

CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC WORKS, CRIME AND MIGRATION

Each occurrence of drought in the 1820s and 1830s forced the Bombay Government to protect its interests. The people who the drought dispossessed of their usual means of survival left their homes in search of an alternative source of subsistence. Some people migrated considerable distances in search of lower grain prices, while others decided on the more direct approach of stealing to survive. It will be shown that crime and migration posed a number of threats to the public and the Government, and that employing the destitute on public works provided a solution that Bombay could not dismiss.

Public works as an antidote to crime.

Drought typically increased the price of grain. This in turn placed an extra burden on the poorest members of society that threatened their survival. Some responded by turning to crime to ensure their livelihood. Thus, as the Bombay officials knew, increased crime rates typically accompanied drought. The recent history of the region told this story well. During the 1791 famine in Sholapur district ‘thefts became the order of the day’.¹ The Gaekwad Government in Kaira district was determined to ‘help the people’ by increasing its ‘repressive measures against crime’.² During the 1812-13 famine in Dholka taluka ‘scarcity was attended … by an increase of crime, especially robbery and dacoity’.³

Furthermore, the Bombay officials of the 1820s and 1830s experienced the connection between drought and crime firsthand. Williamson stated in July 1824 that ‘when scarcity is threatened the coolies of Guzerat are generally troublesome’.⁴ Crawford reported from Ahmedabad that ‘the price of grain … has risen considerably, and the Coolies in the Chowal are beginning to commit depredations’.⁵ R. Barniwall at Kathiawar reported ‘a general failure of the crops throughout this Peninsula’, and that

¹ Deputy Sholapur Cltr, no date given, in A. T. Etheridge, *Report on Past Famines in the Bombay Presidency*, Bombay: Education Society’s Press, 1868, p. 100.

² Mr. Elliot, Act Kaira Cltr, 30 Sep 1867, in *ibid*, p. 50.

³ Mr. Borradale, Act Ahmedabad Cltr, 29 Feb 1868, in *ibid*, p. 42.

⁴ Thomas Williamson, Act Kaira Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 30 Jul 1824, BRP, 25 Aug 1824, p. 5547, APAC.

⁵ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 16 Sep 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, p. 5494, APAC.

many poor people were resorting to ‘theft and predatory pursuits for the means of existence’.⁶ Similarly, Archibald Robertson wrote from Khandesh that he expected the poorest people in his district would turn to ‘the commission of crime to supply their wants’.⁷ His subordinate H. F. Dent reported that in the jungles ‘a party of not less than 200 men are collected, many armed with matchlocks’. The usual jungle gang of ‘Bheels’ had been joined ‘in these times of scarcity’ by those who were struggling ‘to procure a meal’. Dent believed that the newcomers were ‘more daring and predatory than the Bheels themselves’.⁸

Bombay’s officials perceived criminal behaviour to be a challenge to their authority and a drain on their districts’ resources. Arthur Crawford reported from Ahmedabad in 1824 that high grain prices had induced some ryots to join gangs that were committing crimes outside British territory and then returning to the sanctuary of their villages. The village headmen were beginning to ‘resist the authority of the Kamavisdar’, or taluka-level officer.⁹ They refused to let the police enter the villages and apprehend the felons. The Government incurred an increase in costs by enforcing its will. Crawford employed an extra constabulary force of 26 men ‘at a monthly charge of Rupees Five hundred and forty’. He stated that if the village headmen continued refusing to ‘give up offenders’, he would ‘requisition for a small Detachment of Regular Troops to aid the Civil power in upholding the authority of the British Government’.¹⁰ Similarly, Saville Marriott responded to the increased frequency of raids in the Northern Konkan in 1824 by augmenting the local police forces ‘from 400 to 560 Privates’, which increased the Government’s costs.¹¹

Since criminals preyed upon the law-abiding and revenue-paying section of the populace, the reduction in the productivity of such people was a further cost to the

⁶ R. Barniwall, Kattywar Political Agent, to Sec to Govt, 29 Sep 1824, BGP, 20 Oct 1824, p. 5916, APAC.

⁷ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 October 1824, BRP, 3 November 1824, p. 6978, APAC.

⁸ H. F. Dent, Asst Khandesh Cltr, to Khandesh Cltr, 15 Nov 1824, BRP, 15 Dec 1824, pp. 8022-3, APAC.

⁹ *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. 50.

¹⁰ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 16 Sep 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, pp. 5494-6, APAC.

¹¹ Saville Marriott, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 1 Jan 1824, BRP, 14 Jan 1824, pp. 202-3, APAC.

Government. William Lumsden reported from Surat in 1824 that 60 men had raided Teemberwa village to the value of Rs. 3,259. One villager was killed and three more were wounded. He offered the victims Rs. 957 as a relief measure.¹² P. F. French argued in 1833 that the drought was likely to force some people out of agriculture and into raiding villages to survive. He recommended avoiding this eventuality by providing them with funds to prop up their efforts to cultivate crops. He argued that this would ‘in the end be a saving to the Government’.¹³ Thus village raids affected not only the villagers but also the Government’s revenues. In some cases people were killed for the food they carried with them.¹⁴ Other villagers were kidnapped ‘until sums were paid for their ransom’.¹⁵ This hurt the Government’s revenues all the more because the Presidency suffered from a labour shortage.¹⁶ Thus, in addition to humanitarian concerns, kidnapped or murdered villagers were no longer productive or revenue-paying individuals. Moreover, village raids could force the wealthier villagers to flee to the towns. In 1839 over three hundred people of Broach district petitioned the Council for an increased police presence in response to a number of village raids by ‘starving persons’. They argued that such raids were ‘the ruin of all’, and had forced many people, particularly grain dealers, to ‘abandon their villages’.¹⁷ This disrupted the village economy. Thus Bombay’s officials considered the increase in criminal behaviour to be a threatening and irksome accompaniment to drought.

During the most extreme drought of 1831-5 the Government was frequently forced to respond to the sharp increase in crime by posting soldiers throughout the troubled areas. Anderson reported from Dharwar in 1833 that ‘the scarcity has already induced a great prevalence of gang robberies and plunder’. He responded by despatching

¹² W. J. Lumsden, Surat Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 15 May 1824, BRP, 9 Jun 1824, pp. 3770_3-13, APAC.

¹³ P. F. French, Bheel Agent, to Khandesh Cltr, 17 Mar 1833, BGP, 17 Apr 1833, No. 45A, APAC.

¹⁴ R. K. Arbuthnot, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Act Chief Sec to Govt, 8 May 1839, BRP, 29 May 1839, No. 3444, APAC.

¹⁵ Saville Marriott, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 1 Jan 1824, BRP, 14 Jan 1824, p. 202, APAC.

¹⁶ Srinivasa Ambirajan, ‘Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the Nineteenth Century’, *Population Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, Mar, 1976, p. 6; and 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 Holocasts: El Nino famines and the making of the third world*, London, New York: Verso, 2001, p. 306.

¹⁷ Dessaie Houkoomutroy Dowlutroy Muzmoodar and 372 Other Broach Petitioners, to Act Chief Sec to Govt, no date given, BRP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 1076, APAC.

troops to the turbulent talukas.¹⁸ Similarly, Williamson noted that in 1832 troops had been despatched to the Kaira district to augment the local constabulary.¹⁹

However, the increased crime rates of the 1831-5 drought made it quite obvious to many Bombay officials that their police and troops could only ensure a degree of law and order. In 1833 an increase in crime forced Williamson to respond by despatching more troops throughout Kaira district. Yet he noted that ‘were any serious disorders to occur, such small parties would be quite unequal to preserve the public peace’.²⁰ Likewise, William Sprott Boyd responded to riots in many of the marketplaces of his district by posting extra policemen while conceding that ‘it is impossible to station police at all bazaars’.²¹ Similarly, in 1834 the Council admitted that it lacked the manpower to protect every trade route in Gujarat that was being attacked by bandits.²² W. Stubbs reported from Kaira in 1833 that there was a ‘general apprehension’ throughout his district that the distress caused by the prevailing scarcity might ‘breakout into acts of outrage and open violence’. He argued that those who would likely turn to crime were ‘so numerous’ and spread throughout the district that it was ‘hopeless to look for any substantial aid from the mere ordinary police of the country’.²³ Thus the officials of the Bombay administration knew that increased crime levels typically accompanied drought, and that they lacked the manpower to fully contain the potential increase in lawlessness.

The administration’s inability to police the entire Presidency after the breakdown of law and order put a premium on removing the initial causes of potential unrest. As noted, Stubbs admitted his inability to police Kaira district if order were to breakdown. But he then suggested that ‘since the means of procuring food is the cause of the evil apprehended it would be good policy’ to employ the likely troublemakers on sinking wells and building water tanks. This would both provide them with food in the medium term but also in the short term ensure that they were ‘kept from doing

¹⁸ G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 4 Jan 1833, BRP, 23 Jan 1833, No. 297, APAC.

¹⁹ T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Kaira Cltr, 24 Oct 1833, BRP, 6 Nov 1833, No. 6050, APAC.

²⁰ T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 23 Aug 1833, BRP, 4 Sep 1833, No. 4888, APAC.

²¹ W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 24 Nov 1832, BRP, 31 Dec 1832, No. 6818, APAC.

²² L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Cltr of Customs in Gujarat, 31 Mar 1834, BRP, 2 Apr 1834, No. 1509, APAC.

²³ W. Stubbs, Kaira Cltr, to Rev Cmr, 16 Oct 1833, BRP, 6 Nov 1833, No. 6049, APAC.

mischief'.²⁴ Thus public works were a means of preventing crime by offering an alternative source of subsistence. Richard Mills reported from the Northern Konkan in 1825 that should 'the distress become so great' whereby many people might consider 'resorting to plunder' he would offer them employment on public works.²⁵ Likewise, Sharma has found that the North Western Provinces Government offered public works employment as an antidote to increased crime levels during the 1837-8 drought.²⁶ Public works in Bombay were used to reduce the likelihood of a breakdown of law and order. Employment was provided to the able-bodied poor who were most likely to turn to crime when their usual means of procuring subsistence had dried up. For this reason the abolitionists' recommended policy of refusing to offer employment to the able-bodied poor was politically unpalatable to the Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s.

Civilizing the 'criminal tribes' with the use of public works.

Throughout the droughts of the 1820s and 1830s many Bombay officials believed that they could identify the types of people who were more likely to turn to crime. They typically considered agriculturalists to be passive and unthreatening to the Government's authority. Agriculture was a relatively sedentary pursuit. The plough was considered symbolic of a civilized, and easy to rule, society. Bombay's officials believed that the more industrious agriculturalists were better equipped to face the drought. Henry Robertson observed in 1824 that the more 'respectable' villages of his district were 'filled with grains' because they had stored the surplus of previous good seasons.²⁷

Naturally the wealthier of Bombay's subjects had less reason to turn to crime during the drought. The poor were the first to feel the effects of a scarcity.²⁸ Their meagre incomes could not stretch to the high grain prices. Unable to acquire grain

²⁴ W. Stubbs, Kaira Cltr, to Rev Cmr, 16 Oct 1833, BRP, 6 Nov 1833, No. 6049, APAC.

²⁵ R. Mills, Act Ntn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 18 Mar 1825, BRP, 30 Mar 1825, No. 58, APAC.

²⁶ Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State; North India in the Early Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 136.

²⁷ H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 5 Aug 1824, BRP, 25 Aug 1824, p. 5520, APAC.

²⁸ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 3 Sep 1824, BGP, 15 Sep 1824, p. 5179, APAC; and A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 16 Sep 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, pp. 5497-8, APAC; and H. Pottinger, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 24 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, p. 5780, APAC; and John A. Dunlop, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 15 Aug 1825, BRP, 31 Aug 1825, No. 36, APAC.

legitimately or locally, they were typically the first to turn to raids to meet their subsistence needs. However, the officials did not simply believe that all poor individuals would become criminals during subsistence crises. Poverty was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for increased ‘criminality’ during drought. Richard Mills remarked upon the ‘harmless and inoffensive dispositions’ of the poor in his district of the Northern Konkan. He claimed that rather than commit a crime, they would probably ‘obtain a livelihood by some honest or peaceable employment’, such as becoming servants of the Pandharapesha²⁹ or migrating to Bombay in search of work.³⁰ Similarly, Arthur Crawford noted the poverty of the villagers of Puranteje taluka, but stated that they were also ‘peaceable’ and ‘well inclined to cultivation’.³¹

The greatest focus of official suspicion was the section of the poor who were only partially committed to the plough in normal years. Bombay’s officials suspected that these people had a bad work ethic and supplemented their meagre income with occasional robbery. They suspected that when the monsoon failed this section of the populace was the most likely section to form gangs and revert in status from petty thieves into fully fledged brigands. During the 1823-5 drought, Edward Mills observed that a taluka in Kaira district was ‘composed of poor indolent and bad cultivators’ who were ‘little attached to their villages’. He argued that under the pressure of the drought, if they were ‘harassed by over assessments’ they would ‘throw up their lands and resort to their old plundering habits’.³² Thus, the people who the administration perceived to be lazy and unwilling to commit to the discipline of the plough were considered the most at risk of turning to crime. If they were only partially committed to the land in times of plenty, it was expected that they were far more likely to turn to crime during drought to fill their stomachs.

The Bombay officials labelled the least settled of their subjects ‘criminal tribes’. Yet Guha has used the early nineteenth century case of tribal chieftain Umaji Raje of Purandhar, in western India, to illustrate how the peoples labelled by the British as

²⁹ Pandharapesha, corruptly Panderpeyshe: ‘A term for classes considered superior to the cultivator, as the Brahman, writer, goldsmith, blacksmith, &c. – Wilson – Bombay’. *A Glossary of Vernacular Judicial and Revenue Terms*, p. 84.

³⁰ R. Mills, Act Nthn Konkan Cltr, Sec to Govt, 18 Mar 1825, BRP, 30 Mar 1825, No. 58, APAC.

³¹ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 28 Mar 1825, BRP, 20 Apr 1825, No. 42, APAC.

³² E. B. Mills, 1st Asst Kaira Cltr in Charge, to Act Sec to Govt, 4 Jun 1824, BRP, 21 Jul 1824, p. 4766, APAC.

'criminal tribes' were in fact asserting their political sovereignty against the British colonisers.³³ Thus their actions were more politically than criminally motivated. Skaria has also argued that in the early nineteenth century the 'Dangi' of Khandesh committed raids as negotiable claims to authority or emoluments from the state. The British misperception of these raids as criminal acts, and subsequent demand that the cattle seized in the raids be returned, represented to the 'Dangi' a 'refusal to negotiate'.³⁴ Yet the British officials were unaware of these interpretations, and continued to perceive the raiders as criminally inclined lazy cultivators.

In the 1820s and 1830s the most prominent 'criminal tribes' described in official correspondence were the Kolis and the Bhils. The Kolis were hill-dwellers of the Western Ghats. Thus they were to be found throughout the length of the Presidency. They lived in the Konkan and as far south as the Karnataka, but they were particularly predominant to the north in Gujarat.³⁵ As hill-dwellers they were only partial cultivators, which, in the official mindset, made them prone to plundering the lowlands to meet their needs.³⁶ James DeVitre, the Kaira Judge, described the Kolis of his district in 1824 as 'the first to suffer in time of scarcity' because they lacked the 'management and foresight to avoid calamity'. He argued that they lived 'from hand to mouth in seasons of plenty' and were 'indolent' and 'improvident on all occasions'. He then connected their 'indolent' habits to a criminal predisposition. He stated that they were of a 'turbulent and unsettled disposition' and 'little inclined quietly to encounter difficulty and deprivation'.³⁷

The Bhils were more localised in Khandesh district. Varma has stated that the British found Khandesh to be a 'wild and desolate district, infertile and inhospitable', which could support only a sparse population.³⁸ Ballhatchet has noted that the Bhils had little knowledge of agriculture, and had previously found employment as village watchmen

³³ Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 99-102.

³⁴ Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wilderness in Western India*, Delhi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 158.

³⁵ Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, (eds.), *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, and of kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive*, 2nd. edn., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, first published 1886, 2nd edn. published 1903, p. 249.

³⁶ J. H. Cherry, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 4 Mar 1824, BRP, 17 Mar 1824, pp. 1714-5, APAC.

³⁷ J. D. DeVitre, Kaira Judge, to Sec to Govt, 20 Jul 1824, BGP, 4 Aug 1824, p. 4231, APAC.

³⁸ S. Varma, *Mountstuart Elphinstone in Maharashtra, 1801-1827. A Study of the Territories Conquered from the Peshwas*, Calcutta: K P Bagchi, 1981, p. 162.

throughout the district. The political turbulence of the 1800s and 1810s had brought poverty to many Khandesh villagers, who could no longer afford to pay the Bhil watchmen for their services. These Bhils consequently took to the hills and formed ‘gangs’. Their chief means of securing subsistence became robbing the villages that they were formerly employed to protect.³⁹ The Kolis and the Bhils therefore attracted considerable official attention.

Yet despite the fact that Bombay’s officials were unaware of the political intentions that motivated many of the raids conducted by the Kolis and Bhils, they might still have felt that British rule was threatened by their ‘illegal’ actions. Sharma has argued that the North Western Provinces Government saw village raids in its region to be a threat to its sovereignty, even though the administration’s authority was not once realistically challenged.⁴⁰ Sharma has also found that the officials did not feel threatened by individual and spontaneous robberies driven by hunger. It was the premeditated and collective action of starving people who had grouped together with what officials perceived to be habitually criminal gangs that deeply concerned the administration.⁴¹ It seems that the Bombay administration took its ‘criminal gangs’ just as seriously. As Ballhatchet has noted, the British continued the Peshwa policy of executing those found guilty of treason or raiding villages as part of a ‘criminal gang’.⁴²

Even as late as the 1850s the British Government of India felt threatened by the more mobile social groups under its rule. Davis had noted that from the late 1850s the British Government of India embarked upon a campaign to settle the ‘nomads and shifting cultivators whom they labelled as “criminal tribes”’.⁴³ Satya has found that the Berar Banjaras, or carriers, were treated this way. The Berar Banjaras were an itinerant community of Central India. They were not criminals, but were rather in the business of transporting goods on the backs of bullocks.⁴⁴ The British were afraid that

³⁹ Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in Western India, 1817-1830*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 124-9.

⁴⁰ Sharma, *Famine*, pp. 97-9.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 102.

⁴² Ballhatchet, p. 10.

⁴³ Davis, p. 328.

⁴⁴ Laxman D. Satya, ‘Colonial Sedentarisation and Subjugation: The Case of the Banjaras of Berar, 1850-1900’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1997, pp. 314-7, 328.

the Banjaras' mobility would enable them to spread seditious thinking from village to village. Satya has referred to the Banjara society as a 'state within a state', in that the Banjaras settled their own legal issues internally. The British efforts to settle the Banjaras began around 1858.⁴⁵ They restricted their movement through an effective pass system introduced in 1872.⁴⁶ Soon thereafter the Banjara culture had disappeared from Central India. The Banjaras became agricultural labourers or, ironically, criminals.⁴⁷

Public works became one means pursued by the British in the 1820s and 1830s of settling and pacifying the Kolis and Bhils. State employment, as mentioned earlier, was offered an alternative means of subsistence. In 1833 an army officer in the Karnatak recommended that a public work be established to improve a dangerous road, which he added would 'give employment to many idle coolies [or Kolis] who at present subsist by plunder'.⁴⁸ In 1839 M. Kelly, the Superintendent of Public Works, commented on certain public works in the Mhor Khanta. He stated that 'numerous people who were, and would shortly be, in a state of starvation have found a subsistence'. He concluded that 'much must have been the crime, such as robberies, rapine, and even murder, which this benevolent work has prevented'.⁴⁹ Similarly, P. F. French, the administration's Agent to the Bhils, reported in 1833 that the drought had produced a 'very distressed state' in the Bhil country of Khandesh district. He recommended offering them employment on road works. He argued that the Bhils 'must be fed' to 'save the country from plunder and devastation'.⁵⁰ The Khandesh Collector, William Sprott Boyd, agreed that 'no time is to be lost in providing the Bheels with employment during the continuation of the high prices of grain'.⁵¹ The Council concurred and sanctioned the works.⁵² Thus, in addition to teaching industriousness, the officials believed that the hard labour of public works employment kept idle hands from mischief.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 325, 327, 333.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 329.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 332.

⁴⁸ Memo by no name given, Commanding Officer of 25th Regiment Native Infantry, 1 Dec 1833, BGP, 31 Dec 1833, No. 7, APAC.

⁴⁹ M. Kelly, Supt of Public Works, to Act Sec to Govt, 22 Jun 1839, BGP, 17 Jul 1839, No. 1545, APAC.

⁵⁰ P. F. French, Bheel Agent, to Khandesh Cltr, 17 Mar 1833, BGP, 17 Apr 1833, No. 45A, APAC.

⁵¹ W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 21 Mar 1833, BGP, 17 Apr 1833, No. 45, APAC.

⁵² J. Bax, Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Cltr, 10 Apr 1833, BGP, 17 Apr 1833, No. 46, APAC.

Public works were also expected to improve the local infrastructure and thereby bring the ‘criminally inclined’ into contact with more ‘civilized’ people. It was thought that exposure to the benefits of a more industrious lifestyle would induce a change in their behaviour. In 1824 John Cherry described the village of Ganjam as inhabited by Bhils who ‘for years’ had been ‘the terror and annoyance of the neighbouring villages’. He stated that they ‘live on what they can plunder and a very trifling produce derived from cultivation’. He recommended ‘reforming their habits’ through increasing their ‘means of communication’ with the ‘more civilized classes of society’, who would provide an ‘example’ of the ‘good effects that result from industrious habits’. He noted two kunbi, or peasant, families who had previously lived in the village, and he considered them to be an ideal civilizing influence for the Bhils. These peasant families were willing to return to the village if the Government assured them of a supply of water. He proposed repairing an old abandoned well for Rs. 700 at the Government’s expense,⁵³ and the Council sanctioned the expense.⁵⁴ The repair of the well was not a typical public works relief measure because it was not large-scale and it was not designed to provide employment to many destitute individuals. But it was still a work at the public expense, only with the added purpose of ‘civilizing’ a village that officials believed was likely to turn ‘criminal’ under the pressure of the prevailing drought.

Jungle land represented to Bombay officials an untamed nature that was the antithesis of a civilized village surrounded by agricultural land created to serve the purpose of civilized man. The officials perceived jungle land to be a haven for ‘criminals’ that was beyond the reach of the taxman and the policeman, who were two symbols of a more ‘civilized’ and governed society. For instance, J. N. Rose noted in 1836 that the heavy bushes that surrounded Junir town offered ‘refuge and lurking places to thieves’.⁵⁵ The Bombay Council noted in 1824 that the Kolis of the Northern Konkan benefited from the abundant jungle land, which allowed for a higher ‘frequency of gang robberies’ and was ‘very favourable for their perpetration and for the escape of

⁵³ J. H. Cherry, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 4 Mar 1824, BRP, 17 Mar 1824, pp. 1714-5, APAC.

⁵⁴ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Ahmedabad Cltr, 16 Mar 1824, BRP, 17 Mar 1824, pp. 1716, APAC.

⁵⁵ J. N. Rose, Asst Poona Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 14 Dec 1836, BGP, 20 Mar 1839, No. 137, APAC.

the plunderers'.⁵⁶ Saville Marriott, the Collector of the Northern Konkan, also observed that the Kolis benefited from the security of such a 'remarkably strong woody country'. The jungle made it 'very difficult' for officials to detect the Kolis in their 'attacks on their neighbour's property' or to 'ascertain the quantity of land which is clandestinely cultivated'.⁵⁷ As such Marriott was unable to police or tax them fully.

Marriott was very much a reformer at heart. Ballhatchet has noted that Marriott wanted to introduce English land customs to western India to promote the creation of a class of landlords.⁵⁸ Yet Marriott was not so extreme a reformer as to suggest an abolitionist-inspired abandonment of public works. He sought to remove the Koli pockets of resistance by using public works to entice the jungle-dwellers out on to open agricultural land and expose their way of life to more 'civilized' alternatives. He recommended building roads to provide a 'ready communication through the jungle districts' as 'the surest means' of 'removing the evils of which I have been speaking'. Marriott also proposed drawing some Kolis out of the jungle by repairing two wells in a nearby village where they would be exposed to 'more civilized persons'.⁵⁹ The Council seems to have shared Marriott's understanding on the matter because it approved of all his recommendations unreservedly.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, the replacement of jungle land with agricultural land was considered indicative of moral progress. Marriott argued that the need for an increased expenditure on the local police force to maintain order was only temporary owing to the generally 'advancing settled state of the country'.⁶¹

Similarly William Andrews reported from Surat in 1839 that the drought had caused distress principally amongst the Koli population of the Mhor Khanta villages. He recommended that they be employed in digging water tanks.⁶² He later stated that he had already sold the rights to jungle land on the condition that the owner had it cleared, and that 'none but labourers from the Coolie population of the neighbouring

⁵⁶ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Nthn Konkan Cltr, 12 Jan 1824, BRP, 14 Jan 1824, p. 205, APAC.

⁵⁷ Saville Marriott, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 22 Jan 1824, BRP, 11 Feb 1824, p. 646, APAC.

⁵⁸ Ballhatchet, pp. 146-8.

⁵⁹ Saville Marriott, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 22 Jan 1824, BRP, 11 Feb 1824, pp. 647, 651, APAC.

⁶⁰ James Farish, Sec to Govt, to Nthn Konkan Cltr, 5 Feb 1824, BRP, 11 Feb 1824, pp. 658-60, APAC.

⁶¹ Saville Marriott, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 1 Jan 1824, BRP, 14 Jan 1824, pp. 202-5, APAC.

⁶² W. C. Andrews, Act Surat Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 18 Jan 1839, BGP, 30 Jan 1839, No. 55, APAC.

Mhor Khanta villages be employed'.⁶³ Bombay officials therefore used public works as a civilizing tool to increase their control and revenues in 'uncivilized' areas. Abolitionist sentiment was widespread throughout the administration. Yet the need to pacify the 'criminal tribes' of western India took precedence over any desire to implement abolitionist policy.

Public works as an antidote to migration.

Migration was a typical survival strategy exercised particularly by the poor during drought. Those who were unable to procure subsistence at home were forced to migrate to the larger towns in search of employment or charity. But the Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s offered public works employment to enable the impoverished to remain near their homes. In fact, keeping the poor from migrating was an important aspect of the Government's scarcity-relief policy. Archibald Robertson wrote from Khandesh in 1824 of the need 'to keep the great portion of them at home'.⁶⁴ William Chaplin expressed the need for the Government to employ the drought-stricken of Poona district 'near their homes',⁶⁵ and the Council authorized the expense for the employment of the destitute 'near their houses'.⁶⁶ Similarly, in 1839 William Andrews recommended offering public works employment for the poor of Surat district, as this would aid in 'preventing further migration'.⁶⁷ In 1838 the Famine Fund Committee recommended providing enough employment opportunities for relief-seekers throughout the Presidency so as to 'prevent the people as much as possible from leaving their homes'.⁶⁸

Klein has argued that by the second half of the nineteenth century the British governments of India purposely made relief 'difficult to obtain' by requiring that the destitute travel considerable distances before they were permitted to obtain public works employment. The administrations expected that this would force their subjects to 'realise the moral gravity and physical discomfort of being state dependents' and

⁶³ W. C. Andrews, Act Surat Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 5 Feb 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 142, APAC.

⁶⁴ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 29 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5771-2, APAC.

⁶⁵ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 5 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 78, APAC.

⁶⁶ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Deccan Cmr, 13 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 79, APAC.

⁶⁷ W. C. Andrews, Act Surat Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 18 Jan 1839, BGP, 30 Jan 1839, No. 55, APAC.

⁶⁸ Famine Cmte, to Act Sec to Govt, 10 Nov 1838, BGP, 21 Nov 1838, No. 113, APAC.

'eschew this parasitic role except as a desperate recourse'.⁶⁹ Currie has noted that the 'distance test' involved rejecting relief-seekers who had travelled less than ten miles from their homes.⁷⁰ Davis has found that the Madras Government implemented a 'distance test' during the 1876-8 famine to deter relief-seekers.⁷¹ McAlpin has found that the Bombay Government followed the same policy between 1876-7 and 1918-9.⁷² Currie has argued that the 'distance test' caused considerable suffering. Many died whilst migrating to distant works, whilst others could not leave their aged loved ones behind and consequently missed the opportunity for relief.⁷³ The distance test was an example of the Benthamite desire to limit eligibility to the works. The Bombay officials of the 1820s and 1830s accepted the need to offer minimal wages to deter all but the truly needy relief-seekers. But the concept of a distance test had not yet occurred to them or entered debate. Thus, the application of the revisers' limited eligibility principle to public works policy was still in its infancy in the 1820s and 1830s. Keeping the drought-stricken near their homes was still a top priority for Bombay, and public works were an important means of achieving this goal.

However, during the 1838-9 drought there were hints of 'distance test' thinking beginning to creep into the Bombay administration. In 1839 David Blane, the Collector of Khandesh, noted the small turnout of relief-seekers on the public works that he had made available in his district. He argued that this was because many villagers had refused 'to go to any distance from their village for work'. Blane wrote that this 'proves' that 'the distress of the individual cannot be so great as his representation would indicate'.⁷⁴ Blane had joined the Company's service in 1819, and therefore certainly attended Malthus' classes at Haileybury.⁷⁵ His career involved a number of posts, one of which was as the Acting Political Agent in Kathiawar by

⁶⁹ Ira Klein, 'When the Rains Failed: Famine, Relief, and Mortality in British India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1984, p. 197.

⁷⁰ Kate Currie, 'British Colonial Policy and Famines: Some Effects and Implications of "Free Trade" in the Bombay, Bengal and Madras Presidencies, 1860-1900', *South Asia*, vol. xiv, no. 2, 1991, p. 47.

⁷¹ Davis, p. 38.

⁷² Michelle Burge McAlpin, 'Dearth, Famine and Risk: The Changing Impact of Crop Failures in Western India, 1870-1920', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1979, p. 152.

⁷³ Currie, 'British Colonial Policy', p. 47.

⁷⁴ D. Blane, Khandesh Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 27 Apr 1839, BGP, 29 May 1839, No. 789, APAC.

⁷⁵ *The East India Register and Directory for 1821*, A. W. Mason, G. Owen and G. H. Brown (eds.), 2nd edn., London, 1821, p. 284.

1831.⁷⁶ Kathiawar was a particularly drought-prone region. Consequently, his gauge of what constituted ‘distress’ may have been higher than other Bombay officials. Regardless, there is nothing in Blane’s report to suggest that he actually enforced a ‘distance test’ policy. He probably did not intend, as did the British administrations toward the close of the nineteenth century, for the works to be sparsely available as a test of the true need of the relief-seekers. In fact W. Scott, the Civil Engineer, had recently informed Blane that ‘the distribution of the works renders them easily accessible to any person really in distress’.⁷⁷

Yet Blane’s belief that the lack of turnout indicated a lack of distress was a fundamental tenet of ‘distance test’ thinking. The emphasis of Scott’s statement implied similar thinking. This was despite Scott’s admission that most villagers ‘will suffer great hardships rather than leave the immediate vicinity of their own villages’, and that several people at Hiswall were ‘living on roots’ and yet still refused to leave their homes.⁷⁸ Blane’s and Scott’s expectation that the truly impoverished should be prepared to leave their homes was approaching, but not equivalent to, the ‘distance test’ policy of the British administrations of the late nineteenth century, which strictly required all relief-seekers to march ten miles before receiving aid. The revisers’ ‘less eligibility principle’ had not yet been implemented in the form of ‘distance test’ policy. Yet the beginnings of ‘distance test’ thinking were becoming apparent in official correspondence.

There were numerous reasons why the Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s typically wanted to keep the destitute near their homes. Firstly, the policy was based on humanitarian grounds because migration was a dangerous survival strategy. McAlpin has argued that ‘aimless migration’, or wandering in search of food, appears to have been a perilous survival strategy in western India in the late nineteenth century. It further weakened the body of the migrant, and often brought him or her into contact with disease.⁷⁹ So too was migration fraught with danger in the early 1800s. In 1824 Archibald Robertson stated that migration involved ‘the risk of

⁷⁶ *The East India Register and Directory for 1831: Bombay*, G. H. Brown and F. Clark (eds.), London, 1831, p. 4.

⁷⁷ W. Scott, Civil Engineer, to Khandesh Cltr, 15 Apr 1839, BGP, 29 May 1839, No. 790, APAC.

⁷⁸ W. Scott, Civil Engineer, to Khandesh Cltr, 15 Apr 1839, BGP, 29 May 1839, No. 790, APAC.

⁷⁹ McAlpin, ‘Dearth, Famine and Risk’, p. 156.

encountering much distress and hardship'.⁸⁰ Frost has noted that migration was one of the last options entertained by the impoverished during the 1823-5 Bombay drought, and that many migrants were nearing starvation before they set off. Walking long distances in such a weak condition was often a death sentence.⁸¹ In 1833 Robert Arbuthnot recorded the fate of those who had migrated from Bagulkot sub-district in search of subsistence. He stated that 'of those who left the country some time ago, the reports are that a great proportion has already fallen victims to famine, cholera, and fever andague'.⁸²

Etheridge's 1868 report on the harsher famines of the early nineteenth century in western India told this tale well. He reported that in the 1802 famine many migrants destined for Dharwar district 'could get neither food to eat nor water to drink' along the way, and thus they arrived 'in a most deplorable condition'. Many did not reach Dharwar, and 'thousands of dead bodies were to be seen lying on the highways'.⁸³ Migrants were far more likely to die than those who were fortunate enough not to require a trek. In the 1803-4 famine there was 'a great influx of starving poor from the adjacent provinces' into Surat district, and the 'mortality appears to have been confined to them alone'.⁸⁴ Similarly in the 1811-12 famine in Broach district, 'comparatively few' of the 'permanent cultivators and inhabitants ... died' but there were 'many deaths ... among the emigrants from the other districts'.⁸⁵

Starvation could also come to those who waited behind. So while it was perilous to migrate in search of subsistence, it was not necessarily ill-advised. It was the lack of food that spurred the migrant's hazardous journey. The Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s therefore offered public works employment to the able-bodied poor. The wages, while minimal, provided the destitute with a livelihood near their homes, and negated their need to migrate. The Bombay officials of the 1823-5 administration saw this offer of employment as a humanitarian act. Archibald

⁸⁰ Translation of Circular Instructions to Khandesh District Moamlatdurs, attached to A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6992, APAC.

⁸¹ Marcia J. Frost, 'Coping With Scarcity: Wild Foods and Common Lands: Kheda District (Gujarat, India), 1824/5', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2000, p. 298.

⁸² R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcotah Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 3 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

⁸³ Ramrao Bhimajee, late Akburnavees at Kolapoor, no date given, in Etheridge, p. 107.

⁸⁴ Mr. Spry, 1st Asst Surat Cltr, 19 Aug 1867, in *ibid* p. 58.

⁸⁵ Mr. McKenzie, 3rd Asst Broach Cltr, no day given, Oct 1867, in *ibid*, p. 56.

Robertson, for instance, argued in 1824 that certain public works would ‘rebound’ to the Government’s ‘credit for humanity’.⁸⁶ He stated that he did ‘not view the matter’ of keeping the cultivators alive ‘in the light of a mere profit and loss speculation only, but ... I conceive it deserving of every consideration on far higher grounds’.⁸⁷ Similarly, the Bombay Council of 1825 instructed Chaplin that works near Poona city should, above other purposes, ‘answer for the relief of the people in question’.⁸⁸

The Bombay officials of the 1838-9 administration also considered their public works schemes to be humane measures. In 1839 M. Kelly, the Superintendent of Public Works, reported that the Government’s offer of employment in Ulpar taluka had ‘prevented several villages from being deserted’, and ‘brought back’ those who had ‘flown in despair’. He informed the Council that the public were appreciative of ‘the humane view your honour took of their distress, and the bountiful goodness of the Government’.⁸⁹ In 1839 Robert Arbuthnot, the Ahmedabad Collector, reported that Gogah town and its surrounding villages were ‘suffering from the want of food’. Arbuthnot was an interventionist humanitarian, as he had recommended state charity for the impotent poor who were suffering in his district during the 1831-5 drought. He noted in 1839 that most of the relief-seekers were foreign migrants who were in a ‘deplorable state of misery’, which ‘behoves us to take some steps to relieve them’.⁹⁰ The Council agreed and sanctioned his recommended works.⁹¹ In 1839 George Coles informed the Council that the drought was causing distress in Broach town, and that ‘the employment of the poor people will be an act of charity’.⁹² The Council authorized the works.⁹³ In response to a request from Blane in Khandesh for authorisation to employ the poor, the Council responded that ‘the emergency resulting from the famished state of the population fully justifies in the opinion of this Government an immediate outlay for their support’.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6971, APAC.

⁸⁷ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6973, APAC.

⁸⁸ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Deccan Cmr, 13 Apr 1825, BRP, 13 Apr 1825, No. 79, APAC.

⁸⁹ M. Kelly, Supt of Public Works, to Act Sec to Govt, 22 Jun 1839, BGP, 17 Jul 1839, No. 1545, APAC.

⁹⁰ R. K. Arbuthnot, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Act Chief Sec to Govt, 8 May 1839, BRP, 29 May 1839, No. 3444, APAC.

⁹¹ L. R. Reid, Act Chief Sec to Govt, to Ahmedabad Cltr, 8 May 1839, BRP, 29 May 1839, No. 3445, APAC.

⁹² G. Coles, Act Broach Sub-Cltr, to Act Surat Cltr, 24 Apr 1839, BGP, 15 May 1839, No. 503, APAC.

⁹³ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Act Surat Cltr, 3 May 1839, BGP, 15 May 1839, No. 504, APAC.

⁹⁴ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Sec to Govt of India, 5 Jan 1839, BGP, 9 Jan 1839, No. 48, APAC.

Evidently, the Bombay administrations of 1823-5 and 1838-9 rejected the abolitionists' non-interventionist form of humanitarianism when it came to the able-bodied poor. They did not believe that leaving the able-bodied poor to face the drought without state support would be a more humane policy in the long run. Yet the 'humanity' was arguably not the primary motivation of this interventionist policy. Granted, as was demonstrated in the fourth chapter, the administrations of the 1830s also intervened to provide humanitarian relief to the impotent poor. Yet the 1823-5 administration was more discerning in its humanitarian interventionism, preferring to exclude the impotent poor from relief and focus on saving the able-bodied poor from hardship.

The officials of the 1831-5 Bombay administration considered the employment of the able-bodied poor on public works to be a humane scarcity-relief measure. Yet while the Council typically authorised public works for its own subjects, its interventionist form of humanitarianism did not extend to employing foreign migrants. These 'foreigners' were Indians who normally lived in non-British territories. Arbuthnot wrote from Bagulkot in 1833 to state his concern to Anderson that if 'employment is not given, I much fear that many persons will die from starvation'.⁹⁵ Anderson agreed despite his hesitations regarding the advisability of public works, and recommended to the Council that employment should be offered to alleviate 'the great distress the poor' in Bagulkot.⁹⁶ In response to detailed reports the following month of increased suffering from the kamavisdars of Indi and Mudebihal talukas, Arbuthnot recommended offering more public works employment. He implored Anderson that 'the urgency of the measure' was 'beyond doubt, from the total want of means there is of otherwise obtaining daily food' for the local poor.⁹⁷ Anderson wrote again to the Council that 'the distress evidently nearly amounts to the horrors of famine'. He argued that further 'authority to grant assistance, at the cost of Government, must I

⁹⁵ R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcota Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 13 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3794, APAC.

⁹⁶ G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 17 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3793, APAC.

⁹⁷ R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcotah Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 3 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

consider be sanctioned'.⁹⁸ The Council responded by sanctioning the extra works, yet it also cautioned its subordinates not to encourage relief-seekers, particularly from foreign states.⁹⁹

Likewise, Josiah Nisbet, who had recommended interventionist humanitarian policies for the destitute impotent poor, argued in 1833 that unless the impoverished able-bodied poor of Belgaon town were employed they would starve to death.¹⁰⁰ The Council agreed and sanctioned Nisbet's recommended works, but stipulated that relief was to be limited to Bombay's subjects only.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Robert Pringle, who had displayed his interventionist humanitarianism toward the impotent poor in 1825, described considerable distress in Sholapur district in 1833 and recommended that the Government provide the able-bodied with employment.¹⁰² Governor FitzGibbon sanctioned the works, but cautioned Pringle not to encourage an influx of foreigners.¹⁰³

The Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s were motivated to provide public works relief for humanitarian reasons. The works relieved the suffering of locals and enabled them to remain near their homes. The 1823-5 and 1838-9 administrations also relieved the distress of foreign migrants who had entered Bombay Presidency from Kathiawar. Yet the 1831-5 Council rejected the foreigners who crossed its borders into the Presidency. Specifically for these foreigners, the abolitionists' form of non-interventionist humanitarianism was deemed applicable. The reasons for this policy aberration, which was specific to the 1831-5 drought, will be explored later in this chapter.

The second reason for the Bombay officials of the 1820s and 1830s to establish public works was to promote the interests of the general public. During non-drought years works were conducted by army engineer corps, and only during droughts was the number of labourers significantly expanded to include the destitute. Officials offered

⁹⁸ G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Chief Sec to Govt, 13 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4328, APAC.

⁹⁹ C. Norris, Chief Sec to Govt, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 29 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4331, APAC.

¹⁰⁰ J. Nisbet, Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 31 Aug 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5225, APAC.

¹⁰¹ L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Dharwar Cltr, 19 Sep 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5227, APAC.

¹⁰² R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 9 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

¹⁰³ Minute by Clare, Bombay Governor, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4209, APAC.

this type of employment to the destitute despite their awareness that the roads were typically of much lesser quality than those built by the professional engineers.¹⁰⁴ The improvements in irrigation and roads were to serve various military and commercial purposes.¹⁰⁵ Yet these efforts at improvement only became a consistent policy in British India in the 1830s. The Bombay Government established the Department of Roads and Tanks in 1835.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in Northern India it was only in the 1830s that the North Western Provinces Government became committed seriously to road construction.¹⁰⁷

Particularly during drought they were also seen as a means of reducing the long-term vulnerability of people to future famines.¹⁰⁸ Irrigation increased the yield of harvests and roads facilitated the trade in grain. In 1824 Archibald Robertson offered employment to the destitute on irrigation works that ‘at the same time’ would contribute to ‘the general stock of food in the Province’.¹⁰⁹ The following month he argued that public works schemes on roads facilitated trade and therefore were ‘promoting … the best interests of the Province itself’.¹¹⁰ John Cherry recommended offering employment to impoverished migrants in sinking wells, which he stated would have the added benefit of ‘providing against’ a general ‘scarcity of water’.¹¹¹ In 1824 the Council recognised a public works proposal for the construction of a road as offering ‘a great public benefit’.¹¹²

This official perception of the added benefit of public works continued into the 1830s. In 1833 E. Hardy, the Quarter Master General, reported suffering at Belgaum and recommended employing the poor in repairing a road, which would also be of ‘advantage to the public’.¹¹³ The Council concurred.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in 1833 William

¹⁰⁴ J. H. C. Crawford, Act Supt of Roads, to Act Sec to Govt, 9 Mar 1839, BGP, 27 Mar 1839, No. 59, APAC.

¹⁰⁵ Sharma, *Famine*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁶ W. R. Morris, Sec to Govt, to Rev Cmr, 11 Dec 1841, V/24/3289, pp. 1-2, APAC.

¹⁰⁷ Sharma, *Famine*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp 46-7.

¹⁰⁹ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 29 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5571-2, APAC.

¹¹⁰ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6971-2, APAC.

¹¹¹ J. H. Cherry, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 8 Oct 1824, BGP, 20 Oct 1824, p. 5834, APAC.

¹¹² J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Nthn Konkan Cltr, 27 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, pp. 6112-3, APAC.

¹¹³ E. Hardy, Quarter Master General, to Sec to Govt, 17 Aug 1833, BRP, 4 Sep 1833, No. 4962, APAC.

¹¹⁴ L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Quarter Master General, 30 Aug 1833, BRP, 4 Sep 1833, No. 4962, APAC.

Stubbs recommended public works employment for the drought-stricken of his district, and added that ‘the work would be a source of permanent advantage to the Country’.¹¹⁵ In 1839 the Council instructed the Poona Collector to offer employment to the impoverished on clearing out a water tank. It stipulated that the cleaning should commence on the ‘part of the tank most resorted to’ by the public to maximise the work’s general benefit.¹¹⁶

The Government’s desire to promote the public good provides an explanation for the existence of its public works scheme in general, but does not shed any light on its use of public works to keep ryots near their homes. Malnourished migrants exhausted from long treks were particularly susceptible to contracting diseases such as cholera and smallpox. Moreover, their itinerant nature spread their disease to local inhabitants. Officials in the 1820s and 1830s were aware of this issue. In 1824 Chaplin instructed a Collector to provide the poor with employment near their homes both to save them from the difficulties of travelling with their families and to avoid the possibility of sparking epidemic diseases. He argued that outbreaks were the ‘usual accompaniment of famine or unwholesome nourishment, when the indigent are congregated in large masses’.¹¹⁷

Yet for this very reason G. W. Anderson protested against the offer of public works employment in 1833. He argued that ‘the collection of these throngs’ on public works ‘brings with it disease, and almost invariably the fatal cholera’.¹¹⁸ Both Chaplin and Anderson were against large-scale public works as breeding grounds for disease. Yet Chaplin’s solution was to offer many small works to keep the ryots near their homes, whereas Anderson recommended discouraging the impoverished from seeking relief to limit the numbers on each work. Evidently Anderson was not as aware as Chaplin that migration could spark disease, and thus he placed less emphasis on the need to offer employment to the destitute to keep them near their homes. Chaplin’s statement demonstrates that serving the public good by limiting the spread of disease through migration was a motivation behind the offer of public works. Furthermore, the fact

¹¹⁵ W. Stubbs, Kaira Cltr, to Rev Cmr, 16 Oct 1833, BRP, 6 Nov 1833, No. 6049, APAC.

¹¹⁶ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Poona Cltr, 24 Nov 1838, BGP, 28 Nov 1838, No. 94, APAC.

¹¹⁷ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6995, APAC.

¹¹⁸ G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Bagulcotah Sub-Cltr, 8 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

that Anderson accepted the need for the Government to offer at least some degree of public works employment also indicates that he saw some benefit to the works. Even Anderson, who was one of the most outspoken critics of the Government's public works scheme, did not go so far as to advocate the abolitionists' recommendation of refusing to offer employment to the able-bodied poor.

Thirdly, there was a strong financial reason to offer local works. Migration not only hurt the migrants, but it also hurt the Government's revenues.¹¹⁹ The Government derived the chief source of its income through the taxation of agriculture. Henry Robertson recognised that 'the great source of revenue in this country is ... derived from the cultivation of the soil'.¹²⁰ Agriculture required a largely sedentary society. Many Collectors reported that certain revenue funds were 'irrecoverable' because some ryots who were indebted to the Government had 'absconded'.¹²¹ Moreover, the degree to which people were settled on the land partially determined their revenue contribution. The Government usually placed a heavier burden of taxation on the more settled cultivators. For instance, W. C. Andrews described the mirasdars, or 'permanently residing classes', as 'possessing a larger capital and greater means of improving their ground'. As such they were 'better able to afford a higher payment' of revenues to the Government than an 'inferior and wandering tribe' such as the uparis.¹²² The Government's revenues were largely dependent on the taxation of agriculture, which required the largest portion of its subjects to be sedentary cultivators.

Yet much migration was of a temporary nature and relatively speaking did not threaten the Government's coffers. Pottinger reported that he was not obstructing the numerous families that were migrating with their cattle from his district. He argued that 'it is better the poor people should save their own lives, and perhaps preserve their cattle by this measure than remain to perish', as they could later 'return to their

¹¹⁹ Henry A. Harrison, Asst Sthn Konkan Cltr in Charge, to Sec to Govt, 19 Nov 1823, BRP, 3 Dec 1823, p. 9402, APAC.

¹²⁰ H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 26 Jul 1825, BRP, 10 Aug 1825, No. 39, APAC.

¹²¹ John A. Dunlop, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 1 Jun 1825, BRP, 29 Jun 1825, No. 27, APAC; and G. More, Sthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 4 Jun 1825, BGP, 29 Jun 1825, Nos. 19&20, APAC.

¹²² W. C. Andrews, 2nd Asst Surat Cltr, to Surat Cltr, 20 May 1825, BRP, 6 Jul 1825, No. 31, APAC.

homes' to cultivate.¹²³ In this sense temporary migration could actually benefit the Government's long-term revenues. It temporarily reduced the number of people who were dependent on the Government for relief during drought, but still maintained a population level from which officials could collect taxes once the rains returned and cultivation resumed. However, some temporary migrants were forced to walk far from their homes to find subsistence and were thus in danger of dying or being remote when the monsoon rains returned to their home fields.¹²⁴ In such circumstances their fields remained fallow and the Government had no harvest to tax.

But especially the permanent form of migration jeopardised the Government's revenues. Some migrants opted to take leases on lands elsewhere under more favourable circumstances. Dunlop reported that he expected a loss of revenue even if the monsoon returned. He stated that many cultivators had already migrated from his district and begun cultivating in the Nizam's territories and were therefore unlikely ever to return home.¹²⁵ As was shown in the fourth chapter, Bombay Presidency suffered from a labour shortage.¹²⁶ There was no surplus of labourers to absorb the effect of migration on the Government's revenues. Archibald Robertson expected that many of the poorest people of his district would 'quit the country altogether' and stated that their 'services when plenty returns will be greatly missed'.¹²⁷ The Council asked Blane in the Southern Konkan if migrants en route for Bombay city might be 'disposed to remain' in his district and persuaded to 'establish villages'. This emphasized the Government's drive to settle its migrants and convert them back into revenue-payers as soon as possible.¹²⁸ Migration, and particularly permanent migration, threatened the Government's main source of income.

¹²³ H. Pottinger, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 24 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5777-9, APAC.

¹²⁴ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6972-3, APAC.

¹²⁵ John A. Dunlop, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 9 Jul 1825, BRP, 27 Jul 1825, No. 13, APAC.

¹²⁶ Charlesworth, 'Rich Peasants and Poor Peasants', pp. 13, 22, cited in Davis, p. 306; and Ravinder Kumar, *Western India in the nineteenth century: a study in the social history of Maharashtra*, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968, p. 73.

¹²⁷ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6978, APAC.

¹²⁸ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Sthn Konkan Cltr, 4 Oct 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, p. 5597, APAC.

The ryots were the main contributors to the Government's coffers.¹²⁹ The Collectors primarily voiced their concern for the welfare of the ryots and often ignored the plight of other occupational groups that contributed less to the treasury.¹³⁰ This suggests a pre-eminent concern for the revenues. The majority of western Indians were cultivators and therefore the Collectors were perhaps simply referring to their subjects in general when they expressed their concern for the ryots, but this is unlikely. The Collectors were specific in their concern. James Simson argued that public works would offer specifically the 'ryots' a 'livelihood till their services shall be required in agriculture'.¹³¹ Archibald Robertson argued that the public works projects enabled the Government to 'keep the greatest possible number' of 'the cultivators' near their homes 'so as soon as possible' to 'turn them to the best account when the season for doing so shall arrive'.¹³² Sharma has also found that during the 1837-8 drought officials of the North Western Provinces were concerned that a 'diminished number of agricultural labourers would result in the fall of rent and consequently a decline in revenue'.¹³³

Thus the third reason for the Government to offer public works in the hope of keeping the ryots near their homes was to protect its revenues. This particular reason was a common motivation behind the offer of public works in each of the three droughts. In 1825 Lumsden recommended that the Government incur an expense repairing the wells of 'Wuchurwar' village to ensure that it would 'remain well inhabited and the Government revenues will remain permanent'.¹³⁴ Even Archibald Robertson, who had expressed the need to offer public works for humane reasons, still outlined the benefits that the public works schemes would accrue to the Government. He argued that the Government should expend sums on public works because otherwise 'there would be less revenue than even these propositions may secure'. He argued that the added expense would ensure a greater number of cultivators remained in the district

¹²⁹ H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 26 Jul 1825, BRP, 10 Aug 1825, No. 39, APAC; and R. K. Pringle, Asst Poona Cltr on Deputation, to Poona Cltr, 8 Jul 1825, BRP, 10 Aug 1825, No. 39, APAC.

¹³⁰ Spinners and weavers, for instance, were never mentioned in the official correspondence of either the Bombay Revenue Proceedings or the Bombay General Proceedings relating to the drought years of the 1820s and 1830s.

¹³¹ J. B. Simson, Ntn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 19 Apr 1825, BRP, 11 May 1825, No. 14, APAC.

¹³² A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6972-3, APAC.

¹³³ Sharma, *Famine*, p. 137.

¹³⁴ W. J. Lumsden, Surat Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 26 Feb 1825, BRP, 9 Mar 1825, No. 66, APAC.

the following season, and that their agricultural assets would be less depleted.¹³⁵ He argued the importance of ‘keeping the Ryots alive’ on humanitarian grounds, but also ‘since it is from their numbers that the wealth or poverty of the treasury arises’,¹³⁶ Thus public works expenditure, which was ostensibly a scarcity-relief measure, was also an investment with the prospect of a financial return to the Government.

The need to protect the Government’s revenues continued to motivate its public works policy during the 1831-5 drought. In 1833 Arbuthnot informed Anderson of widespread distress in Bagulkot taluka. He stated that if the Government did not offer employment, many ‘will remove out of the districts altogether, who may not easily be induced to return’.¹³⁷ It has been shown that Anderson had his reservations about the wisdom of offering public works employment as a relief measure. Yet even he could see that the revenues would suffer in the absence of such a measure. He recommended to the Council that 1,000 people be employed ‘on the roads till the distress ceases or until ... the early crops will be ready for cutting’.¹³⁸ This would ensure that the labourers did not permanently migrate out of the Presidency. Yet two weeks later Arbuthnot stated that more than 1,000 people had presented themselves for employment on the Government’s works. He relayed his mamlatdar’s opinion that ‘in the event of Government refusing to employ them, many ... will emigrate’.¹³⁹ Ultimately the Council sanctioned the extra works.¹⁴⁰ The following year Henry Harrison reported the effects that the 1833 drought had had on the Government’s revenues in Dharwar district. He stated that the total value of ‘lands left waste owing to deaths, desertions, and poverty’ was Rs. 31,000. Harrison was pleased with this minor loss, especially when he compared it to the suffering that was experienced in Bagulkot taluka. He concluded that the Government’s loss was ‘less than might have been anticipated and would have been far more but for the timely relief afforded by

¹³⁵ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6971-4, APAC.

¹³⁶ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6972, APAC.

¹³⁷ R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcota Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 13 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3794, APAC.

¹³⁸ G. W. Anderson, Act Dharwar Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 17 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3793, APAC.

¹³⁹ R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcotah Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 3 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

¹⁴⁰ C. Norris, Chief Sec to Govt, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 29 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4331, APAC.

Government which kept many cultivators employed in the district who would otherwise have emigrated'.¹⁴¹

The 1838-9 administration was also spurred to offer public works employment as a means of fostering its revenues. In 1839 the Civil Engineer, W. Scott, recommended a large expenditure on particular roads in Khandesh district that promised to be of commercial advantage.¹⁴² Yet Scott made no mention of any suffering in Khandesh caused by the drought. The Council instructed Scott to report whether 'the necessities of the people' rendered the work 'of paramount importance in order to secure the country from extensive loss and severe distress, on which grounds, Government recently was induced to sanction a piece of road' elsewhere.¹⁴³ In normal years commercial advantage was motivation enough for the Government to commit its engineers to building roads. Yet during the drought the Government's priority was to reduce distress and migration to protect its revenues. In 1839 George Coles reported that a water tank outside Broach town needed repairs at a cost of Rs. 1,100. He justified his recommendation with the fact that the seven villages that relied on the tank for their cultivation paid to the Government Rs. 49,000 per year.¹⁴⁴ The Council sanctioned the works.¹⁴⁵ In 1838 Harrison reported that a village in his district was suffering from a 'scarcity of water', and that 'the inhabitants were likely to leave the village in consequence'. He compared the cost of sinking a well to the yearly revenues produced by the village.¹⁴⁶ The Council authorised the expense to maintain the village's revenues.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1839 Andrews reported distress in 46 villages of Ulpar taluka. He expected that many would migrate 'unless some relief be afforded'. His subordinate recommended a large expenditure on public works, but Andrews stated that 'a sum considerably under that amount would ... have the effect

¹⁴¹ H. A. Harrison, Bagulkotah Sub-Cltr in Charge of Dharwar District, to Sec to Govt, 23 Oct 1834, BRP, 17 Dec 1834, No. 6868, APAC.

¹⁴² W. Scott, Civil Engineer, to Act Sec to Govt, 5 Jan 1839, BGP, 23 Jan 1839, No. 29, APAC.

¹⁴³ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Cltr, 13 Jan 1839, BGP, 23 Jan 1839, No. 31, APAC.

¹⁴⁴ G. Coles, Act Broach Sub-Cltr, to Act Surat Cltr, 24 Apr 1839, BGP, 15 May 1839, No. 503, APAC.

¹⁴⁵ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Act Surat Cltr, 3 May 1839, BGP, 15 May 1839, No. 504, APAC.

¹⁴⁶ H. A. Harrison, Ahmednagar Cltr, to Rev Cmr, 12 Dec 1838, BRP, 9 Jan 1839, No. 61, APAC.

¹⁴⁷ L. R. Reid, Act Chief Sec to Govt, to Rev Cmr, 3 Jan 1839, BRP, 9 Jan 1839, No. 62, APAC.

of preventing further emigration'.¹⁴⁸ The Council approved of Andrews' recommendation.¹⁴⁹

The Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s had accepted the concerns of the abolitionists regarding the potentially harmful effects of public employment. Yet their financial circumstances did not allow for an implementation of abolitionist policy. The labour shortage in Bombay Presidency made the retention of ryots who were committed to cultivating and paying taxes vital for the sake of the administrations' finances. Malthus mistakenly believed that India had a labour surplus, and it was he more than any other abolitionist who called for the removal of state support for the relief of the able-bodied. But in the 1820s and 1830s the British administrators of India knew that their territories suffered from a labour shortage. The abolition of Bombay's public works policy would have translated into significantly reduced revenues. Given the Presidency's financial troubles, this was a financial impossibility. Yet to appease their abolitionist concerns, the administrations applied the revisers' 'less eligibility principle' in the form of minimal wages.

The profitability of the works themselves.

In addition to keeping the ryots near their fields and protecting future revenues, Bombay officials tried to ensure that the public works provided another form of return on the Government's investment. Improved roads translated into increased commercial traffic and thereby increased customs duties.¹⁵⁰ Improved irrigation made for greater harvests and thereby increased land revenues. Officials preferred to establish works that would pay directly for themselves in this way, quite aside from the indirect benefits to the state coffers of reducing migration. James Simson insisted in 1825 that public works should be 'an occupation profitable to all parties'.¹⁵¹ In 1833 William Sprott Boyd expressed his intention that the works he established would be of sufficient direct benefit to the Government's revenues that the expenditures were 'not altogether thrown away'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ W. C. Andrews, Act Surat Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 18 Jan 1839, BGP, 30 Jan 1839, No. 55, APAC.

¹⁴⁹ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Act Surat Cltr, 26 Jan 1839, BGP, 30 Jan 1839, No. 50, APAC.

¹⁵⁰ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6971-2, APAC.

¹⁵¹ J. B. Simson, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 19 Apr 1825, BRP, 11 May 1825, No. 14, APAC.

¹⁵² W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 6 Aug 1833, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4795, APAC.

Moreover, the profitability of the works may have inadvertently benefited from the Government's policy of offering its labourers a subsistence wage. Simson recommended a public works project to the Council in 1825, and stated that it could be 'upon more favourable terms' to the Government 'than the rate of pay' previously proposed.¹⁵³ Conversely, it has been previously argued that the minimal wages offered by the Government may have encouraged public works labourers to work slowly to conserve their strength. Official efforts to ensure that the works paid for themselves were often hampered by sluggish workers.¹⁵⁴

Not all recommendations for public works were sanctioned. Yet the reasons offered by officials when they rejected works proposals were not abolitionist arguments. Rather, the desire to avoid large expenses on works that did not promise to be cost-effective was the most common reason for the Government to refrain from establishing public works. In 1824 Chaplin offered his sanction to a work recommended by Archibald Robertson unless, he stated, there was 'a favourable change in the weather' because the proposed works would be 'a considerable direct sacrifice to the public resources'.¹⁵⁵ The Council concurred.¹⁵⁶ Richard Mills suggested in 1825 that the Government should abstain from offering employment until the eleventh hour 'by watching with minuteness the progressive changes' in the people's temperament whereby 'measures might be pursued before the last extreme arrives, for employing them in the construction of roads or other public works'. He recommended leaving the relief of the poor to the upper classes for a little longer before the Government accepted financial responsibility for them.¹⁵⁷ In 1834, one year after the most severe season of drought throughout the 1820s and 1830s, the Court of Directors in London congratulated the Bombay Council on its 'economically' run public works programme.¹⁵⁸ This cost-consciousness seems to have been a common feature of public works policy throughout the century. Klein has

¹⁵³ J. B. Simson, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 19 Apr 1825, BRP, 11 May 1825, No. 14, APAC.

¹⁵⁴ R. Foster, Supt of Roads, to Act Sec to Govt, 15 Feb 1839, BGP, 27 Feb 1839, No. 48, APAC; and W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Supt of Roads, 23 Feb 1839, BGP, 27 Feb 1839, No. 49, APAC; and J. H. Burke, Asst Supt of Roads, to Supt of Roads, 5 Mar 1839, BGP, 27 Mar 1839, No. 59, APAC.

¹⁵⁵ W. Chaplin, Deccan Cmr, to Khandesh Cltr, 7 Oct 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, p. 6993, APAC.

¹⁵⁶ G. More, Act Sec to Govt, to Deccan Cmr, 1 Nov 1824, BRP, 3 Nov 1824, pp. 6998-9, APAC.

¹⁵⁷ R. Mills, Act Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 18 Mar 1825, BRP, 30 Mar 1825, No. 58, APAC.

¹⁵⁸ Bombay Despatches, 8 Aug 1834, E/4/1060, pp. 206-7, APAC.

found that in the late nineteenth century the ‘development projects’ of the British governments of India were also financially ‘restrained’.¹⁵⁹ Currie has also found that during the second half of the century ‘discussions and decisions centred on the best use of available resources’.¹⁶⁰

Some officials were so eager to ensure that the works were directly profitable that they refused to establish works that were best suited to the needs of the cultivators and the Government’s long-term revenues. In 1824 Archibald Robertson rejected his Assistant’s proposed public works scheme on the grounds that it was unlikely to ‘repay the outlay that it would require’. He stated that he was ‘perfectly aware of the difficulty of finding public employment in the vicinity of their abodes for the villagers’. But he was reluctant to sanction ‘any measure that does not promise to be of some advantage as well to the Government as to the Ryots themselves’.¹⁶¹ Thus the need to ensure that the works would provide a direct return on the Government’s investment sometimes precluded works being established that would keep the ryots near their homes and protect the Government’s long-term revenues. The ‘difficulty’ of finding employment for the destitute near their homes was therefore sometimes enhanced by the desire to ensure the works paid for themselves. The Government may have achieved economies of scale on the larger works. But these were fewer and therefore further for the ryots to reach, which could mean greater distress and consequently less revenue the following season.

Yet in other cases the drive to ensure that the works rendered a direct profit was a more minor consideration. In 1839 Commissioner John Vibart passed up to the Council his subordinate’s plans for a work in Poona district, but without his recommendation. Vibart stated that the ‘traffic along the road is hardly considerable enough in my opinion to justify so large an outlay’. Yet he considered the possibility that the Council might wish to sanction the work as a means of ‘affording to the labouring population of the neighbourhood employment near their own homes in a season of scarcity’.¹⁶² But the Council opted not to establish the works. Yet it also

¹⁵⁹ Klein, p. 197.

¹⁶⁰ Currie, ‘British Colonial Policy’, p. 26, n. 14.

¹⁶¹ A. Robertson, Khandesh Cltr, to Asst Khandesh Cltr, 17 Nov 1824, BRP, 15 Dec 1824, pp. 8024-5, APAC.

¹⁶² J. Vibart, Rev Cmr, to Act Sec to Govt, 16 Feb 1839, BGP, 27 Feb 1839, No. 112, APAC.

instructed Vibart to report on the level of distress in Poona district, and whether the poor needed support.¹⁶³ Thus while this particular work was not sanctioned, the Council was willing to consider other works that might prove directly profitable to the Government as well as keep the ryots near their homes.

In fact, despite the perpetual concern to minimise costs, more often than not works were sanctioned to meet the needs of the ryots, and thereby mitigate migration and crime and protect the Government's long-term income. In 1839 the Collector of Khandesh, David Blane, recommended building a road between the town of Burampur and Surat on the coast. Connecting the district of Khandesh with a port town had obvious commercial benefits, which seem to have been Blane's primary concern. He stated that 'furnishing employment to the sufferers from the late unfavorable harvest' was an 'additional object'.¹⁶⁴ Blane was not a cold-hearted businessman oblivious to the suffering of his subjects. It has been demonstrated in the fourth chapter that Blane was an interventionist humanitarian toward the impotent poor.¹⁶⁵ Yet in regard to this public work, relieving suffering amongst the able-bodied poor was not his main concern. The Council sanctioned the work, but informed Blane that 'the employment of the people was the primary and not collateral object in authorizing the commencement of this work'.¹⁶⁶

The Bombay Council was allowed to sanction works up to the expense of Rs. 10,000. Sanctioning any work beyond this expense first required permission from the Supreme Government of India. This rule was an indication of the pressure emanating from the Court of Directors in London to minimise expenditure. The projected cost of the Burampur to Surat road exceeded Rs. 10,000. Calcutta informed Bombay that it was uncomfortable in sanctioning the works, as it questioned the road's 'utility for public purposes'. Thus, the Supreme Council questioned whether the expense was worth the expected commercial and customs revenue benefits. Yet Calcutta stated that it would sanction works above Rs. 10,000 that were 'absolutely necessary for the

¹⁶³ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Rev Cmr, 26 Feb 1839, BGP, 27 Feb 1839, No. 113, APAC.

¹⁶⁴ D. Blane, Khandesh Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 15 Jan 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 94, APAC.

¹⁶⁵ D. Blane, Khandesh Cltr, to Act Sec to Govt, 21 Jan 1839, BGP, 13 Mar 1839, No. 1, APAC.

¹⁶⁶ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Cltr, 15 Feb 1839, BGP, 20 Feb 1839, No. 97, APAC.

support of a starving population'.¹⁶⁷ Bombay defended its recommendation to Calcutta, stating that employing a starving population was the 'primary object' of the work.¹⁶⁸ The Court of Directors later increased to Rs. 50,000 the amount that the Bombay Government could spend on a single public work without first seeking Calcutta's sanction.¹⁶⁹

The need to minimise costs was a constant feature of official correspondence regarding public works. Some works proposals were rejected for this reason, even to the detriment of the ryots' needs and, because of the effect on the Presidency's labour force, the Government's long-term revenues. Yet such cases were rare. Overall, the primary motivation behind the public works policy of the 1820s and 1830s was to protect the interests of the ryots and thereby the long-term interests of the Government.

Public works as a means of intercepting migrants en route to Bombay city.

It has already been demonstrated that the occurrence of drought jeopardised the survival of the poorest members of society, who turned to crime or migration as a means of securing their subsistence. Yet the options of crime or migration were not entirely distinct from one another. Just as the migrants often brought disease to their destinations, they also often brought crime. Firstly, the influx of migrants could cause a strain on the resources of their destination, or more to the point it could appear to do so. There was a psychological effect on a town's inhabitants as they watched large numbers of hungry people flooding into the area. People rushed to the market to buy up the available grain which caused an escalation in grain prices, and higher grain prices were an important cause in the increase of crime rates during drought.

The effect of an arrival of migrants on local food prices was not specific to the 1820s and 1830s. An influx of 'thousands' of migrants into Sholapur district in the 1791

¹⁶⁷ H. J. Prinsep, Sec to Govt of India, to Act Sec to Govt, 27 Feb 1839, BGP, 29 May 1839, No. 788, APAC.

¹⁶⁸ W. S. Boyd, Act Sec to Govt, to Sec to Govt of India, 21 May 1839, BGP, 29 May 1839, No. 794, APAC.

¹⁶⁹ L. R. Reid, Act Chief Sec to Govt, to Officiating Sec to Govt of India, 31 May 1839, BRP, 31 May 1839, No. 3639, APAC.

famine had caused considerable ‘distress throughout’.¹⁷⁰ Many migrants also ‘flocked’ into Dharwar district, ‘thereby raising the price of food to such an extent that it was scarcely procurable’.¹⁷¹ In the 1801-4 ‘great famine’ in Kolaba, an ‘influx of people in search of food’ ‘caused the extension of ... famine to these districts’.¹⁷² Likewise, the ‘great distress’ in Surat district was ‘mainly caused by the sudden increase of population’.¹⁷³ Migrants therefore often brought scarcity with them when they reached their destination.

Bombay’s officials of the 1820s and 1830s observed this process firsthand. Dunlop reported in 1824 that people were ‘beginning to flock to our ports from the Dukhun in great numbers for grain’ and therefore ‘the price may be expected to rise rapidly’.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Crawford reported that there was enough grain stored in his district to meet the local inhabitants’ wants, but ‘as thousands of people are daily immigrating [sic] ... it is greatly to be feared that ere long we shall ourselves be reduced to the greatest distress’.¹⁷⁵ The Council stated its concern in 1824 that the migrants entering Bombay might overwhelm the city’s ‘water as well as provisions’.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Walter Elliot reported in 1832 that although the store of grain in Hubli sub-district was ‘sufficient for our own population it may be doubted if it will also suffice for the crowds emigrating from the eastern provinces’.¹⁷⁷ Although he added ‘I think it will’, his statement demonstrates the effect of migrants on local food prices.

Migrants brought crime to their destination indirectly by raising food prices, but they also posed the direct threat of resorting to crime themselves to secure their subsistence. This was a common feature of drought in the early nineteenth century. In the 1802-3 famine the ‘poorer classes’ who migrated into Surat district ‘committed acts of depredation at the hazard of their lives’, which was ‘to the great detriment of the inhabitants’.¹⁷⁸ In 1833 William Sprott Boyd reported from Khandesh that the

¹⁷⁰ Deputy Sholapur Cltr, no date given, in Etheridge, p. 100.

¹⁷¹ Mr. Grey, Belgaum Cltr, 18 Feb 1868, in *ibid*, pp. 102-3.

¹⁷² Mr. Salmon, Act Kolaba Sub-Cltr, no date given, in *ibid*, p. 117.

¹⁷³ Mr. Spry, 1st Asst Surat Cltr, 19 Aug 1867, in *ibid*, p. 58.

¹⁷⁴ John Dunlop, Sthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 14 Sep 1824, BGP, 29 Sep 1824, p. 5359, APAC.

¹⁷⁵ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 30 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5739-40, APAC.

¹⁷⁶ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Sthn Konkan Cltr, 4 Oct 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, p. 5597, APAC.

¹⁷⁷ W. Elliot, Hubli Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 30 Dec 1832, BRP, 23 Jan 1833, No. 298, APAC.

¹⁷⁸ No name given, Deputy Surat Cltr, 6 Sep 1867, in Etheridge, p. 60.

severe drought in neighbouring Berar had forced hundred of migrants into his district. He stated that they were in such a deplorable state as to be ‘absolutely driven to steal food whenever they can find it’.¹⁷⁹

Bombay officials could not always succeed in predicting when and where the destitute needed employment. For the migrants who slipped through the net, public works assumed a slightly different role. The administrations of 1823-5 and 1838-9 used public works as a means of intercepting the potentially disruptive migrants before they reached Bombay city. Migrants were most attracted to the Presidency’s principal towns and ports, as these locations offered better opportunities to find work,¹⁸⁰ larger flows and stores of grain,¹⁸¹ and wealthier people from whom to beg for food or loans.¹⁸² As Divekar has noted, by 1818 Bombay city had become the ‘unrivalled trading centre in the whole of western India’.¹⁸³ Thus Bombay city represented the most popular destination for migrants.

Bombay city was also the Presidency’s main seat of power, and the Council members felt threatened by the large numbers of migrants headed their way. The Northern Konkan was the last district that stood between the famished migrants on the move throughout the Presidency and the Government’s main seat of power in Bombay. A migrant first had to pass through the Northern Konkan district before he or she could enter Bombay. The Council was concerned to halt the influx outside the city limits. Thus official correspondence regarding public works focused on the Northern Konkan. Between 1823 and 1825, 20 of the 41 letters concerning the construction of public works throughout the Presidency were focused on the works in this one district.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the public works in the remaining nine districts of the Presidency were comparatively neglected by the Council. There were no letters regarding works

¹⁷⁹ W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 6 Aug 1833, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4795, APAC.

¹⁸⁰ H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Deccan Cmr, 31 Dec 1824, BRP, 19 Jan 1825, No. 17, APAC; and G. C. Wroughton, 1st Asst Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Act Nthn Konkan Cltr, 31 Jan 1825, BRP, 30 Mar 1825, No. 58, APAC.

¹⁸¹ Rev. Henry Davies, Bombay Msny, 24 Sep 1824, C I 3 M 1, CMS, p. 103; and W. Lumsden, Surat Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 31 Aug 1824, BGP, 15 Sep 1824, p. 5119, APAC.

¹⁸² David Hardiman, ‘Usury, dearth and famine in western India,’ *Past and Present*, vol. 152, Aug, 1996, pp. 129, 132.

¹⁸³ V. D. Divekar, ‘Regional Economy 1757-1857, Western India’, Dharma Kumar, (ed.), *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 343.

¹⁸⁴ The calculation is based on notes taken from the Bombay General Proceedings series, volumes P/345/76-7, and P/346/1-22, and from the Bombay Revenue Proceedings series, volumes P/368/32-65, and P/369/1-12.

in Ahmedabad, Broach, Dharwar, Kaira, and Surat districts. There were two letters for the Southern Konkan, five for Ahmednagar, six for Poona and eight for Khandesh district. The Northern Konkan's total of 20 letters compares to the 21 letters for the Presidency's remaining nine districts.

In October 1824 the Council informed John Cherry, the Northern Konkan Collector, that it was 'contemplating the ingress into Bombay of great numbers of individuals from the Northward in search of employment and maintenance', and that it was 'desirous of being prepared against the occurrence of such a contingency'. It instructed him to provide the migrants with employment 'in the Island of Salsette' beyond the limits of the city centre. The Council preferred transporting grain to feed the workers in the Northern Konkan rather than having their presence in Bombay central city.¹⁸⁵ Cherry acknowledged that 'finding them employment out of Bombay is indispensable'. He informed the Council that 'it might now be considered advisable to employ any great number of the natives who may be expected to resort to Bombay ... in the Concan'.¹⁸⁶ Some migrants from the southern districts of the Presidency travelled through the Southern Konkan before reaching the Northern Konkan. In October 1824 the Council asked David Blane, the Southern Konkan Collector, whether 'a number of Natives who may be expected to resort to Bombay in consequence of the present Scarcity, may not be advantageously employed in the [Southern] Conkan on public Works'.¹⁸⁷ The Government therefore used public works as a means of keeping migrants away from its main seat of power.

However, many migrants made it through to the city and the Council was anxious to ensure that the newcomers were well behaved. Most of these migrants were foreigners from Kathiawar, which was a province to the north of Bombay Presidency. In October 1824 the Bombay Senior Magistrate of Police, R. Snell, reported 'the arrival of near 5,000 Natives' from the north 'within the last twenty days'. He remarked that 'great numbers continue to arrive daily' and that 'they state as a reason for coming to Bombay the great scarcity of grain in their own Country and that they were in a state

¹⁸⁵ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Nthn Konkan Cltr, 2 Oct 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, pp. 5532-3, APAC.

¹⁸⁶ J. H. Cherry, Nthn Konkan Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 11 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6110, APAC.

¹⁸⁷ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to Sthn Konkan Cltr, 4 Oct 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, p. 5597, APAC.

of starvation'.¹⁸⁸ The Council instructed the city's magistrates to report 'how far the persons ... are likely to obtain subsistence'. It informed the magistrates that the city's 'inhabitants have manifested some alarm at parties parading the Island armed', and that the migrants were to 'deposit such weapons ... under your charge'. Security in this situation was an immediate requirement for the Council. Indeed, it was a standing order of the Government that the inhabitants of Bombay city should not be armed.¹⁸⁹ It asked the magistrates whether 'you consider it necessary to augment your establishment of constables of the best class and of peons to exercise a general superintendence over the people and especially as a guard during the night'. The Council was also willing to bypass protocol and allow the magistrates to act independently in case of an emergency. It stated, 'you are authorized to engage at once such additional establishment for this purpose as may be indispensably necessary should it be too urgently required to admit of a previous reference to [the] Government'.

The requirement of civility from the newcomers was emphasized in the Council's instruction that 'among the strangers themselves some of the more respectable may be entertained to look after and be responsible for the rest'. The Council concluded by ordering its magistrates to provide a 'weekly report' on the 'number of strangers arriving and departing from the Island'. Each report was to provide 'the total number of needy natives from distant places who may be supposed to be in the Island'.¹⁹⁰ The Council considered the migrants a security matter: it instructed the Junior Bombay Police Magistrate to round up as many migrants as possible in Bombay city and assign them to the revenue surveyor in charge of Bombay city's public works.¹⁹¹ Even with the migrants having reached the city, the Council resorted to public works as a means of reducing the likelihood of unrest in its capital. The heavy influx of migrants into the city in 1824 concerned the Council and it took action to ensure that order was maintained.

¹⁸⁸ R. Snell, Bombay Snr Mgst of Police, to Sec to Govt, 5 Oct 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5716-7, APAC.

¹⁸⁹ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to the Stipendiary Mgsts, 9 Oct 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5718, APAC.

¹⁹⁰ J. Farish, Sec to Govt, to the Stipendiary Mgsts, 9 Oct 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5717-9, APAC.

¹⁹¹ H. Gray, Jnr Mgst of Police, to Sec to Govt, 20 Oct 1824, BGP, 27 Oct 1824, p. 6062, APAC.

The 1838-9 administration faced a similar predicament. In October 1838 J. M Shortt, the Bombay Superintendent of Police, informed the Council that several hundred migrants from the north had recently entered the city, and were ‘living in ruinous houses, and in the open air, in different parts of the Island, both town and country’. Five hundred migrants had set up near a water tank in the city. He expressed his concern that ‘some thousands of these poor people will soon be in Bombay, and as the greatest number will exist by begging, perhaps by plunder, it may perhaps be a subject worthy the consideration of Government, whether at all or under what circumstances they may be allowed to remain on this Island’.¹⁹² Shortt evidently considered the newcomers a security threat. Governor Farish agreed, and instructed the city magistrates to ‘exercise such surveillance as may be in their power over these people’.¹⁹³ The magistrates were to report to the Council on ‘the important point’ of whether the foreigners were ‘able to obtain employment and sustenance’.¹⁹⁴

As in the 1823-5 drought, the 1838-9 administration reached to public works as a means of reducing the likelihood of unrest. Governor Farish instructed Foster, the Superintendent of Roads, to report on the prospects of employing the foreigners on public works.¹⁹⁵ The offer of employment not only provided subsistence to would-be troublemakers, but also had the advantage of being in the location of the Government’s choosing. It therefore enabled the Government to entice the foreigners out of the city. In December over 1100 foreigners, who had taken refuge at the city’s Panjrapole charitable society, accepted employment on the Government’s public works.¹⁹⁶ By January the Government was employing the foreigners on a roadwork in Thana district, which was the renamed Northern Konkan district. J. H. Burke, the Assistant Superintendent of Roads supervising the work, informed his superior that ‘more and more people continue to arrive’ in search of work.¹⁹⁷ The roadwork was therefore an effective means of keeping this ever-increasing number of migrants out of Bombay city. In fact, two months later Burke reported that he had 2208 migrants

¹⁹² J. M. Shortt, Supt of Police, to Act Sec to Govt, 10 Oct 1838, BGP, 24 Oct 1838, No. 70, APAC.

¹⁹³ Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 13 Oct 1838, BGP, 24 Oct 1838, No. 71, APAC.

¹⁹⁴ Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 13 Oct 1838, BGP, 31 Oct 1838, No. 97, APAC.

¹⁹⁵ Minute by J. Farish, Bombay Governor, 13 Oct 1838, BGP, 24 Oct 1838, No. 71, APAC.

¹⁹⁶ W. C. Bruce, President of Famine Cmte, to Act Sec to Govt, 22 Dec 1838, BGP, 9 Jan 1839, No. 39, APAC.

¹⁹⁷ J. H. Burke, Asst Supt of Roads, Etc., to Supt of Roads, 11 Jan 1839, BGP, 30 Jan 1839, No. 46, APAC.

under his supervision.¹⁹⁸ Thus the number of migrants had doubled since the works were established in December, and the works were therefore an effective means of reducing the number of migrants in, or headed for, Bombay city.

The fact that all the labourers on this roadwork were foreigners shows that the 1838-9 administration was not, in this case, offering public works employment to protect its long-term income. The Government had afforded a livelihood for the Kathiawar foreigners to tide them over until the rains returned to their homeland, at which point they were expected to return home. The migrants' subsequent harvests would therefore be in Kathiawar and would not be taxable by the Bombay administration. Foster recognised this in June 1839 when the rains had returned to Kathiawar and yet the migrants were reluctant to take the long journey home. He suggested reducing their pay to encourage them to leave, 'particularly as they are not immediate subjects of our Government'. But he cautioned the Council that he did not consider it 'prudent to set such a body loose upon the country, with very doubtful means of finding an honest subsistence'.¹⁹⁹ The 1838-9 administration therefore offered employment to these foreigners to keep them out of Bombay city and to maintain law and order in the Presidency.

Curiously, in contrast to the measures of the 1823-5 and 1838-9 administrations, the 1831-5 Council did not offer public works as a means of keeping migrants out of Bombay city. Official correspondence on public works during the 1823-5 and 1838-9 droughts focused on the need to employ foreign migrants in the Northern Konkan/Thana district. Yet of the 35 letters regarding public works relief that were written during the 1831-5 drought, 19 pertained to Dharwar district, seven to Khandesh, six to Poona, and three to Kaira district. Most of the correspondence regarding public works therefore related to the south and east of the Presidency, and not to Thana district. There was no need to intercept migrants with the offer of public works employment in Thana district because, unlike in the 1823-5 and 1838-9 droughts, the foreigners that entered Bombay Presidency did not get anywhere near the administration's main seat of power. The 1831-5 migrants lingered in the south-east of the Presidency, where the drought was fiercest and the suffering was greatest.

¹⁹⁸ J. H. Burke, Asst Supt of Roads, to Supt of Roads, 5 Mar 1839, BGP, 27 Mar 1839, No. 59, APAC.

¹⁹⁹ R. Foster, Supt of Roads, to Act Sec to Govt, 3 Jun 1839, BGP, 5 Jun 1839, No. 1079, APAC.

There were several reasons why the 1831-5 migrants did not push on to Bombay city. Firstly, they were enticed to remain in the south-eastern districts of the Presidency where they, at least initially, received charity. The 1823-5 migrants who made it to Bombay city were almost entirely from the north, from Kutch and Kathiawar.²⁰⁰ As such, before they could reach Bombay city they travelled through the northern districts of the Presidency – Gujarat province. These districts were only in the initial stages of scarcity when the migrants passed through. Gujarat was not as drought-prone as the Deccan in the east. Arthur Crawford reported from Ahmedabad in September of 1824 that thousands of foreign migrants were passing through his district heading south.²⁰¹ Ahmedabad district was experiencing high grain prices, but while Crawford feared a scarcity might take place later on, it was not yet in effect.²⁰² As the foreigners travelled through Kaira district, the area had experienced one month of strong sunshine and the prospect of the crops was unfavourable. Yet Thomas Williamson, the Acting Kaira Collector, made no mention of suffering amongst the locals.²⁰³ Similarly, at this time Robert Boyd wrote from Broach district that he was anxiously anticipating the ‘probable miseries and sufferings of the [local] people’, but he noted that a scarcity had not yet arrived at his doorstep.²⁰⁴ William Lumsden reported a more serious situation in his district of Surat, the final district on the migrants’ journey before the Northern Konkan. He reported three weeks of unremitting sunshine and that the price of grain had almost doubled. Although Lumsden did not report any suffering amongst the locals, the high prices must have reduced the grain consumption of the poor. Many locals were certainly apprehensive about the near future – at Bulsaur some people ransacked a grain boat before it could export its cargo.²⁰⁵ Yet Surat district was still only three weeks into its scarcity. Thus,

²⁰⁰ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 30 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5739-40, APAC; and R. Snell, Bombay Senior Magistrate of Police, to Sec to Govt, 5 Oct 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5716-7, APAC; and R. Barniwall, Kattywar Political Agent, to Sec to Govt, 29 Sep 1824, BGP, 20 Oct 1824, p. 5916, APAC.

²⁰¹ A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 30 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5739-40, APAC.

²⁰² A. Crawford, Ahmedabad Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 30 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5739-40, APAC.

²⁰³ T. Williamson, Act Kaira Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 9 Sep 1824, BGP, 29 Sep 1824, p. 5357, APAC; and T. Williamson, Act Kaira Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 20 Sep 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, pp. 5635-6, APAC; and T. Williamson, Act Kaira Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 27 Sep 1824, BGP, 13 Oct 1824, pp. 5763-5, APAC.

²⁰⁴ Robert Boyd, Broach Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 24 Sep 1824, BGP, 6 Oct 1824, pp. 5525-9, APAC.

²⁰⁵ W. J. Lumsden, Surat Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 21 Sep 1824, BGP, 29 Sep 1824, pp. 5429-37, APAC.

the foreigners heading south in September 1824 passed through a country only in the initial stages of want.

During the 1831-5 drought the foreigners did not come from the north, but rather only came from the east and south – from the Nizam, Berar and Surapur territories.²⁰⁶ As such, they travelled into the drought-prone province of the Deccan and Dharwar district. Being a more drought-prone region, the wealthier of the Deccanis were more used to offering charity to the poor than their wealthy Gujarati counterparts. Unlike in 1824, the foreigners who migrated into Bombay Presidency in 1833 entered districts that were themselves experiencing severe scarcities. In mid June 1833, the wealthier inhabitants of Bagulcota town, in Dharwar district, raised a charitable fund to feed the 2,000 destitute locals who were suffering under the high grain prices.²⁰⁷ By late June the richer inhabitants of Almela town, also in Dharwar district, began distributing free food to the local poor. The mamlatdar reported that the charity subsequently attracted foreign migrants from ‘the Nizam’s Country and Soorapoor’.²⁰⁸ Similarly, in early July in Sholapur town, Sholapur sub-district, Robert Pringle reported severe distress. Private charitable individuals from both the ‘Native and European Community’ were providing as much as they could for the poor.²⁰⁹ His superior, Henry Robertson, noted that half the paupers who were seeking aid in Sholapur were foreigners from the Nizam’s territory.²¹⁰ Thus, the foreign migrants who entered Dharwar and Sholapur districts in 1833 found the wealthy locals already in the act of giving charity to the local poor. Naturally they joined the same queues for relief, and for a time it was given.

The second reason why the 1831-5 migrants lingered in the south-east of the Presidency was that they were too exhausted to continue through to Bombay city. McAlpin has argued that migration was only an option when the area affected was small enough for the migrants to reach a more abundant area.²¹¹ Yet the distances

²⁰⁶ Translation of a Letter from Indee Mamlutdar, 29 Jun 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC; and W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 6 Aug 1833, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4795, APAC.

²⁰⁷ R. K. Arbuthnot, Bagulcota Sub-Cltr, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 13 Jun 1833, BRP, 10 Jul 1833, No. 3794, APAC.

²⁰⁸ Translation of a Letter from Indee Mamlutdar, 29 Jun 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

²⁰⁹ R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 9 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

²¹⁰ H. D. Robertson, Poona Cltr, to Rev Cmr, 12 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

²¹¹ McAlpin, ‘Dearth, Famine and Risk’, p. 148.

travelled by the Kathiawar migrants during the 1823-5 and 1838-9 droughts demonstrate that migrants were capable of walking hundreds of miles. A likely factor in determining the distance a migrant was able to travel was the condition in which he or she set off. It seems probable that the foreign migrants from Kutch and Kathiawar who entered the Presidency in 1824 left their homes more promptly than the Nizam and Surapur migrants of 1833. The former were in good enough physical condition to migrate all the way to Bombay city. Yet the latter travelled a shorter distance to Dharwar and Poona districts, and arrived in a woeful state. Pringle described both the local and foreign poor of Sholapur in 1833 as ‘emaciated’ and facing ‘extreme destitution’.²¹² In Indi taluka of Dharwar district the foreigners found charity, but it was ‘insufficient for them all’, and those unable to find a donor ‘died on the spot’.²¹³ The Mudebehal mamlatdar described the deaths of other emaciated foreigners under similar circumstances in his taluka.²¹⁴ The promise of charity in the districts of Dharwar and Poona kept the few foreigners who may have been capable from pressing further into British territory. Yet even if charity had been entirely withheld many foreigners would have lacked the strength to continue any further into the Presidency.

The foreign migrants from Berar who entered Khandesh district in August 1833 pursued a different strategy in securing subsistence. Instead of seeking charity as the Nizam and Surapur migrants had done in Dharwar and Sholapur, they immediately took to stealing food from the Khandesh locals.²¹⁵ They were in sufficient physical condition to take the food that they needed by force. Presumably, if they had been averse to resorting to crime they would have had the strength to continue on to Bombay city, but evidently terrorizing the inhabitants of Khandesh was the preferred option. Regardless, the foreigners who entered Bombay Presidency in 1833 either found sufficient food in the outlying districts, or lacked the necessary strength, to travel any further toward Bombay city.

²¹² R. K. Pringle, Sholapur Sub-Cltr, to Poona Cltr, 9 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4206, APAC.

²¹³ Translation of a Letter from Indee Mamlutdar, 29 Jun 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

²¹⁴ Translation of a Letter from Modeebhall Mamlutdar, 5 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

²¹⁵ W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 6 Aug 1833, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4795, APAC.

The first two reasons so far presented for the migrants lingering in the outlying districts of the Presidency did not involve governmental influence. Yet the third reason was that, unlike the 1823-5 and 1838-9 administrations, the 1831-5 Council made it very clear to the newcomers at an early stage that they were not welcome. The meagre and fading hospitality offered by private charitable individuals that delayed the foreigners in Dharwar and Sholapur in late June and early July 1833 was soon replaced with hostility from the Government. From July onwards it began propping up the failing charitable efforts of private individuals with relief measures of its own. Yet this new benefactor was more discerning of its beneficiaries. Relief was intended for the Government's subjects only. On the 2nd and 3rd of July the Mudebehal mamlatdar had distributed free food to over 2,000 paupers each day, regardless of their origin. On the evening of the 3rd, however, he was instructed by his superior not to give food to foreigners. He subsequently reported cases of starvation amongst the foreigners who were in the process of returning to their homeland.²¹⁶ In mid July Pringle received sanction to channel Government funds into the private charities that were struggling to feed the poor in Sholapur, but he was to ensure that all foreigners were rejected.²¹⁷ Thus, in this case, the Government did not merely offer its own charity as an alternative to the private charities – it effectively took control of the private charities and closed them off to foreign paupers.

Moreover, from July the Government also offered public works employment to the able-bodied poor of Bagulkot, Belgaon and Sholapur, but to the exclusion of foreigners.²¹⁸ In Khandesh district no works were offered at all. In August William Sprott Boyd recommended that the Berar migrants who were terrorizing the local populace should be placated with an offer of employment.²¹⁹ But the Council rejected his suggestion for fear of encouraging further incursions.²²⁰ The Nizam and Surapur

²¹⁶ Translation of a Letter from Modeebahall Mamlutdar, 5 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4329, APAC.

²¹⁷ T. Williamson, Rev Cmr, to Sec to Govt, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4207, APAC; and Minute by Clare, Bombay Governor, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4209, APAC.

²¹⁸ C. Norris, Chief Sec to Govt, to Act Dharwar Cltr, 29 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4331, APAC; and L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Dharwar Cltr, 19 Sep 1833, BRP, 25 Sep 1833, No. 5227, APAC; and Minute by Clare, Bombay Governor, 16 Jul 1833, BRP, 31 Jul 1833, No. 4209, APAC.

²¹⁹ W. S. Boyd, Khandesh Cltr, to Sec to Govt, 6 Aug 1833, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4795, APAC.

²²⁰ Minute by Mr. Clare, Bombay Governor, no date given, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4796, APAC; and L. R. Reid, Sec to Govt, to Khandesh Cltr, 23 Aug 1833, BRP, 28 Aug 1833, No. 4798, APAC.

migrants in Dharwar and Sholapur were openly rejected, whereas the Berar migrants in Khandesh were simply ignored.

Until June 1833, therefore, the foreign migrants either lacked the physical strength to press on to Bombay, or they found a sufficient source of food in the outlying districts to negate the need, or both. By July and August, however, the foreigners in Dharwar and Sholapur districts were informed that they would no longer receive relief in Bombay Presidency. To communicate this message the Council removed both public charity and public works employment as possible sources of subsistence to the impoverished foreigners. Instead of attempting to test the Government's resolve with a march to Bombay city, they either returned home or died trying. Subsequently, any foreign paupers residing in their homelands had less reason to contemplate migrating into the Presidency.

Thus, the 1823-5 and 1838-9 Councils offered employment on public works to the foreigners as a means to maintain law and order, particularly in its main seat of power. Yet the 1831-5 Council did not have to deal with an influx of migrants into Bombay city, and had the luxury of rejecting or ignoring the newcomers to the Presidency. The predicament of 1823-5 and 1838-9 required the Councils to intervene, albeit in the limited manner prescribed by the revisers, for the political purpose of maintaining order. The refusal to offer public works employment, even to foreigners who could offer no financial return on the Government's expense, was not considered politically feasible. Yet the predicament of 1831-5 allowed the Council a greater discernment in determining its beneficiaries. The protection specifically of the Government's own subjects, and thereby its revenues, required the limited intervention of the revisers in the form of charity and public works. But the distance of the foreigners from Bombay city allowed the 1831-5 Council the luxury of implementing the non-interventionist policies of the abolitionists which were otherwise politically and economically impracticable. This was a luxury specific to the 1831-5 Council, and it was a luxury that it did not fail to indulge.

Conclusion.

The abolitionists had convinced most members of Parliament in England and most officials in the Bombay administration that an unrestrained offer of state employment to the able-bodied poor could have harmful consequences both for the state and the recipients of relief. Yet in both England and western India the policy was not entirely removed. Nevertheless, the abolitionists had succeeded in leaving a non-interventionist mark on what was otherwise an interventionist policy. Minimal wages were offered on public works in western India to minimise the effect of the Government's intervention in the labour market. This limited intervention was the manifestation of the revisers' 'less eligibility principle' – the halfway house solution to the abolitionists' concerns.

The Bombay administrations of the 1820s and 1830s were widely convinced by the arguments of the abolitionists against public works. Yet the implementation of abolitionist policy was impracticable, both politically and financially. The administrations could not ignore the suffering of their own able-bodied subjects for fear that they might put down their ploughs, join gangs and raid revenue-paying villages, or pack up and permanently migrate out of British territory and contribute to the coffers of another ruler. Public works were a means of keeping ryots near their homes, and of settling and civilizing the mobile and wayward. Neither could the 1823-5 and 1838-9 administrations ignore the plight of the Kathiawar migrants who had entered Bombay city by the thousand. Public works, in this case, were a means of keeping migrants away from the Government's main seat of power. Only the 1831-5 administration had the luxury of ignoring the suffering of the foreigners in its outlying districts to the south and east. The application of abolitionist policy to these foreigners posed no serious political or financial ramifications for the administration, and thus in this one isolated case abolitionism finally found full expression.