

Imperial Solution of a Colonial Problem: Bhils of Khandesh up to c. 1850

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Khandesh region in Maharashtra is an extensive plain interspersed with ranges of hills. It is nearly surrounded by broad chains of mountains covered with vegetation. It was inhabited by the Bhils. They lived in hovels which often crested the tops of isolated hills where approach was immediately discovered and easily defended. They shifted to new habitats after a few weeks or months. Turbulent by disposition and skilful hunters by necessity, they obtained their supplies of roots, berries and game from the jungles. As Captain D. C. Graham put it, ‘To barter anything but what was reaped by the hand of violence was an offence against the tribe; to cultivate or engage in mechanical craft deeply degrading; and no employment was considered to be correct which in any way interfered with the cherished burden of the long-bow, and the ponderous sheaf of arrows’.¹

¹ Historical sketch of the Bheel tribes inhabiting the province of Khandesh; accompanied by an outline, down to the year 1843, of the principles of the conciliatory line of policy which has been observed towards these rude tribes, by the Bombay Government, from the year 1825 included in rough notes containing historical, statistical, and other information connected with the petty states of Junjeera, and Jowar, in the Tanna collectorate; Sucheen, Dhurumpoor, and Bansda, in the Surat collectorate; Cambay, in the Khaira collectorate, Penth in the Nasik sub-collectorate; and the petty native states under the control of the collectorate of Khandesh; historical narrative of the city of Gambay, from Sanskrit and Persian books, and oral tradition; comprising also, a brief sketch of the province of Guzrat at various periods; observations on the ‘bore’ or rushing tide in the northern parts of the Gulf of Cambay, and the entrances of the Mahee and Suburmuttee rivers; proceedings connected with the question of succession to the Penth estate, in consequence of the death, in the year 1837 without male issue of Dulput Rao, raja of that petty principality; historical sketch of the Bheel tribes inhabiting the province Khandesh, accompanied by an outline, down to the close of the year 1855, of the principles of the conciliatory line of policy which from the year 1825, has been observed towards these rude tribes by the Bombay Government. See R. Hughes Thomas (compiled and edited), *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government (New series)* (Bombay: Bombay Education Society’s Press, 1856), No. 26, p. 206.

The term 'Bhils' was often applied to all those who led a lawless life and resided in the deep jungles. The Bhils could be broadly divided into three classes. First, the hill Bhils who were almost all under different *naiks* or chiefs and were both turbulent and dangerous. Second, there were the *kothuls* or the Bhils in the plains, who although of the same tribe as the former, were not equally formidable, and were scattered in villages and holding the position of *jagalyas* or watchmen. Some of them were also engaged in agriculture. Although at times they did become a party to gang robberies, their fixed abodes acted as a constraint. Hence, they were not as turbulent as the hill Bhils. The third class was composed of the *Turvees*. These Bhils were originally Hindus and converted to Islam during the reign of Aurangzeb. They were troublesome to deal with whether by conciliation or by drastic action. There were some other tribes also (like *Nehals*, *Bheelalies*, etc.,) which were included in the generic term of Bhils. But they were comparatively unimportant. Precise data regarding the population of the Bhils in Khandesh are not available. In early 1830s, it was estimated that at about one-eighth of the total population of Khandesh, the Bhils numbered 55,000 or so.²

When the British conquered Khandesh from the Peshwa in 1818, they found the Bhils to be a turbulent tribe. This was partly because of the historical antecedent. The military operations of the Maratha chieftains followed by the famine of 1802–03 depopulated the villages and threw the lands out of cultivation. The Bhils could neither exist amidst ruins nor procure food from the needy cultivators. They began to do highway robberies and live in bands either in the mountains or took possession of villages. The revenue contractors were unwilling to spend money on maintaining soldiers to protect the country. The Bhils started attacking towns also, carrying off cattle and hostages. The territory was in '... a complete state of anarchy, being plundered alternately by Bhils, Pindarees, and rapacious leaders professing allegiance to the Maharatta Government, so that the villages were rapidly becoming desolate, and the country covered with jungle'.³ But, as William Chaplin, Commissioner in Deccan, commented, '... the

² Letter dt. Malligaum, April 30, 1833 from Boyd, Collector in Khandesh, to Charles Norris, Chief Secretary to Government, Bombay. Political Deptt., 1830. Vol. 14/398. Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (hereafter MSAM). By 1848 it had increased to around 73,000. Thomas, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, p. 240.

³ Letter from Covans, Bhil Agent, Khandesh to W. J. Boyd, Collector of Khandesh, Camp Kunur, dt. 17/10/1831, Judicial Deptt., 1831. Vol. 3/217, MSAM.

visitations of Pindaries however formidable are much less to be dreaded than those of the Bheels . . . The incursions of Pindaries may be compared to the flights of locusts which at uncertain intervals terribly devastate wherever they alight, but happily their descents are only partial, occasional & transient. The havoc of the Bheels on the contrary extends to every part of the unfortunate country within their range, &c. is a perpetually recurring evil; they are as it were a permanent indigenous part from the ravages of which the traveller (*sic*), the merchant, &c. the peaceful cultivator of the plains of Khandesh are never long in security. The tigers which swarm in every part of this half desolate Province, are indeed infinitely less baneful to its prosperity than these outlaws whom it is more difficult to reclaim from their savage nature than those wild animals.⁴

Using swords, arrows, stones, axes, spears, etc., they ravaged the villages and plundered the travellers. They treated such activities as a part of their huks or rights. Under the Maratha rule, attempts were made to militarily subdue them but they failed. This was because of two principal reasons, viz., the Bhils had a contempt for death when involved in a military engagement; and secondly, when their cause became desperate, they retired to the inaccessible hills. Efforts made at supposed conciliation were a ruse. When the Bhils gathered to negotiate a settlement with the government, it ended in a general massacre. Hence, a negotiated settlement with them was also not possible.

The British found that about 50 rapacious Bhil chiefs held sway over more than 5,000 ruthless followers whose subsistence depended on pillage and murderous forays in Khandesh. Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, suggested to Col. Briggs, the Political Agent, to drive the Bhils into the hills. But Briggs pointed out that this plan would encourage them to resort to plunder.⁵ He also pointed out that the Bhils of the hills as well as of the plains were similar and that they became residents of the hills or plains according to circumstances. Hence, he preferred to make settlements with some Bhil chiefs in 1818. The chiefs were sanctioned pensions in return for which they agreed to maintain peace in their neighbourhood. The first Bhil

⁴ Letter dt. Poona, April 18, 1825 to Newnham (no. 93 of 1825). Political Deptt., 1825. Vol. 29/192, MSAM.

⁵ Sushma Varma, Mountstuart Elphinstone in Maharashtra (1801–1827) A Study of the Territories Conquered from the Peshwas (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Co. 1981), p. 162. Also see Kenneth Ballhatchet, Social Policy and Social Change in Western India 1817–1820 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 124–34 and 213–34.

chief with whom Briggs came to an agreement was Gumani Naik who had 230 Bhils under him and controlled the area around the Sendhwa pass which was in the most important trade route between Khandesh and Malwa.⁶ But the chiefs violated these agreements and continued to create a law and order problem. In 1821 a military expedition was undertaken to dislodge some refugee Bhils who did not take to the quiet life of cultivators and watchmen. More than 200 prisoners were made and sent to Thana. This was done with the active assistance of villagers. But the Court of Directors the Bombay Government instructed that unless there was evidence for a regular trial, the prisoners should be released. The Bhils were released and they returned to Khandesh. They murdered all those villagers whom they suspected of aiding their apprehension.⁷ This is only one example to show that beyond the immediate influence of the British troops, there was hardly any protection for life and property.

The situation remained like this in the coming years. Murders, robberies and house-breaking continued to take place. Cattle and hostages were driven off from the very centre of the province. Threats were invariably written on scraps of paper, left dangling round the neck of the idols of Hanuman and the villagers took them seriously so that the kunbis declined to receive the taccavi loans when their property was utterly insecure. John Briggs, Political Agent in Khandesh, wrote: '... the Inhabitants could if they exerted themselves seize every Bheel in the Hills and deliver them up to Government in ten days, if they chose, but the people... generally have been so accustomed to submit to every species of depredation... that their minds are entirely subdued by fear, and they are incapable of rousing themselves to any exertion...'⁸ The Bhils believed that the government shrank from encountering their marauding bands, or following them to their mountain hutties, i.e., clusters of Bhil huts.

Briggs adopted a plan to subdue the Bhils. It comprised stopping the supplies of food which were chiefly drawn from the plains, cutting off the Bhils who attempted to sally forth for plunder, and making vigorous attacks on the hills to which the chiefs retired. But the Bhils

⁶ For an account of the settlements which he made with the individual Bhils and other details, see Arvind M. Deshpande, *John Briggs in Maharashtra (A study of District Administration under Early British Rule)*, (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), Cha. III.

⁷ Evans Bell, *Memoir of General John Briggs, of the Madras Army; with Comments on some of his Words and Works*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), pp. 80–1.

⁸ Letter dt. Dhulia, Dec. 12, 1819. Political Deptt., 1821, Vol. 4/8, MSAM.

residing in the plains acted as spies of those living on the hills. When the troops marched against the hill Bhils, many of them came to the villages or remained in the jungles near them where the inhabitants connived at their concealment.⁹ In the military engagements the Bhils were killed and also captured. But in most cases they were succeeded by others equally ferocious. When they ran to the hills after committing the crimes, '...the troops were obliged to fire at the fugitives; by these means the death(s) of women are some times occasioned; a circumstance which must always create horror and pity, but which it is impossible by any management to be quite secure against.'¹⁰

The captured Bhils were sent to Bombay and from there to Malwan, Sindhudurg, Ahmedabad, Anjar and as far as Penang. Many of them died on the journey. J. G. Hancock, In-charge of Bhil Prisoners, reported in 1823 that three Bhils died on board a ship from Bombay to Sindhudurg. W. Newham, Chief Secretary to the Government, also regretted in the same year that of the 238 Bhils sent from Khandesh, as many as 172 had died.¹¹ Some others escaped from their captors. Those Bhils who came out of the prisons felt neither shame nor remorse. All the while, officers commanding the troops complained bitterly of the loss of their men through sickness. The territory was overgrown with the jungle. Malaria and Cholera seemed almost perpetual. Medical facilities were poor. Both the geography and the want of its knowledge made the expeditions a costly failure. An auxiliary force was raised. But it was disbanded after a brief and useless existence.

Proclamations were issued that the crimes already committed would be forgiven, and that in the future those Bhils who returned to the plains would be looked after at the expense of the village. But these first offers of amnesty were rejected. The Bhils had a bitter experience of such offers earlier made by the Maratha Government.

Military operations were resumed but on a reduced scale of harassing the gangs in the hills and of not allowing them rest in any one locality. Large rewards were offered for heinous offenders. Fatigued by the hardships of their miserable existence and finding their raids both harder and less fruitful, they understood that the government

⁹ Letter dt. Dhulia, June 18, 1821 from Briggs to Chaplin. Political Deptt., 1821, Vol. 4/8, MSAM.

¹⁰ Minute of Mountstuart Elphinstone dt. nil. *Political Deptt.*, 1824, Vol. 6/147, MSAM.

¹¹ Political Deptt., 1823. Vol, 10/105., MSAM.

not only had the means of restraining their future depredations, but also wished to promote their welfare. Hence, they became amenable to negotiation with it.

Mountstuart Elphinstone visualized their reclamation if English officers could be brought into intimate relations with them to acquaint themselves with their habits and in time win their confidence. It was his desire to turn them from their lawless pursuits to a gainful employment.¹² He foresaw the true solution of the problem by a two-pronged strategy. There were to be two Bhil Agents- one for the south and the other for the west. They were to endeavour to bring the Bhils to follow agricultural pursuits by grants of land and loans of bullocks. Besides, an irregular corps was to be formed for local duty to take the place of the Regulars in the outposts, and also to act as armed police. Chaplin supported the idea. In 1824 Arch Robertson, the first collector, also suggested the adoption of a conciliatory policy towards the Bhils. In 1825 the Court of Directors ordered the formation of a Bhil Corps together with the adoption of conciliatory measures. In the same year Robertson repeated his suggestion. He wrote: '... the Bheels . . . may be likened to children, who do right more from fear than from a love of what is good, and to whose criminal conduct therefore, it was necessary to evince the most determined opposition till a strong impression had been made. This there is now considerable reason to suppose has been effected The marauders cannot but be satisfied, that there is but little room to hope for success or safety in the pursuits of their depredations They know too that if they are not visible to our troops . . . , they may still be reached by the offer of rewards . . . an amnesty would not tend to wear out the impression that has been created. If it succeeds it will immediately relieve our other subjects from the injuries to which they are now exposed. If it does not succeed, there is the plan of rewards to resort to' He added: '...it is my wish, if the amnesty be sanctioned, to endeavour . . . as much as possible to avoid proposing pecuniary provisions for the Bheels now in the Hills and instead, to induce them to settle in some of the waste villages in the plains, and there, aided by Tuccavy grants to cultivate for a livelihood under some favourable management'.¹³ The Bombay Government broadly approved the proposal. The Governor minuted

¹² J. W. Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company; A History of Indian Progress* (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), p. 478.

¹³ Letter dt. Camp at Galnah, Mar. 11, 1825 to William Chaplin, Commissioner in the Deccan, Poona. Political Deptt., 1825, Vol. 10/193., MSAM.

that '... though certainly of difficult accomplishment [the step] is directed to so desirable an object that no pain should be spared to give it effect'.¹⁴

The new policy was initiated by Robertson. He selected James Outram, 22-year Adjutant of the 23rd Bombay Native Regiment of Foot, to raise and command the new Bhil Corps. Although no reasons are recorded, the choice could not have been better. Robertson issued guidelines to Outram. The recruits for the Corps should be made from different parts of Khandesh to ensure that they did not have the same prejudices. Their payment could be made chiefly in terms of grain and only at certain periods in cash. They needed to be taught the important duty of obedience to orders. Attention was required to be given to their personal appearance to produce a favourable impression in respect of themselves and a change of habits. Punishments of a personal nature needed to be avoided. Punishments suitable to their own ideas could be given for minor offences and serious offenders should be dismissed before they were handed over to the Magistrate.¹⁵

A general amnesty was given on the condition of the naiks becoming the guardians of the police of their respective districts and villages; all their huks and inams being duly enquired into and restored, and land and taccavi loans given to those Bhils who would take to the plough for subsistence. At the same time, no exertions were to be spared to punish those leaders who continued to carry on their depredations and who refused the liberal terms held out to them. In order to assure the Bhils of the sincerity of the government's intentions, John Bax, Acting Collector of Khandesh, personally pledged his word to every member of the Corps assembled in the parade that all the past offences were both forgiven and forgotten. In order to inspire perfect confidence among them, he gave a *kowl* or general pardon annexing the name of each Bhil in the Corps but having the condition that the future offences would result in the forfeiture of the *kowl*. Bax also expressed his '... great satisfaction ...' at '... the efficient and orderly state of the Bheel Corps ...'.¹⁶ Naturally then, a communication from the Bombay

¹⁴ Undated minute, *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Letter dt. May 6, 1825 from Col. Robertson to Lieut. Outram, Commanding Bheel Corps, Quoted in A. H. A. Simcox, A Memoir of the Khandesh Bhil Corps Compiled from Original Records, (Bombay: Thacker & Company Limited, 1912), pp. 43-7.

¹⁶ Letter dt. Camp Choprah, December, 16, 1826 to William Newnham, Chief Secretary to Government, Bombay. Political Deptt., 1827. Vol. 6/261, MSAM.

Castle expressed '... the high satisfaction of the Government with the progress of that Corps'.¹⁷

The Government established three Bhil Agencies. First, the Kokar-munda Agency comprised Mutwas, its tributary and independent chiefs, Nandurbar, Sultanpur, Pimpalner and the chieftains of the Dhangs. Secondly, the Ajanta range and the lands below it were placed under the Southern Agency. Thirdly, the North-eastern Agency covered the Satpuda Range. Outposts were established in the hills and their vicinity under each Agency. The last Agency was entrusted the duty of raising the Bhil Corps under native and non-commissioned officers. Dhrangaon was chosen to be the headquarters of the Agencies.

The Collector of Khandesh gave instructions to the Bhil Agents to enable them to function effectively. The Agents were to preserve the peace of the country, ameliorate the condition of the Bhils, keep a watch over the range committed to their charge, inspire the Bhils with confidence in the government, encourage them to undertake industrious pursuits, ensure payment of pensions, attend to complaints, apprehend and punish the offenders, superintend military operations, etc. The Agents could recommend allotment of rent-free land, grant of taccavi loans, bullocks and agricultural implements, etc., for meritorious services of the individual Bhils.

Bhil Corps

When the proposal for the formation of a Bhil Corps was first mooted in 1819, Briggs expressed his doubts regarding the fitness of the Bhils to be sepoys. After this inhibition was overcome, even the most sanguine in the government despaired of its success because of the possible resistance of the Bhils to joining the Corps. The Bhils themselves believed that the object was to link them in line like the galley-slaves to extirpate the race, that their blood was in high demand as a medicine in England, and so on.¹⁸ But these prejudices and suspicions gradually gave way. This was because of the judicious actions taken by Outram. He laid the foundations of the Corps through the medium of his captives. He released some of them to bring in the relatives of the rest on the pledge that they all would be set at liberty. He has

¹⁷ Letter dt. Bombay Castle, Jan. 5, 1827 to John Bax, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ R. V. Russell, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, Vol. II (London, Macmillan & Co., 1916), p. 284.

recorded the inauguration of the movement thus: 'I thus effected an intercourse with some of the leading Naicks, went along with them into the jungles, gained their hearts by copious libations of brandy, and their confidence by living unguarded among them, until at last I persuaded five of the most adventurous to risk their fortunes with me, which small beginning I considered ensured ultimate success'.¹⁹ They were soon attached to his person which enabled him to draw others to his standard. The number of Bhil recruits was 25 on July 1, 1825. The choice of the place of recruitment was unfortunate. Outram's ill-success in recruitment was because he attempted it mainly in those parts of Khandesh where the Bhils were in protracted rebellion.²⁰ The number increased to 62 in August and further to 92 in September. He selected the youngest and most promising Bhils and began to teach them the regular drills. He kept the older men as irregular police or sibandis.

To begin with, the Bhils disliked the drills. By November they gave up this dislike and paid as much attention to it as the regular recruits. The swords were the arms which were first supplied to them and they showed antipathy for the European arms. Gradually they became anxious to get the European arms like matchlocks and army muskets. By the end of the year, Outram and his Bhils were so confident of each other that he could think of a march through the province. It had many objects. It would encourage recruitment, display the strength of the Corps and fill the Bhils with martial pride. It would provide an opportunity to capture any marauding bands around and test the worth of the recruits when engaged with their late comrades in crime. The reception of the Corps by the Twenty-third Regiment of Bombay Native Infantry in the camp in Malegaon was also conducive. High caste men behaved in a manner flattering to the Bhils by visiting them and offering betelnuts. Outram wrote, the number would have been higher but for '... an unfortunate coincidence ...' in that the kutchery or court house in Dharangaon in which he resided was the scene of a massacre of several Bhils who had assembled for a similar reason about ten years back. He left no stone unturned to remove the dread from the minds of the Bhils. He reported: 'To remove these fears I have spared no endeavours by constant intercourse with them, talking

¹⁹ J. J. Goldsmid, *James Outram A Biography*, Vol. I (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1880).

²⁰ Letter dated Poona, July 28, 1825 by W. Chaplin to A. Robertson, collector, Deccan Commissioners Record, Vol. 438, No. 10755, Pune Archives, Pune.

of the cruelty above alluded to with marks of detestation and without reserve; explaining the advantages we expect from their services (for they could not understand and would suspect any other motive for the liberality of Government), listening to their complaints and enquiring into and obtaining redress for oppression to which the families of some were subjected when unable to complain . . . , taking every opportunity of displaying a perfect confidence in them, and demanding services from them'.²¹ He lived unattended among them for weeks together, thereby unhesitatingly entrusting his life to them which proved that the government was sincere in its professions.

Outram established his headquarters in Dharangaon. The town was centrally located and had a good market. But the area around it was dry and had no flowing water supply. He arrived here by the end of June 1825. He provided huttis for some of his men, and quartered the rest in the town. He built a bungalow for himself in course of time. Other bungalows and offices arose. Regimental lines also sprang up for the Corps.

On its part, the government took precaution to ensure faithful service of the recruits. A Bhil was never enlisted in the Corps without the security bond of at least one individual already in it, or from the head of his family. This was a powerful inducement for good conduct.

While the government in Bombay approved the formation of the Bhil Corps, it did not pass any specific order laying down its strength. The Collector of Khandesh proposed the experiment with 400 men till it could be increased further, depending on whether the Bhils were found trustworthy as well as capable. However, Outram increased the strength of the Corps to 600 men without requesting for any specific orders as he thought it to have been authorized by the Government's acquiescence to the monthly returns displaying that number which he submitted. The number rose to 700 privates in 1835 and 763 privates in 1842. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the

²¹ *Letter dt. Dhulia, Sept. 1, 1825 to Robertson, Collector of Khandesh. Political Deptt., 1825. Vol. 10/193.* Dhurramgaon apart, Chaleesgaon and Kopurgaon also witnessed scenes of indiscriminate slaughter. The Bhils assembled there on promises of full pardon by the government. But the concealed troops massacred them. Women were mutilated and burnt. Even children were dashed against the stones. Graham added, 'Among a nation who consider it disgraceful to forgive an injury, and who bequeath the blood feud to their heirs, such treatment was not likely to pass unatoned: a deep and implacable hatred was nourished towards its oppressors, and every opportunity of vengeance was greedily enjoyed with the most savage atrocity.' Thomas, *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government.*, p. 209.

total strength of the Khandesh Bhil Corps was 1,160 men, of whom 1,072 were Bhils of different sub-castes, viz., 841 Bhils, 107 Turvee Bhils, 85 Dhang Bhils, 28 Nahal Bhils, 10 Parvee Bhils and 1 Monchee Bhils.²² The remaining men were Pardesis or non-Bhils. Obviously then, the Corps had become well-disciplined and it contained different classes of the Bhils so as to have representation of practically the entire tribe.

To begin with, the Bhils of Dhang were not recruited for the Corps. This was done later at the instance of D. A. Blane, Collector and Magistrate. In putting forward their case, he wrote that the Bhils of this region were in a destitute condition which '... cannot but excite one's sympathy....' Besides, the Bhil chiefs were unruly and action against them involved '... great expense and sacrifice of life from the effects of the climate.' Hence, their inclusion in the Corps would '... allow small detachments being kept down there in times of disturbance(.) the punishment of lawless individuals in whose misconduct these incursions originate might frequently I think with the assistance of the well affected be accomplished without allowing the evil to grow into a derangement of so much magnitude'.²³ However, the Government was reticent about the proposal. It pointed that these Bhils were '... a bad class of people ...' who '... hitherto pertinaciously (*sic*) refrained from joining the Bheel Corps ...'. Moreover, it was doubtful whether Government could for long trust the relations and friends of the delinquent.²⁴ The opinion of D. G. Graham, Agent and Commandant of Bhil Corps, was sought who admitted that these Bhils were '... a bad class of people and in every respect an inferior race to the Khandesh Bhils.' But he favoured the proposal with the provision that '... about seventy-five men with the usual proportion of officers would be sufficient.' Of this force, 50 might be kept continually below the Ghats, moving about to gain intelligence, and the remaining 25 might be retained in Khandesh for purposes of drill and relief.²⁵ The Governor-in-Council sanctioned the arrangement for six months to begin with. As J. W. Auld, Lieutenant & Adjutant-in-Charge, Khandesh Bhil Corps, wrote,

²² Letter dt. Dec. 21, 1847 from the Registrar, Bombay Sadr Faujdari Adawlat to the Secretary to the Government, Judicial Deptt., 1848. Vol. 16/1387, MSAM.

²³ Letter dt. Dhulia, July 13, 1839. Judicial Deptt., 1839. Vol. 16/543., MSAM.

²⁴ Letter from L. R. Reid to the Collector & Magistrate, Khandesh dt. Bombay, Aug. 23, 1839. Judicial Deptt., 1839. Vol. 16/543, MSAM.

²⁵ Letter dt. Dhurramgaon, Sept., 5, 1839 to D. A. Blane. Judicial Deptt., 1839. Vol. 16/543, MSAM.

'But as was expected, considerable difficulty was at first experienced in persuading the Bhils to enlist in the Corps and those that were eventually got we were obliged to treat in regard to duty matters as leniently as could be, and with every kindness and attention, in order if possible to induce others from that district to enter the service.' He was convinced that the proposed measure would succeed '... to the utmost of our wishes, and I have no hesitation in asserting...' that '... in a very short time...' these Bhils '... in all respects...' would prove their work '... to the satisfaction of Government and the credit of the Bheel Corps'.²⁶

This opinion was corroborated by Graham. These Bhils willingly accompanied him in an expedition and '... were perfectly prepared to exert themselves to the utmost for their new master, even against their ancient friends and companions'.²⁷ The Governor-in-Council conceded that their performance was satisfactory and by the year-end decided to make them a part of the Bhil Corps.

The number of recruits in the Corps fluctuated. This was primarily due to the discharge of the sepoy (amounting to two-thirds of the total strength) and secondarily to casualties among them.²⁸

The duty expected from the Corps was the same as was rendered by the sepoy of the regular service. It had to march in insalubrious tracts for weeks together. Patrolling of hills was assigned to it. Its sepoy guarded and escorted the prisoners. As early as 1826, the reformed Bhils seized two notorious Bhil leaders. Government treasure was also entrusted to them for transport. As N. J. Morris, Captain Commandant, Bhil Corps, pointed out, 'The late operations in the wildest part of the Sathpoora hills are a specimen of the service required from the Bheel Corps. For days exposed to intense heat, and from the rugged nature of the country deprived of the shelter of a Tent-obliged to drink the stagnant waters so scantily existing in the Nallas at this late period of the year, except when chance of circumstances brought us to the banks of a river, and liable moreover, to the casualties active service often produces'.²⁹ Upwards of two-thirds of the Bhils

²⁶ Letter dt. Durrangaon, Feb. 29, 1840 to R. K. Pringle, Magistrate, Khandesh. Judicial Deptt., 1840. Vol. 16/616., MSAM.

²⁷ Letter dt. Dhurrangaon, Sept., 21, 1840 to R. K. Pringle, Magistrate Khandesh, Judicial Deptt., 1840. Vol. 16/616., MSAM.

²⁸ Letter dt. Dhurangaon, Mar. 7, 1836 from Lieutenant in charge, Bhil Corps to W. J. Boyd, Magistrate, Dhulia. Judicial Deptt., 1836. Vol. 10/363., MSAM.

²⁹ Letter dt. Dhurrangaon, June 5, 1841 to R. K. Pringle, Collector and Magistrate, Khandesh, Judicial Deptt., 1841. Vol. 17/707, MSAM.

were continually in unhealthy outposts.³⁰ The outpost of Kokarmunda was particularly deleterious for health so much so that it '... sent many to their graves, and those who had strength to battle its influence were obliged to go into the Invalid or Pension Establishment. The relief of these Posts by the Bheel Corps has been a great saving to Government both in expence(*sic*) and the availability of Troops of the regular army'.³¹ The number of outposts was 7 in 1828. It was increased to 11 in 1835 and further to 16 in 1842. The regular troops were relieved from the outpost duty by the Bhil Corps from 1827. Duties of patrolling the hills were assigned to the latter.

Three military operations of the Corps may be mentioned here. In the second year of its existence, the village of Boorwaree was plundered by a gang of Bhils which retired on the eminence of a hill. Outram dashed thereon but was attacked by arrows and stones. He feigned retreat and drew the marauders in the plain below. Then he charged and dispersed them. The plunder of the village was recovered and the chief and many of his followers were killed. The success of the operation encouraged other Bhils to join the Corps.

The second glaring incident occurred in 1846. The Bhil chief, Kooer Wusawa suddenly threw off his allegiance and took to the jungle with an armed gang headed by an Arab. He refused offers of pardon by the Collector and Magistrate. Hence, a detachment composed of the Malegaon Brigade, Poona Irregular Horse and Bhil Corps was sent against him. He was captured after a skirmish. He was sentenced for ten years, but released from jail before time in 1854 as an act of grace.

Thirdly, a part of the Corps volunteered for service in the Deccan and Konkan against a freebooter named Raghoji Bangria. It captured the outlaw. On its return to Khandesh, the government applauded the Bhils for cheerfully leaving their homes to go in the pursuit of a refractory man at a bad season of the year in a wild and strange country.

On the whole, the recruits were law-abiding and served their new masters faithfully. However, a glaring exception to this was the conduct of Mohan Lal. With about 30 years' of service, he enjoyed the confidence of officers like Outram and Graham. He was presented a dress of honour and considered to be a soldier of unblemished

³⁰ Letter dt. Dhuramgaon, Mar. 7, 1836 from Lieutenant in charge, Bhil Corps to W. J. Boyd, Magistrate, Dhulia. Judicial Deptt., 1836. Vol. 10/363, MSAM.

³¹ Captain W. J. Morris' letter dt. Dhurramgaon, Aug. 25, 1842 to R. K. Pringle, Magistrate of Khandesh. Judicial Deptt. 1842. Vol. 16/793. MSAM.

reputation. But he became a party to gang robberies and instigated as many as 27 other sepoys to undertake such activities. But he could get collaboration from only a few Bhils. Morris wrote, 'The conduct of the Subedar Major and other delinquents I am happy to observe is viewed with the greatest disgust by the Officers and men of the Corps, who have all come forward with expressions of deep indignation at the stain cast upon the Regiment and with ready willingness to assist me in these investigations to the utmost of their power.' Subsequently, Morris added: '... I am convinced many of them would have given information against him had they not been deterred by the apparent difficulty of proving charges against their superior officer, who for so many years previously has been looked upon as a pattern of all that was correct, and who, up to the very time of his detection stood high in the estimation of the authorities'.³² That the Bhils as a whole did not associate themselves with Mohan Lal was viewed by the government in Bombay as a matter of '... the highest gratification'.³³

As mentioned earlier, the Bhils were posted in far-flung outposts which were in unhealthy surroundings. Hence, they were susceptible to sicknesses. But many outposts were without medical aid. Medical assistance was also required by the government officials like the Bhil Agents. Hence, Graham proposed to D. A. Blane, Acting Magistrate, Khandesh, that Assistant Surgeon Ritchie, then on general duty in Khandesh, be permanently attached to the Corps which would be '... a most desirable arrangement'.³⁴ But Grant, Governor of Bombay, turned down the proposal. He thought it '... impossible to comply with the request without occasioning inconvenience in some other branch of the public service where it would be more felt than with the Bheel Corps.' He continued: 'I am not aware of the circumstances demanding the arrangement herein applied for which might not with equal force have been urged before'.³⁵

Meanwhile, attention was given to the education of the Bhils. A school was established for the men of the Corps and Bhil children at Dharangaon in 1829. These were the first Bhils who learned to read and write. In the school they were taught by the Brahmin teachers and also sat with the Brahmin pupils. This gave them a sense of pride.

³² Letters dated Dhrramgaon, June 28, 1841 and Dhulia, Aug. 17, 1841 to R. K. Pringle, Magistrate of Khandesh. Judicial Deptt., 1841. Vol. 17/707, MSAM.

³³ Letter dt. October 26, 1841 from Bombay Government to the Magistrate of Khandesh, *Ibid.*

³⁴ Letter dt. Jan. 6, 1838. Judicial Deptt., 1838. Vol. 10/454, MSAM.

³⁵ Minute no. 752 dt. Feb. 12, 1838. *Ibid.*

The school also eradicated their memory of the hills in which they wandered about earlier and thereby ensured that they did not cherish the wild notions. Consequently, their nature softened.

But there was also a problem faced by the school. When the children were away from home, the expense of feeding them was a strain on their parents. Others were anxious to send their children to the school but were deterred from doing so for the same reason. In addition, when the children were at home, they cut the grass and sticks for sale in the nearest markets and helped the parents in other ways too. Therefore, J. W. Auld, Captain, Bhil Corps and Acting Bhil Agent, suggested that a monthly allowance of, say, Rs. 20/- be sanctioned by the Government and with this money each child could be given Rs. 1-8-0 each month.³⁶ The Government cleared the proposal.

Four principal naiks of Bhadgaon Taluka solicited the government to establish another school in Bhadgaon city. They neither afforded nor liked their children to go to the school in Kunhur which was 40 miles away. They offered to bring 32 children if it was established in that city. Auld recommended that the government should sanction it '...with its usual liberality towards this once despised and neglected race....' He estimated that the school would entail an expenditure of Rs. 69/- per annum. The Government of India approved the proposal.³⁷ The school was opened in January 1845 with 32 boys. There was another school which was subsequently transferred to Tulloda.

True, the education imparted in these schools was not of a high order. But they taught the children the reading and writing of Marathi as well as simple arithmetic. The Bhil Agent at Kunhur wrote: 'I have every reason to be satisfied with the conduct of the Boys both of the Kunhur and Bhurgaum Schools, they are easily managed, and most of them willing to learn. The Pundits have taken considerable pains and from personal examination, I have, from time to time, observed a marked improvement in the lads'.³⁸ The Western Bhil Agent also remarked: 'I, however, recently inspected that institution (at Tulloda)

³⁶ Letter dt. Camp Kunhur, Nov. 10, 1842 to R. K. Pringle. Political Deptt., 1843. Vol. 20/1441, MSAM.

³⁷ Letter dt. Kunhur, August 8, 1844 to W. W. Bell, Collector, Khandesh. Political Deptt., 1844. Vol. 16/1549, MSAM.

³⁸ Letter no. 6 dt. Feb. 7, 1858 to the Collector and Magistrate of Khandesh, para 13. Education deptt., 1859. Vol. 17, MSAM.

and examined the several classes, and considering the very tender age of most of the Bheel boys(,) I have every reason to be pleased.³⁹

Established in April 1825, the Corps was on a firm footing by the end of 1827. It was raised entirely from among the Bhils in around Khandesh, except a draft from the Line of 50 high caste men who were attached to the Corps with the pay and privileges of the Line. It was disciplined as Light Infantry. The wild jungles and mountainous tracts surrounding Khandesh which had hitherto been inaccessible to regular troops were penetrated by the Corps and bandits subdued.⁴⁰

Once peace was established, the Corps automatically began to act as the armed police for the simple reason that it had hardly any military duty to perform. As Simcox observed, 'As a military force it lost its *raison d'être*, and this fact forced itself upon the notice of Government by degrees. In fact, as the years went by the retention of the Bhil Corps became more and more a matter of sentiment and tradition'.⁴¹ Till Major Probyn remained the Commandant of the Corps, the sentiments generated by its honourable tradition continued to sway the official thinking. But finally, sentiments gave way to common sense. For the Bhils themselves the Corps did not remain attractive when they could obtain higher wages outside.⁴² The Government passed the final orders in July 1891. It approved the recommendations of the Inspector-General of Police that the Corps be transformed into the Armed Police of Khandesh. Thus, it lasted for 66 years. It remained active only during the first phase of its life but remained inactive in the second 30 years or so.

Bhil Police

At the time of the British advent, regular police did not exist in Khandesh. The Bhils who were earlier the village watchmen or Jagalyas were up in arms against the government. They also connived with the marauders for a share in the spoil. Pillage and murders were frequently reported. More than 100 such complaints were received from Nandurbar in one month alone. Unless formed into

³⁹ Letter no. 189 dt. Dec. 25, 1859, para 9. Education Deptt., 1860. Vol. 27, Para 9, MSAM.

⁴⁰ Outram's letter dt. Dhurrungaum, June 9, 1835 W. S. Boyd. Simcox, pp. 126–8.

⁴¹ Simcox, A Memoir of the Khandesh Bhil Corps, p. 269.

⁴² Russell, The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces, p. 285.

large caravans and accompanied by strong military escorts, travellers did not venture to cross the country. Inhabitants of some places paid an annual tax to the Bhil chiefs or naiks to secure protection of life and property.

In 1818 an attempt was made to raise an irregular corps of Turvee Bhils. But the experiment came to naught. The men were mostly intoxicated, their groveling habits incorrigible and their Indian officers licentious. This body was found to be ‘... totally useless...’ and ultimately disbanded. Among the other plans, Briggs proposed pension to turbulent Bhils with a certain quantity of grain. Failure of these measures resulted in military operations. But the troops had to quit, with two-thirds of them being victims of malaria. In the next four years, the story was repeated. Conciliatory policy was followed by military operations and so on. While the Bhils were unable to face the disciplined troops, ‘... the inaccessible nature of the fastnesses favoured flight and concealment, and the taunting yell of the marauders generally rose high over the protecting cliffs, as the baffled and wearied pursuers... return’.⁴³ The subject of raising the Bhils as a police force was again discussed in 1821 but it again came to nought.

The government then decided to examine and where necessary confirm the huks and enam lands of the Jagalyas. In return, they were assigned the duty of tracing the robbers. By this settlement, an honest subsistence was assured to the Jagalyas. Their huks were modest in many villages because of the small size of the villages themselves. However, the system of huks was sanctioned by old traditions and was so much cherished by the villagers that they voluntarily supported their Jagalyas if their huks were inadequate to sustain them. Although they had the inam lands, they did not bring many of them under cultivation because of distance from their villages which interfered with their duties, or they lacked the means to purchase agricultural implements, etc. At other times, when they chased the robbers, their crops were left to chance. There were 435 villages with Jagalyas and 186 without them (including 11 uninhabited villages) in the

⁴³ Captain D. C. Graham, Historical sketch of the Bheel tribes inhabiting the province of Khandesh; accompanied by an outline, down to the year 1843, of the principles of the conciliatory line of policy which has been observed towards these rude tribes, by the Bombay Government, from the year 1825. Thomas, *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, p. 211.

Kunhur Agency around the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Later the imposts levied by the naiks were abolished and equivalent cash amounts were paid to them from the government treasury.

There was a difference in the ordinary occurrences of crime during the rainy months when there was abundance of employment, and the dry months when the want of both employment and food had a tendency to increase the number of those who sought livelihood through violence and depredation. Nevertheless, Auld mentioned that even in the second consecutive year of scarcity, '...crime has been...most trifling.' There were a few petty grain robberies and '...the offenders were I verily believe driven from sheer starvation and I dealt with them accordingly, by punishing them as slightly as I could....'⁴⁵

Thus, from being the scourges of the society, the jagalyas were made useful members of the police. They were held responsible for a crime. They could be officially fined for neglect of duty. A villager whose property they failed to protect, or whose recovery they could not make, could withhold for a time his share of jagalya's emoluments. Those of them who took to the plough, settled as cultivators. They began to protect the village, the traveller and the property of the Government – which were earlier the objects of their spoliation. Overall, the long list of crimes of the Bhils dwindled to a few petty thefts.

Bhil Agriculture

At the time of the British occupation, the economy of Khandesh was in a bad shape. The territory was in '...a very depopulated condition...', '...great many...' villages were depopulated and waste land constituted 'A very large proportion indeed'.⁴⁶ Excluding the villages which were under the princely states outside British India, the total number of villages in Khandesh in 1826–27 was 4,015 of which 356 were jagir and inam villages. The remaining villages

⁴⁴ Annual accounts of the Kunhur Bheel Agency (ending April 30, 1839). Political Dept., 1839–40. Vol. 16/1012, MSAM.

⁴⁵ Annual report up to April 30, 1846 for the year 1845–46 dated Kumhur, Oct. 21, 1846. Political Dept., 1847. Vol. 22/1903, MSAM.

⁴⁶ Evidence of Henry William Hodges, Assistant to the Collector, 1818–1831. Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee on the affairs of the East India Company; an appendix and index. III. Revenue. Parliamentary paper No. 735–III. of 1832. Qs. 835, 836 and 855.

numbered 3,659 which consisted of 2,701 cultivated villages and 958 deserted villages.

The government encouraged the Bhils to take up agricultural pursuits in both cultivated and deserted villages. At first the plan of setting the Bhils to cultivate was considered as almost hopeless, such was their wild and unstable character. Many Bhils held inam lands. But they could not bring many of them under cultivation as these lands were far from the villages and so working on them interfered with their police duties. Still others did not have land to do cultivation. The government gave them wastelands in 1825 and thereafter. As per the *kowls* given to them, these lands were exempted from the assessment of land revenue for twenty years. When this period was over, Auld suggested that new *kowls* for a further period of ten years be given to the old colonists after which each plough could be assessed at the rate of Rs. 5/- per annum. Justifying his proposal, he wrote: 'Still the great secret of the hold we have got of this once savage and turbulent people is wholly attributable to the mild, conciliatory and indulgent policy that a most liberal Government has in its wisdom pursued towards them, thereby binding them to us, by every tie of gratitude . . . and no paltry consideration of the Revenue to be derived from their lands, should at present tempt us to risk in the smallest degree creating the slightest discontent or disgust amongst them.'⁴⁷ The Bombay Government considered the proposal and noted that ' . . . while on the one hand Government cannot altogether overlook its ultimate rights on the lands cultivated by the Bheels, on the other hand it is requisite, that great care should be taken in introducing an assessment on these lands, which should be light in amount and be gradually imposed.'⁴⁸ It decided that the duration of the rent-free tenures be extended by five years.⁴⁸

Soaked in poverty as the Bhils were, possession of land alone would not have been enough to make them agriculturists. They required seed capital to commence agricultural operations. Hence, the government decided to sanction them taccavi advances to purchase agricultural implements, bullocks, etc., which were repayable in seven years. The Bhils used the loans not for productive purposes but also for food,

⁴⁷ Letter dt. Jan. 8, 1846 to W. W. Bell, Collector of Khandesh. Political Deptt., 1846. Vol. 17/1782., MSAM.

⁴⁸ Letter dt. Bombay Castle, Mar. 3, 1846 by Bombay Government to A. Campbell, First Assistant in charge of the office of Collector and Magistrate in Khandesh. Political Deptt., 1846, Vol. 17/1782. MSAM.

clothes, etc. All the same, repayments were made in small instalments. The government took a lenient view. Its concern was not so much in the repayment of the loans, but in civilizing them, especially the rising generation. Ovens suggested to the Acting Collector of Khandesh that where deaths and desertions of the borrowers took place, and a plough was '...made over to a new Bheel, the value only of the Bullocks &c. actually forthcoming may be charged to him as Tuccavy, and the balance of the original Tuccavy consumed in food &c. by the original Bheel cultivator may be written off'.⁴⁹ The government accepted the proposal as '...no more than reasonable...' in that '...the balance of the original Tuccavee consumed in food &c. by the original Bheel Cultivator being written off in the same manner as other bad debts due by absconded cultivators'.⁵⁰ The government's financial support to the Bhil cultivators is given in the appendix.

The Bhils cultivated many crops. Their kharif crops were mung, urud, tur (pulses), til (oilseeds), maize and sugarcane. Their rabi crops were wheat, gram and kurdec. They attempted to grow potatoes and indigo also. In 1828, the total area under cultivation was 918,472 bighas in which the share of grains was 727,562 bighas (79.21 per cent), rice 10,080 bighas (1.10 per cent), tilie and ulsee 78,565 bighas (8.55 per cent), cotton bighas 38,720 (4.21 per cent), indigo 24,709 bighas (2.69 per cent), tobacco bighas 5,089 (0.55 per cent), sugarcane bighas 3,754 (0.41 per cent), turmeric 504 bighas (0.05 per cent) and sundries 29,489 bighas (3.21 per cent). We presume that the areas cultivated with different crops by the Bhils were broadly in the same order.⁵¹

Their work culture transformed over time. When French, the Bhil Agent, proposed to them to sell grass and wood in a season of scarcity to supplement their income, they laughed down the proposal during the early years. But their attitude changed gradually. They began to take up other works when unoccupied in their field. Up to 200 Bhils were employed for road-making for several months by the mid-nineteenth century.

However, the Bhils were placed unfavourably as agriculturists. They had hardly any previous work experience. The constant attention

⁴⁹ Proposal dt. Camp, Marh 3, 1827. Revenue Deptt., 1827. Vol. 11/165. MSAM.

⁵⁰ Letter no. 554 of 1827 from J. A. Dunlop, Secretary to Government dt. Bombay Castle, Apr. 1827 to the Acting Collector of Khandesh. *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Letter dt. Dhulia, Aug. 1, 1828 from George Giberne to John Bax, Secretary to Government, Bombay. Para 21. Revenue Deptt., 1828. Vol. 3/208, MSAM.

required for agricultural operations was not consistent with their irregular habits. When a Bhil fell sick, he required friends who would gratuitously carry on agricultural operations or hired paid labourers. Both the alternatives were not easily available. The rent-free lands became unproductive for want of manure after yielding a few crops which made it necessary for them to clear fresh jungles. Nor were they always able to guard their ripe crops. Finally, as Captain Rose wrote, 'The general consequence of these opposing circumstances is that a Bheel's crop is seldom a very good one'⁵²

While placing reliance on the good feelings of the Bhils, Ovens was aware that their erratic habits could not be changed within a few months. Therefore, he decided to surround the colonies by a cordon of mild restraint. He established a system of registration. The Bhils were required never to leave their village- even for a day- without the permission of the naiks. If this rule was infringed, the matter was immediately reported to the Agency. A daroga or police superintendent was appointed in each taluka or division whose duty was to proceed from village to village to ensure that these regulations were enforced, while in every colony one functionary of an inferior rank was appointed to control and report upon the proceedings of the colonists.⁵³

The peasantisation of the Bhils was by and large a success. Some examples from the Kunur Agency can be cited. Krishna Naik, aged about 25 years, ' . . . manages his village admirably.' It had 28 ploughs. Subal Naik and others cultivated a good deal of waste land. Eetea and his associates were ' . . . perhaps, the best Bheel cultivators in the Chaleesgaon Talooka.' Wagu Naik and his fellow Bhils cultivated with great spirit. When they started their agricultural operations, the village was deserted and land waste. In about five years' time, it had a thriving appearance. Some more examples to this effect can be given. In short, the Bhils cultivated industriously. They reclaimed lands which were lying waste for 25-30 years and in one case for at least 40 years. They cleared the jungles infested with tigers. Because of the return of peace, patels and kunbis came back to the villages.⁵⁴ Instances of the Bhils absconding after taking taccavi loans did take place. But they were rare. Hence, Ovens wrote: 'The settlements

⁵² Thomas, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, p. 225.

⁵³ Kaye, The Administration of the East India Company, p. 485.

⁵⁴ Memoir of the principal Bheel Naiks and Bheel colonies now established in Kunur Agency. Judicial Dept., 1831. Vol. 3/217, MSAM.

made with the cultivating Bheels and also with the Jaglia Bheels are now working as favourably as could have been anticipated.' He further added: '... all the districts ... are now enjoying perfect pose that the Bheel cultivators are busy one and all at their ploughs and only require the necessary supply of rain to put in their seed and that the Jagbea Bheels are all living quietly and obediently their homes in the plains, doing their duty as the guardians of the Police of their respective villages'.⁵⁵ Many towns in the Sultanpur Taluka were cultivated entirely by the Bhils. They were particularly well-behaved and their revenue was easily recovered.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The Bhil Corps owed its origin to the motives of humanity and preservation of peace in Khandesh, combined with the desire to relieve the regular army from the unhealthy outposts. As the discipline and faithfulness of the Bhils became evident, the duties of the Corps were extended and its strength was raised. Its discipline was maintained by regular drills. Its officers toured from time to time to ensure efficiency.

The devotion to duty of the Corps spread a dread amongst the turbulent Bhils and others, and went a long way towards the maintenance of law. Gang robberies became almost unknown. Covans wrote that the Jagalyas had become '... our best and most effective police'.⁵⁷

The settlement with the Bhils brought about a marked improvement in the agrarian economy. The numbers of deserted villages re-established in Chalisgaon, Burgam and Jhamner talukas was 36, 48 and 28 respectively, the total being 113 by 1831. The villages of Chalisgaon were '... utterly desolate and abandoned.' A greater part of the taluka was in '... a miserable state and fast falling into decay. All the Villages have improved more or less since the Bheel Settlements'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Annual account, 1830–31. From Ovals to Boyd dt. Camp Kunur, July 15, 1831. Revenue Deptt., 1832. Vol. 2/406., MSAM.

⁵⁶ Letter from the Second Acting Collector to Boyd dt. Camp Dhurramgaon, Oct. 1, 1834, para 4. Revenue Deptt., 1833. Vol. 15/483., MSAM.

⁵⁷ Letter to W. J. Boyd, Collector of Khandesh, Camp Kunur, dt. 17.10.1831. Judicial Deptt., 1831. Vol. 3/217, MSAM.

⁵⁸ Statement of the names of the deserted villages re-established in the three talukas of Chalesgaon, Bhurgam and Jhamner since the Bheel settlements in the

The Governor of Bombay was gratified with the policy of conciliation. He expressed: 'I do not as (*sic*) suppose in any part of India has so much good been done in so short a time as in the wild district under review, and by pursuing the same conciliating line of Policy and . . . I have little doubt that a thorough reform of the Bheels in our district will in time be accomplished'.⁵⁹

This policy benefited the Bhils themselves. They ceased to be predators and lived a settled life. As Boyd commented, 'It is now astonishing to behold the rapid change produced by the liberal system of Government in many of these miserable beings who without a hovel to cover them, nor a rag to their backs, came in and sued for life and food. Now they are fat and sleek, and decently clad, living in their own Huts, surrounded by swarms of healthy children ploughing their own lands and many also possessing a few goats'.⁶⁰ The clothing of a Bhil sepoy consisted of a green *pugree* (turban), white *angurka* (gown) reaching the knee and *goorgee* reaching below the knee made of double and strong cloth. This dress was to their liking and gave them a respectable appearance. They were also continuously improving in cleanliness. The attitude of many Bhils, particularly those from the hills, with respect to shelter also changed. Earlier they were satisfied with the wretched hovels constructed in a few hours similar to the camps they had on the hills. But subsequently they liked to have the comforts of good huts.

One serious vice which they had was addiction to liquor. This problem was solved by Outram for those Bhils who joined the Corps. He made payment to them daily with scarcely more than sufficient to obtain the necessaries of life, except on the last day of the month when the surplus of their salary was given which they spent on articles of finery (ornaments, etc).⁶¹ Boyd also remarked: 'Intoxication . . . has now . . . been thoroughly overcome; not an instance has occurred for a length of time. Not even the most trifling complaint against any

Kunur Agency (Camp Kunur dt. Oct. 17, 1831. Compiled by Covans, Bheel Agent, Khandesh, *Judicial Deptt.*, 1831. Vol. 3/217, MSAM.

⁵⁹ Minute dated Dec. 10, 1831. *Judicial Deptt.*, 1831. Vol. 3/217, MSAM.

⁶⁰ Letter dt. Malligaum, April 30, 1833 to Charles Norris, Chief Secretary to Government, Bombay. *Political Deptt.*, 1830. Vol. 14/398, MSAM

⁶¹ Letter dt. Sept. 25, 1825 from J. Outram to Robertson, Collector of Khandesh. *Political Deptt.*, 1825. Vol. 10/193, MSAM

one member of the Corps has been made to me during the past year (1832).⁶²

Hence, it is not surprising that the Court of Directors commented: 'This signal instance of . . . the superior efficiency of conciliatory means in reducing uncivilized and predatory tribes to order and obedience, is one of the most gratifying events in the recent history of British India: and we trust that the success of your measures will impress upon our Indian Governments the policy as well as the humanity of pursuing the same course in all similar cases'.⁶³

⁶² Letter dt. Malligam, April 30, 1833 Charles Norris, Secretary to Government, Bombay. Political Deptt., 1830. Vol. 14/398, MSAM.

⁶³ Letter dt. London, April 1, 1835 to the Governor-in-Council at Bombay. Political Deptt., 1835/36. Vol. 33/657, MSAM.

APPENDIX:

Taccavi loans to Bhil cultivators, area cultivated and their ploughs

Year	Taccavi balance at the commencement of year	Amount advanced in Rs.	Total Rs.	Recovered Rs.	Written off as irrecoverable	Outstanding balance	Area under cultivation in bigahs	No. of ploughs
1827-28	25416-4-0	10727-4-0	36143-8-0	871-0-6	867-15-6	34404-8-0	NA	607 ^{1/2}
1828-29	34404-8-0	5222-10-0	39627-2-0	817-7-6	752-12-6	38056-14-0	NA	619 ^{1/2}
1829-30	38056-14-0	5985-11-0	44042-9-0	1440-2-9	945-8-3	41656-14-0	6908 ^{1/2}	623
1830-31	41656-14-0	5908-6-0	47565-4-0	1437-12-9	1298-0-3	44829-7-0	8024 ^{1/2}	645 ^{1/2}
1831-32	44829-7-0	3125-12-0	47955-3-0	1062-12-9	928-7-3	45963-15-0	7876 ^{3/4}	648 ^{1/2}
1832-33	45963-15-0	3128-12-0	49092-11-0	1610-1-3	2208-15-9	45273-10-0	6784 ^{1/2}	635 ^{1/2}
1833-34	45273-10-0	6243-1-0	51516-11-3	1955-8-3	2243-7-0	47317-12-0	7694 ^{3/4}	633
1834-35	47317-12-0	2782-12-0	50100-8-0	3075-0-0	1990-12-0	45034-12-0	7460 ^{1/2}	652
1835-36	45034-12-0	1801-0-0	46835-12-0	8832-8-9	1915-3-3	36088-0-0	7324 ^{1/4}	652
1836-37	36088-0-0	655-8-0	36743-8-0	3981-3-6	1675-3-6	31087-1-0	6592	641
1837-38	31087-1-0	2571-4-0	33658-5-0	3333-10-6	1766-4-6	28558-6-0	7073 ^{1/2}	637
1838-39	28558-6-0	4100-3-3	32658-9-3	5458-5-6	2443-0-6	24757-3-3	6128 ^{1/4}	647
1839-40	24757-3-3	2102-9-6	26859-12-9	4032-11-9	903-2-3	21923-14-9	6264 ^{3/4}	614
1840-41	21923-14-9	1010-4-3	22934-3-0	3280-6-3	1147-11-6	18506-1-3	623 ^{1/4}	604
1841-42	18506-1-3	2066-8-0	20752-9-3	2212-15-3	967-10-3	17391-15-9	6150 ^{1/4}	604
1842-43	17391-15-9	3288-6-0	20680-5-9	3158-1-9	560-13-3	16961-6-9	6646	597
1843-44	16961-6-9	2139-8-0	19100-14-9	2582-1-9	195-3-6	16323-9-6	6396	612
1844-45	16323-9-6	3185-13-0	19509-7-0	2276-3-3	620-6-6	16612-13-3	6470	651
1845-46	16612-13-3	4650-12-0	21263-9-3	2219-12-3	1188-14-9	17854-14-3	7660 ^{1/2}	675
1846-47	17854-14-3	4082-6-0	21937-4-3	3701-11-6	450-5-3	17785-3-6	7767 ^{1/2}	728
1847-48	17785-3-6	1538-5-0	19323-8-6	3813-15-6	577-7-3	14932-1-9	760 ^{3/4}	719
1848-49	14932-1-9	589-15-0	15522-0-9	2898-11-0	222-10-0	12400-11-9	7211 ^{3/4}	710
1849-50	12400-11-9	150-4-0	12550-15-9	2568-15-0	592-15-6	9389-1-3	6446 ^{1/2}	666

Source: Revenue Deptt., 1857, Vol. 23, *Annual Reports*, Kuntur Agency, Pp. 236-37. MSAM.