

# *Pacification and Patronage in the Maratha Deccan, 1803–1818\**

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For Chris Bayly, 1945–2015. In memoriam.

## Abstract

This article examines pacification operations conducted by British colonial armies throughout the Maratha Deccan from 1803 to 1818. The East India Company assembled concentrations of coercive force by extending patronage to loyalist elites and mobile war bands. Military contingents from allied princely states were mobilized and combined with a policy of brokerage intended to demobilize hostile forces holed up in forts or engaged in brigandage. Pacification through a mixture of negotiations and force ensured loyalist groups a privileged place in the emerging colonial order.

## Introduction

By the early nineteenth century the East India Company had come to dominate the Deccan's military economy. Political bargains played an essential role in the construction of this dominance. Colonial patronage drew units of military labour out of the service of rival states and placed them at the disposal of British commanders.<sup>1</sup> Rival armies were thus deprived of their most effective elements before they even reached the battlefield. Subterfuge, more than

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<sup>1</sup> R.G.S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India: The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 275–76, 281–82, 294–95, 306.

any inherent superiority of Company regiments, enabled colonial expansion. The period between the Second and Third Anglo-Maratha Wars (1805–1817) has been viewed as a tense interlude between bouts of inexorable conquest. While the Company strove to establish a monopoly of violence over the Indian subcontinent, it shared wide frontiers with declining Maratha polities that proved unable to concentrate the means of coercion into formal institutions.<sup>2</sup> Mutually incompatible notions of sovereignty could not coexist and the Company was eventually compelled to bring disorderly Maratha chieftaincies to heel.

Yet, much of this sociopolitical decline had been of the Company's own making. Assertions of British power resulted in a glut of excess military labour. Increasingly fewer states were able to contract out armed service to warrior groups. War bands locked out of gainful employment increasingly turned to brigandage as an alternative means of subsistence. This exacerbated agrarian disorder and eventually resulted in an extensive campaign by Company forces and their princely allies to disarm superfluous armed formations. They would face *pindaris*<sup>3</sup> and a bevy of local chieftains based in forts strung out across the Maratha Deccan. These warriors would eventually be pacified by a combination of negotiations and violence. Colonial officials had neither the desire nor the means for protracted military operations. The ultimate objective of colonial officials was the exit rather than the annihilation of free-floating war bands from the military labour market. Thus, brokerage would play a decisive role in attenuating armed conflict.

Armed formations fomenting disorder triggered further rounds of bargaining with the Company state. The dispensation of patronage and selective incorporation of warrior elites into legitimate power structures were the primary means of British territorial expansion. Prior experiences in the southern districts had generated both personnel and precedents that were now applied to the Maratha Deccan. Although the British faced opponents of a somewhat different character from the recalcitrant *poligars* of Madras, they deployed

<sup>2</sup> D.H.A. Kolff, 'The end of an ancien regime: colonial war in India, 1798–1818' in *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa*, J.A. de Moore and H.L. Wesseling (eds), E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1989, pp. 22–49.

<sup>3</sup> For an extensive discussion of armed formations labelled '*pindaris*' by indigenous polities and British colonial authorities, see below.

similar methods of pacification with analogous results.<sup>4</sup> Military contingents from Mysore played a vital role in dispersing hostile forces while war bands were eager to gain access to colonial patronage networks.

Open access to the military labour market was closed off as Company regiments and their associates presented themselves as the only legitimate means of organized violence. Princely regimes and regular sepoy were determined to sustain the steady flow of benefits from the colonial state.

### Decline of the Maratha confederacy

Among post-Mughal successor states, the Marathas came closest to constructing a transregional empire.<sup>5</sup> Initially emerging as a frontier reaction to the inability of an expanding Mughal state to incorporate them into imperial patronage networks, Maratha warlords formed a loose association of regional chieftaincies that accumulated extensive wealth via predatory warfare. Yet, confederate politics remained inherently unstable as subordinates of major *sardars* (chieftains) often rebelled to found their own polities when the rewards of serving a superior proved unsatisfactory.<sup>6</sup>

During the last two decades of the eighteenth century, growing infighting at the Pune court had begun to destabilize the Deccan countryside. Leading rural families jockeyed to preserve their estates and influence at court. Rivalries within the confederacy and protracted military campaigns across the subcontinent left many of their mercenary contingents looking for new patrons and sources of livelihood.

The British in turn viewed Maratha politics as fundamentally disordered. The Company argued it had no choice but to instigate a war

<sup>4</sup> *Poligars* were warrior princes who commanded walled forts throughout southern India. For pacification campaigns in the Madras Presidency and Mysore state, see M. Vartavarian, 'Warriors and the Company State in South India, 1799–1801', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2014, pp. 212–24.

<sup>5</sup> Much of this section derives from the insightful work of A. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics Under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarājya*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, and S. Gordon, *The Marathas 1600–1818*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> See Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, passim, for a discussion of *fitna* (sedition) that led to political fragmentation.

against the *peshwa* (prime minister). Ever since the succession of Baji Rao II, the Deccan had been plagued by factionalism and rebellion; there was no effective government to protect the people.<sup>7</sup> Yet, colonial authorities had no intention of extending Company rule to these vast territories. Constituent components of the Maratha confederacy were not dissolved; instead, they became autonomous princes under British suzerainty.

### **Military labour and the Maratha campaigns of 1803–1805**

While a great deal of scholarship has focused on Company relations with major Maratha *sardars*, there has been far less focus on the plethora of minor war bands incorporated into British Indian regiments during military campaigns. Throughout the country numerous bodies of mobile armed men were adversely affected by the contraction of independent Maratha power. As British officials saw it, the subsistence needs of these groups depended on either finding employment for them in the armies of the Company or with Holkar, one of the few Maratha chieftains who remained a major employer of military labour after the 1803 campaigns.

Maratha *jagirdars* (fife holders) in the southern districts stood aloof during the conflict as it was not entirely certain that the British would emerge victorious.<sup>8</sup> Even after their victory, Company officials chose to protect lesser *jagirdars* against the predations of larger chieftains.<sup>9</sup> Patronage was key to linking standing regiments with supplementary sources of manpower. Calcutta had made it clear that if petty principalities did not ally with the British they might turn to one *sardar* or another.<sup>10</sup>

Several war bands in search of lucrative contracts directly imposed themselves on the Company during military operations. In 1805, Bumbu Khan, a local warlord, entered the field at the head of 5,000 Afghan warriors and made clear his expectations of finding employment with the British—or he would join Holkar.<sup>11</sup> At the

<sup>7</sup> Intelligence Report, date illegible, British Library, European Manuscripts (MSS Eur.) F151/39.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Wellesley to the Governor-General, 24 July 1802, British Library, Additional Manuscripts (Add. MSS) 13738.

<sup>9</sup> Close to Lord Wellesley, 24 April 1803, Add. MSS 13739.

<sup>10</sup> Lord Wellesley et al. to Lake, 15 January 1804, Add. MSS 13737.

<sup>11</sup> Gerard to Lumsden, 22 June 1805, Add. MSS 13742.

time he approached the British camp his forces were described as starving and on the verge of plundering the surrounding countryside. The British faced the choice of either destroying them or providing temporary relief. They chose the latter and after receiving some pecuniary assistance Bumbu Khan sent back most of his tattered band.<sup>12</sup> Providing outdoor relief to roving war bands that Company forces did not have the means to crush was tacitly recognized as the most effective means of guaranteeing some semblance of order around army camps.

Mobile armed groups could also be converted into auxiliary forces attached to Company armies. Arthur Wellesley recommended gathering together plunderers, providing them with horses, clothing them in 'Hindustani' uniforms, and placing them on active service.<sup>13</sup> Major R. Frith inducted mounted men into regimental service throughout North India. He argued that a cavalry corps could be assembled from such elements in the course of a few months which would be nearly equal to regular mounted units in terms of quality.<sup>14</sup> They could perform a great variety of duties at about half the cost.

The Marathas were capable of bringing numerous bodies of irregulars into the field. The Company interdicted mounted bands by either utilizing the cavalry of a native power or raising auxiliary units on their own. By using pre-existing bodies of horse the Company saved time and effort in training mounted formations. Frith claimed that Company service held out more substantial and permanent advantages to men of military age on the subcontinent than any other native power. If these men were allowed to ride, dress, and attire themselves in their own fashion, the British would succeed in enticing back many of the inhabitants of Company domains who were presently serving in the armies of native princes.<sup>15</sup>

The provision of beasts of burden and mounts remained a crucial component of the war effort. Company armies continued to provide

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Wellesley to the Secretary of Government, n.d., British Library, India Office Records (IOR), Bombay Military Council (BMC) P/354/32, ff. 4692–93.

<sup>14</sup> Frith to Edmondstone, ? May 1803, Add. MSS 13738.

<sup>15</sup> S. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in North India 1770–1830*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995, pp. 225–26, 232–33. My views complement Alavi's discussion of the gradual displacement of auxiliary war bands in the South Asian military economy by Bengal sepoys who associated with the colonial state in order to consolidate their socioeconomic privileges. Whereas Alavi is primarily concerned with core Company territories in North India, I have focused on frontier regions of British power which saw a more extensive co-option of warrior elites and princely states.

opportunities for dealers servicing the military economy. Acquired animals compelled further investment in their effective maintenance. Bullocks that went several days without their full allotment of feed did not visibly lose their vigour but in reality were unable to serve at full capacity. Once in this weakened state, it would take them several days to recover their strength. This would result in innumerable transport delays. Arthur Wellesley understood that without bullocks Company troops would be rendered useless. This in turn created a demand for drivers to sustain herds on the march. Teamsters hired in Bombay were found wanting. Many simply did not have the ability to care for cattle and deserted at the first opportunity. This was in spite of the fact that they received double the pay of drivers from Madras.<sup>16</sup> Great losses were incurred during attempts to transport military provisions and medical stores from Bombay to Pune.

Regular commissariat services simply could not cope. Bombay officials had to turn to a group of local merchants to provide haulage services.<sup>17</sup> British officers also purchased horses and attempted to resell them to Company cavalry units. Mounts purchased in Surat were dispatched via native shipping ventures; each horse was provided with a keeper who received one month's pay in advance on taking up a contract. Captain Bunyon paid his horse keepers eight rupees a month plus *batta* (field pay) while on campaign; they agreed to double as grass-cutters when required.<sup>18</sup>

### **Efforts at retrenchment and the persistence of militarism<sup>19</sup>**

In a November 1814 military dispatch to Bengal, the Court of Directors stated that, due to the restoration of peace in Europe, the return of overseas territories to the Dutch and French, and a general shortfall in territorial revenues, Calcutta was to reduce

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Wellesley to the Secretary of Government, 4 November 1803, IOR, BMC P/354/32, ff. 4652–59.

<sup>17</sup> For a thorough investigation of provisioning during the Anglo-Maratha campaigns of 1803, see R.G.S. Cooper, 'Beyond Beasts and Bullion: Economic Considerations in Bombay's Military Logistics, 1803', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1999, pp. 159–83.

<sup>18</sup> Young to ?, 5 November 1803, IOR, BMC P/354/32, ff. 4601–04; Bunyon to Walker, 30 October 1803, *ibid.*, ff. 4607–08; Skrine to Galley, 2 November 1803, *ibid.*, f. 4613; Bunton to Walker, 5 November 1803, *ibid.*, ff. 4643–45.

<sup>19</sup> This section owes much to D.M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in Early Nineteenth-century India*, I.B. Taurus, London, 1995.

army force levels across the board. While the ravages of mounted bands were cause for concern, the directors felt that these could be dealt with by dispatching irregular forces to affected regions.<sup>20</sup> Lord Moira, governor-general from 1813 to 1823, protested that forces in Bengal were entirely inadequate to meet the many challenges still facing British rule on the subcontinent. Moira contended that as nearly the entire Bengal Army was presently engaged in the Gurkha War, independent powers remaining on the subcontinent might seize the opportunity to plunder neighbouring territories. Ranjit Singh in Punjab would only be encouraged to engage in further acts of aggression if British forces on the ground were stretched too thin.<sup>21</sup>

While notions of British hegemony became established dogma after 1800, officials on the spot stressed it could only be maintained through the upkeep of large armies. Native princes allied with the Company provided crucial supplements of military manpower. Treaty provisions stipulated precise service obligations. According to one such agreement, the raja of Mysore was relieved of all pecuniary contributions to the Company in exchange for providing a force of 4,000 cavalymen, known as the Silladar Horse. This force was not only responsible for internal security throughout the princely state, it was also obliged to serve with Company regiments wherever the need arose.<sup>22</sup> When deployed beyond Mysore's frontiers they were given four star pagodas per month towards maintenance costs for each effective man and horse in the field. The Company was liable for any field pay on 'foreign' service lasting more than one month; the princely state was to meet *batta* costs for any service lasting less than that. The Company defrayed expenses of any augmentation to the force.<sup>23</sup> Mysore also possessed large contingents of military 'Chandachar *peons*'.<sup>24</sup> Bodies of standing infantry throughout Mysore were more a product of the recent disarmament of a heavily militarized society than the induction

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum, IOR, Home Miscellaneous (HM) 89, No. 162, ff. 71, 78–79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 82–3, 94–5.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum, IOR, HM 89, No. 202, ff. 249–51. For the mobilization of Mysore and other princely contingents as stipulated by contractual agreement during the 1817–1818 campaigns, see Elliott to the Nabob of Kurnool, 29 December 1817, IOR, Madras Country Correspondence (MCC) P/321/59, No. 26, and the Marquess of Hastings to the Maharajah of Mysore, 19 December 1817, IOR, MCC P/321/60, No. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum, IOR, HM 89, No. 202, ff. 249–51.

<sup>24</sup> *Peons* were generally defined as militia units that might or might not be permanent components of a military establishment.

of skilled warriors into state service. To prevent any potential unrest, the diwan of Mysore was compelled to maintain 20,000 such *peons*.

These forces were granted *batta* when they were mobilized for service beyond Mysore's frontiers. Princely officials were anxious to limit their deployment to local village forts. A force of 2,500 *peons* served with regular infantry units in more strategic military stations. Select contingents acted as personal guards of the raja, diwan, and other high officials. Most of Mysore's regular sepoys were composed of men who had formerly been in the service of Tipu Sultan. They were paid the same rates and clothed in the same manner as the Company's native infantry.<sup>25</sup>

Princely contingents proved to be of tremendous value. During the 1803 campaigns the raja's military establishment enabled Company forces to redeploy nearly all Mysore-based garrisons to the Deccan. A body of the raja's troops was assigned to protect Mysore's frontier against incursions by 'predatory' troops, further relieving the Company of defence commitments.<sup>26</sup> This released greater numbers of men for offensive actions.

Cavalry units from Hyderabad were of far more dubious value. Few contingents maintained their full quota of troopers. Their widespread dispersal into small units was highly inefficient. If large concentrations of cavalry were assembled to meet any emergency they were often composed of no fewer than 20 independent parties culled from across a vast territory.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Pindaris* and military labour in the Deccan**

*Pindari* bands were a by-product of regular armies. The various polities that had fought for supremacy across the Deccan had attracted a steady stream of mounted irregulars. Many were rootless Maratha peasants in search of subsistence. Other multi-ethnic contingents coalesced around various leaders, frequently of Indo-Afghan origin. A number of chieftains collected followers en route to major conflict zones. These bands depended on booty obtained from army camps and baggage trains. There was potential for rich rewards when

<sup>25</sup> Notices Relative to the Military Establishments of Native States, IOR, HM 89, No. 240, ff. 337–38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 341.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum, IOR, HM 89, No. 236, ff. 274–75, 277



trailing victorious armies. Some were hired out by the Maratha *sardars* to harry enemy columns on the march. Few had any sense of lasting attachment to an employer and often fled in the face of determined assaults.<sup>28</sup> Between wars they relied primarily on brigandage as a means of survival. Protracted confrontations between rival states generated opportunities for larger quantities of loot. While some *pindari* chiefs managed to accumulate substantial resources and assume the trappings of more established rulers, the majority remained itinerant warriors living off the detritus of combat.

For John Malcolm, *pindaris* were not true Marathas. He claimed that the followers of Shivaji and his successors were united by ties of faith and kinship. It was not just love of plunder but an attachment to their native soil that drove their ambitions forward.<sup>29</sup> *Pindaris* by contrast were a far more inchoate phenomenon. The porous nature of these bands had attracted unattached and free-floating elements into their ranks throughout the subcontinent. They provided a volatile mass of material which charismatic war chiefs used for their own aggrandizement. Like Tartar nomads, they had neither the means nor the inclination to settle.<sup>30</sup> Their numbers would only increase for as long as they were allowed to pursue plunder as a form of subsistence. As their predatory incursions covered ever wider areas, local inhabitants would deem immobile property insecure and those ruined by their raids would have no choice but to embrace a life of violence themselves.<sup>31</sup> If the British stood firm and engaged in punitive actions, *pindari* bands would soon be reduced for want of any popular support. Villagers who had suffered from their depredations readily attacked retreating *pindari* formations.<sup>32</sup> Malcolm's efforts to condemn the disordered state of irregular armed formations should not be taken too far. Depredations by Company sepoy could be just as destructive. On occasion, armed villagers readily attacked soldiers seeking supplies. This triggered the sacking of towns by British units in

<sup>28</sup> The literature on *pindaris* remains thin. But useful impressions of their role in the South Asian military economy can be gleaned from Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns*, pp. 32–34, 42, 44, 49, 84–85, 303–04, and S. Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, pp. 20–22, 114–15.

<sup>29</sup> J. Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, 2 vols, Parbury, Allen and Co., London, 1832, Vol. 1, pp. 426–27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 428–29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 445, 462. For examples of how destructive and frequent these raids could be, see IOR, HM 520, No. 238, ff. 595–600.

retaliation.<sup>33</sup> Colonial officials readily matched tough rhetoric against *pindari* bands with concessions. The British later granted pensions to certain chiefs who surrendered themselves to the Company's mercy.<sup>34</sup>

*Pindaris* could not withstand concentrated assaults in open terrain. Clashes with Company units during the Maratha campaigns of 1803–1805 had devastating results. During one encounter, Major General Campbell received word that a body of *pindaris* numbering some 10,000 horse and *peons* intended to cross the Kistna to plunder Company convoys and the surrounding countryside. This group was headed by a Muslim whom assumed the character of a *fakir* and took the name of the late Dhondia Waugh. Campbell intercepted this body of men with mounted units and purportedly killed up to 2,000 of them.<sup>35</sup> Yet, British commanders could rarely concentrate sufficient forces to deliver such crushing blows. With Company forces thin on the ground, *pindari* bands easily evaded interception by outriding their pursuers or occupying derelict forts.

### Disorder in the Deccan

As the power of major Maratha chieftains contracted, the *pindari* bands that hovered around their armies in search of loot were gradually cut loose.<sup>36</sup> A mass of unemployed soldiers soon swelled their ranks, presumably bringing several years of military experience with them. Left to fend for themselves, they turned to raiding agricultural settlements. The lack of conventional battles between rival states left the losing side few opportunities to plunder. Thus, *pindari* raiders concentrated their efforts all the more on agrarian cultivators and market towns. In the process, a type of military labour that had previously been attached to Maratha hosts came up against a rising power that had little use for it.

The situation in the Deccan had become quite desperate by the second decade of the nineteenth century. Reporting on the situation

<sup>33</sup> Maj. W. Thorn, *Memoir of the War in India Conducted by General Lord Lake Commander-in-Chief and Major-General Sir Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington; From its Commencement in 1803, to its Termination in 1806, On the Banks of the Hyphasis . . .*, T. Egerton, London, 1818, pp. 346–47, 384.

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm, *Memoir*, Vol. 2, p. 176.

<sup>35</sup> Thorn, *Memoir of the War*, pp. 308–10.

<sup>36</sup> For *pindaris* as Maratha auxiliaries, see M.P. Roy, *Origin, Growth and Suppression of the Pindaris*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1973, pp. 4–9.

inland from Bombay, Lieutenant Hardcastle claimed that ‘the face of the country is miserable, resembling a sandy beach, more than anything else, and every body and thing about us has the appearance of starvation’. No grain was to be found at local bazaars. The two or three *baniyas* (traders) who had provisions were dealing them out very sparingly. A number of starving families were offering their children for sale, sometimes even willing to give them up to anyone who would take them.<sup>37</sup> In such conditions, *bindari* raids became increasingly frequent.

British commanders understood that Maratha chieftains could only maintain large armies through the plunder of adjacent territories. Arthur Wellesley observed that any reduction in the power of a chieftain like Shinde would produce a mass of unemployed warriors formerly in his service. If they were not provided for in some way by the Company they would seek employment in the armies of a rival chieftain like Holkar. In 1804, Holkar’s army was said to consist of some 40,000 Rohillas and 150,000 mounted men. Though probably an exaggeration, the potential for loot did more than anything to attract a mass armed following. Rohilla Afghans allegedly offered their service to him for three years without pay in exchange for permission to plunder the countryside.<sup>38</sup>

The reduction of Shinde’s and Bhonsle’s power sharply cut into the resources on offer to mounted irregulars. Subsidiary alliance treaties with the Company further reduced the ability to patronize mobile war bands. As Maratha princes had no desire to see their truncated territories ravaged by *bindari* bands they assigned land grants to certain chiefs who promised to refrain from raids. British officials saw this as an attempt to deflect *bindari* attacks onto Company territory. Most of the land grants were located along the banks of the Narmada, which bordered Company holdings in the Deccan. Land grants did little to reduce predatory incursions. It could hardly have been otherwise as ‘the despairing effort of hungry Bodies, who have seen in every attempt lately made to reduce them, the influence of the British Power, who feel the circle of their expeditions for plunder and subsistence bounded on every side, and daily narrowed, by that Power, who find themselves

<sup>37</sup> Hardcastle to Aitcheson, 30 September 1812, MSS Eur. D666.

<sup>38</sup> Holkar’s chieftaincy was able to incorporate large numbers of armed men formerly employed by Shinde. Wellesley to Lake, 17 January 1804, IOR, HM 491, ff. 145, 152–53; Extract of a Letter from General Wellesley to the Governor-General, 30 December 1803, *ibid.*, ff. 190–91; Minutes of Conversation between Lake and the Vakils of Holkar, 18 March 1804, *ibid.*, ff. 222–23.

as it were starving in the midst of Plenty which the British Provinces present to their sight'.<sup>39</sup> While much of the Maratha Deccan was open country and relatively easy to plunder, it had little to offer. *Pindaris* would take increasingly greater risks to attack wealthier Company territories.

Inland regions of the Deccan were particularly prone to bandit raids. Borderlands bred a sense of impunity.<sup>40</sup> Mounted bands launched attacks and dispersed across rough terrain before Company forces had a chance to mobilize. Lumbering columns of troops gathered from multiple garrisons and allied princely states took a great deal of time to assemble. Efforts to combat *pindari* raiders led to the establishment of military colonies. Armed *peons* held land rent free in exchange for providing local defence.<sup>41</sup> In the Nellore district, bodies of *peons* were maintained by local *poligars*.<sup>42</sup> These chieftains typically contributed as little as possible to their upkeep, pocketing the remaining revenues for their own consumption. Low levels of remuneration for potentially dangerous duties resulted in poor policing at best. Village *peons* called up by magistrates proved to be far more effective. Service in the local militia proved the most effective means of defending one's own property.

Hyderabad suffered from the misfortune of being a weak state with an abundance of wealth. Plundering expeditions generally did not result in any effective retaliation by the nizam's forces. Easy pickings attracted roving bands increasingly locked out of legitimate military employment. The British accused Hyderabad officials of permitting armed gangs to assemble in rural areas. Some even furnished raiders with arms in exchange for a share of the loot. Rural inhabitants in turn provided bandits with provisions and informed them of any oncoming government troops. Other villages along Hyderabad's frontiers were constantly ransacked by small bands who had no identifiable leadership.<sup>43</sup> These raids followed a typical pattern. Gangs

<sup>39</sup> See Jenkins to Adam, 3 March 1814, IOR, HM 598, ff. 30–31; on the socio-political pressures that increased bandit incursions, see Edmondstone to Adam, 31 March 1814, *ibid.*, ff. 44–56, 58.

<sup>40</sup> Thackeray to the Judge and Magistrate of Cuddapah, 28 November 1811, IOR, Madras Police Committee (MPC) P/328/56, ff. 16–17, 21–22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 8

<sup>42</sup> ? to the Chief Secretary of Government, 8 December 1812, IOR, MPC P/328/58, ff. 1257–58.

<sup>43</sup> Tod to the Chief Secretary of Government, 26 May 1813, IOR, *ibid.*, ff. 1206, 1211–13.

would march long distances, attack villages at night, and then rapidly retreat into wooded areas before effective countermeasures could be taken. Lacking leaders that the British could strike out against or co-opt, such groups were exceedingly difficult to suppress.

It would be incorrect to view *pindari* bands as desperate rabble. The number of horses they obtained and maintained indicate some level of organization. Chiefs able to seize large quantities of loot easily attracted armed followings. Followers rendered loyal service to leaders who successfully led their bands to plunder. By early 1817, well-organized *pindari* forces began seizing abandoned forts which they used as temporary staging points to loot the surrounding countryside.<sup>44</sup> Raiding clearly paid. A single chance engagement by a British unit with a particularly large band yielded thousands of rupees worth of prize money for the officers involved. It took several years of haggling before the spoils were divided up to the satisfaction of all concerned.<sup>45</sup>

*Pindaris* were more akin to professional bandits. Hobsbawm's romanticized notions of social banditry simply do not apply here. Indeed, their activities appear to have been highly disruptive of the agrarian and commercial economies. Most inhabitants viewed them as yet another war band demanding exactions and further diminishing local resources. While Company rule was never very good, it was better than arbitrary rapine. The British viewed the plight of local populations with great concern, albeit for economic reasons. By providing protection and organizing defence forces, the Company hoped to draw the local populace into its pacification campaigns.

'Natural' dispositions towards violence and looting had to be suppressed by vigorous action. Local magistrates were to consider the protection of inhabitants as a top priority.<sup>46</sup> Failure to provide rudimentary security would inevitably result in the flight of rural inhabitants and the loss of land revenue. Salaries were kept high in an effort to prevent collusion between bandit groups and indigenous officials. None of this prevented abuses of the local population by sepoys and the British alike. Passing sepoy regiments and European travellers often extorted supplies from villages alongside the high

<sup>44</sup> Russell to Doveton, 6 December 1816, National Army Museum (NAM), 1965-11-49-4; Russell to Adam, 23 January 1817, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> McDowall's Memorandum, 23 August 1819, NAM, 1968-07-318; McDowall to Palmer, 20 October 1819, *ibid.*; McDowall to Palmer, 12 August 1820, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Thackeray to the Judge and Chief Magistrate of Cuddapah, 28 November 1811, IOR, MPC P/328/56, ff. 21-22.

road.<sup>47</sup> Such exactions resulted in severe hardships as horses taken by passing soldiers were essential for working fields. Cultivators stood by helplessly as their grain reserves and cattle were ‘purchased’ at prices well below their local market value.

As large bodies of horse from Hyderabad and Mysore assembled to interdict mounted bands, tensions were further ratcheted up by disgruntled Maratha chiefs. While recent political settlements had lessened the potential threat of the southern *jagirdars*, a considerable number of their troops were now unemployed. They had ‘not had time to settle into other occupations’. If not kept under control, they could spark considerable unrest.<sup>48</sup>

By the spring of 1815, almost the entire Indian Army was committed to agrarian pacification. In an effort to placate protests at harsh service conditions, Company officials admitted sepoys would be fully within their rights to demand *batta* once they were compelled to cross the Narmada River. Colonel Doveton was authorized to issue double *batta* to native soldiers of every rank crossing the river should the need arise.<sup>49</sup> Yet, regular troops could not cover such large stretches of territory. Raids by mounted brigands continued to result in much loss of life, burnt villages, and numerous abductions.<sup>50</sup> During a particularly large incursion into the Company’s southern domains in 1816 British officials were compelled to distribute guns, cartridge balls, powder, and flints to rural notables for local defence. They were told to repel any attack made on frontier villages by marauding horsemen. Rural notables freely distributed these arms to local inhabitants. Colonial authorities expected elites to inspire confidence among cultivators ‘by exhibiting an example of becoming firmness on your own part, excite them to determined resistance of any hostile attempt that may be made upon them’.

Lofty calls for determined defence often had mixed results. A *apindari* attack on Guntur met with sharp resistance but the defenders were soon overwhelmed and the whole town overrun. One man was thrown down a well, five others were abducted. Twelve horses were also captured and the home of J.A. Dalzell, the local assistant magistrate,

<sup>47</sup> Wright to the Secretary of Government, 21 December 1813, *ibid.*, ff. 39–41.

<sup>48</sup> For Mysore, see Strachey to Cole, 13 November 1814, IOR, HM 599, ff. 385–86; for Hyderabad and the southern *jagirdars*, see Moira to Elliott, 26 January 1815, IOR, HM 600, ff. 18, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Extract of a Letter from the Commander-in-Chief, 11 April 1815, *ibid.*, ff. 327–30; Strachey to Hislop, 26 April 1815, *ibid.*, ff. 332–33.

<sup>50</sup> Carnac to Warden, 18 April 1815, *ibid.*, ff. 446–49.

was ransacked.<sup>51</sup> Lieutenant Macdonald, en route to Guntur, was overtaken by the *pindaris* on the road. In the ensuing scuffle he was wounded in three places, robbed of his horse, watch, and most of his clothing. The inhabitants of plundered villages proclaimed they wished to emigrate to other 'countries' where they would enjoy a greater degree of security for their persons and property than could be found in their present habitations. Dalzell asserted that every 'exertion of which I am capable shall be used to remove an impression so prejudicial to the vital interests of the empire'. When the local inhabitants of the village of Ainavole learned of an impending *pindari* assault they were resolved to collective sacrifice rather than see their womenfolk violated. When horsemen overwhelmed their defences they retreated to their dwellings, set them alight, and perished in the ensuing conflagration.<sup>52</sup> Scores of villages were plundered throughout 1816. Nearly all the inhabitants of Guntur were said to have been robbed except those that had been able to obtain some matchlocks for their protection.

Women were reportedly raped in the streets. Local inhabitants were deprived of their money, jewellery, and clothes. These depredations resulted in mass flight from numerous villages; pariah castes reportedly plundered what the *pindaris* had left behind. Those who fled to upland terrain would face certain starvation unless their landholdings were made secure from incursions. Reinforcements sent to intercept mounted bands were often too fatigued to launch a pursuit once they arrived on the scene. At times, local zamindars dispatched parties of armed *peons* that managed to disperse marauders. Forts were utilized as places of refuge for women and children. Captain Stuart reported that when rural inhabitants learned of an impending *pindari* attack, hundreds of them flocked to Guntur fort with their property, seeking the Company's protection. Adult males declared they were prepared to resist any attempts to sack their dwellings. Arms were distributed from public stores to volunteers. At Cuddapah fort, affluent members of the town and neighbouring villages were armed

<sup>51</sup> Dalzell's Memorandum, 19 January 1816, IOR, HM 601, ff. 58–60; for quote, see Draught of a Letter addressed to Barnobe Rouling, a pensioner residing at Timmeracotta in Paulnad, n.d., *ibid.*, ff. 62–64; J.A. Dalzell to the Secretary to Government in the Judicial Department, Fort St George, 12 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff. 284–85.

<sup>52</sup> Reports from Dalzell to the Secretary to Government in the Judicial Department, Fort St George, 13, 16, 18 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff. 300–02, 368–69, 379–81.

by the Company.<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere, ammunition was liberally distributed to 'respectable' elements of the rural population who had remained behind to defend their possessions. The offices of colonial officials were converted into garrisoned strongpoints. Servants, jail guards, and *peons* were reinforced by sepoy units dispatched from military stations nearby.

Operations against *pindari* bands took place over massive swathes of territory. Sepoy regiments and princely contingents simply could not be everywhere at once. Company officials took measures to deprive mounted bands of people and plunder. Relocating agrarian inhabitants into fortified towns attenuated the effects of sweeping raids. Potential recruits for roving gangs were rendered inaccessible as they had been removed from poorly defended villages. Driving people into walled fortress towns locked resources in and marauders out. Roaming bands dependent on settled communities for food, plunder, and potential recruits were thus deprived of essential resources. Thus left in the open, they would have been easy targets for mounted units patrolling the countryside.

British commanders attempted to envelop marauders with a series of overlapping armed formations. Large elements of the Company's coercive apparatus were drawn from the general population and placed in local militias where they were kept under close watch in walled towns. Such forms of surveillance assured compliance with the colonial state's security requirements. It also facilitated the collection of weaponry doled out for militia duty once the initial danger had passed. During its confrontations with the Mysore Sultanate, Company commanders frequently released weaponry into the wider society and then lost control of its flow across wide sectors of the population determined to collect the basic tools of coercion. Weaponry allowed mobile bands to defend themselves against unreasonable exactions from larger political entities and engage in predation against weaker social formations. By the early nineteenth century, armed groups that stood outside institutional structures sanctioned by the colonial state could expect to be harried and pursued by a broad coercive apparatus fully committed to internal pacification.

<sup>53</sup> Russell to Doveton, 19 March 1816, IOR, HM 602, ff. 60–62; Oakes to the Chief Secretary of Government, Fort St George, 21 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff. 65–75; Stuart to the Judge and Magistrate of Guntur, 23 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff. 127–28; Newnham to the Chief Secretary of Government, Fort St George, 22 March 1816, *ibid.*, f. 94.



British officials quickly realized they would have to involve the general population in government efforts to suppress bandit gangs. Local authorities found rural inhabitants quite willing to cooperate. Propertied inhabitants from the surrounding countryside moved into walled towns with armed retainers to assist in their defence. It was safer to remain in such fortified areas than make for upland country. A number of locals fled *pindari* bands only to be robbed by bandits in the hills.<sup>54</sup> Bhil tribes often gathered around Company supply trains as these lumbering convoys were particularly inviting targets for loot. Even the Company's opium stocks were not safe. A native contractor travelling with a Company regiment had his carts attacked on the road and was robbed of 300 rupees worth of opium by a group of Bhils.<sup>55</sup>

The British were not alone in their hostility towards independent armed elements. Princely states actively lobbied to be allowed to meet the Bhil problem with force. Later efforts to divide and rule the Bhils by incorporating certain elements of the tribes into auxiliary units formed to keep more recalcitrant groups in check did not prove very successful. These units were rarely manned by Bhils themselves. Instead, they provided employment to a wide assortment of Rajputs, Muslims, and low caste Hindus.<sup>56</sup> Colonial officials admitted that the situation of Bhil tribes in central India had become so desperate by the 1830s that they had little choice but to engage in robbery. Those not engaged in raiding faced starvation.

There were suspicions that people associated with bandits were settling in Company territory after the loss of their horses. Some of them were returning to areas they had previously inhabited, claiming they were travellers who had returned from service in distant lands. One man who had recently settled in Cuddapah admitted to being employed as an armed *peon* in a bandit gang for three years. Company officials blamed the *pindaris*' accurate knowledge of travel routes on

<sup>54</sup> Ross to the President and Members of the Board of Revenue, Fort St George, 23 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff. 138–39, 143–45; Newnham to the Chief Secretary of Government, Fort St George, 28 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff. 163–66.

<sup>55</sup> Ambrose to Grant, n.d., IOR, BMC P/357/11, ff. 4801–03; Shepard to Stannus, 27 January 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/16, ff. 1063–64. The native contractor argued that he should either be exempted from his monthly tax on 'intoxicating drugs' or be given 300 rupees to compensate for his loss. Company officials resolved that if his carts were bad or he could not keep up with troops on the march, he should suffer the consequences and he was denied compensation. See Minute by Prendergast, n.d., *ibid.*, f. 1068.

<sup>56</sup> 'Settlement of the Bheels', 13 April 1835, National Archives of India (NAI), Foreign Department, Political Consultations, nos. 25–27, ff. 1–5.

spies, who, under the pretext of being itinerant merchants, spread themselves across the country to obtain information from disloyal inhabitants who were often related to persons serving in predatory gangs.

*Pindaris* were heavily dependent on their horses for their personal safety and their ability to rapidly haul off booty. Locals who possessed matchlocks were authorized to shoot these horses on sight as well as take advantage of hilly or forested terrain that irregular cavalry could not easily traverse. Those who resisted bandit incursions were promised financial rewards.<sup>57</sup> Outsourcing pacification to local inhabitants was an absolute necessity as the conventional forces of the Company were stretched precariously thin. Constant patrols of frontier zones resulted in the physical exhaustion of mounted contingents responsible for policing vast tracts of country. Some native cavalymen had not seen their families in years.<sup>58</sup> A number had their health ruined due to extensive campaigning during monsoon seasons and many of their horses were no longer fit for field service. Eventually, selected units were sent home on leave to rest and arrange marriages for their children. Rotations out of active service would have been far more problematic if the general population had not been willing to aid in pacification measures. Mobilizations of cultivators for militia duty ensured that the local balance of forces remained in the Company's favour.

Disorder in the Deccan did not come as a great surprise to British colonialists. The destruction of the Mysore Sultanate along with the reduction of the *peshwa*, nizam, and major Maratha chieftains had greatly added to *pindari* numbers. Their subjugation had severely circumscribed the resources with which they had previously employed or given a modicum of direction to auxiliary units. Whereas previously *pindari* activity had usually been tied to the movement of large armies, they now resorted to plundering anywhere and everywhere in a desperate struggle for subsistence. Not only had the subsidiary alliance system brought about a severe decline in the effectiveness of certain princely states, it also turned large segments of military labour previously employed by those states into free-floating raiders.

<sup>57</sup> Newnham to the Secretary of Government, Fort St George, 3 April 1816, IOR, HM 602, ff. 313–15, 318–19, 323–25.

<sup>58</sup> Hislop to Elliott, 10 July 1818, IOR, Madras Military Consultations (MMC) P/259/82, ff. 6895–99.

All of this was entirely to be expected. Although Lord Wellesley faced substantial criticism for pushing ahead with subsidiary alliances, their destructive consequences were seen as the lesser of two evils. While the ravages of unemployed military service groups throughout the Deccan were deemed regrettable, independent concentrations of military force in the hands of indigenous states were considered to be an unacceptable risk.<sup>59</sup> Colonial authorities wanted to control access to legitimate forms of military labour and lock out groups they deemed recalcitrant or superfluous to their military requirements. To have halted conquests with the toppling of Tipu might have only emboldened the remaining princely regimes to soak up the vast pools of military labour cut loose after the storming of Seringapatam. Additionally, the very disorder that the subsidiary alliance system created in princely domains increased their dependence on the British. Company troops and militias were essential components in the emerging security regime determined to overcome free-floating war bands that threatened the orderly collection of revenues.

### Mutinies in Madras regiments

Yet, colonial regiments could not entirely be relied upon to perform the hard tasks of pacification. While the Madras Army had improved a great deal since the desperate days of the 1780s, it still displayed worrisome signs of insubordination. Two major mutinies occurred in Madras regiments between 1806 and 1812, with Muslim sepoys playing a leading role in both. The Vellore mutiny of 1806 appears to have been triggered by the imposition of new forms of dress which sepoys found disagreeable. Standardized forms of headgear meant to erase caste and confessional distinctions apparently triggered great resentment among Muslims who had little desire to be equated with Hindus.<sup>60</sup> During the mutiny, Muslim sepoys made an attempt to free Tipu Sultan's family from Vellore fort. The mutiny was violently suppressed and attributed to overzealous commanders who

<sup>59</sup> ? to the Marquess of Hastings, n.d., Add. MSS 23759, ff. 30–31.

<sup>60</sup> Cradock to Bentinck, 29 June 1806, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. c. 2737, ff. 6–7; Reynell to McKerras, 14 May 1806, *ibid.*, ff. 2–3. For the debate on the origins and meaning of the Vellore mutiny, see J.W. Hoover, *Men Without Hats: Dialogue, Discipline, and Discontent in the Madras Army 1806–1807*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2007; S. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 224, 226–27.

had overstepped the mark by disregarding the liberties of native troops under their charge. Testimonies by several indigenous officers denied that the removal of dress distinctions had prompted the mutiny.<sup>61</sup> Others viewed it as a Muslim conspiracy to restore the Mysore Sultanate.

There might be some truth to both contentions. Madras Army sepoy clearly did not appreciate attempts to curtail their religious liberties. Such infractions might have acted as a pretext for a general protest in defence of their privileges. Muslim soldiers possibly viewed the dissolution of notionally Islamic dynasties like the Mysore Sultanate and Arcot as a loss of status for their religious community. Recourse to violent action on behalf of an imprisoned Muslim princely lineage may have been an expression of this dissatisfaction. There was little chance of it succeeding, but it signalled the increasing sense of exclusion among Muslims in British service.

The harsh nature of the repression appears to have had long-term effects. In 1812, a contingent of sepoy, several of whom were Muslim, conspired to murder their officers at Quilon in the princely state of Travancore. The conspirators were betrayed to the British by their fellow sepoy. A number were subsequently strapped to cannons and blown apart. Abdul Cauder, one of the captured mutineers, testified that his brother-in-law had been taken prisoner during the Vellore mutiny. He had denied taking part in the attack on Vellore but was nevertheless found guilty and executed. Abdul Cauder stated he had taken part in the plot to kill British officers because of this injustice. He is reported to have said, 'Why should we preserve these People, let them be killed, and I agree to assist.'<sup>62</sup>

British commanders could not push conventional sepoy regiments too far. Native allies continued to provide a vital source of military manpower that bolstered the British presence in the countryside. Princely states in turn were eager to serve the military needs of the Company to confirm their privileges in the emerging colonial order. Pacification was conducted by a coalition of princely contingents acting in concert with Company units. The often-fragile state of order in

<sup>61</sup> Pierce to the Commander-in-Chief, 25 July 1806, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. c. 2737, f. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Court Martial Proceedings, 12 February 1813, IOR, HM 702, ff. 219–20. For the events of the Quilon mutiny of 1812, see the entire volume of IOR, HM 702 and HM 703, 704.

sepoy regiments may have given further justification for pursuing negotiated settlements with as many hostile armed bands as possible.

### **The *pindari*-Maratha war, 1817–1818**

British efforts to pacify superfluous armed bands culminated in a subcontinent-wide campaign in 1817–1818 against *pindaris* and the arbitrary powers of Maratha chieftains.<sup>63</sup> The objectives were to destroy a system of plunder by reducing the collectors of *cauth* (protection money) into domesticated sedentary princes. Indian warrior elites were seen as habitually conflict prone. Any notion of a balance of power preserving the legitimate rights of all powers was wholly foreign to them. Colonial authorities claimed that from time immemorial local inhabitants had been transferred from the authority of one sovereign to another. Thus, they had no notion of national feeling binding them to a single political entity. The very concept of sovereignty was presented as a tangle in which numerous states possessed revenue rights to the same territories and demanded tribute from the same vassals. For local ruling elites, martial prowess was considered the wellspring of honour and renown. Usurpation, aggrandizement, and rapine were fostered by ‘tales of other times’. Contrary to policies of the recent past, Company officials claimed that this spirit of native aggression prevailed to an extent that was inversely proportional to the progress of British power.<sup>64</sup> John Malcolm contended that indigenous disorder would provide the ideal pretext to absorb all power into British hands.<sup>65</sup>

In spite of such belligerent declarations, a short war of incorporation through bargaining was the Company’s primary objective. Protracted resistance on the part of the *peshwa* could potentially have had an unfavourable effect on forces whose commitment to British power was still untested. Sir Evan Nepean, governor of Bombay, feared that the *peshwa* was attempting to draw Company sepoys into his service. He

<sup>63</sup> For a general narrative of the *pindari* campaign and its links to actions against the Marathas, see Roy, *Origin*, pp. 232–51, 260–90.

<sup>64</sup> Minute by N.B. Edmondstone, 29 April 1814, IOR, HM 598, ff. 243–47.

<sup>65</sup> Malcolm to Elphinstone, 5 November 1817, MSS Eur. F88/402, ff. 109–10. Thomas Munro considered Company military action to be an essential precondition for bringing order to the southern Maratha country, a region long in the grips of anarchy brought about by turbulent feudatories. See Munro to Elphinstone, 28 August 1818, MSS Eur. F88/383, f. 67.

had attempted this by intimidating the families of Company sepoys who resided in his domains. Nepean stressed that a campaign should be launched as soon as possible. It was believed that the majority of Maratha *sardars* would not come to the *peshwa*'s aid.<sup>66</sup> A jocular Henry Pottinger asserted that military operations would not last two months unless a power in Hindustan made a move in the *peshwa*'s favour, a prospect deemed highly unlikely. He stated to Nepean: 'I hope I shall soon have to congratulate you on the Southern Conkan and the whole range of the Ghauts being added to your dominions for without the latter the low country is always liable to be infested with coolies and other banditti . . . My health continues [to be] excellent, and I enjoy the bustle and hubbub of a Camp and hunting the Mahrattas exceedingly.'<sup>67</sup> Local commanders felt that exemplary punishment had to be meted out to recalcitrant towns in order to dissuade others from resisting.<sup>68</sup> A more sober Mountstuart Elphinstone had earlier expressed misgivings that a sudden reduction of the southern *jagirdars* would throw the countryside into great confusion. At the same time, he emphasized that none of their forts could withstand determined assaults by regular troops; the capture of several strongholds would induce the remainder to surrender.<sup>69</sup> The Company would be better served by directing its energies against the *peshwa*'s person rather than his forts, territories, or vassals. Even if the *peshwa* evaded capture, the Company would weaken his reputation by constantly harrying him.<sup>70</sup>

Forces under the command of John Malcolm eventually cornered Baji Rao II. Malcolm was later accused by Lord Hastings of offering terms he deemed to be too lenient.<sup>71</sup> Malcolm reposted that it was crucial to impede tendencies towards extending direct colonial control. Conquered territories should be administered by native governments dependent on the British for their sense of legitimacy. A political agent exercising moderate control over a native ally was far more efficient than a bevy of judges, collectors, and military detachments.<sup>72</sup> Malcolm went so far as to state, 'I cannot think it altogether disinterested to study impressions or to feel deeply for every point that touches

<sup>66</sup> Nepean to the Honourable Chairman of the East India Company, 5 November 1815, MSS Eur. D1095.

<sup>67</sup> Pottinger to Nepean, 26 November 1817, *ibid.*, underlining in original.

<sup>68</sup> Cumming to Jenkins, 23 August 1818, Add. MSS 23757, ff. 36–37.

<sup>69</sup> Elphinstone to Edmondstone, 26 October 1810, MSS Eur. F88/378, ff. 34–36.

<sup>70</sup> Elphinstone to Smith, 6 December 1817, MSS Eur. F88/402, ff. 28–29.

<sup>71</sup> Malcolm to the Duke of Wellington, 8 July 1818, IOR, HM 733, ff. 306–07.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 308.

in the slightest degree on our reputation with the natives—for it is an axiom with me, that in the ratio, our Dominion spreads, we become more dependent upon that reputation—and it is the chief danger of our increased power that it disposes most, to forget this truth.<sup>73</sup> British dominance could not be sustained by coercion alone; it ultimately depended upon reciprocal arrangements between regional polities and colonial overlords. Such arrangements were lubricated by the provision of patronage and protection to indigenous political elites. This policy was not cheap. During the 1817–1818 campaigns, the Company loaned the nizam of Hyderabad 80,000 rupees a month with little prospect of it ever being fully repaid.<sup>74</sup>

British policy regarding armed bodies of irregulars was far less considerate. Plunderers were considered freebooters and refused quarter. Even local Brahmans who joined bandit gangs were subject to capital punishment. Although capital cases were supposed to be reported to higher authorities before execution took place, the need for sudden examples was acknowledged.

There had been attempts to conciliate certain Bhils tribes by allowing them to retain the privileges they held before the accession of Baji Rao II. Bhil chiefs who held their people in check were granted pensions. Those found to be in favour of Company rule were allotted small portions of rent-free land to be held in perpetuity by their descendants on the condition that they would aid *patils* (village headmen) in maintaining local police forces. Alterations to fiscal bargains that Bhil chiefs might find disagreeable were postponed until the completion of major military operations.

*Patils* in turn were promised generous privileges. During the course of the Maratha campaigns, colonial officials behaved leniently towards villages occupied by Company forces. Generosity was bound to impress areas still uncertain as to where to place their allegiance. A number of villages well-disposed to Company rule had been subjected to attacks by war bands loyal to the *peshwa*. British authorities granted them financial remissions to repair damaged infrastructure and fund local militia forces.

A number of native irregulars employed by the Company defected during military operations. Elphinstone's answer was to deploy such units far away from their native villages, thus exposing their families to the Company's ire should they persist in acts of disloyalty. As far as

<sup>73</sup> Malcolm to Elphinstone, 12 July 1818, *ibid.*, ff. 317–18.

<sup>74</sup> Russell to Adam, 10 January 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/73, f. 1800.

such irregular units were concerned, Elphinstone stated: ‘it does not sit [with] our policy to preserve a permanent military spirit among them, but to allow them in time to sink into judge’s and collector’s *peons*’.<sup>75</sup>

The British freely turned to local communities to finance and outfit irregular forces. Captain Charles Swanston, commander of the Pune Auxiliary Horse, raised 150,000 rupees in the local bazaars. He used these funds to purchase mounts, recruits, weaponry, and equipment.<sup>76</sup> When his unit was nearly destroyed in action against the *peshwa*, Swanston returned to the marketplace and soon collected sufficient resources to have it reassembled.

While it may have been part of British strategy to disarm mobile military groups in Indian society, the British were more than willing to utilize deprived elements of the local population against warrior groups. Such a policy was unavoidable given the paucity of troops throughout the Deccan—whole districts were without a single sepoy. The only thing which prevented such areas from being plundered by a roving band was the fact that a local raja might be hostile to them and block their entrance into his territory. Local forces continuously filled wide gaps in conventional coercive structures.

### Rewarding regimental soldiers

Uniformed soldiers frequently had to do without proper accoutrements and weaponry. Budgetary constraints meant that some cavalymen went into the field with old and unserviceable pistols.<sup>77</sup> There had been numerous desertions during the height of field operations in early 1818. Company officials claimed that while the men were well-disposed to serve, a number had been enticed to desert by the machinations of the *peshwa* or threats he had made against their families. Some sepoys met these threats with sharp defiance. Jemandar Shaik Hussein and another sepoy posted at Pune were purportedly offered monetary rewards if they came over to the *peshwa*’s forces with as many of their companions as possible. They promptly refused. The Company had them promoted and granted them double

<sup>75</sup> Abstract of Orders on Criminal Justice and Police, n.d., MSS Eur. F88/407, ff. 150–52; Elphinstone to Robertson, 26 February 1818, *ibid.*, ff. 180–82, 185–86.

<sup>76</sup> Swanston’s Biography, NAM, 1979-01-76-26.

<sup>77</sup> Nightingall to ?, 24 September 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/10, ff. 4333–35.



the pay officially allotted to their advanced rank. In addition, they were promised generous pensions and *inam* (rent-free) lands in any part of Company territory once they left active service. These lands were to be held in perpetuity by their heirs.<sup>78</sup>

Bombay attempted to increase its manpower reserves by offering a full pardon to all deserters who turned themselves in. Returnees filled the ranks of newly formed battalions. Their previous military experience cut down on training time and allowed the rapid reinforcement of units in the field. Colonial authorities called for the formation of companies composed of veterans previously discharged due to their inability to endure the fatigues of active service. These contingents were used for garrisoning forts and freed up line regiments for offensive operations.<sup>79</sup>

There were efforts to match the privileges of Bombay Army officers with those of officers in other establishments. Subalterns in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Madras Light Cavalry serving in the Deccan were allowed to draw grain for their horses from public stores at the reduced rate of 20 seers per rupee. This provoked a significant outcry among Bombay officers. Madras itself was resentful of the fact that Bombay offered better prices for horses as this drew high quality mounts away from the South.<sup>80</sup> Squabbles over entitlements were endemic between Briton and native alike. Groups of grass-cutters deserted speedily after receiving their wages. As they performed the essential function of preparing horse fodder, their services could not be easily discarded. Without a substantial number on the job it would be impossible to have cavalry mounts fit for duty. Numerous efforts to recruit grass-cutters into the Bombay establishment proved ineffectual as they refused to enlist until they were allowed the same monthly allowance as their colleagues in the Madras establishment. Bombay Castle had no choice but to concede to their demands.<sup>81</sup>

Time limits were imposed on bringing forward any claims to benefits based on past military service. Those not meeting arbitrary deadlines often had their petitions rejected. Company officials argued that

<sup>78</sup> General Order by Government, 28 November 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/12, ff. 5519–21.

<sup>79</sup> Morison to Urquhart, 27 December 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/14, ff. 81–82; Nightingall to ?, 13 January 1818, *ibid.*, ff. 197–98.

<sup>80</sup> Bellasis to Chief Secretary Warden, 25 February 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/16, f. 1005; Conway to the Chief Secretary of Government, 24 August 1818, IOR, MMC P/260/2, f. 8347.

<sup>81</sup> Pierce to Bellasis, 18 October 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/11, ff. 4808–09.

‘if such petitions were noticed, Government would be subjected to endless applications’.<sup>82</sup> The British were far more generous with those currently in their service as immediate rewards were seen as an incentive to ever greater exertions.

Financial inducements remained an essential means of recruitment in western India. Bombay regiments were made up of volunteers from as far away as Hindustan. Yet, the disordered state of the Deccan had made it unsafe to dispatch recruiting parties across such a wide swathe of country.<sup>83</sup> Units of the Bombay Army had to rely increasingly on sources of military labour within their own domains. In order to strengthen the defences of the Northern Konkan, a formal request was dispatched to Joao Bernardo, a Portuguese officer in Bassein, to raise a body of 150 Portuguese militia from his district. Bernardo had been receiving a pension from the Company ever since he had taken advantage of Lord Wellesley’s proclamation that all ‘non-natives’ should quit the service of indigenous armies. Colonial authorities considered Portuguese troops to be a reliable class of people who could perform a variety of services.<sup>84</sup> Rewards were also offered to native inhabitants who brought in recruits.<sup>85</sup> There were efforts to re-engage the services of indigenous recruiting agents employed by the Bombay government on previous occasions. Two rupees were granted for every grenadier and one for every ordinary battalion sepoy they managed to induct into active service. Sepoys within Bombay regiments also engaged in recruiting and were rewarded with promotions if they proved successful in their endeavours.

Bombay officials drew their sepoy recruits from a variety of castes, with recruits from Hindustan valued above all. Recruiting parties were dispatched to North India and Kanara under the command of a European officer. The Bengal and Madras governments provided subsistence for the new recruits until they entered the Bombay Presidency.<sup>86</sup> Civilian recruiting agents received one rupee per man. Payments were disbursed only after the sepoy had remained with his unit for two months. Given there was a need to concentrate regular troops in key operational zones, a number of forts along the Konkan coast had to be garrisoned by *peons* or sepoy recruits on the pension

<sup>82</sup> Committee for Investigation of Pensions, 2 September 1817, IOR, MMC P/259/60, ff. 6923–24.

<sup>83</sup> Lewis to Carnac, 24 January 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/15, ff. 459–61.

<sup>84</sup> Babington to ?, 12 January 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/14, ff. 195–97.

<sup>85</sup> Nightingall to the Board, 29 November 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/12, ff. 5308–09.

<sup>86</sup> Nightingall to ?, 31 January 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/15, ff. 481–83.

list. Considerable numbers of the latter were anxious to obtain such employment. *Pindari* and Maratha bands did not have the capacity to attack these forts. A number were heavily fortified and could be defended by small garrisons in any case. The costs of provisioning such small contingents in a region that had had a bumper rice crop were particularly low. Garrison duty was a form of charitable relief for a number of aged sepoys who did not have to face the burdens and dangers of active duty.<sup>87</sup>

During large-scale operations on a variety of fronts, the Company had to find efficient ways of being generous to those it had to please. In the end, Bombay regiments contributed least to the campaigns of 1817–18. In fact, the Bombay Army would not be able to hold its own until well into the nineteenth century. Much of the fighting was done by units from Madras or Bengal in conjunction with loyal allies.

### **Bargains and pacification**

Colonial administrators had spent several decades building institutions bent on consolidating Britain's military presence in India. Yet, when faced with sustained resistance on the part of local warrior groups, punitive actions conducted by conventional coercive structures proved unable to pacify society. John Malcolm's very notion of an 'empire of opinion' admitted that the effort to propagate notions of British power exceeded actual military capabilities. Indigenous society had to be cowed into submission by a highly visible, heavily militarized state. As a looming threat, open displays of state power might have served a useful purpose but were far less effective when Company armies actually took to the field. Pacification campaigns only achieved success when they combined bargaining with allied armed formations. Allied forces could only be relied upon through the strategic distribution of patronage.

Possession of strategic strongpoints allowed warrior elites to extract lucrative benefits during pacification drives. Company armies operating over vast swathes of rough terrain had neither the time nor the resources to besiege numerous forts. Commanders who opened their gates were granted generous pensions, exemptions, and

<sup>87</sup> Babington to the Chief Secretary, 12 January 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/14, ff. 231–32. Sepoy veterans made up the ranks of several militias. Nightingall to the Board, 23 March 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/17, ff. 1529–30.

guarantees by a colonial state eager to attenuate armed conflict with groups ensconced in remote places. Quite often, fort garrisons were not even homogenous units under the control of a single commander. Motley armed retinues that made up garrisons regularly had rival interests. On occasions when a *qiladar* (fort commander) might wish to capitulate, his troops could insist on continued resistance. Company contingents exploited these divisions to their advantage. But if British officers and Deccan garrisons proved unable to reach an initial settlement these encounters became highly protracted affairs in which tortuous negotiations and violent denouements were common.

Chieftains in northern and central India provided vital assistance to British armies in the field. Benaick Rao of Saugor was obligated by his 'feudal dependency' on the Company to furnish cavalry and supplies. He was granted a generous pension of 250,000 rupees per annum with which to support himself and his followers after the Company decided to annex his domains. Because of the highly mobile nature of the campaigns of 1817–1818 British forces had to discard as much of their supply train as possible in secure locations. When Major General Marshall engaged in a rapid pursuit of one *pindari* band, Dond Khan had no objections to him depositing his heavy guns and baggage at his fort. Commanders in the northern theatre of operations also drew on the resources of local Bundela chiefs.<sup>88</sup> British officers were at great pains not to antagonize the cultural sensibilities of local chieftains who had committed themselves to the Company. The slaughter of cattle for regiments on the march in the presence of rural Brahmans provoked a particularly negative reaction. Such practices were circumscribed as far as possible and, where unavoidable, were carried out in such a manner that generated the least offence possible. Beef was to be obtained from areas inhabited by lower caste communities who proved quite willing to sell their cattle for slaughter.<sup>89</sup>

Grass-cutters and horse keepers serving with Company units around Aurangabad found their contracts promptly renewed as British officers had great difficulty finding locals with the requisite skill set.<sup>90</sup> Other

<sup>88</sup> Adam to Marshall, 5 October 1817, Add. MSS 23758, ff. 14–15; Marshall to Nicol, 21 November 1817, *ibid.*, f. 39; Marshall to Nicol, 1 December 1817, *ibid.*, f. 44; for Benaick Rao's pension, see Wauchope to Benaick Rao, 6 March 1818, Add. MSS 23761, ff. 17–19; on the Bundelas, see Adam to Wauchope, 6 October 1817, *ibid.*, ff. 7–10.

<sup>89</sup> Nicol to Ochterlony, 9 February 1818, Add. MSS 23755, ff. 36–37; Pelly to the Chief Secretary, 9 January 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/14, f. 349.

<sup>90</sup> Conway to the Chief Secretary, 13 April 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/77, f. 4368.

measures were taken to mollify any potential dissent among troops and camp followers. British officers in Bangalore bought up all the rice they could while prices were low. These procurements were used to build up stocks to be drawn on during the course of subsequent campaigns.<sup>91</sup> News of military actions led to substantial price rises as a result of panic in the countryside.

British officers had originally approached certain armed contingents intent on their rapid demobilization. They were surprised to find a number of educated young men of the 'respectable classes' among them who were willing to serve in Company regiments. After thorough screening, a number obtained lucrative situations in the re-formed units.<sup>92</sup> Such opportunities were generally provided to those the British found to be 'genteel'. The lower orders were unceremoniously disarmed and mustered out of armed service.

When Thomas Munro was entrusted with the pacification of the southern Maratha Deccan he found a number of willing collaborators among rural cultivators.<sup>93</sup> The desai of Nepauni was purportedly so hated by the local community that they openly invited Company forces to occupy their villages. In this instance, all they wanted from Munro was his consent to expel the garrisons of their *jagirdar* and a promise not to be reattached to the desai after the campaign.<sup>94</sup> Munro openly recruited the rural population into auxiliary *peon* units that took part in pacification campaigns. These groups knew their worth to British commanders during military operations and negotiated profitable conditions of service. A great number of *peons* were recruited from Muslim and lower caste populations.

Few locals were engaged to go as far as Dharwar, a major base of operation in the southern districts, for less than six rupees a month along with an advance of three rupees on average.<sup>95</sup> *Peons* from Mysore and the Ceded Districts were paid almost as well as regular sepoys. Direct costs for auxiliary units were curtailed by paying them with

<sup>91</sup> Taylor to the Commissary General, 25 January 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/73, ff. 1959–60.

<sup>92</sup> Hamilton to Ochterlony, 24 April 1818, NAI, Military Department (MD), Miscellaneous Records (MR), no. 6, ff. 1160–70.

<sup>93</sup> B. Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, Chapter 6; for Munro's appointment, see Young to Hislop, 20 October 1817, MSS Eur. F151/38.

<sup>94</sup> G.R. Gleig, *The Life of Major-General Thomas Munro . . .*, 3 vols, H. Colburn and R. Bentley, London, 1830, Vol. 2, pp. 266–67.

<sup>95</sup> Lindsay to Munro, 21 December 1817, MSS Eur. F151/38.

revenues seized from enemy territory.<sup>96</sup> By 20 January 1818 there were 4,062 military *peons* employed around Dharwar alone.<sup>97</sup> The rural militia was partly paid in money and partly in land. Munro stated the importance of continuing regular payments to militia units; while they might not have been of much military value they could not be suddenly disbanded for fear of triggering agrarian unrest.<sup>98</sup>

This motley collection of local auxiliaries and regular sepoys engaged in partial combat with the Maratha forts that dotted the rural landscape. Munro claimed most fortified points were garrisoned with contingents of *peons* ranging anywhere between 30 to 400 men. The British had supporters in many fort towns. With the help of the local inhabitants they gradually expelled those parts of the garrison loyal to recalcitrant Maratha chieftains.<sup>99</sup> Chieftains who came to some form of negotiated settlement with the British quickly had their armed contingents reconstituted into units under British control. When Nawab Meer Khan was brought into the Company service, the eight battalions under his command were re-formed into four provincial battalions of ten companies each. Each company in turn was to consist of 100 rank-and-file. Their native commanders were pensioned off and replaced by British officers. Indigenous officers were encouraged to leave military life and were replaced by natives on the Company's payroll.<sup>100</sup>

While violence did occur, negotiated settlements were the usual result of siege operations. One of the largest battles Munro was involved in was the storming of Sholapur on 12 May 1818. The *pettah* was escalated and the garrison, which consisted partly of Arabs, made various attempts to retake it. The enemy infantry was eventually so discouraged that by the late afternoon they had moved off to the West whereupon they were charged and dispersed by Company cavalry. Some 800 of the enemy were killed outright.<sup>101</sup> The few who escaped were mostly disarmed or killed by rural inhabitants.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Munro to Agnew, 18 January 1818, MSS Eur. F151/40. Munro felt that if campaigning had begun a month later there would have been no enemy revenue left for Company forces to collect.

<sup>97</sup> Memorandum on the Military Peons, 20 January 1818, MSS Eur. F151/57.

<sup>98</sup> Munro to Elphinstone, 20 July 1817, MSS Eur. F151/40.

<sup>99</sup> Gleig, *Munro*, Vol. 3, p. 224.

<sup>100</sup> Nicol to Ochterlony, 27 March 1818, Add, MSS 23755, ff. 54–56.

<sup>101</sup> Gleig, *Munro*, Vol. 3, pp. 253–54.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

Far more typical were incidents like the Siege of Belgaum in March 1818. The fort was bombarded and the enemy sallied forth to take advantage of an explosion of one of the Company's batteries that killed six artillerymen. They were promptly driven back and the *qiladar* came out to offer terms. After negotiations, the *qiladar* agreed to capitulate. Company forces were to receive immediate possession of the outer gateway; the fort itself was to be completely evacuated within several days. The garrison was allowed to carry away their arms and private property. Overall losses among the garrison consisted of roughly 70 killed and wounded out of a total strength of 1,600 men.<sup>103</sup> Another fort surrendered when a quarrel broke out after the *qiladar* refused to pay arrears to the families of three men who had recently been killed. Troops in the garrison then proceeded to set fire to the *qiladar*'s home. The flames spread so quickly and caused such havoc that they were forced to capitulate.<sup>104</sup>

Further north, Chitur Singh, styling himself the 'Buncella Rajah', stated that his sovereignty had been annihilated by the *peshwa* and he presently had no means of relief. It was only in the Company's power to arrange the affairs of his government. 'My whole dependence is on you—you are my benefactors,' he stated. Thus, he dispatched his agent who was instructed to agree to any conditions the British proscribed.<sup>105</sup> By presenting himself as a man of authority, the raja hoped to link up to the flow of Company patronage that would allow him to re-establish his power in the guise of a British vassal. *Qiladars* in other regions refused refuge to bands of *pinjaris* being harried by British forces.<sup>106</sup> Conciliatory gestures and written guarantees spared the Company from protracted sieges. Lieutenant Colonel McDowell even submitted a signed pledge to one garrison promising them their lives would be spared.<sup>107</sup> Once they marched out he returned all knives to the Arabs in the garrison, arguing that they were ancestral heirlooms and hence could not be confiscated.

<sup>103</sup> Munro to Conway, 14 April 1818, MSS Eur. F151/40.

<sup>104</sup> E. Lake, *Journals of the Sieges of the Madras Army in the Years 1817, 1818, and 1819 with Observations on the System According to Which Such Operations Have Usually Been Conducted in India and Statement of Improvements that Appear Necessary*, Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, London, 1825, p. 97.

<sup>105</sup> Nepean to Elphinstone, 8 January 1818, MSS Eur. D1095.

<sup>106</sup> Donkin to the Marquess of Hastings, 17 December 1817, Add. MSS 23759, ff. 17–18.

<sup>107</sup> McDowell to the Adjutant General, 17 June 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/83, ff. 7368–69.

On 18 October 1817, Munro informed Sheo Rao, then based in Sundur, of his intended march and offered him a *jagir* of 8,000 rupees in any part of the Company's domains if he would surrender. Munro admitted this was an inadequate sum for the loss of his district but, as he was aware that there would be demands to provide for the chieftain's family and dependents, he thought it best to begin with a lower offer. Sheo Rao asked for a *jagir* of 12,000 rupees. Eventually, the pair settled on a 10,000 rupee *jagir* from which Sheo Rao could make provisions for his relations and followers. The fort was handed over without incident. Sundur had been built by Haidar and Tipu; it was considered so strong that no native Maratha power could have stormed it. Munro confessed that even the 12,000 rupee holding he demanded would not have been adequate compensation for the concessions Sheo Rao eventually made.<sup>108</sup>

British officers occasionally expressed regret that the Marathas did not put up more of a fight as a number of their forts were formidable structures. On occasion a lucky shot during bombardments would detonate a fort's magazine and result in immediate surrender.<sup>109</sup> Other forts along the Konkan coast had long been in a parlous state of repair. They were originally built for the purpose of repelling piratical raids from the ocean and now served little purpose other than providing refuge to local inhabitants in fear of marauding bands. The Company was reluctant to demolish them because cultivators might otherwise flee to parts beyond the reach of revenue collectors.<sup>110</sup> Rural communities sought sanctuary wherever it was offered. After capturing a hostile fort, the British commander found that a number of locals were housed inside of it.<sup>111</sup> Once rural populations relocated to other domains, Bombay officials had to provide repeated assurances of their safety to draw them back again.

Where forts were marked for demolition they provided work for a number of artisans and menial labourers. The dismantling of a collection of forts in the Konkan required the services of 20 miners, ten stonecutters, four carpenters, and two smiths from the vicinity.<sup>112</sup> Strongpoints further inland were of great strategic value. Most had been built on high elevations and a number could only be accessed via

<sup>108</sup> Gleig, *Munro*, Vol. 3, pp. 288–90.

<sup>109</sup> McDowell to the Assistant Adjutant General, 10 June 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/83, ff. 7362–63.

<sup>110</sup> Dickson to Brooks, 1 February 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/16, ff. 904–05.

<sup>111</sup> Prother to Leighton, 15 March 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/17, ff. 1450–51.

<sup>112</sup> Nightingall to the Board, 3 March 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/16, ff. 1252–53.



precarious roads through extensive ravines. They were generally quite well provisioned. Had fort commanders chosen to make a stand they would have caused Company forces a great deal of trouble.

British officers claimed the capture of such well-positioned forts without encountering significant resistance was indicative of the ignorance or cowardice of the enemy.<sup>113</sup> It is far more likely that the favourable terms offered by Company commanders made protracted resistance unnecessary. Warrior chieftains were being offered a comfortable and dignified place in an emerging colonial order. They do not seem to have had any great sense of attachment to a way of life that was no longer viable. A show of resistance might bring better terms but, if pushed too far, would only lead to ruin. Maratha commanders could not rely on alternate sources of military employment. The resources of indigenous states were either being curtailed or harnessed to the strategic interests of the Company state. The rewards of discretion were substantial enough to induce the majority of warrior elites throughout the Deccan to disarm and exit the military labour market.

On occasion, violence was more accidental than intentional. During an assault on the fort of Talnair in 1818 the garrison called for quarter. The *qiladar* met the storming party at the main gateway to negotiate terms. Soldiers advanced into a gated enclosure and attempted to roughly disarm the Arab garrison whereupon an affray broke out in which nearly all those who had entered the enclosure were either killed or wounded. The remainder of the storming party then entered the enclosure and massacred all members of the garrison they found inside.<sup>114</sup> Edward Lake, a Company officer, lamented this outcome, stating '[had] some ambassador more polished than a British Grenadier, and one acquainted with the language and customs of the Arabs, . . . preceded the storming party, to explain to them the terms on which they were to be admitted to quarter, and to prevent the possibility of such affrays as that which took place, and the loss of lives that necessarily resulted from it'.<sup>115</sup>

Most Company officers and men appear to have been driven by little more than a desire for plunder. When the fort at Chauda, southwest of Nagpur, fell, one officer made off with 30,000 rupees worth of silver

<sup>113</sup> Lake, *Journals*, pp. 10–11, 108–09; Prother to Leighton, 15 February 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/15, ff. 815–18.

<sup>114</sup> Lake, *Journals*, pp. 53–55.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57; see also East India Company, *Pindarree and Maharatta War, 1817 and 1818: Claims of the Marquis of Hastings and the Grand Army (Appendix)*, London, 1824, pp. 244–45; Hislop to Elliott, 28 February 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/74, ff. 2763–64.

plate. Henry Bevan regretted that he was rather late in reaching the spoils but still managed to walk away with a silver tub worth 300 to 400 rupees. Sepoys also looted immense quantities of bullocks, clothes, and brasswares.<sup>116</sup>

Military actions against Maratha chiefs only came after considerable delay. Munro stated that since a number of chieftains were negotiating with the British it would be best to defer the commencement of hostilities for some time. Although their property might be restored to them after the war, temporarily occupying it might produce resentment that would complicate any future settlement.

British objectives were geared toward assertions of dominance rather than the conquest of territory. At the same time, Munro felt that if districts were restored to their former *jagirdars* the local inhabitants would not assist the British in their pacification efforts for fear of punishment from landed elites. To conceal the Company's true intentions in order to turn local populations against their *jagirdars* would be profoundly unfair but highly expedient. If chiefs refused to surrender, the British were not beneath arming the local populace in an effort to frighten *jagirdars* into submission.<sup>117</sup> Outsourcing crucial military services to local communities remained as essential as ever. Where there was a shortage of European officers, the British readily turned to recruiting indigenous inhabitants who had knowledge of the local terrain.<sup>118</sup> At times, Company regiments were entirely dependent on local villages to obtain supplies of fresh water.

*Pindari* chiefs who curried favour with the Company also obtained its patronage. Several chose to live off the bounty of the colonial state in North India. Rajun Pindara appeared to have no legitimate claims for arrears in his pension. Yet, as an indulgence the governor-general complied with his application and he was granted a sum of 900 rupees.<sup>119</sup> *Pindari* chieftains Kureem Khan and Kander Buksh were granted asylum along with their families and dependents in Farrukhabad. Generous land grants were provided for their

<sup>116</sup> Bevan to Adams, 22 May 1818, Add. MSS 23762, ff. 27–29; for shares of prize money due to the men of His Majesty's 25<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons, see Wood to Craigie, 31 January 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/77, f. 4285.

<sup>117</sup> Munro to Elphinstone, 3 February 1818, MSS Eur. F151/40.

<sup>118</sup> Bowler to Simons, 21 May 1818, IOR, MMC P/259/80, ff. 5760–62.

<sup>119</sup> Metcalfe to Stoneham, 7 December 1819, IOR, Board's Collections (BC) F/4/787/21392, ff. 21–22; on resettlement policies toward *pindari* chiefs more generally, see Roy, *Origin*, pp. 297–307.

maintenance.<sup>120</sup> Several years later when a dacoity was committed against the household of Kander Buksh in Goruckpore colonial officials arranged a donation of 4,000 rupees in compensation.<sup>121</sup> Many of those who failed to make such arrangements were later re-categorized as ‘thugs’ and subjected to further bouts of repression by an increasingly hostile colonial state.<sup>122</sup>

### Petitions and military patronage

By the later stages of the war there was little eagerness to face down forces that continued to resist. British commanders frequently left them to wither on the vine until they agreed to come to terms. Officers in the field undertook various economy measures to cut transportations costs. John Malcolm ordered a drastic reduction of rice stores attached to Lieutenant-Colonel Collin’s brigade from a supply of six months to six weeks. Excess rice was sold off on the march. This both cut the cost of carriage cattle and reduced losses due to spoilage. If there were a sudden need to supplement rice stores, various grain merchants throughout the countryside could readily make up potential shortfalls. Stock reductions combined with curtailing the number of pack cattle attached to battery trains substantially reduced financial outlays.<sup>123</sup> The British also tapped into civilian horse breeders to supplement mounted contingents. Efforts to direct patronage flows towards civilian breeders indicated an increasing unwillingness on the part of Company armies to deal with mobile warrior groups. Colonial authorities in the Deccan preferred to subsidize sedentary communities who utilized animal power for the purposes of cultivation.

*Rayats* (rural cultivators) typically sent one or two mounts to Company units in order to raise additional funds to help meet rental payments. Munro hoped that once horse dealers found a slackening

<sup>120</sup> Ricketts to Newnham, 23 April 1818, IOR, BC F/4/729/19772, f. 11; Newnham to Ricketts, 19 May 1818, *ibid.*, f. 25.

<sup>121</sup> Extract of a Political Letter from Bengal, 12 September 1823, IOR, BC F/4/830/21971, ff. 1–2.

<sup>122</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1770–1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 160, 176; Radhika Singha, ‘Providential’ Circumstances: The Thugee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation’, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1993, pp. 97–102.

<sup>123</sup> Malcolm to Doveton, 5 June 1818, MSS Eur. C854; John Malcolm to Francis Warden, 4 July 1818, *ibid.*

of demand due to British disarmament of petty chieftains they would turn their capital to some other trade. He felt that *rayats* would benefit from a British-imposed peace as no other group suffered more from the contending armies that laid waste to their fields.<sup>124</sup> The British could not afford to turn away from mobile elements in local society all at once. Commissariat officers and collectors in the northern districts of Gujarat asked horse dealers to bring their mounts to local assembly points. If they were found serviceable, native dealers were promised a fair price. Indigenous contractors in turn would lobby to monopolize the supply of horses from Kandahar and Sind.<sup>125</sup> Campaigns of internal pacification could be just as lucrative for itinerant dealers servicing the military economy as more conventional modes of warfare.

Several merchants actively petitioned for contracts to provision Company forces. Others like Emajee Sasoo and Rajanah Malloo eagerly sought employment in commissariat services. They had both served as bullock drivers as far back as the siege of Seringapatam and then with the Army of the Deccan under Arthur Wellesley. At the conclusion of the campaign, they had returned to Bombay where they worked for four years clearing ditches around the town. Cheated of their full wages by their employer, they had spent almost all of their savings in fruitless legal actions to recoup their losses. Reduced to desperate circumstances they now begged for a place as army bearers or in the cattle department in consideration of their previous service.<sup>126</sup>

Another local named Sadnundrow stated he had organized a force of 1,000 men on the Company's behalf. He asked that they be incorporated into regional military forces under his command. Most of the men could ride horses and had combat experience from previous campaigns with indigenous rulers. As they were currently without employment they were willing to fight for reasonable wages.<sup>127</sup>

### ***Banjara bands and military provisions***

Armies ranging across wide stretches of territory required constant infusions of food, forage, and weapons. Warring states readily turned

<sup>124</sup> Gleig, *Munro*, Vol. 2, pp. 270–71.

<sup>125</sup> Bellasis to Chief Secretary Warden, 11 March 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/17, ff. 1410–13; for attempts to monopolize the supply of horses from the northwest, see Baker to Bellasis, 4 November 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/11, ff. 4885–86.

<sup>126</sup> Petition of Razaram Tooleram and Raguoath Khushall, 25 August 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/10, ff. 4428–31.

<sup>127</sup> Petition of Sadnundrow, 8 November 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/11, ff. 4955–56.

to the portage services offered by *banjara* (itinerant hauler) bands. Constant mobility put these groups in touch with a wide variety of socioeconomic centres, thus deepening their connections with numerous merchants, rulers, and stockbreeders.<sup>128</sup> Such linkages allowed *banjara* chiefs to assemble supply convoys in areas removed from conflict zones. They directed a constant stream of supply-bearing bullocks towards armed contingents in the field. As a result, political elites did not have to invest scarce resources in the creation of conventional commissariat services. Peripatetic groups circulating across the subcontinent provided for and profited from the armies of sedentary states.

Company armies were no exception to this general trend. Colonial authorities failed to construct adequate commissariat services during wars of conquest and pacification. *Banjara* bands provided essential portage services to standing regiments. As a result, British officials had to negotiate a series of contractual arrangements with *banjara* bands. The massive outflow of resources to indigenous transporters enriched their chiefs and provided many haulers with a means of subsistence. In addition, Company contingents provided protection for *banjara* herds on the march. Chiefs also used their alliance with the British to rustle cattle from enemy territory. These benefits enriched mobile sectors of the population at the expense of a colonial state that was generally seen as hostile to nomadic forms of existence.<sup>129</sup> Military campaigns necessitated the dispersal of patronage to mobile groups that supplied regular armies. Concerted efforts to settle *banjaras* would not begin until the middle of the nineteenth century.

*Banjaras* provisioning Company units during the Maratha-*pindari* campaigns were allowed to fatten their herds on pasturage under British protection. Several bands also plundered the baggage trains of Company contingents.<sup>130</sup> All the while, relations with bazaar merchants remained precarious. Several bazaar dealers complained

<sup>128</sup> R.G. Varady, 'North Indian Banjaras: Their Evolution as Transporters', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1–2, 1979, pp. 1–18.

<sup>129</sup> L.D. Satya, 'Colonial Sedentarisation and Subjugation: The Case of the Banjaras of Berar 1850–1900', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1997, pp. 314–36; on the role of indigenous haulers during the Second Anglo-Maratha War, see Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns*, pp. 25, 75, 88, 95, 98, 192.

<sup>130</sup> Morris to the Adjutant General of the Army, 24 September 1817, IOR, BMC P/357/10, f. 4433; Holt to Hislop, 14 November 1817, IOR, MMC P/259/74, ff. 2598–99; for raids by dacoits on the supply trains of subsidiary forces, see Carfrae to Doveton, 12 April 1817, IOR, MMC P/259/75, ff. 3011–12.

that the local collector would not allow them to collect rice from farmers to whom they had previously advanced considerable sums of money. The dealers claimed they had entered into binding contracts with the rural inhabitants that entitled them to a portion of the harvest. The local collector protested that his priorities were to see that military units within his district had a ready supply of grain, hence he would not allow foodstuffs to be removed from areas under his jurisdiction until buyers had paid government duties on them.<sup>131</sup>

### Reformed regiments, benefits, and pensions

As the drive to disarm warrior groups in the Deccan drew to a close John Malcolm laid out plans for the future composition and role of Anglo-Indian armies. The British did provide pensions to the chief military commanders of Baji Rao II. These people were considered too important to be excluded from Company patronage. *Vakils* (representatives), minor chiefs, and experienced bureaucrats were also all granted monetary compensation.<sup>132</sup> Indians in Company armies continued to receive monetary benefits. As early as 1810, there had been substantial pay raises for indigenous officers. Pay levels were increased in accordance with seniority. The governor-general claimed such measures were necessary to demonstrate the value of native subalterns in Company service. The British hoped monetary incentives would inspire sepoys in the Bombay establishment to strive for the rank of *subedar* through motivated and loyal service.<sup>133</sup>

Malcolm had initially been reluctant to place British officers in command of elite native units like Mysore's Sillardar Horse because he felt this would reduce the centrality of the military aristocracy in princely states.<sup>134</sup> An idle class of military servitors would in turn diminish the prestige of the raja in the eyes of his subjects. Nevertheless, British officer-envoys were a vital conduit through which princely contingents could be monitored and yoked to Company interests. Malcolm eventually accepted the policy of implanting British

<sup>131</sup> Robertson to Brigadier General Smith, 1 February 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/15, ff. 548–49; Marriott to Robertson, 3 February 1818, *ibid.*, ff. 764–66.

<sup>132</sup> The largest number of pensions were granted to those who had provided military intelligence. ? to Metcalfe, 28 October 1819, MSS Eur. F88/407, ff. 34–35.

<sup>133</sup> Extract from General Orders, Bombay Head Quarters, 11 July 1810, MSS Eur. D666.

<sup>134</sup> Malcolm to Adam, 23 June 1818, IOR, MMC P/260/1, ff. 8024–29.

personnel as supervisors of princely military units provided they took the views of indigenous commanders into consideration.

Veteran corps served a variety of purposes. These units were ostensibly composed of men who had served their time and were no longer considered fit for active duty.<sup>135</sup> The existence of invalid units also guaranteed the fidelity of indigenous soldiers on active service. It would be a comfort for sepoys to know they would have an institutionalized support structure to turn to in their old age. Malcolm stressed the lack of similar institutions in the armies of native princes.<sup>136</sup> He also considered it essential that irregular units of horse should not be drawn down too rapidly. Simply put, it would cost more money to extirpate roving bands of unemployed horsemen than to continue subsidizing them. Reductions were to take place gradually. The Company would play an active part in finding further employment for auxiliary troops discharged from its service. Indigenous chieftains played an essential role in this respect. Malcolm contended, 'As policy compels us to destroy with one hand we must raise with another and the Chiefs we elevate are the natural absorbents of our Irregulars.'<sup>137</sup>

Remuneration for regular army units continued to be a top priority. The days of a Company presence confined to coastal enclaves were long gone. Before the 1790s most regular sepoys in the South had been recruited and served near their homes. Proximity to their personal property allowed them to guard it more effectively. They were never far removed from familial affairs during periods of peace between the Company and Mysore. Officers were often the proprietors of the units under their command and could make adjustments accordingly to the needs of any particular body of men. Indeed, one British commander felt the Madras Army was little more than a local militia for much of the eighteenth century. By 1820, it was responsible for far-flung dominions and a number of princely states. Overseas commitments in places like Ceylon stretched its reserves of manpower to the limit. Hence, there was a greater need for more centralized control of regiments that traversed, guarded, and garrisoned vast tracts of terrain.<sup>138</sup> In order to have complacent sepoys moved further away from their places of origin, wages had to be adjusted according to the

<sup>135</sup> Malcolm to Young, ? May 1818, MSS Eur. F88/383, f. 3.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 3-4.

<sup>138</sup> For a report on wages and the place of sepoy regiments in an enlarged Madras Presidency, see Conway to Wood, n.d., IOR, MMC P/259/83, ff. 7601, 7605-07, 7612-14.

type of service a particular unit provided. Native horse artillery units were not only responsible for their mounts but the upkeep of their guns as well. This entitled them to higher wages than cavalry units who were not responsible for equipment. Madras regiments were now part of a standing army engaged in imperial control.

Malcolm considered the Madras Native Infantry to be highly disciplined. This is remarkable given that the Vellore mutiny had only occurred a dozen years prior to the final Anglo-Maratha war. Continuous service in the field had also rendered its European officer corps highly efficient. Reports stress the kindness and consideration with which sepoys were treated. Punishments were rare; the use of the rattan was prohibited by General Orders. While Madras sepoys were generally of lesser stature than their Bengal counterparts they were capable of courageous service and bore any fatigue. Desertion was nearly unknown.<sup>139</sup> As the Madras Presidency was engaged in extensive overseas operations until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, it had to attract various people with particular skills into its service. Elephant catchers from as far afield as Chittagong were contracted to ply their trade on the island of Ceylon.<sup>140</sup> Foreign military ventures made servicing the manpower and transportation needs of the Madras Army highly remunerative.

The families of sepoy veterans expected financial relief from the colonial state once initial recipients of a pension passed on. When sepoy contingents suffered heavy losses in conflict zones special committees were formed to compile lists of soldiers who had perished to make due provisions for their families.<sup>141</sup> A number of women bereft of their husbands took the initiative by petitioning the government directly. Rambaj, recently widowed, informed British officials that her husband had faithfully served the Company for 32 years as a native assistant surgeon for which he had been granted a pension equivalent to half his pay. On his death, he was survived by his wife and five young children, four of whom were daughters. As they had little hope of providing for their own subsistence, the Company continued to pay out his pension.<sup>142</sup> During the Deccan campaigns of 1817–1818, two Muslim sisters who were purportedly next of kin to a sepoy recently

<sup>139</sup> Malcolm to Young, ? May 1818, MSS Eur. F88/383, ff. 7, 12–13.

<sup>140</sup> Morison to Wood, 19 July 1817, IOR, MMC P/259/60, ff. 6993–95.

<sup>141</sup> General Orders by the Commander-in-Chief, 24 December 1817, IOR, MMC P/259/74, ff. 2798–99.

<sup>142</sup> Petition of Rambaj, n.d., IOR, BMC P/354/32, ff. 4711–13.



killed in a brawl after six years of service in the Marine Battalion asked that his savings be transferred to them.<sup>143</sup> Luximon Cargawanah had served in the bodyguard corps of the governor of Bombay for upwards of 50 years. During his service he had received two wounds on his arms and one on his side. He had recently lost his only son from whom he had expected support in his old age. Now bereft, he requested and was granted a pension.

Monetary awards were also used to diffuse social tensions among kin groups of the soldiery. The families of a handful of indigenous officers killed by European troops were placated with pensions.<sup>144</sup> One widow was deprived of her deceased husband's pension due to the duplicity of her in-laws. In this case, a series of petitions to the Company led to the restoration of monetary awards to the aggrieved party but countless others were doubtless cheated of just compensation.<sup>145</sup> Numerous Madras and Bombay pensioners found better lives in the towns of northern India and arranged to have their pensions collected in their new domiciles.<sup>146</sup> Veterans depended on the colonial state apparatus to arrange the transfer of funds to locales thousands of miles away from their original points of collection.

Bureaucratized forms of supplication through the submission of petitions are indicative of the increasingly formalized nature of Company patronage. Those who did not conform to the proper procedures or could not make an adequate case to share in the bounty of the state were turned away. Colonial authorities had been far more generous in the distribution of benefits during its earlier wars of conquest. The need to attract a continuous influx of personnel resulted in a policy of extensive short-term handouts to whomever could meet immediate military requirements. With the consolidation of Company power, there was a turn towards long-term commitments to support selective groups who had consistently demonstrated their loyalty to the state. Company officials were willing to provide monetary pensions to a veteran's family, provided his surviving kin acknowledged their continuing dependence on the Company's charity. The flow of benefits

<sup>143</sup> Petition of Begum Bhicco and Tatima of Bombay, n.d., IOR, BMC P/357/10, ff. 4357-59.

<sup>144</sup> Petition of Luximon Cargawanah, 3 February 1818, IOR, BMC P/357/15, f. 567; Conway to the Chief Secretary to Government, 7 August 1818, IOR, MMC P/260/2, ff. 8331-12.

<sup>145</sup> Dyce to Elliott, 2 September 1817, IOR, MMC P/259/73, ff. 2110-12.

<sup>146</sup> List of Madras and Bombay Pensioners Residing in Hindustan, 1820-1847, NAI, MD, MR, no. 7.

to veteran families assured the cohesion of kin groups that had a vested interest in British rule.

Madras Army personnel had a particular advantage in gleaning financial benefits. The conventional military capacities of the Bombay Presidency remained deficient until well into the nineteenth century. This provided Madras officers with an opening to provide essential military services throughout western India and accrue monetary compensation accordingly. As Bombay began to construct its own sub-imperial domain in West Asia and the Persian Gulf after 1830, it remained dependent on Fort St George to provide it with sepoy to man its garrisons. Madras regiments proved only too willing to take up garrison duties in western India as a means of increasing their allowances.<sup>147</sup> This allowed Bombay to divert its resources into new fields of conquest while Madras units obtained remuneration for light duties. In order to keep sepoy complacent, the Company was compelled to constantly distribute resources to the soldiers it needed to make the empire function. Patronage was the cornerstone of renewing and sustaining its military personnel.

## Conclusion

Although central directives spoke of the need to thoroughly pacify the Deccan, both senior administrators and local commanders engaged in fluid exchanges with their opponents. While such exchanges could result in violence, the British were intent on expansion through negotiation.

The colonial state was far more callous in its treatment of wandering *pindaris*. These bands were often viewed as freebooters in search of plunder. Lord Hastings felt that independent mobile formations were a security threat to sedentary communities that provided the Company with land revenue. Mobilizing cultivators and rural notables proved the most effective means of depriving bandit gangs of shelter and resources.<sup>148</sup> The disarmament of superfluous military labour was a collective effort that encompassed a variety of armed formations

<sup>147</sup> Bombay Castle to Fort St George, 7 September 1838, NAI, Foreign Department (FD), Secret Proceedings (SP), nos. 48–49, ff. 11–12; Bombay Castle to the Secretary to Government, 11 September 1838, NAI, FD, SP, nos. 50–51, ff. 5–6; Fort William to Fort St George, 17 October 1838, NAI, FD, SP, no. 52, f. 4.

<sup>148</sup> The East India Company, *Pindarree and Maharatta War*, pp. 183–84.

assembled and subsidized by British commanders. Pacification, like conquest, depended on maintaining armed coalitions of allies and auxiliaries.

No such pacification of agrarian elites and armed rural communities took place in Hindustan until the late 1850s. Bengal Army sepoys continued to be the central component of the Company's coercive apparatus in North India. The persistence of semi-independent armed elements in local society was an essential prerequisite for the provision of the high-caste 'aristocratic' soldiers prized above all others. Substantial concentrations of military force remained outside Company control in North India, while warriors further to the South were gradually locked into colonial institutions. The Maratha Deccan and the southern districts were eventually pacified because the British no longer required the armed services of independent war bands. In terms of its soldiers and society, Hindustan would increasingly become the exception rather than the rule.