

# Colonial Legacy: The British Governor Generals' Contribution to Making Modern Bangalore Gangadhara

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17952193>

## ABSTRACT:

The colonial encounter between Britain and India transformed not only the political landscape but also the urban and social geography of many Indian cities. Bangalore, today known as Bengaluru—the Silicon Valley of India—owes much of its modern urban form and infrastructure to the British colonial administration. This paper explores the significant contributions made by British Governor Generals and Resident officers in shaping the city's civic, military, and administrative framework. The study analyses how policies under British rule established the city's dual character—one indigenous and the other colonial—and how this duality continues to influence Bangalore's contemporary identity. Using historical records, municipal archives, and secondary research, this paper highlights the role of colonial governance in building modern infrastructure, administrative systems, and socio-economic foundations that set the trajectory for Bangalore's later development.

## KEYWORDS:

Colonial legacy, Governor Generals, Modern Bangalore, British administration, Urban development, South India, Residency system.

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## 1. Introduction:

The city of Bangalore stands as a living museum of India's colonial past and postcolonial transformation. Its evolution from a fortified town under the Kempe Gowdas to a thriving metropolis was profoundly shaped by British colonial administration. The establishment of the British Cantonment in the early nineteenth century introduced modern civic amenities, military infrastructure, and western administrative practices that distinguished Bangalore from other princelytowns.

The British Governor Generals and their local representatives, particularly the Residents at Mysore, played a decisive role in this transformation. Their policies were directed not merely toward maintaining imperial control but also toward establishing a strategic military and

administrative centre in southern India. As such, Bangalore became a model of colonial urban planning—divided physically and socially between the native town and the British cantonment.

## **2. Historical Background:**

Before British intervention, Bangalore was under the rule of the Wodeyars of Mysore and later Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. Following Tipu Sultan's death in 1799 at the Battle of Srirangapatna, the British restored the Wodeyar dynasty under subsidiary alliance, placing Mysore under indirect British control. The British Resident stationed in Bangalore became the intermediary between the Governor General and the Mysore rulers.

Lord Wellesley, the Governor General of India at the time, recognized Bangalore's strategic military importance. Situated on the Deccan plateau, the city offered a temperate climate and a defensible position for troops. Consequently, a permanent British garrison was established, giving rise to the Bangalore Cantonment in 1809. Over the next century, successive Governors General and Residents transformed the cantonment into a prototype of colonial urbanism in southern India.

## **3. Contributions of the British Governor Generals and Residents:**

### **3. 1 Lord Wellesley (1798–1805): The Strategic Foundation**

Lord Wellesley's decision to establish a cantonment in Bangalore laid the foundation of its transformation. His policies aimed to create strong military nodes across the subcontinent, and Bangalore became one of these key points. The cantonment not only secured British dominance in southern India but also spurred economic activity by attracting soldiers, traders, and artisans.

### **3. 2 Lord William Bentinck (1828–1835): Administrative and Civic Reforms**

Bentinck's tenure as Governor General marked the beginning of administrative modernization. His emphasis on law, education, and social reform indirectly influenced the governance of Bangalore. Under his regime, the Mysore Residency adopted administrative models based on rational taxation, municipal planning, and the creation of civic institutions. The introduction of English education in the cantonment area also sowed the seeds for Bangalore's future as an educational centre.

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### 3. 3 Lord Dalhousie (1848–1856): Infrastructure and Communication

Lord Dalhousie's policies were transformative for India's infrastructure. His advocacy for railways, telegraph, and postal networks extended to Bangalore as well. The Madras–Bangalore railway line, initiated during his administration, connected the city to major trade routes and ports, facilitating economic and demographic expansion. Dalhousie's centralization of governance also strengthened the British administrative presence in Bangalore, making it a crucial link between the Madras Presidency and Mysore.

### 3. 4 The Role of the Mysore Residents

Residency officers such as Sir Mark Cubbon (1834–1861) and Lewin Bentham Bowring (1862–1870) were instrumental in the actual urban transformation of Bangalore. Sir Mark Cubbon, in particular, established a robust civil administration, reformed the police system, and introduced revenue reforms that stabilized the local economy. He laid out broad roads, improved sanitation, and organized the municipal layout of the cantonment. The Cubbon Park and Cubbon Road remain enduring symbols of his contributions.

Lewin Bowring continued this work, initiating projects such as the construction of public offices, schools, and hospitals. He strengthened the link between the British cantonment and the Mysore Maharaja's administration, promoting urban expansion and civic order.

## 4. Colonial Urban Planning and Infrastructure:

The British imprint on Bangalore's urban form is most evident in its dual structure: the Native City (Pettah) and the Cantonment. The Pettah retained its traditional markets and indigenous architecture, while the Cantonment reflected European urban aesthetics—broad avenues, bungalows, churches, clubs, and parade grounds. Key infrastructural developments included:

- Roads and Drainage Systems – Introduced European standards of urban sanitation and planning.
- Public Buildings – Offices, courts, and educational institutions reflected neoclassical and Victorian architectural styles.
- Water Supply and Electricity – Initiatives like the Hesaraghatta reservoir (1890s) marked early modern public utility management.
- Healthcare Facilities – The establishment of hospitals such as the

Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital catered to both Europeans and locals.

This dual city model created a cultural and spatial segregation that persisted into the postcolonial era, shaping Bangalore's socio-economic geography.

### **5. Social and Educational Impact:**

British governance also introduced modern education and civic institutions. Missionary schools and government colleges promoted English education, laying the foundation for Bangalore's later reputation as an educational and technological hub. The creation of municipal boards fostered civic participation and introduced Western ideas of governance and public health.

Socially, the city became a melting pot of communities—Anglo-Indians, Tamils, Kannadigas, and Europeans—creating a cosmopolitan character that still defines Bangalore today.

### **6. The Legacy of Colonial Governance:**

The colonial administration's influence persists in Bangalore's administrative structure, architecture, and civic systems. Institutions such as the Bangalore Municipal Council (1862), the Residency, and public spaces like Cubbon Park remain vital parts of the city's identity. While colonial rule was exploitative in many respects, its urban reforms laid a foundation for later modernization. The British legacy, thus, represents a paradox—one of both domination and development.

### **7. Conclusion:**

The British Governor Generals and Residents profoundly influenced the making of modern Bangalore. Through military planning, administrative innovation, and infrastructural development, they transformed a provincial town into a modern urban centre. The legacy of their interventions endures in the city's civic institutions, spatial layout, and cosmopolitan culture. Recognizing these colonial contributions does not diminish the exploitative nature of imperial rule; rather, it helps understand the historical layers that define Bangalore's modern identity. The duality of colonial modernity continues to shape its growth trajectory even in the twenty-first century.

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**Funding:**

This study was not funded by any grant.

**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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