
Impact of Colonial Governance on Modern Civic Administration in Bangalore: Legacy, Renewal, and Reconfiguration

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper, the continuity between the colonial process of civic governance and the development of the modern model of municipal administration in Bangalore is studied, considering the recent structural changes in the city. The British rule piloted in municipal institutions, infrastructure, and administrative structures that formed a base on which independent India established its civic order. These colonial precedents, too, however, were marked by strict hierarchies and spatial inequalities. The state government superseded the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) with the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA). It split the city into five corporations in 2025 to decentralize and modernize administration. Examining the innovations of colonial times, post-independence legacies and the rationale of contemporary rearrangements, the paper maintains that Bangalore is reworking its colonial legacies – retaining its administrative assets and coping with new urban demands. The new composition reflects the burden of the past and the possibility of institutional regeneration.

KEYWORDS:

Colonial Legacy, Civic Governance, Bangalore, Municipal Administration, Greater Bengaluru Authority.

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Introduction

Bangalore, today known as Bengaluru, is commonly cited as one of India's most vibrant and modern-day metropolises. But beneath that modernist surface are institutional strata constructed under the British imperial regime. The city operated under local administration before British influence, and the civic and revenue functions were undertaken in the traditional mode of doing things before the British. The defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799 and the creation of a British Cantonment in 1809 brought in a new administrative spirit of planning, sanitation and control. This bipolar government – a British Cantonment and a Mysore Pete side of the city, placed adjacent to each other – created a complicated institutional geography (roads, services, jurisdictions) that would define the urban nature of Bangalore. In addition to control and exclusion that came with colonial rule, the concept of municipal responsibility and civic infrastructure was embedded in the rule. These systems gradually formed the basis of the civic government in post-independent Bangalore. The recent repeal of the BBMP in 2025 and the establishment of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), together with the separation of the city into five separate corporations (Central, East, West, North, South), is an important institutional change. In this new form, Bangalore is actively re-examining the level of governance, the fragmentation of jurisdiction, and service delivery – efforts to reform or rectify inherited colonial forms.

Scope of the Study

The study stretches back to the early nineteenth century, when British civic institutions began to restructure Bangalore, to the modern-day world of municipal reorganization. It deals with municipal government, infrastructure, sanitation, urban design, and urban spatial legacies. It attempts to not just pursue continuities but also analyse how the civic structure of Bangalore is changing – how the redivision of the city in 2025 expands on or breaks with colonial precedents. It is an institutional-historical, normative approach: how would the city rewrite its history?

Colonial Administrative Framework in Bangalore

The office of the Resident (in Mysore) and Commissioners (particularly of the Cantonment) formed the basis of the colonial administrative building in Bangalore. These officers served as middlemen between the British central authority and local government. Even the Cantonment

was designed to be an exhibition of British urban discipline – broad streets, separate quarters, open rank. In 1862, the Municipal Regulation created formal municipal boards, which took control of roads, drainage, markets, lighting and waste – a civil regime superintended by the British. Co-opted Indian members had advisory or limited roles. The dual system continued, with the Cantonment controlled by the British and the Pete controlled by Mysore, creating functional overlaps and jurisdictional confusion. Nevertheless, property registers, mapping, revenue record keeping, and civic budgeting were within the reach of early administrative experimentation with this system. However limited, the idea of a city government was a germ-bed of subsequent reform.

Civic Reforms, Infrastructure & Urban Services in Colonial Bangalore

In Bangalore, significant urban infrastructure improvements occurred during the British rule. The roads were widened, drainage was laid, parks and open spaces were excavated, and railway lines linked the Cantonment to regional lines. These investments were not gilding but an element of a colonial urban template that valued movement, hygiene, and connectivity. The Hesaraghatta waterworks, which were started in 1896 to supply piped water in the Cantonment and its surroundings, are among the legacies that have continued to serve Bengaluru throughout its growth – one of the municipal engineering projects that have enhanced the development of Bengaluru. Public health and sanitation became central aspects of colonial government. The destruction of unsanitary housing, population translocation, and systematic extensions (such as Basavanagudi and Malleswaram) were part of the administrative response to the disastrous epidemic of the plague in 1898. The Cantonment, in civic amenities, such as lighting and policing, and street maintenance, was more liberally funded and performed than the Pete. The difference between them became normalized over time. However, the infrastructure established during the colonial period became one of the fragments of the urban skeleton that subsequent expansions would add to.

Representation, Indian Participation & Civic Culture

Colonial municipal government initially excluded Indian representation but eventually accepted it in a restricted capacity. The property-based franchise enabled local elites to join municipal boards, typically

in advisory or subservient roles. These experiences created administrative capabilities and civic consciousness in Indians, allowing them a foundation for city leaders later in their lives. Sitting on municipal boards introduced Indian leaders to the practice of governance – budgeting, planning, regulation – which would be extended later by universities and civil services. An emergent civic culture – citizens working with municipal agencies – was reflected in collaboration in civic undertakings like hospitals, schools, and libraries. Practically, colonial municipal institutions were training grounds in future democratic governance, rather than inflexible containers of exclusion.

Post-Independence Continuities and Transformations

Following Indian independence, the Bangalore City Corporation and subsequently the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) replaced the municipal structure in Bangalore. The logic of administration inherited – the roads, water, health, and waste departments – was retained, yet these structures were democratized and expanded with time. Relevant reforms ensued, with significant reforms being the 74th Constitutional Amendment in 1992 that purported to devolve power to urban local bodies and empower municipalities with fiscal, planning, and executive functions. The spatial separation between old colonial and new neighborhoods was maintained, yet the amalgamation of municipal zones was slowly incorporated into a single municipal vision. Old cantonment areas such as Richmond town and Fraser town were integrated into overall municipal maps, and infrastructure developed during the colonial period formed the basis of future development.

Colonial Legacy and Contemporary Municipal Challenges

There are numerous features of the civic government in modern Bengaluru that are both traditional and a proactive redefinition. Colonial models are reflected in departmental structures, documentation systems, and administrative culture. This consistency offers predictability but may restrict flexibility. Similarities between jurisdiction – BBMP, BWSSB and BDA – reverberate the two-tier government of Cantonment and Pete. There is also the existence of spatial inequality in the service delivery process, with the colonial neighborhoods continuing to receive better infrastructure. Nevertheless, the contemporary reforms, including digital grievance and participatory planning, indicate the attempts to transform

inherited structures into responsive institutions.

Incorporating the 2025 Reorganization: GBA and Five Corporations

The point of departure came in 2025 when the Karnataka government formally disbanded BBMP and established the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), restructuring the civic governance in Bangalore into five municipal corporations – Central, East, West, North, and South. Every corporation operates its commissioner and elected council under the GBA banner. This reform is an effort to make governance more accessible to citizens and to decentralize administrative authority. It can be considered a positive development of colonial administrative basics, adjusting the centralized efficiency to the inclusion of democracy. However, there have been complaints of revenue disparities and administrative overlaps, yet the motive has been good – to restructure civic management on a scale, equitably and accountable.

Conclusion

The civic government of Bangalore is a breathing mixture of the colonial legacy and newer inventions. The British rule brought the municipal order, infrastructure systems and administrative professionalism that influenced the city's development. However, as independent India has progressively changed these systems, they are becoming more democratic and involve citizens. This is evidenced in the active effort to decentralize government and modernize inherited structures in the 2025 reorganization of the Greater Bengaluru Authority and five corporations. The story of Bangalore demonstrates that colonial legacies, as interpreted critically, can also be sources of renewal. Layering history with futuristic change, Bengaluru is developing a form of governance that respects the past but looks to the metropolitan future.

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