

CHAPTER 4  
CHARITY AND THE RISE OF THE REVISERS:  
BOMBAY POLICY IN THE 1830S

By the 1830s Bombay had significantly altered its charity policy. There was no change in policy toward the able-bodied poor. They continued to receive relief in the form of employment on public works as they had done in 1823-5. Yet during the droughts of the 1830s the impotent poor were offered gratuitous relief to avert their starvation. This was a departure from the policy of the 1823-5 administration, which preferred to delegate responsibility on this matter to private charity. It was also a departure from the recommendations of the abolitionists in Britain, who wanted to abolish the Poor Law's provision of state charity for the impotent poor. There are two potential reasons for this change in policy.

*The increased severity of drought.*

The 1831-5 drought was certainly more severe in its effects than the 1823-5 drought. There was only one report in 1823-5 of drought-induced starvation, and it involved 18 people from Poona district.<sup>1</sup> Reports of starvation became more prevalent in the 1831-5 drought. Two reports from Dharwar district in 1833 noted the widespread drought-induced starvation of an undisclosed number of people.<sup>2</sup> Four more reports from Sholapur recorded extensive starvation in 1833. Two of which could not offer specific figures, but the remaining two stated that six and forty-four people had died from a lack of food.<sup>3</sup> Thus the effects of the 1831-5 drought seem to have been more extensive and severe.

This increased ferocity might provide an explanation for the Bombay administration's change in policy in favour of providing charity to the impotent poor. While the

---

<sup>1</sup> R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 2 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 17 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3793, APAC; and R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcotah Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 3 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

<sup>3</sup> Translation of a Letter from Indee Mamlutdar, 29 Jun 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC; and Translation of a Letter from Modeebhall Mamlutdar, 5 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC; and R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 9 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC; and R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 12 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4208, APAC.

relatively small number of deaths in 1823-5 was insufficient to challenge the abolitionist principles of the Bombay officials of the time, the sheer increase in suffering during the 1831-5 drought conceivably shook the foundations of the principles otherwise held by those in office. Thomas Williamson, for instance, initially hesitated to recommend government intervention to minimise ‘the misery some of the poorer classes are suffering at Sholapore from having no means of subsistence’. He expressed his *laissez-faire* inspired concerns that with such a policy of intervention ‘there is danger of its increasing the evil it is supposed it will alleviate’.<sup>4</sup> Yet only three days later Williamson changed his mind after reading more detailed reports from his subordinates regarding the degree of distress. He endorsed his subordinates’ interventionist recommendations for ‘the relief of the people’ by offering, among other forms of support, charity to the impotent poor.<sup>5</sup> In this case an official’s ideological preconceptions were at least temporarily sidelined by an appreciation of the pressing needs of so many people. This response suggests that the increased severity of the 1831-5 drought might have similarly influenced the Bombay administration.

Yet the interpretation that the 1831-5 administration changed its charity policy due to the severity of the drought is not entirely convincing. The 1838-9 drought was nowhere near as extreme as that of 1831-5. It lasted for a shorter time during which only one report of drought-induced starvation was submitted to the Council. It was reported in 1839 that ‘several persons’ had died from starvation in Ratnagiri district.<sup>6</sup> Despite the relative mildness of the 1838-9 drought, which seems to have been of a similar or lesser magnitude to that of 1823-5, the administration of the late 1830s retained the interventionist policy that had been followed in 1831-5. Thus the interpretation that the shift back to an interventionist charity policy was driven by greater suffering does not hold. An explanation for the interventionism of the 1830s must therefore be sought elsewhere.

---

<sup>4</sup> T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 13 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4205, APAC.

<sup>5</sup> T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4207, APAC.

<sup>6</sup> R. V. Goodhuleykur, and 10 Other Ratnagiri Petitioners, to Act Chief Sec to Govt, 9 Mar 1839, BRP, 11 Sep 1839, No. 5716, APAC.

*The rise of the revisers' interventionist humanitarianism.*

The gradually increasing humanitarian backlash against the abolitionists in Britain in the 1820s, which culminated in 1834, almost certainly influenced Bombay's policy shift toward supporting the impotent poor in the 1830s. The term 'humanitarian' in this context applies to the interventionists' short term version of the concept; the abolitionists believed that non-intervention was the most humanitarian policy in the long run. As early as 1818 the radical George Ensor criticised Malthus for his 'inhumanities, his loud abuse of the people'. He argued that the abolitionist case implied 'a portion of this man's property is more sacred than that man's life'.<sup>7</sup> At this stage Ensor was in the minority. Yet as Poynter has argued the abolitionists lost ground in the 1820s as opponents, and indeed previous supporters, increasingly challenged their cause to abolish the Poor Law's provision of state charity to the impotent poor.

The 1820s in Britain was a decade in which momentum shifted from the abolitionists to the revisers.<sup>8</sup> While the abolitionists recommended abolishing the Poor Law's provision of state relief to the impotent poor, the revisers rejected this position in favour of supporting the impotent poor. The shifting momentum in favour of the revisers in Britain was personified in the story of J. R. McCulloch. His staunch support of the abolitionist cause in 1825 had waned by 1828, and by 1830 he was arguing that state relief to the impotent poor was required by humanity.<sup>9</sup> The swing in momentum in favour of the revisers culminated in the 1834 Amendment Act, which retained the Poor Law provision of relief to the impotent poor.<sup>10</sup> The 1832-4 Royal Commission into the Poor Law, which embodied the revisers' position, argued that refusing to offer relief was 'repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind'.<sup>11</sup> It asserted that the impotent poor were 'proper objects of relief'.<sup>12</sup> Hence, on the issue of

---

<sup>7</sup> G. Ensor, *An Inquiry concerning the Population of Nations* (1818), esp. pp. 79, 110, 81, cited in J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 263.

<sup>8</sup> Poynter, p. 296.

<sup>9</sup> J. R. McCulloch, *Principles of Political Economy*, (1830 ed.), part III. chap. iii, cited in *ibid*, pp. 304-5.

<sup>10</sup> Poynter, p. 320.

<sup>11</sup> The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws, Report, PP, 1834 (44), p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

the impotent poor the revisers preferred an interventionist style of humanitarianism and sided with the defenders of the Poor Law. Their solution to the problem of the impotent poor became predominant in Britain by the end of the 1820s.

Bombay officials in both the 1820s and 1830s often showed a genuine humanitarian concern for the suffering of their subjects. The difference in the 1830s was that the Councils began approving their subordinates' recommendations that the Government should provide charity to the impotent poor. For instance, Robert Arbuthnot reported in 1833 that over 2000 people in Bagulkota town were 'utterly incapable of working or maintaining themselves in any way'. They were in so much distress as to be 'offering their children for sale, to keep themselves alive'. He recommended that the Government contribute Rs. 1000 to the efforts of the town's private charity to relieve their suffering.<sup>13</sup> Arbuthnot joined the Company in 1819 and gained over a decade of judicial experience in the Bombay civil service before becoming an Assistant Collector in Poona in 1831.<sup>14</sup> In this post he would have been exposed to the potential influence of the utilitarian Robert K. Pringle, who has already been shown to have argued in favour of state charity for the impotent poor in the 1823-5 drought.

Arbuthnot's superior in Dharwar, G. W. Anderson, recommended his subordinate's suggestions to the Council. He stated that 'as the distress in these districts is real and of great extent I cannot doubt the Government will immediately sanction the sum here applied for'. He also directed an investigation into reports of starvation in Indi taluka, and stated that 'if such extremity of distress does really prevail I have instructed Sir R Arbuthnot to ... afford immediate relief to the extent that may be absolutely required'.<sup>15</sup> This action was a far cry from the 1823-5 Council's rejection of Pringle's offer to investigate villages for suspected cases of privation.

In 1833 Arbuthnot's and Anderson's recommendations received welcome from Governor FitzGibbon, who stated that he was 'pleased to sanction the donation of

---

<sup>13</sup> R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulkota Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 13 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3794, APAC.

<sup>14</sup> *The East India Register and Directory for 1821*, A. W. Mason, G. Owen and G. H. Brown (eds.), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, 1821, pp. 281, 284.

<sup>15</sup> G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 17 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3793, APAC.

Rupees 1000 ... in aid of the poor of Bagulcotta'.<sup>16</sup> FitzGibbon was a true aristocrat. His father was the Lord Chancellor of Ireland. In 1802 he succeeded his father to become the Second Earl of Clare. Educated in Oxford, he was knighted twice, and after his posting as the Governor of Bombay he became a Privy Councillor in 1835.<sup>17</sup> His aristocratic nature may have made him more amenable to the paternalist policies recommended by his subordinates. Regardless, his interventionist humanitarian response shows that the concept of offering charity to the impotent poor had gained acceptance in the upper echelons of the Bombay administration.

Yet in the interests of a timely response FitzGibbon had dealt with the Bagulkota issue outside of the Council. The policy of charitably aiding the impotent poor was therefore not necessarily the consensus in the Council. Yet only two months later Josiah Nisbet, the Dharwar Collector, recommended 'feeding those who are totally unable to work and destitute of all other means of subsistence' in Dharwar and Belgaon towns. He recommended that the Government contribute Rs. 2000 to feeding the local impotent poor. His interventionist humanitarian concerns were evident in the statement that scanty rains and high grain prices had created the 'unhappy consequence ... that thousands are in absolute want of food, and unless furnished with the means of subsistence must certainly starve'.<sup>18</sup> Nisbet had been initially an officer in the Madras administration.<sup>19</sup> The response to Nisbet came from the entire Council this time, and it was in favour of his recommendation to provide 'the destitute poor of that neighbourhood with food'.<sup>20</sup> Thus an interventionist humanitarian desire to alleviate the suffering of the impotent poor, which in the 1823-5 drought was expressed entirely by district-level officials, had extended to the upper levels of the Bombay administration by the 1830s. This was despite the fact that *laissez-faire* was still very much the preferred policy with regard to the grain trade.

In the charity cases of Bagulkot, Dharwar and Belgaon the administration did not technically make its contributions directly to its subjects. Instead, it channelled the

---

<sup>16</sup> L. R. Reid, Sec in Attendance with the Right Hon'ble the Governor, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 22 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3795, APAC.

<sup>17</sup> C. E. Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1906, pp. 82-3.

<sup>18</sup> J. Nisbet, Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 31 Aug 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5225, APAC.

<sup>19</sup> *The East India Register and Directory for 1831: Bombay*, G. H. Brown and F. Clark (eds.), London, 1831, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Dharwar Cltr, 19 Sep 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5227, APAC.

funds through private charities. Was this an example of a lingering abolitionism in the administration? Did the officials accept the impotent poor as state dependants but still feel uncomfortable with the recipients realising their privileged status? At first glance these indirect relief efforts seem reminiscent of Henry Robertson's suggestion in 1825 that Pringle might distribute government funds disguised as his own private charity.<sup>21</sup> However, on closer inspection it transpires that even before the private subscriptions were bolstered with the administration's contributions they were being distributed by government agents. In Bagulkot, the private funds were being distributed 'under the superintendence' of the local government representative.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in Dharwar the private subscriptions were being distributed at the local government office under the superintendence of Nisbet himself.<sup>23</sup> Under such circumstances the recipients could easily have assumed that the Government was their benefactor. When the private funds finally were exhausted and state charity took over, the public funds continued to be distributed by government agents. Thus the 1831-5 administration was not afraid that its charity recipients would realise their state dependent status. Abolitionist concerns, at least in this regard, no longer held sway.

*Foreign migrants and the resurrection of abolitionism.*

The interventionist humanitarian reaction in Britain against the demands of the abolitionists only applied to the impotent poor. The 1834 Act was not 'humanitarian' in the interventionists' sense toward the able-bodied poor, whose eligibility to state relief was in fact restricted. Moreover the conditions of relief for the able-bodied poor were intentionally made harsher so as to deter state dependence. As Fischer-Tine has argued, the workhouses of the 1830s in England were 'institutions of punishment rather than of welfare'.<sup>24</sup> This was an expression of the long-term humanitarianism of the abolitionist, who saw state dependence as a cause of indigence. Furthermore, the Act had followed the abolitionists' recommendations of specifically excluding children from state relief so as not to support their parents or promote fertility rates

<sup>21</sup> H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 4 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

<sup>22</sup> R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcota Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 13 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3794, APAC.

<sup>23</sup> J. Nisbet, Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 31 Aug 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5225, APAC.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

amongst the poor.<sup>25</sup> Reviser ideology, which dominated the 1830s in Britain, therefore dictated an interventionist approach to the impotent poor, a limited interventionist approach to the able-bodied poor, and an entirely non-interventionist approach to children. The treatment of each category was considered the most humane for their particular circumstances.

Similarly in western India there were limits to the Bombay administration's interventionist humanitarianism in the 1830s. Although FitzGibbon agreed to offering Rs. 2000 in charity to the impotent poor of Dharwar and Belgaon, he did so with hesitation. He was concerned that if foreign paupers in the nearby territory of the Nizam caught word that the British Government of Bombay was feeding its poor, 'our districts will be infested' by them.<sup>26</sup> These 'foreigners' were Indian subjects of another ruler. Thus FitzGibbon's humanitarianism was not as universal as the concept might suggest, but was rather restricted to Bombay subjects. People from beyond the Presidency's borders were not the administration's financial responsibility.

The Council agreed that charity should only be offered to the subjects of Bombay Presidency. It instructed Anderson that whilst distributing the Rs. 2000 amongst his own subjects, 'the influx of foreign paupers should be discouraged as much as possible'.<sup>27</sup> Anderson himself had already proposed this form of restricted relief. Three months earlier he had recommended giving his subordinate authority to distribute alms to the destitute impotent poor he found in his district, but 'judiciously, so as to form no encouragement for others to flock to our districts to avail themselves of this relief'.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean that FitzGibbon and Anderson's humanitarianism was disingenuous. Rather, their sincere humanitarian concern was restricted by their financial responsibilities. Given that the administration could not afford to gratuitously support foreigners, the most humane policy was to avoid encouraging them to migrate into the Presidency only to be disappointed. Thus, the long-term humanitarianism of the abolitionist came to the fore.

---

<sup>25</sup> Poynter, p. 320.

<sup>26</sup> Minute by Mr. Clare, Bombay Governor, no date given, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5226, APAC.

<sup>27</sup> L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Dharwar Cltr, 19 Sep 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5227, APAC.

<sup>28</sup> G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 17 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3793, APAC.

Yet in the case of the impotent poor of Sholapur district FitzGibbon's charitableness was not only restricted, it was entirely withheld. In July 1833 Robert K. Pringle, the Sholapur Sub-Collector, reported distress in his district and requested permission to distribute charity to the impotent poor. During the 1823-5 drought Pringle had reported suffering in Poona district and distributed charity from his own pocket. On that occasion the Council had rejected his requests for reimbursement and for permission to extend his investigation. By 1833 Pringle evidently had not been so jaded by this experience to have lost his humanitarian concern or his determination to convince the Governor to take interventionist action. His report came in between Arbuthnot's in June and Nisbet's in August. Yet while his superiors sanctioned both Arbuthnot's and Nisbet's requests for permission to distribute charity, they rejected his own. Pringle's report described a similar degree of human suffering in Sholapur as in Arbuthnot or Nisbet's districts and thus his case for state support was not lacking in this regard. He stated that people were 'every where to be met with whose emaciated appearance marks extreme destitution. Sales of children have become frequent and some cases of death from starvation are reported to have occurred'.<sup>29</sup> Three days later he reported that 'forty four cases of death from want of food are reported to have occurred in the Town of Sholapoor within the last five days', and that 'cases have also occurred of young children being left destitute in the streets by the death or abandonment of their parents'.<sup>30</sup> The level of human suffering in Sholapur seems to have been no less than that experienced in the towns of Bagulkot, Dharwar or Belgaon.

Yet the problem may in fact have been the extent of distress in Sholapur. The number of impotent poor people requiring assistance in Dharwar and Belgaon was not disclosed, but in Bagulkot it was 2,000. In Sholapur it was twice that number at 4,300 people.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the composition of the needy was another factor. While there was concern that state charity might attract foreign paupers to Bagulkot, Dharwar and Belgaon, there was no mention of any foreigners already comprising a portion of the needy in those towns. In fact, the indigent of Dharwar and Belgaon were described as

---

<sup>29</sup> R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 9 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

<sup>30</sup> R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 12 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4208, APAC.

<sup>31</sup> Statement by R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, 9 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

consisting specifically of ‘persons from all parts of the district’.<sup>32</sup> Henry Robertson estimated that in Sholapur, however, roughly ‘one half of the individuals reported to be in distress appear to have come from the territories of neighbouring states’.<sup>33</sup>

This observation did not escape the Revenue Commissioner’s attention. Thomas Williamson was no abolitionist with regard to charity to the impotent poor – he supported his subordinate’s recommendations and noted the drought’s ‘truly distressing consequences’. Williamson may in fact have been an interventionist at heart, as in 1832 he recommended intervention in the grain trade.<sup>34</sup> Yet his endorsement of Pringle’s interventionist requests came with a *laissez-faire* inspired caution regarding the foreign paupers. He recommended that Pringle should be warned of ‘the danger of allowing wanderers, from other places, to flock to Sholapoor’ where ‘the hope of relief might attract a multitude to swell the list of those perishing from starvation. Attractions of this kind have been attended with the most lamentable effects in other parts of our Provinces’.<sup>35</sup> This was an expression of the non-interventionist type of humanitarianism. Williamson was evidently cautious to avoid the potential suffering that might be caused by following too ardently either the abolitionists’ non-interventionism or the revisers’ interventionism. He therefore recommended a restricted intervention. It was an intervention restricted to Bombay’s subjects only.

Yet these ideological explanations had an inherent financial element. An influx of foreign paupers would only overwhelm the amount offered by the state in charity if it refused to increase the amount to cater for the newcomers. Their ‘guaranteed’ suffering, which Williamson was so eager to avoid, was dependent on the assumption that the Government had reached the financial limits of what it was willing to give in charity. Evidently FitzGibbon and the Council were willing to give nothing to the paupers of foreign states. In the towns of Bagulkot, Dharwar and Belgaon the potential of encouraging a flood of foreigners spurred them to offer charity with caution. Moreover, in Sholapur the presence of so many foreigners at the time of Pringle’s request prompted FitzGibbon, who dealt with this case outside of the

---

<sup>32</sup> J. Nisbet, Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 31 Aug 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5225, APAC.

<sup>33</sup> H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Rev Cmr, 12 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

<sup>34</sup> T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 10 Nov 1832, BRP, 31 Dec 1832, No. 6814, APAC.

<sup>35</sup> T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4207, APAC.

Council, to reject Pringle's request altogether. FitzGibbon accepted Pringle's other proposal of offering public works employment to the able-bodied poor who were in need of assistance.<sup>36</sup> He then instructed his Secretary, L. R. Reid, to state on his behalf that of the people in need in Sholapur, 'a large proportion (particularly women and children) is stated to be unable to work, and that if Government undertake to provide food for all such, their number may be expected to increase in a short time to an alarming amount'. Only the cost of interring the bodies was to be 'borne by Government'.<sup>37</sup> FitzGibbon's genuine humanitarian concerns were channelled by financial limitations into a restricted interventionist response in Bagulkot, Dharwar and Belgaon, and a non-interventionist response in Sholapur.

William Newnham was a member of the Council. He praised what he considered to be FitzGibbon's rapid and humane offering of employment in Sholapur, despite his exclusion of the impotent poor from relief.<sup>38</sup> For most of his thirty-year career Newnham had been stationed in Bombay city. He had therefore been remote from most of the drought-induced suffering that had intermittently taken place over the years, particularly in the famine belt of the Deccan. Newnham's early years in the service of the Bombay administration were spent in Bombay in secretarial posts for various departments and boards.<sup>39</sup> He subsequently accepted his place as a member of the Bombay Council in 1829.<sup>40</sup> Sheltered from the suffering in the districts, Council member Newnham believed that intervention should have its limits.

Furthermore, the refusal to support the impotent poor in Sholapur so as to deter an influx of foreign paupers found similar expression in Bagulkot after a second round of correspondence. One month after FitzGibbon's approval of the distribution of Rs. 1000 to the impotent poor of Bagulkot, Anderson submitted further correspondence on the matter to the Council. Arbuthnot had handed up a letter from his mamlatdar in Mudebehal, who stated that he had been distributing food free of charge to the impotent poor in his area until he received orders to deny such support to the foreigners amongst them. The mamlatdar reported that he had 'warned the persons

<sup>36</sup> Minute by Clare, Bombay Governor, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4209, APAC.

<sup>37</sup> L. R. Reid, Sec with the Right Hon'ble Governor, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4210, APAC.

<sup>38</sup> Minute by W. Newnham, Council Member, no date given, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4211, APAC.

<sup>39</sup> *The East India Register and Directory for 1821*, p. 281; and *The East India Register and Directory for 1811*, John Mathison and Alexander Way Mason, (eds.), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, 1811, pp. 256, 258.

<sup>40</sup> *The East India Register and Directory for 1831: Bombay*, p. 1.

from other states to go away'. Soon thereafter he learned that at least three people had died of starvation 'as they were returning [home] in consequence of the injunction that had been given to such persons to go back to their own country'. He confirmed that they had 'died from want as their bodies were literally nothing but skin and bone'.<sup>41</sup>

Yet the Council responded with non-intervention toward the foreigners. Granted, it instructed Anderson to allow Arbuthnot to 'extend relief where in his judgement it is most required'. But it also concluded that 'you cannot too strongly impress on that officer the disastrous consequences of collecting within our districts the distressed poor from other states, and to observe that, generally speaking, it would be desirable to relieve the distress only by employing those who are able and willing to work'.<sup>42</sup> This was a repeat of the decision FitzGibbon had made regarding Sholapur only two weeks earlier. FitzGibbon's initial reaction was that the state should accept financial responsibility for the impotent poor and provide them with relief. This interventionist humanitarian policy soon gave way, however, to abolitionist concerns in the Council when such displays of charity began to coax foreign paupers, for whom the administration accepted no financial responsibility, into British territory. The possibility of increasing relief expenditure to cater for the foreigners was not considered. The most humane policy therefore became non-intervention. Partially forgotten *laissez-faire* principles were temporarily remembered under pressing financial circumstances.

*The abandoned child and the resurrection of abolitionism.*

The 1831-5 administration came to a similar conclusion regarding what to do with abandoned children, even amongst its own subjects. In 1833 in Sholapur, Pringle had instructed his local representatives to support 'at the public expense' the children who had either been abandoned or orphaned by their parents. The children were to be supported until he received word from the Council 'respecting their future disposal'.<sup>43</sup> FitzGibbon's order that the women and children who were unable to work should not

<sup>41</sup> Translation of a Letter from Modeebhall Mamlutdar, 5 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

<sup>42</sup> C. Norris, Chief Sec to Govt, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 29 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4331, APAC.

<sup>43</sup> R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 12 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4208, APAC.

be supported by the state implied that these children should be cut loose. This order was a repeat of the non-interventionist instructions the Bombay Council had issued to Lumsden in 1824. FitzGibbon explained in 1833 that if the women and children were supported then ‘their number may be expected to increase’.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the 1824 Council had explained that supporting abandoned children tended to ‘encourage such practices’.<sup>45</sup> In both cases state dependence was to be discouraged for fear of its further expansion. This was the one entirely abolitionist charity policy that survived the rise of the revisers in the 1820s in Britain. Both the abolitionists and the revisers agreed that children should be excluded from state support, which they were in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in this case, the Bombay administration’s rejection of the abandoned Sholapur children conformed to mainstream British politics.

Yet contemporary British ideology was not entirely the motivation. In the Sholapur case it was not just the children but all of the impotent poor who were excluded from state relief. This departure from both British orthodox opinion and standard Bombay policy was followed for the very specific reason of wanting to discourage an incursion of foreign paupers. Such an incursion was considered too costly in both financial and non-interventionist humanitarian terms. Thus the concerns of the abolitionists, which dictated policy so strongly in the 1823-5 Government but became largely dormant in the 1830s, were intermittently awakened under certain circumstances. The desire to limit suffering had been a key component in both the decisions to offer, and then to retract, state support to the impotent poor. When foreign paupers began crossing the borders into British territory the non-intervention of the 1820s temporarily became the order of the day once again.

So the reformist ideologies of Britain found expression in both Bombay’s intervention to relieve the impotent poor, and its non-intervention to avoid relieving foreign paupers. Yet mainstream orthodox opinion in Britain, which in the 1830s was the position of the revisers, could only have influenced Bombay’s intervention to save its indigenous impotent poor. Bombay’s rejection of foreign paupers conformed to

---

<sup>44</sup> L. R. Reid, Sec with the Right Hon’ble Governor, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4210, APAC.

<sup>45</sup> J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Surat Mgst, 2 Jul 1824, BGP, 7 Jul 1824, pp. 2838-9, APAC.

<sup>46</sup> Poynter, p. 320.

abolitionist thinking, but was unlikely to have been motivated entirely by it. The abolitionists, who had lost favour in Britain in the 1830s, were against state support of the impotent poor. If Bombay had believed entirely in this position it would have never supported its indigenous impotent poor in Bagulkot, Dharwar and Belgaon. Ideological convictions, in tune with those of the revisers in Britain, influenced the Bombay administration into providing interventionist support for its own impotent poor. These genuine convictions were, however, challenged by the prospect of being overwhelmed by thousands of foreign paupers, who unless discouraged would swarm into British territory to partake in the administration's benevolence. To discourage foreign paupers Bombay was sometimes forced to exclude their indigenous impotent poor from relief. Thus the financial responsibilities of the Bombay administration did not always allow for an unchecked application of the new ideology of the revisers, and in these circumstances the old abolitionist way of thinking came to the fore.

*Maintaining ideological convictions despite mounting financial pressures.*

However, a perusal of the financial concerns facing the Bombay administration of the 1830s strengthens, more than it detracts from, the argument that contemporary mainstream British ideology drove Bombay's shift in policy toward the impotent poor. The pressures that London was placing on the governments of India to cut costs before the 1823-5 drought did not abate after 1825. Philips has noted that between 1823 and 1834 'the Directors were constantly pressing their Indian Governments drastically to reduce the costs of administration'.<sup>47</sup> These pressures did not necessarily desist after 1834, but rather this was simply the last year of Philips' study. Particularly the years leading up to the 1831-5 drought involved an increase in this pressure.

The Company was divided into two branches. The territorial branch was based on the Company's territorial gains in India, and brought in revenue primarily from land and custom taxes. The commercial branch, which before the militaristic expansion of the territorial branch was the Company's sole source of income, brought in revenues from the profits of trade. The territorial branch, which typically posted a deficit each year due to the expense of an oversized military, had long since relied on the profits of the

---

<sup>47</sup> C. H. Philips, *The East India Company, 1784-1834*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2nd edn., 1961, p. 247.

commercial branch to keep the entire Company financially afloat.<sup>48</sup> The commercial branch's monopolistic trade with China was particularly profitable and formed one of the few solid foundations of the Company's otherwise shaky financial viability. Yet in 1828 Ellenborough, the President of the Board of Control in London, warned the Company's Court of the Directors that their monopoly of trade with China would be removed in the upcoming Charter renewal of 1833. Thus the territorial branch came under considerable pressure after 1828 to reduce its expenditure in anticipation of the coming fall in the Company's income.<sup>49</sup>

The effects of this news can be seen in the reduction in military expenditure in Bombay between the 1823-5 and 1831-5 droughts. It has already been demonstrated that the administration's military expenditure in 1823-5 equalled its revenues, leaving little room for civil expenditure without incurring debt.<sup>50</sup> During the 1831-5 drought the military expenditure had been reduced to around 80 per cent of the revenues.<sup>51</sup> The military expenditure had also declined steadily in absolute terms from its highpoint in 1825/6. These cuts indicate that the Bombay administration took very seriously its financial responsibility to lighten the burden of the territorial branch. Yet despite this climate, the administration accepted the added financial liability of supporting the impotent poor during 1831-5, which it had previously rejected in the 1823-5 drought. The financial pressures on the Bombay administration may have forced it to rethink its shift in policy when considerable numbers of foreign paupers began crossing its borders. Yet prior to this point the administration was willing to incur the financial costs of adhering to its ideological commitments. There was no financial incentive for the administration in keeping the impotent poor alive. Unlike its investment in maintaining the able-bodied poor, the cost of preventing starvation in the ranks of the impotent poor offered no return to the state coffers. The administration's acceptance of this liability during such financially pressing times demonstrates the strength of their interventionist humanitarian convictions.

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 295.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 287-8.

<sup>50</sup> East India Budgets for 1824/5-1825/6, PP, V/4/SESSION 1828 VOL 23, pp. 14-5, APAC.

<sup>51</sup> 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.

It could be argued that the reduction in military expenditure made it easier for the administration to accept the liability of supporting the impotent poor. It is true that the administration began to increase its civil expenditure on a number of accounts after it had reduced its military burden. Yet these increases were initiated only after the 1831-5 drought. For instance, the Department of Roads and Tanks was established in 1835. As the Commissioner wrote six years later, the new department was established for the ‘development of the natural resources of the country’, and with the intention of ‘improving the irrigation of districts subject to frequent drought and consequent misery’.<sup>52</sup> During the 1838-9 drought there were increasing calls from officials within the administration and from British merchants for considerable increases in the road building budget as a means for increasing the wealth of the populace and the Government.<sup>53</sup> Bombay’s expenditure on roads and irrigation was increased, but still to only a minimal level.<sup>54</sup> Bombay also began spending funds on local dispensaries and hospitals.<sup>55</sup> But these examples demonstrate, among other things, the influence of the revisers’ interventionist humanitarianism in the 1830s.

*The final drought and a continued commitment to intervention.*

It was in this context of increased commitments to the civil expenditure that the Bombay administration continued its policy of providing charity to the impotent poor during the 1838-9 drought. In 1839 David Blane, the Collector at Khandesh, recommended that the Government contribute several hundred rupees to the support of a charitable hospital that had been established on private funds in Dhoolia town. He

---

<sup>52</sup> W. R. Morris, Sec to Govt, to Rev Cmr, 11 Dec 1841, V/24/3289, pp. 1-2, APAC.

<sup>53</sup> W. C. Bruce, Bombay Collector, to Sec to Govt, 21 Feb 1838, BGP, 7 Mar 1838, No. 107, APAC; and Minute by R. Grant, Bombay Governor, 24 Feb 1838, BGP, 7 Mar 1838, No. 107A, APAC; and Minute by J. Farish, Council Member, 24 Feb 1838, BGP, 7 Mar 1838, No. 107B, APAC; and W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Bombay Cltr, 7 Mar 1838, BGP, 7 Mar 1838, No. 213, APAC; and J. Brownrigg, Chairman of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, to Act Sec to Govt, 9 Aug 1838, BGP, 22 Aug 1838, No. 64, APAC; and T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Act Chief Sec to Govt, 14 May 1838, BRP, 18 Jul 1838, No. 5517, APAC; and W. Scott, Civil Engineer, to Act Sec to Govt, 5 Jan 1839, BGP, 23 Jan 1839, No. 29, APAC; and W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Cltr, 13 Jan 1839, BGP, 23 Jan 1839, No. 31, APAC.

<sup>54</sup> R. Foster, Supt of Roads, Tanks and Wells, to Act Sec to Govt, 10 Sep 1838, BGP, 31 Oct 1838, No. 96, APAC; and Statement by R. Foster, Supt of Roads, Tanks and Wells, to Act Sec to Govt, 10 Sep 1838, BGP, 31 Oct 1838, No. 96, APAC; and Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 13 Oct 1838, BGP, 31 Oct 1838, No. 97, APAC; and Minute by G. W. Anderson, Council Member, no date given, BGP, 31 Oct 1838, No. 98, APAC.

<sup>55</sup> J. Glen, Sec to Med Bd, to Act Sec to Govt, 27 Aug 1838, BGP, 5 Sep 1838, No. 57, APAC; and D. Blane, Khandesh Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 21 Jan 1839, BGP, 13 Mar 1839, No. 1, APAC; and W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Mar 1839, BGP, 13 Mar 1839, No. 2, APAC.

stated that ‘the care of the sick and those suffering from bodily injuries is unquestionably an act of the purest “Dhurrum”, or charity’.<sup>56</sup> The Council approved Blane’s suggestion.<sup>57</sup> The administration was particularly pleased to support private charities that were run economically. In 1838 the Bombay District Benevolent Society requested financial support from the Government as it had recently gone into debt to ‘meet the growing wants of the local poor of Bombay’. This was no doubt due to the prevailing drought. The society assured the administration that the recipients of its charity were the ‘really necessitous poor’.<sup>58</sup> The interim Governor, James Farish, stated that he had ‘seen a good deal of the internal proceedings’ of the society. This suggests that he may have been a contributor or a senior member. He endorsed the society’s request on the grounds that ‘the greatest care is observed in enquiring into the cases coming before it and in the economical application of its resources’.<sup>59</sup> Farish had been a Secretary to the Government during the 1823-5 drought. As a non-executive member of that Council he would have witnessed its *laissez-faire* policies. Whether that experience made an impression on Farish or not, his policy by 1838 was interventionist. The Council was willing to support cost-effective and discerning private charities, and recommended to the Government of India that Rs. 300 per month be offered to the society.<sup>60</sup> The 1838-9 administration therefore retained the 1831-5 administration’s interventionist policy with regard to the impotent poor.

The 1838-9 drought seems to have been more severe in Kathiawar to the north of the Presidency. Over one thousand Kathiawar foreign migrants entered Bombay city and first relied upon the support of the Panjrapole charitable society. The society had previously been formed by 63 Bombay merchants for the relief of the city’s impotent poor, and their funds were stretched by the arrival of so many foreign paupers. The society therefore petitioned the Government for ownership of Hawur village on Salsette Island. The society proposed that it would use the village’s revenues to replenish its funds and maintain its expanded charitable obligations. The Government rejected the society’s request, but considered the possibility of leasing the village to

---

<sup>56</sup> D. Blane, Khandesh Ctr, to Act Sec to Govt, 21 Jan 1839, BGP, 13 Mar 1839, No. 1, APAC.

<sup>57</sup> W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Ctr, 7 Mar 1839, BGP, 13 Mar 1839, No. 2, APAC.

<sup>58</sup> J. Vaupell, Act Sec to Bombay District Benevolent Society, to Act Sec to Govt, 3 Aug 1838, BGP, 22 Aug 1838, No. 5, APAC. [Emphasis in original].

<sup>59</sup> Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 13 Aug 1838, BGP, 22 Aug 1838, No. 6, APAC.

<sup>60</sup> W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Sec to Supreme Govt, 16 Aug 1838, BGP, 22 Aug 1838, No. 7, APAC.

the society.<sup>61</sup> Thus the 1838-9 administration supported some private charities, but it stopped short of permanently giving away a village's revenues. However, to relieve the Panjrapole society's burden the Government offered public works employment to the able-bodied poor amongst the Kathiawar migrants. Over 1100 people, who constituted most of the foreign paupers, accepted the Government's offer in December of 1838.<sup>62</sup>

In response to the drought a group of prominent members of the public in Bombay city formed the Famine Fund Committee, for which they raised considerable sums.<sup>63</sup> This particular private charity was important because it raised funds entirely for the Government to spend how it liked in providing for the impotent poor. It was explicit in stipulating that the fund was 'solely for the benefit of those who were incapable of earning their own livelihood'.<sup>64</sup> In January of 1839, Governor Farish approved of a plan whereby the Government would foot the bill of providing employment to the able-bodied Kathiawar poor, and rely on the finances of the Famine Fund Committee to support the impotent poor.<sup>65</sup> By April over 1300 able-bodied foreign paupers were employed on a road from Panwell to Urun in the Konkan.<sup>66</sup> Over 1000 of their loved ones who were unable to work joined them, and were supported by the Famine Fund.<sup>67</sup> Thus unlike the 1831-5 administration the Government of 1838-9 did not reject its foreign paupers. This was possibly because, unlike the former administration, it had the financial support of a private fund placed entirely at its disposal. The 1838-9 Government may not have been so accommodating had it lacked such financial support. Yet there were other reasons for the 1838-9 Government to support the foreigners which will be discussed in the sixth chapter.

---

<sup>61</sup> Framjee Cowasjee, Panjrapole Charitable Society, to Act Chief Sec to Govt, 27 Dec 1838, BRP, 6 Feb 1839, No. 822, APAC; and L. R. Reid, Act Chief Sec to Govt, to Tannah Cltr, 31 Jan 1839, BRP, 6 Feb 1839, No. 823, APAC.

<sup>62</sup> W. C. Bruce, President of Famine Cmte, to Act Sec to Govt, 22 Dec 1838, BGP, 9 Jan 1839, No. 39, APAC.

<sup>63</sup> A. T. Etheridge, *Report on Past Famines in the Bombay Presidency*, Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1868, p. 150.

<sup>64</sup> W. C. Bruce, President of Famine Cmte, to Supt of Roads, 30 Jan 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 23, APAC.

<sup>65</sup> Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 25 Jan 1839, BGP, 30 Jan 1839, No. 50, APAC.

<sup>66</sup> W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Famine Fund Cmte, 23 Apr 1839, BGP, 24 Apr 1839, No. 339, APAC.

<sup>67</sup> J. H. Burke, Asst Supt of Roads, to Act Supt of Roads, 15 Apr 1839, BGP, 24 Apr 1839, No. 338, APAC.

Although the Famine Fund was based on private subscriptions, it was run at least partially by public officials. The President of the Famine Fund Committee was William Bruce, who was also the Bombay Collector.<sup>68</sup> The Committee had chosen its head wisely. It has been shown that the 1838-9 Council was more willing to support private charities that appeared to be run economically. Before accepting his post as the Collector of Bombay, Bruce had spent a number of years since 1821 as the sub-Accountant of Bombay's General department, and the Accountant of four other departments.<sup>69</sup> By 1831 he had become the Bombay administration's sub-Treasurer and General Paymaster.<sup>70</sup>

Once the Government had accepted responsibility for employing the able-bodied, an issue soon arose over who should finance their support on Sundays when they were not expected to work. The Superintendent of Roads, Captain Foster, recommended that the Famine Fund should pay. Foster was reluctant to support the able-bodied migrants in idleness for one day in every seven. Yet Bruce responded that the Committee's funds were entirely for the support of the impotent poor, and it had 'no power to appropriate any part of the famine Funds to make good the loss arising from such a cause'.<sup>71</sup> The Council accepted Bruce's response and decided that it would offer seven days' pay to the able-bodied poor for six days' work each week.<sup>72</sup>

Thus the 1838-9 administration continued the interventionist policy followed by the 1831-5 administration in supporting private charities during drought. It did not ask for support from private funds or rely entirely on them in providing for the needs of the impotent poor. Thus the 1838-9 administration was not driven by abolitionist ideology, which had influenced the 1823-5 administration so strongly. But when the Famine Fund Committee offered its funds the administration gladly accepted. It even overstepped the mark by proposing that the Committee might meet some of the expense of maintaining the able-bodied poor.

---

<sup>68</sup> W. C. Bruce, President of Famine Cmte, to Supt of Roads, 30 Jan 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 23, APAC.

<sup>69</sup> *The East India Register and Directory for 1821*, p. 283.

<sup>70</sup> *The East India Register and Directory for 1831: Bombay*, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> W. C. Bruce, President of Famine Cmte, to Supt of Roads, 30 Jan 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 23, APAC.

<sup>72</sup> W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Famine Cmte, 9 Feb 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 24, APAC.

*Conclusion.*

The 1823-5 Government broke with the tradition of the previous governments of western India and refused to offer charity under any circumstances. The *laissez-faire* ideology of the abolitionists in Britain had convinced most officials in the Bombay administration that state charity caused more poverty than it removed and that private charity was more capable of meeting the needs of the impotent poor. It was considered more humane in the long run not to intervene so that private philanthropic individuals would see the impotent poor to be unassisted and reach into their pockets to offer aid. Bombay was quicker than Madras to accept abolitionist ideology with regard to the impotent poor. This was facilitated by its unhealthy finances, which were faltering under the weight of its heavier military burden. Bombay applied the revisers' limited interventionism to the valuable able-bodied poor by employing them on public works, and applied the abolitionists' strict non-interventionism to the worthless impotent poor. The able-bodied were able to offer an economic return in both the short run, through their labour on the works, and in the long run, through their survival and subsequent production of harvests for the Government to tax. The impotent poor could offer no such financial incentive to encourage benevolence from an impoverished Government. They alone were to taste the bitter remedies of the abolitionists. What was politically impracticable in Britain was financially so in Bombay, but only with regard to the able-bodied poor.

Yet *laissez-faire* ideology was not cynically upheld to merely justify a fiscally expedient policy. Bombay had been in financial trouble prior to its shift to a non-interventionist policy during the 1812-13 famine. Moreover, its financial troubles continued into the 1830s, in which the 1831-5 and 1838-9 administrations reverted to the traditional policy followed by western Indian rulers. Ellenborough's warning that the Company would lose its monopoly of trade with China in the 1833 Charter renewal translated into a reduction in military expenditure rather than scarcity-relief expenditure. In fact, it was under these pressing financial circumstances that the 1831-5 administration accepted the extra financial liability of supporting the impotent poor. The revisers had gradually gained predominance in British politics during the course of the 1820s. By the 1831-5 drought the Bombay Council had accepted the revisers' interventionist humanitarian principles regarding the treatment of its own impotent

poor. Yet the Council's commitment to such principles was challenged by an influx of foreign paupers seeking aid in British territory. Its financial responsibilities dictated a return to the non-interventionist humanitarianism preached by the abolitionists in rejecting the foreigners' cries for aid, even to the point of rejecting its own impotent poor to discourage a greater incursion of foreigners.

The 1838-9 administration was far more accommodating to its foreign migrants. But this was somewhat thanks to the efforts of the Famine Fund Committee, which ensured that the administration only bore the financial responsibility of supporting the able-bodied foreigners. Yet regarding its own subjects the 1838-9 administration continued the policy of its predecessor in 1831-5 of providing charity to the impotent poor. Abolitionist principles did not make a partial comeback as they had in the 1831-5 drought. But the 1838-9 administration's interventionist humanitarian convictions were not challenged the same way by the influx of foreign migrants because of the support of the Famine Fund Committee.

Thus throughout the 1820s and 1830s the varying charity policies of the Bombay administrations were heavily influenced by the reformist ideologies on poor relief that were dominant in Britain at the time. Abolitionism held greater sway in Bombay in the 1820s at a time when it was also political orthodoxy, albeit fading, in Britain. Likewise, the interventionist humanitarianism of the revisers had become predominant in Bombay in the 1830s after it had done the same in Britain. Yet Bombay did not go so far as to fully implement all of the abolitionists' recommended policies in the 1820s or the revisers' recommended policies in the 1830s. These reformist ideologies were implemented as far as the financial realities of the Company's operations in western India could allow.