due to high land taxes rather than a sparse population. Pringle and Chaplin argued in the mid-1820s that the ryots had no incentive to cultivate land that was overtaxed.¹¹⁸ But Elphinstone himself commented during the early years of his reign that 'the people [of Maharashtra] are very few compared to the quantity of arable land'.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Bombay officials were very concerned to reduce the permanent migration of the poor out of British territories during the 1823-5 drought. Robertson and Dunlop, for instance, knew that the permanent migration of their cultivators would reduce the Government's land revenues.¹²⁰ Their concern implied that Bombay Presidency suffered from a labour shortage.

Both Ambirajan and Commander have claimed that most officials of British India only came to believe that the subcontinent's population had reached its Malthusian ceiling by the 1860s and 1870s. This change of mindset, they have argued, was provoked by the successive and extreme famines that began in the 1860s and continued with little hiatus until the turn of the twentieth century.¹²¹ Ambirajan has noted that in this time period British policy makers posed the Malthusian question: 'what is the use of saving lives when once again the people so saved would suffer later in the same way?'¹²² State expenditure on famine relief was reduced so as not to 'breed paupers'.¹²³ Thus Malthus' population theory certainly affected British Indian famine policy, but not as early as the 1820s or 1830s.

Hence it must be concluded that, though Malthus' population theory was likely accepted *per se* by many Bombay officials, it was not considered applicable to the western Indian context in 1824. The Council's decision to instruct Lumsden to cease supporting the abandoned girl was therefore unlikely to have been driven by a fear of

¹¹⁷ Neil Charlesworth, 'Rich Peasants and Poor Peasants in Nineteenth Century Maharashtra', in C. J. Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, (eds.), *The Imperial Impact: Essays in the Economic History of Africa and India*, London, 1978, pp. 13, 22, cited in Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the third world*, London, New York: Verso, 2001, p. 306.

¹¹⁸ R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 21 Sep 1824, BRP, 6 Apr 1825, No. 3A, APAC; and W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Act Sec to Govt, 26 Jul 1824, BRP, 10 Nov 1824, pp. 7074-5, APAC.

¹¹⁹ Mountstuart Elphinstone, no reference details given, cited in Kumar, p. 73.

¹²⁰ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6972-3, APAC; and John A. Dunlop, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 9 Jul 1825, BRP, 27 Jul 1825, No. 13, APAC.

¹²¹ Commander, pp. 662-3; and Ambirajan, 'Malthusian Population Theory', p. 6.

¹²² Ambirajan, 'Malthusian Population Theory', p. 5.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

setting a precedent that might contribute to a population problem and thereby further impoverish western Indian society. The Council's only explanation for rejecting the girl was that supporting abandoned children tended to 'encourage such practices'.¹²⁴ Even if the Council meant by this statement that supporting abandoned offspring encouraged adults to have more children than they could afford to support, it has already been demonstrated that it was not population growth that would have concerned them.

Malthus' population theory was the point from which the abolitionists and revisers found their consensus regarding the best policy toward impoverished children. Most Bombay officials doubted the applicability of Malthus' theory to India and were nonplussed by an increase of population *per se*. Yet they still shared the abolitionists' and revisers' belief in the need to discourage state dependence. Supporting infant children would merely 'breed paupers' who were reliant on the state for their survival. The administration was willing to temporarily accept state dependants from the ranks of the able-bodied poor as labourers on public works. Yet the first difference was the temporary nature of this dependence – supporting the impotent poor was not a temporary assignment. The second difference was that only the able-bodied poor could offer their labour to offset the Government's costs of providing relief. Supporting the impotent poor offered little or no financial return, particularly in the short to medium-term. Perhaps there were financial considerations behind Bombay's varied responses to the needs of the impotent and able-bodied poor.

The financial burden of an oversized military.

The Bombay administration had financial reasons for refusing to offer charity. It will be shown that Bombay was in financial trouble due largely to the heavy financial burden of its oversized military. Moreover, it has already been demonstrated in the previous chapter that Bombay was under considerable pressure from London and Calcutta to reduce its costs. Under these circumstances the prospect of offering charity to the poor during drought might have seemed fiscally inexpedient. Indeed, one of the attractions of the abolitionists' cause against state charity in Britain was a

¹²⁴ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Surat Mgst, 2 Jul 1824, BGP, 7 Jul 1824, pp. 2838-9, APAC.

promised elimination of the poor rates, which many rate payers perceived to be burdensome.¹²⁵ This argument will be illustrated by a comparison between the Bombay and Madras administrations.

Both the Bombay and Madras governments had been exposed to the ideologies emanating from Britain. However, while the Madras Government's drought policies had been considerably altered by the influence of the abolitionists, its paternalist responses to drought lingered longer than in Bombay. Prior to the rise of the abolitionists the Madras administration was, not surprisingly, interventionist. During the 'great famine' of the early 1780s it offered charity to the poor and regulated the grain market.¹²⁶ Yet despite the reformist school having begun to exert its influence over policy makers since the early 1800s, in the 1823-5 drought the Madras Government offered grain import subsidies and ensured 'numerous paupers' were 'fed once a day at the public expense under the superintendence of charitably disposed persons'.¹²⁷ In fact, during the 1807, 1824, and 1833 scarcities the Madras administration initially declared its devotion to *laissez-faire* principles, but as the scarcities intensified it 'found it necessary' to intervene in the grain market.¹²⁸ The Bombay Government, on the other hand, was a more willing convert to abolitionist ideology and remained truer to its convictions. By the 1820s it steadfastly refused to intervene in the grain market or provide general charity to the poor.

Madras' finances were in far better shape than Bombay's. For ease of comparison, all the following figures have been converted into Bombay Rupees. Between the years of 1812/3 and 1840/1, the Madras Government enjoyed a pitiful average annual surplus of Rs. 15,914, or just 0.037 per cent of its average total revenues of Rs. 42,984,256 per year.¹²⁹ Yet over the same 29-year time period, the Bombay Government recorded

¹²⁵ Poynter, pp. xxiii, 317.

¹²⁶ Ahuja, pp. 366-7.

¹²⁷ D. Hill, Chief Sec to Madras Govt, to Sec to Bombay Govt, 31 Aug 1824, BGP, 29 Sep 1824, pp. 5271-5, APAC.

¹²⁸ Etheridge, pp. 9-10.

¹²⁹ East India Budget for 1812/3-1813/4-1814/5, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1815/6-1816/7-1817/8, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1818/9-1819/20-1820/1, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1821/2-1822/3-1823/4, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/Session 1828 Vol. 23, p. 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1826/7-1827/8, PP, V/4/Session 1831 Vol. 19, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1829/30-1830/1-1831/2, [which also gives figures for 1828/9], L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 8-9, APAC; and East India Budget for 1832/3-1833/4-1834/5, L/AG/11/1/5,

a deficit every year. It had an average annual expenditure of Rs. 23,765,269 versus an average annual income of only Rs. 16,202,904.¹³⁰ Its deficit therefore averaged Rs. 7,562,365 each year, or 47 per cent of its average annual revenues. Thus, Madras' very small annual surplus was dwarfed by Bombay's enormous annual deficit.

The Bombay Government was therefore fixated on the need to stop the bleeding. The Collectors were constantly admonished by their superiors for yielding unacceptably low profits from their districts. Even in the middle of the 1823-5 drought, Chaplin reported that he had informed the Poona, Ahmednagar and Khandesh Collectors that their expenditure was 'a great deal too high with reference to the revenue'.¹³¹ It is perhaps not a coincidence that the frugal Chaplin was also the most forthright official in expounding the administration's reasons for refusing to offer state charity. The officials who he admonished for yielding low profits were also the officials he lectured on the importance of abstaining from providing state charity. It was specifically to Archibald Robertson in Khandesh that Chaplin expressed his views on charity most clearly.¹³² Moreover, Chaplin emphasised the financial limitations of the Bombay administration when he told Pottinger in Ahmednagar that it was not 'within the competence of the ruling power' to 'provide generally for the necessities of the people'.¹³³ Furthermore, the fiscal returns of Dharwar district, which also came under Chaplin's supervision as the Deccan Commissioner, were considered sufficient enough not to call forth Chaplin's expression of displeasure regarding profitability.¹³⁴ Perhaps not coincidentally Thackeray at Dharwar was also spared Chaplin's lectures on the evils of state charity.

pp. 12-3, APAC; and East India Budget for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 10-1, APAC; and East India Budget for 1838/9-1839/40-1840/1, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 18-9, APAC.

¹³⁰ East India Budget for 1812/3-1813/4-1814/5, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1815/6-1816/7-1817/8, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1818/9-1819/20-1820/1, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1821/2-1822/3-1823/4, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/Session 1828 Vol. 23, p. 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1826/7-1827/8, PP, V/4/Session 1831 Vol. 19, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1829/30-1830/1-1831/2, [which also gives figures for 1828/9], L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 12-3, APAC; and East India Budget for 1832/3-1833/4-1834/5, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 16-7, APAC; and East India Budget for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 14-5, APAC; and East India Budget for 1838/9-1839/40-1840/1, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 22-3, APAC.

¹³¹ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Act Sec to Govt, 26 Jul 1824, BRP, 10 Nov 1824, p. 7136, APAC.

¹³² W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6995-6, APAC.

¹³³ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Provisional Ahmednagar Cltr, 21 Jul 1824, BRP, 4 Aug 1824, p. 5139, APAC.

¹³⁴ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Act Sec to Govt, 26 Jul 1824, BRP, 10 Nov 1824, p. 7121-32, APAC.

Chaplin had been transferred from the Madras service into the Bombay administration around 1818. He had joined the Company's service in 1798, and spent twenty years as an official in the Madras administration.¹³⁵ Yet by the 1823-5 drought he displayed none of Madras' characteristic wavering of conviction regarding *laissez-faire* principles. Admittedly, before Chaplin's transfer the Governor of Madras, Thomas Munro, described him as having 'more extensive general views than any of the Civil Servants under Madras'.¹³⁶ Yet this was not necessarily in reference to his *laissez-faire* convictions, which he may have picked up in Bombay. If Chaplin did have any doubts about the policy of rejecting all charity candidates before his transfer, those reservations certainly evaporated after he was drafted into the financially troubled Bombay administration.

Despite Chaplin's concern that his Collectors' expenditure was far too high, these officials were typically raising larger sums in revenues for the central Bombay Government than they were spending in the districts. Ahmednagar district spent just Rs. 760,000, or 37 per cent of an expected revenue total of Rs. 2.06 million. Khandesh district's expenditure was Rs. 510,000, or merely 39 per cent of Rs. 1.29 million in total expected revenues.¹³⁷ The remaining six-tenths of the Ahmednagar and Khandesh Collectors' revenues for the year 1822/3 went into the central Bombay Government's coffers. Yet Chaplin still felt compelled twice in two seasons to call 'the attention of the collectors to this subject' and force 'some reductions' in expenditure.¹³⁸ The districts typically had a surplus of revenue over their expenses. Yet Bombay Presidency as a whole, as has been demonstrated, was consistently a deficit Presidency. Thus, the large surpluses provided by the districts indicate that the central administration was spending heavily.

The Bombay Government's burdensome deficit was largely due to its enormous military budget. Madras also spent a large amount on its military. In fact, Madras spent twice as much as Bombay in absolute terms. But relative to its revenues Madras

¹³⁵ *The East India Register and Directory for 1811*, p. 161.

¹³⁶ Munro to M. Elphinstone, 12 May 1818, in G. R. Gleig, *The Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro, Bart. and K.C.B., Late Governor of Madras, with Extracts from his Correspondence and Private Papers*, 3 vols., London, 1830, vol. III, p. 252, cited in Ballhatchet, pp. 15-6.

¹³⁷ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Act Sec to Govt, 26 Jul 1824, BRP, 10 Nov 1824, pp. 7085, 7103, 7117, APAC.

¹³⁸ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Act Sec to Govt, 26 Jul 1824, BRP, 10 Nov 1824, p. 7136, APAC.

spent less than Bombay. Hence Madras' military did not affect the administration's profitability as much as the Bombay military did its own. The Madras Government, which offered charity to the poor, had a total military expenditure over the 29 years between 1812/3 and 1840/1 of 820,764,324 Bombay Rupees. This was an average of Rs. 28,302,218 per year, or 66 per cent of the average total annual revenues, which left the remaining 34 per cent for non-military expenditure without incurring debt.¹³⁹ However, the Bombay Government's total military expenditure over the same time period was Rs. 420,934,230, or Rs. 14,514,973 per year, which constituted 90 per cent of the average total annual revenues.¹⁴⁰ The remaining 10 per cent of the Bombay Government's income was insufficient to cover the considerable costs of the civil budget and made for a sizeable deficit.

It must be conceded that Madras' military campaigns certainly came at a high price. Ambirajan has observed that between 1780 and 1800 the Madras administration fought the Mysore wars, the Anglo-French wars, and others. These wars pushed the administration into considerable debt by the turn of the century.¹⁴¹ Yet Ambirajan has also found that the Madras administration offered charity while it was relatively prosperous in the 1780s and refused to do so at the turn of the century when it was relatively poor.¹⁴² This supports the argument that the financial burden of the military affected the civil budget for expenses such as charity. By the 1820s Madras' finances seem to have recovered, whereas Bombay's military campaigns were fresher in the

¹³⁹ East India Budget for 1812/3-1813/4-1814/5, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1815/6-1816/7-1817/8, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1818/9-1819/20-1820/1, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1821/2-1822/3-1823/4, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/Session 1828 Vol. 23, p. 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1826/7-1827/8, PP, V/4/Session 1831 Vol. 19, pp. 10-1, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1829/30-1830/1-1831/2, [which also gives figures for 1828/9], L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 8-9, APAC; and East India Budget for 1832/3-1833/4-1834/5, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 12-3, APAC; and East India Budget for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 10-1, APAC; and East India Budget for 1838/9-1839/40-1840/1, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 18-9, APAC.

¹⁴⁰ East India Budget for 1812/3-1813/4-1814/5, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1815/6-1816/7-1817/8, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1818/9-1819/20-1820/1, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1821/2-1822/3-1823/4, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/Session 1828 Vol. 23, p. 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1826/7-1827/8, PP, V/4/Session 1831 Vol. 19, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1829/30-1830/1-1831/2, [which also gives figures for 1828/9], L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 12-3, APAC; and East India Budget for 1832/3-1833/4-1834/5, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 16-7, APAC; and East India Budget for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 14-5, APAC; and East India Budget for 1838/9-1839/40-1840/1, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 22-3, APAC.

¹⁴¹ S. Ambirajan, 'Laissez-faire in Madras', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1965, p. 239.

¹⁴² S. Ambirajan, 'Political Economy and Indian Famines', *South Asia*, vol. 1, 1971, p. 26.

account books. Kaye has found that in western India the Second Maratha war of 1804-5 'brought about a deficit of more than two millions and a half', not to mention the cost of the decisive Third Anglo-Maratha war of 1817-8 that won Bombay Presidency for the British.¹⁴³ Regardless of the accumulated debt of either Presidency, by the 1820s the yearly financial burden of Bombay's military eclipsed a greater portion of its revenues than Madras' military did its own. Consequently, Bombay's sizeable annual deficit cast a longer shadow than Madras' much smaller annual profit.

Little surprise, then, that Madras only acknowledged the principles of eschewing state charity, whereas Bombay actually put them into practice. Little wonder, too, that Bombay accepted responsibility for employing the able-bodied poor on public works but delegated the responsibility of supporting the impotent poor to private individuals. Public works were an expense that offered Bombay a return on its investment in the form of increased customs and land revenues through extended road and irrigation networks.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the works prevented the migration of valuable ryots to the princely states.¹⁴⁵ When the drought abated the able-bodied poor would return to their fields and continue raising crops and contributing to the Government's land revenues. Their salvation was thus the Government's main focus. Charity to the impotent poor, however, was a one-way transaction that offered no easily recognisable return. Archibald Robertson argued in 1824 that one reason why it was important to support the able-bodied cultivators through the drought was because 'it is from their numbers that the wealth or poverty of the treasury arises'.¹⁴⁶ Bombay's financial troubles rendered it more readily receptive to the non-interventionist ideologies of the abolitionists, because many of the latter's recommended policy changes promised either lower expenditures or higher revenues. The abolitionists' recommendation that the Government should abstain from offering charity promised to reduce civil expenditure during drought. The fact that both governments were exposed to abolitionist ideologies, but the financially viable Madras Government continued offering general charity while the financially destitute Bombay Government

¹⁴³ John William Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company; A History of Indian Progress*, London: Richard Bentley, 1853, pp. 155-7.

¹⁴⁴ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6971-4, APAC; and J. B. Simson, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 19 Apr 1825, BRP, 11 May 1825, No. 14, APAC; and W. J. Lumsden, Surat Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 26 Feb 1825, BRP, 9 Mar 1825, No. 66, APAC.

¹⁴⁵ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6971-4, APAC.

¹⁴⁶ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6972, APAC.

discontinued the practice suggests that Bombay's charity policy was partially motivated by its own financial self-interest.

This argument is corroborated by an analysis of Bombay's varying military burden in relation to its shifting charity policies between 1818 and 1840. The ratio of Bombay's military charges to its total revenues was 0.99:1 in 1824/5 and 1.05:1 in 1825/6.¹⁴⁷ That is, in 1825/6, the Bombay administration spent five per cent more on its military, quite aside from its civil budget, than it earned in revenues. It has been shown that Bombay refused to offer charity during the 1823-5 drought. But during the 1831-5 and 1838-9 droughts it did offer charity as a relief measure to the impotent poor. The reasons for this policy shift will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. For now, however, it is important to note the relative drop in the financial burden of Bombay's military. The ratio of military charges to total revenues was admittedly 0.97:1 in 1831/2, but had dropped to 0.85:1 in 1832/3, 0.79:1 in 1833/4, 0.81:1 in 1834/5, and 0.67:1 in 1835/6.¹⁴⁸ The ratio was 0.72:1 in 1836/7, 0.75:1 in 1837/8, 0.82:1 in 1838/9, and 0.73:1 in 1839/40.¹⁴⁹ Thus the financial burden of Bombay's military was roughly 20 to 25 per cent less during the droughts in which it offered state charity.

These observations of the Bombay administration could be extended somewhat to the Company as a whole. The Company's debt increased sharply in the opening years of the nineteenth century. Lawson has noted that India's debt increased from £18 million to £32 million between 1802 and 1808.¹⁵⁰ Much of this increase in debt was to finance numerous military campaigns and an aggressive expansion of territory. From a mere 18,000 troops in 1763, the Indian Army had grown to 154,500 troops by 1805.¹⁵¹ This, perhaps not coincidentally, was the time when many governments of India began at least partially shifting toward non-interventionist policies.¹⁵² Philips has noted that from 1822 to 1828, the Company's debt in India rose from £30 to £40

¹⁴⁷ East India Budgets for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/SESSION 1828 VOL 23, pp. 14-5, APAC.

¹⁴⁸ East India Budgets for 1829/30-1830/1-1831/2, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 12-13, APAC; and East India Budgets for 1832/3-1833/4-1834/5, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 14-5, APAC; and East India Budgets for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 14-5, APAC.

¹⁴⁹ East India Budgets for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 14-5, APAC; and East India Budgets for 1838/9-1839/40-1840/1, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 22-3, APAC.

¹⁵⁰ Lawson, p. 139.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3.

¹⁵² Ambirajan, 'Political Economy and Indian Famines', pp. 737-8.

million, which was largely due to the Burmese war.¹⁵³ Kaye has argued that there was a strong connection between the years in which the Company posted a deficit and the years in which it was at war.¹⁵⁴ Lawson has found that the Company's Army was one of the largest in the world.¹⁵⁵ From 1813 to 1856 it fought the Marathas, Gurkhas, and Sikhs, and fought Burma, China, Afghanistan and Malaya. The mounting debt in the Company's name was 'simply charged indefinitely to future revenues and possible surpluses'.¹⁵⁶

Several historians have argued that this financial pressure not only induced a *laissez-faire* approach to the grain trade, but to famine relief in general. Stokes has asserted that the military's constant desire for large revenues encouraged 'over-extension of dominion' and the prioritisation of 'external security' over 'internal development'. This, Stokes has argued, was not restricted to Wellesley's reign as Governor-General of 1798-1805, but was rather a constant throughout the nineteenth century with the brief exception of Bentinck's rule of 1828-33.¹⁵⁷ Kaye has argued that the Company as a whole was 'so impoverished' in the early nineteenth century that it could not afford to be 'generous', and that it was 'compelled to take a financial view of almost every question'.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Klein has maintained that non-interventionist ideology provided a justification for the frugal and deadly famine-relief policies of the late nineteenth century Indian governments.¹⁵⁹ He has contended that many lives could have been saved during the great famine of 1876-8 in western and southern India if the Government had been willing to spend more, which it did 'unhesitatingly' in the Afghan war during the year that the famine ended.¹⁶⁰ Davis has also found that the Madras Government gave fiscal priority to its military over famine-relief in the 1876-8 famine.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Davis has argued that during the 1896-8 famine, Viceroy

¹⁵³ C. H. Philips, *The East India Company, 1784-1834*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2nd edn., 1961, p. 262.

¹⁵⁴ Kaye, pp. 155-7.

¹⁵⁵ Lawson, p. 148.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-7.

¹⁵⁷ Eric Stokes, 'The Land Revenue System of the North-Western Provinces and Bombay Deccan (1830-1860): Ideology and the Official Mind', C. H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright (eds.), *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation, c. 1830-1850*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1976, p. 45.

¹⁵⁸ Kaye, pp. 159-60.

¹⁵⁹ Ira Klein, 'When the Rains Failed: Famine, Relief, and Mortality in British India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, Apr-Jun, 1984, pp. 189-91.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁶¹ Davis, pp. 36-7.

Elgin very reluctantly allowed public works in the most drought-stricken areas, and was entirely against private charity. In reaction to the cost of the war on India's North Western Frontier, Elgin reduced his Government's Famine Fund contribution from Rs. 15 million to Rs. 10 million.¹⁶² So the Company's heavy military expenditure seems to have limited its civil expenditure.

The concurrence of financial and ideological factors.

However, the argument that the Bombay Government used abolitionist principles merely to rationalize its fiscally expedient policies would be too cynical an emphasis. Granted, Bombay was in greater financial trouble than Madras between the seasons of 1812/3 and 1840/1, and it was also quicker to totally convert to the dictates of the new *laissez-faire* ideology. Yet a comparison between Bombay's finances before the 1812/3 season to those after this season tells a different story. The 1812-13 season had been the first scarcity in which Bombay began instituting the new abolitionist policies toward state charity.¹⁶³ After this date, between 1812/3 and 1840/1, the Government's average annual expenditure exceeded its revenues by 47 per cent.¹⁶⁴ Yet before this period, between the years of 1797/8 and 1811/2, the Bombay Government also posted a deficit every year. Its total expenditure was Rs. 216,728,459, which eclipsed its total income of Rs. 77,080,928.¹⁶⁵ Its average annual deficit was 181 per cent higher than its average annual income. Bombay was therefore in greater financial difficulties in the pre-1812/3 period. Yet as has been demonstrated, in this period Bombay offered

¹⁶² Ibid, pp. 144-6.

¹⁶³ Rabitoy, 'The Control of Fate and Fortune', p. 757.

¹⁶⁴ East India Budget for 1812/3-1813/4-1814/5, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1815/6-1816/7-1817/8, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1818/9-1819/20-1820/1, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1821/2-1822/3-1823/4, L/AG/11/1/4, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/Session 1828 Vol. 23, p. 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1826/7-1827/8, PP, V/4/Session 1831 Vol. 19, pp. 14-5, 19, APAC; and East India Budget for 1829/30-1830/1-1831/2, [which also gives figures for 1828/9], L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 12-3, APAC; and East India Budget for 1832/3-1833/4-1834/5, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 16-7, APAC; and East India Budget for 1835/6-1836/7-1837/8, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 14-5, APAC; and East India Budget for 1838/9-1839/40-1840/1, L/AG/11/1/5, pp. 22-3, APAC.

¹⁶⁵ East India Budgets, 1797/8 to 1799/1800: Accounts of Revenues and Disbursements of East India Company, 1797-1800, PP, 1801 (64), p. 15; and East India Budgets, 1800/1: Accounts of Revenues and Disbursements of East India Company, 1798-1801, PP, 1801-2 (126), p. 15; and East India Budgets, 1801/2 to 1803/4: Accounts of Revenues and Disbursements of East India Company, 1801-4, PP, 1806 (158), p. 15; and East India Budgets, 1804/5 to 1806/7: Accounts of Revenues and Disbursements of East India Company, 1804-7, PP, 1808 (240), p. 15; and East India Budgets, 1807/8 to 1808/9: Accounts of Revenues and Disbursements of East India Company, 1806-9, PP, 1810 (228), p. 13; and East India Budgets, 1809/10 to 1811/2: Accounts of Revenues and Disbursements of East India Company, 1809-12, PP, 1813-14 (113), p. 15.

general charity to the poor.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Bombay's financial straits cannot provide a complete answer for the change in its charity policy.

Similarly, the Company's financial difficulties may have increased after 1805, yet it was not devoid of such difficulties before then. Bowen has argued that even as early as the 1780s and 1790s, the army's territorial expansion in India had brought economic crisis for the Company, which sold its shares to meet its debt repayments. He has concluded: 'the transition from trader to sovereign was uncomfortable and largely unsuccessful'.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, he has contended that in this time period, much like in the nineteenth century, London demanded a 'maximization of investment' from its representatives in India.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, Metcalf has argued that in the 1770s and 1780s Edmund Burke, one of Britain's prominent political thinkers, attacked the Company's Government of India for its lack of investment in the subcontinent.¹⁶⁹ The Company therefore fought expensive wars prior to its shift to non-interventionist policies in the early nineteenth century, and thus the financial burden of the military is not a sufficient condition in and of itself to account for the shift in policy. More accurately, the Company's increasing expenses gave the new ideology an added allure.

By 1813 the reform movement was beginning to affect aspects of the Company's rule beyond its charity policy. That year the Company's monopoly of trade with India was abolished and its restrictions placed on missionaries wishing to preach in India were removed.¹⁷⁰ The coincidence of the rise of the abolitionist movement in Britain and the shift in charity policy in Bombay suggests that the ideas of the abolitionists had a genuine impact on the Bombay administration. Non-intervention was the abolitionists' version of humanitarianism – they genuinely believed that their policies would have the most humane effect in the long run. The policy of refusing to offer state charity to the impotent poor so as not to discourage private charity was thus

¹⁶⁶ Mr. Borradaile, Act Ahmedabad Cltr, 29 Feb 1868, in Etheridge, p. 42; and Indian Famine Commission Report, Part I, PP, 1880 Cmd. 2591, lii, pp. 9-10.

¹⁶⁷ H. V. Bowen, 'Investment and Empire in the later eighteenth century: East India stockholding, 1756-1791', *Economic History Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1989, p. 190.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, New Cambridge History of India, vol. 3, no. 4, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 18-20.

¹⁷⁰ Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, p. xiv.

considered the best option because, in official eyes, it benefited both the impotent poor and the Government. Ideology served more than just a rationalising function for Bombay's charity policy. It also provided a driving force behind the paradigm shift.

Conversely, while reformist ideology had a genuine effect on Bombay's charity policy, the implementation of that ideology was also tailored to fit Bombay's financial circumstances. Bombay did not mindlessly apply abolitionist ideology to every component of its relief policy. It chose to apply the abolitionists' *laissez-faire* case specifically toward the impotent poor – it refused to offer financial support to this particular category of the indigent who could offer no profitable labour in return. Their fate was to be the burden of private individuals. Yet Bombay chose to apply the revisers' interventionist approach to the able-bodied poor, who alone were capable of offering their labour to offset the administration's expenditure on their relief. Hence, it chose to apply the interventionists' approach to altering the fate of those who were most valuable to the Government. The abandonment of the able-bodied poor to their own devices would have been fiscally irresponsible by the policy makers entrusted with fostering the Bombay Government's revenues. Thus it may be concluded that Bombay stayed as true to its newly found and genuinely held ideological convictions as its financial requirements allowed.