

**Colonial Trade and Industrial Legacy:
The British Governor Generals’ Role in
Shaping Entrepreneurial Bangalore
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ABSTRACT:

Bangalore’s rise as an entrepreneurial and technology hub is rooted in its transformation during British colonial rule under successive Governor Generals from 1799 onwards. The establishment of the Cantonment in 1809, the expansion of railways and textile industries, and foundational education reforms catalyzed rapid migration, dual-city urban growth, and significant industrial and export development—illustrated by institutions such as Binny Mills (established 1884). Population and workforce data, together with recent peer-reviewed publications (Beleyur, 2025; Iyer & Weir, 2024), confirm how colonial policies produced both economic progress and persistent inequalities. Reforms by leaders like Mark Cubbon established educational, legal, and governance institutions that enabled Bangalore’s modern information technology (IT) sector to flourish. Today’s startup ecosystem, encompassing over 11,000 firms and over one million technology workers, remains concentrated in former colonial industrial and transport corridors. This multidisciplinary empirical study integrates historical data, visuals, and scholarship to analyze Bangalore’s continuing colonial legacy and its influence on present-day economic dynamics.

KEYWORDS:

Colonial legacy, Governor Generals, Bangalore, Trade and Industry, Urban migration, Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Bangalore's journey from a provincial town to India's "Silicon Valley" originated during British colonial rule with Governor Generals establishing the Cantonment (a segregated colonial district) in 1809. This urban design created a dual-city framework separating European and native quarters, restructuring migration, commerce, and education landscapes (Bangalore Cantonment, 2006; Deccan Herald, 2011). Infrastructure developments and institutional reforms accelerated growth, positioning Bangalore as a key regional economic center. This paper investigates the British Governor Generals' role in shaping Bangalore's industrial, educational, and urban growth by analyzing demographic and workforce data. It links colonial infrastructure and education policies to the city's current vibrant technology and startup sectors, while critically examining ongoing colonial legacies shaping socioeconomic patterns (CBValueAddRealty, 2025; Beleyur, 2025; Gonzalo et al., 2022; Iyer & Weir, 2024).

Objectives of the Study

- Analyse the influence of British Governor Generals on Bangalore's industry, trade, education, and urban growth.
- Support findings with quantitative population and workforce data.
- Highlight the direct connection between colonial infrastructure/education reforms and contemporary information technology (IT) and startup sectors.
- Critically assess the dual legacies of development and exploitation, based on current scholarship.

Research Methodology

This empirical study uses historical documents, government archives, census data, international journal articles (Beleyur, 2025; Gonzalo et al., 2022; Iyer & Weir, 2024), and contemporary business reports. All abbreviations, such as IT (information technology), VC (venture capital), and tech (technology), are defined at first use for clarity.

Cantonment Economy and Role of Governor Generals

The 1809 creation of the Bangalore Cantonment (an administrative district for the colonial army and business) by Arthur Wellesley, combined with reforms by leaders like Mark Cubbon, centralized governance, and catalysed economic growth, trade, and urban migration.

Table 1: Colonial Administrative and Industrial Timeline

Year	Sector	Development	Impact
1799	Politics	British defeat of Tipu Sultan	Colonial rule begins
1809	City Planning	Cantonment (colonial district) built	Dual city structure
1831	Governance	The capital moved to Bangalore	Centralization
1864	Transport	Bangalore–Chennai railway opened	Migration and trade soar
1884	Textiles	Binny Mills' operation begins	Start of industrialization
1886	Business	Binny & Co. expansion	Export sector grows
1919	Manufacturing	Minerva Mills inaugurated	Industry diversifies
1940	Infrastructure	Railway network complete	City integrated nationally

Source: Binny & Co., 2011; Beleyur, 2025; Deccan Herald, 2011

Colonial Trade Policy and Commerce

British economic policies—including tariffs and export priorities—fostered rapid expansion in textiles, coffee, and silk, but also privileged British businesses and extracted resources from Indian entrepreneurs (Hansard, 1840; Iyer & Weir, 2024). Evidence from peer-reviewed work shows strong trade and employment growth alongside persistent barriers for local producers.

Industrialization and Entrepreneurship

Employment in Bangalore's textile sector more than doubled from 900 (Binny Mills, 1884) to 1,650 (Minerva Mills and others, 1919) and reached over 1 million in modern technology (tech), information technology (IT), and manufacturing sectors.

Table 2: Bangalore Industrial Workforce Growth (1884–2025)

Year	Sector/Event	Number of Employees
1884	Binny Mills (textiles)	900
1919	Textile manufacturing expands	1,650
2025	Tech, IT, manufacturing	10,00,000+

Source: Binny & Co., 2011; Beleyur, 2025; CBValueAddRealty, 2025; India Today, 2025; Economic Times, 2025.

Education and Entrepreneurial Support

British education reform established mission schools, Central College (from 1875), and University of Mysore (from 1916), which trained the technical and professional workforce crucial to later growth in information technology (IT) and entrepreneurship (Sathee, 2024; IGNITED, 2022;

Gonzalo et al., 2022).

Table 3: Colonial Educational Institutions

Year	Institution	Type	Purpose
1833	Raja's School, Mysore	Government School	First formal education
1851	Wesleyan Mission School	Mission School	English literacy, social access
1858	High School, Bangalore	Public School	Mass secondary education
1875	Central College, Bangalore	College	Initiates higher education
1916	University of Mysore	University	Regional professional/tech hub

Source: Sathee, 2024; IGNITED, 2022

Migration, Labour, and Social Change

Bangalore's population exploded from 75,000 (1881) to 13,600,000 (2025), fuelled by opportunities in colonial factories and railways and labor migration from across South India (CBValueAddRealty, 2025).

Table 4: Population Growth in Bangalore (1881–2025)

YEAR	1881	1901	1921	1941	1961	1981	2001	2021	2025
POPULATION	75,000	1,60,000	2,80,000	4,06,000	12,07,000	29,22,000	51,01,000	1,10,00,000	1,36,00,000

Source: CBValueAddRealty, 2025; Wikipedia, 2002; IJIRT, 2023

Critical Analysis – Exploitation and Development

Recent studies (Iyer & Weir, 2024; Gopalan, 2013; Gonzalo et al., 2022) show that colonial infrastructure and education established strong economic foundations and embedded social, spatial, and economic inequalities. Many current information technology (IT) districts occupy former colonial industrial territories.

Colonial Legacy in Present Bangalore

Today, Bangalore's information technology (IT) and startup sectors—more than 11,000 companies, \$3.3 billion venture capital (VC) investment in 2024, and over one million tech workers—are concentrated in former colonial industrial and railway districts. The strongest technology and innovation hubs (such as Whitefield and Electronic City) follow the layout of colonial infrastructure (AjuniorVC, 2025; BHIVE Workspace, 2025; Business Standard, 2025).

Conclusion

Bangalore's dynamism as an information technology and entrepreneurial city stems from colonial-era foundations: infrastructure, education, and governance structured by the Governor Generals. The evidence shows that the legacies of development and exploitation remain central, requiring thoughtful engagement by urban planners and business leaders.

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Conflict of interest:

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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