

**The Dual Urbanism: The Socioeconomic and Demographic
Changes Brought About by The Construction and
Expansion of The British Cantonment (C. 1800–1947)
in the Bangalore Hinterland
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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the colonial urbanization of Bangalore, emphasizing the role of British colonial rulers in altering the city's layout, infrastructure, and sociopolitical environment during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Before British intervention, Bangalore was a minor regional hub governed by South Indian dynasties. The establishment of the Bangalore Cantonment in 1809 marked a pivotal shift, leading to the construction of roads, drainage systems, telegraph lines, and military installations primarily for colonial purposes. This development resulted in a division between the local "Pete" area and British-controlled Bangalore, fostering a "dual city" characterised by racial hierarchies, socio-spatial segregation, and uneven growth. Utilizing archival materials and historical data, the article argues that the colonial approach to urbanization has left a lasting legacy of spatial and infrastructural inequalities in modern Bengaluru. It also explores the influence of colonial planning on the city's evolution post-independence into a major administrative and technological hub, contributing to a nuanced understanding of urban modernity and postcolonial identity in Indian cities.

KEYWORDS:

British India, Bangalore cantonment, colonial urbanization, dual city, Mysore state, infrastructure, colonial governance.

Introduction:

During the colonial era in India, urbanization was influenced by political, ideological, demographic, and economic factors, with British colonial rulers viewing cities as instruments for control and cultural dominance. Bangalore, initially a provincial town characterized by a caste- and occupation-based living system and central markets (petes), experienced a pivotal transformation when the British East India

Company established the Bangalore cantonment in 1809, relocating its military base from Srirangapatna. This action marked a significant shift in Bangalore's urban narrative, as the cantonment emerged under the administrative jurisdiction of the Madras Presidency, which was separate from the governance of the Mysorean princely state. The resulting dual-city structure, comprising the colonial Cantonment and the indigenous Pete, exemplified the overarching imperial control and social segregation prevalent in British urban policy across India. The establishment of the Bangalore Civil and Military Station galvanized a wave of localized migration, resulting in demographic changes, increased economic prospects, the deindustrialization of local economies, socioeconomic segregation, and uneven urban growth favoring the cantonment. This bifurcated governance framework contributed to the emergence of a Western-oriented elite and created persistent geographical and infrastructural inequalities still evident in contemporary Bengaluru.

The growth of Bengaluru Cantonment

In the early 1800s, the British established Bangalore Cantonment by relocating forces from Srirangapatna, leading to its expansion into a significant military and administrative area separate from the old town. From 1800 to 1947, key developments included the establishment of barracks in Agram in 1807 due to malaria concerns, the creation of General Bazaar after the army's departure in 1809, and Bangalore becoming the administrative center post-1831. Under Commissioner Bowring (1862–1870), reforms improved government and education services, while a railway connection bolstered trade with Madras. Despite Mysore's restoration to the Maharaja in 1881, Bangalore remained the government seat, evolving into a prosperous town recognized as a 'garden city' by the late 19th century, with an increase in shops and luxury goods.

End of the nineteenth century:

The Cantonment in Bangalore experienced a unique architectural transformation influenced by Europe's Gothic revival, characterized by abundant decorative details and distinct features like the monkey top. Following India's independence in 1947, the integration of the City and Cantonment catalysed industrial growth, while the area's spaciousness and greenery contributed to its reputation as the "garden city." The establishment of British cantonments, starting with the Bangalore Civil and Military

Station in 1809, led to significant socioeconomic and demographic shifts, promoting urbanization, social segregation, and a new military economy, as well as reinforcing colonial power dynamics and transforming the surrounding rural communities.

The Cantonment's impact on rural Bangalore society was marked by both disruption and opportunity, resulting in long-term demographic, economic, and social changes.

1. The Migration Push and Pull on Rural Karnataka

The "Pull" of the Urban Job Market

Labour Drain: The British military and civilian operations in Mysore utilized low-skilled labor for construction, sanitation, and domestic services, drawing agricultural laborers and artisans from nearby villages, particularly noticeable around the Cantonment areas now within Bangalore Urban and Bangalore Rural districts.

Cash Economy: Migrants shifted from subsistence farming to cash-based urban jobs due to greater and more constant pay, as opposed to seasonal, drought-prone agriculture.

Famine and Distress Migration: During severe droughts and famines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Cantonment acted as a significant relief center, attracting rural residents facing crop failures. These individuals often abandoned their land for urban areas, seeking jobs or charity, typically settling in high-density regions adjacent to British-planned zones.

The "Pull" of Supporting Services

Agricultural Supply: The demand from the large garrison and civilian population led to a rise in commercial agriculture in peri-urban areas, shifting rural production from subsistence crops to cash commodities for the Bangalore market.

Fuel and Resources: Villages near the city were heavily exploited for resources like as firewood, brick-earth, and stone to power the urban construction boom, resulting in new non-agricultural jobs for some rural populations.

2. Economic and Social Effects on Bangalore Rural

Economic Transformation and Remittances

Financial Injection: Wages from migrant workers in the

Cantonment's service industry were sent back to their communities, stabilizing rural household incomes, helping to pay debts, and allowing for small investments in land or livestock.

Reduced Agricultural Labour: While remittances sustained incomes, the out-migration of prime male working-age population caused labor shortages in villages. This frequently led in:

Increased Rural Wages: An equivalent increase in pay for the remaining farm workers.

Feminization of Agriculture: increased dependence on older people, women, and children to handle farm labor.

Social and Demographic Disruption

Altered Village Demography: A traditional indicator of persistent male-dominated labor migration, the female-to-male ratio among working-age people increased in villages around Bangalore.

• **Urban Culture Diffusion:** The introduction of urban and colonial cultural elements (such as clothes, ambitions for education, and new consumer goods) into the incredibly traditional rural community was facilitated by returning migrants or those who moved back and forth between their village and the city.

Rise of Peri-Urban Settlements: Unable to sustain a purely agricultural economy but too close to overlook the city, the villages that immediately border the cantonment frequently become peri-urban settlements or "kuchra peths" (slums), offering the British the lowest-quality services without the advantages of the cantonment's infrastructure.

3. Demographic and Labour Shifts

Out-Migration and Labour Scarcity

Feminization of Agriculture: The loss of male labour often resulted in the increased reliance on women, children, and the elderly to manage agricultural tasks, altering traditional gender roles and increasing the burden on women in the villages.

Reduced Farm Labour: During peak seasons, villages experienced genuine labour scarcity, which could sometimes lead to a relative increase in agricultural wages for the remaining workers, though this was often offset by the overall instability of rain-fed farming.

Birth of Peri-Urban Settlements

The rural identity of villages adjacent to the cantonment diminished as they transitioned into peri-urban communities, formed primarily to serve the colonial city. These areas, often established by migrant groups and sometimes segmented by caste or occupation, lacked the cantonment's planned infrastructure while being entirely dependent on its economy.

4. Economic Transformation and Inequality

Remittance Economy

Debt Reduction and Resilience: In the extremely precarious, rain-fed agricultural economy, these monies frequently acted as an essential safety net against starvation and debt. Remittances stabilized household earnings by providing funding for small improvements and aiding in the repayment of money lenders.

Shift to Commercial Crops: By encouraging nearby villages to transition from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture and resource extraction, the Cantonment's high demand for food, fodder, and raw resources (such as firewood and construction stone) connected the rural economy to the urban market cycle.

Land and Resource Exploitation

The physical expansion of the Cantonment and the Mysore State's planned suburbs (like Malleswaram and Basavanagudi after the 1898 plague) involved the acquisition or compulsory purchase of village land.

The process ousted traditional landholders and displaced communities who relied on common resources such as grazing land, tanks (kere), and woods, driving them into the city's low-skilled labor market to survive.

5. Social and Cultural Diffusion

Cultural Hybridity

Aspiration and Education: Exposure to modern institutions within the Cantonment (particularly schools and hospitals) increased the demand for English-medium education among rural households, who increasingly considered city jobs as the surest road to upward mobility, pushing future migration.

Caste Dynamics and Social Status

While socially segregated from the elite British perspective, the

Cantonment provided economic opportunities for marginalized communities, particularly in sanitation, laundry, and construction. Employment with the British, although low-ranked and poorly compensated, disrupted traditional agrarian caste control and allowed workers to alter their social status or flee the strict village caste system. The establishment of the Bangalore Civil and Military Station in 1809 created a unique "dual city" that merged colonial, foreign, and Indian cultures, significantly transforming Bangalore's identity and isolating it from the surrounding Princely State of Mysore.

6. Segregation in Society and the "Dual City"

The most significant impact was the physical and social division between the Cantonment (the British-administered area) and the Pete (the indigenous, or native, city), which led to two distinct, yet interdependent, societies.

Racial and Class Segregation: The Cantonment was a socially privileged area resembling a British town, characterized by wide streets and spacious homes, where wealthy Anglo-Indians, British officials, and European officers resided. This well-planned neighborhood was often separated from the dense native populations, such as those in Pete and nearby service communities like Blackpully/Shivajinagar and Dhobi Ghats, by a large military parade ground.

Avenues for Social Contact: The Cantonment's operation depended on contact notwithstanding segregation. Indian and Anglo-Indian labor and trade were governed by British consumption habits in the service industries and bazaars (Commercial Street, South Parade/MG Road), which served as important cultural touchpoints.

8. Linguistic and Cultural Fusion

Linguistic Pluralism

The Cantonment area's multilingual character was solidified by this large-scale, ongoing migration, with Tamil establishing as the primary vernacular language for labor and trade alongside English, the administrative language, and Kannada, the state capital's language.

Meanwhile, the native Pete continued to speak Telugu and Kannada, which further widened the cultural divide.

Religion and Institutional Culture

Christianity and Education: Many Protestant and Catholic churches, schools, and colleges (such as Bishop Cotton's, St. Joseph's, and Baldwin's) were founded in the Cantonment. The wealthy native elite, Europeans, and Anglo-Indians were the main draws of these schools, which developed into hubs for the spread of Western education, curricula, and social graces.

The Club Culture: The rise of upscale, European-style clubs (like Bangalore Club and Bangalore Golf Club) brought dress codes, social customs, and pastimes (like polo and cricket) that characterized colonial social life and were later embraced by the upper class of westernized India.

9. Changes in Social Norms and Aspiration

New Social Mobility

People from marginalized groups and lower castes (such as those working in sweeping, leatherworking, or laundry) discovered new, low-paying jobs that gave them cash income and some degree of autonomy from the social structures of the village.

This cash flow subtly questioned the established, inflexible social order by making it possible to invest in urban real estate or educate children.

Aesthetics and Public Life

Garden City Concept: The Cantonment's distinctive "Garden City" appeal, a representation of planned modernity, was distinguished by its broad, tree-lined avenues, spacious bungalows, and designated parks (such as Cubbon Park and Lal Bagh, though they were started earlier and were greatly influenced by colonial landscape design).

Consumerism: New cuisines, clothes, and manufactured goods became popular among the wealthy native people as a result of the introduction of imported commodities and a retail culture centered on European preferences by stores on South Parade and Commercial Street.

Conclusion

During the British colonial period, the establishment of Cantonments in India led to a cosmopolitan and stratified society, particularly in Bangalore, which became a multicultural hub within

Mysore State. This era drastically altered India's socio-economic landscape through the introduction of Western ideas, scientific knowledge, and modern education, while also addressing social issues like slavery and child marriage. However, colonial rule was marked by significant inequalities and an extractive structure that resulted in extreme poverty and resource depletion. Despite these drawbacks, British governance contributed to industrial development and improved infrastructure, leaving a complex legacy that India continues to navigate.

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