
The Role of British Governor Generals, Residents, and Commissioners in the Administration of Bangalore

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ABSTRACT:

The British conquest of Mysore in 1799 marked the beginning of a new political and administrative order in Bangalore. Over the next century, the city came under three distinct but interrelated authorities: the Governor Generals of India, who directed overall colonial policy; the Residents, who supervised the Mysore court; and the Commissioners, who directly administered the state during the period of Commissioner's Rule (1831–1881). This research article examines their respective roles in reshaping Bangalore's governance, economy, and urban identity. While the Governor Generals provided strategic direction, the Residents functioned as political supervisors ensuring Mysore's compliance, and the Commissioners carried out administrative reforms and infrastructural development from Bangalore. The study highlights how these interventions consolidated colonial power, created a dual city structure of Cantonment and Pettah, and inadvertently laid the foundations of Bangalore's modernity.

KEYWORDS:

Bangalore administration, Governor Generals, British Residents, Commissioners, Mysore state, colonial governance.

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Introduction

The fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799 was a turning point in southern Indian history. With the reinstallation of the Wadiyars under the Subsidiary Alliance, Bangalore became both a military garrison and a political centre for British power. The city's administration was influenced by three distinct layers of authority: Governor Generals in Calcutta, Residents stationed in Bangalore, and Commissioners during direct British rule. This layered governance transformed Bangalore into a colonial city marked by political subordination, administrative modernization, and urban restructuring.

Role of the Governor Generals

Lord Wellesley (1798–1805):

The Governor-General of India, played a key role in shaping Bangalore's early colonial administration after the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799. Following the British victory in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, Wellesley placed the young Wodeyar ruler, Krishna raja Wodeyar III, on the throne under a Subsidiary Alliance. Under this arrangement, a British Resident was stationed at Bangalore, and the state had to maintain a British army contingent, marking the beginning of Bangalore's growth as a military cantonment and administrative centre. Wellesley's policy ensured British control over Mysore's foreign affairs and finances, while allowing the Wodeyars limited internal authority. This laid the foundation for later British intervention and eventually the Commissioner's rule in 1831. Thus, Wellesley's administration firmly established Bangalore as both a strategic military base and a centre of British supervision in southern India.

Lord William Bentinck (1828–1835):

The Governor-General of India played a key role in shaping Bangalore's early colonial administration. In 1831, due to alleged misrule by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, he annexed Mysore and established the Mysore Commission, placing Bangalore at the centre of British administration. Under his direction, the city's administrative machinery including revenue, judicial courts, police, and postal services was reorganized and centralized. He also encouraged infrastructure development, improving roads, communication, and public buildings, which strengthened Bangalore as both a military and administrative hub. While his broader social reforms, like the abolition of Sati, were not

specific to Bangalore, they set a precedent for governance and justice. Bentinck's tenure laid the foundations for modern administration in Bangalore, which were further developed by later Commissioners like Mark Cubbon and Lewin Bowring.

Role of the Residents

The British Residents in Bangalore played an important role as political representatives of the Governor-General in Mysore. Their main duty was to supervise the Maharaja's court and advise on state affairs, ensuring that British interests were protected. Though the Wodeyars were formally the rulers, the Residents exercised real influence by monitoring revenue collection, judicial matters, military arrangements, and foreign relations. In Bangalore, they acted as intermediaries between the Mysore palace and the East India Company (later the British Crown), reporting on the state's administration and intervening whenever misrule or inefficiency was suspected. Their constant oversight eventually led to the British takeover in 1831, when the administration of Mysore including Bangalore was transferred to the Commissioners. Thus, the Residents laid the groundwork for direct British control and were key in making Bangalore an important administrative and military centre under colonial rule.

Role of the Commissioners

Sir William Morison (1831–1832) :

He was the first British Commissioner of Mysore after the kingdom was taken over from the Wodeyars due to allegations of misrule. He made Bangalore the centre of administration, marking the beginning of Commissioner's rule. Morison reorganised the revenue and finance system, introduced stricter control over law and order, and brought civil and military administration under closer British supervision. He also laid the foundation for using Bangalore as the administrative and military headquarters, which later commissioners developed further. Though his tenure was short, his measures created the framework for future reforms under successors like Sir Mark Cubbon and Lewin Bowring.

Sir Mark Cubbon (1834–1861):

Sir Mark Cubbon reorganised the administrative divisions of Mysore, making Bangalore the capital and dividing the territory into manageable districts and taluks under native as well as British officers,

which improved governance and accountability. He introduced structured judicial reforms, establishing a hierarchy of courts to ensure legal order, separating civil administration from military functions, and instituting police forces around 1834 to maintain law and order. In revenue matters he tightened oversight and improved efficiency reforming tax collection, enforcing strict standards of record-keeping, and reducing corruption among revenue officers. He promoted local languages (Kannada, Marathi) in administration instead of multiple languages like Urdu or Persian, which helped reduce barriers in governance and made administration more comprehensible to the local populace. On infrastructure, he oversaw the construction of roads, dams, bridges, improvements in irrigation and public works, and also encouraged agriculture, forestry, and horticulture (for example transferring Lalbagh gardens to an agri-horticultural society) which supported economic growth.

Lewin Bowring (1862–1870):

He was served as the Chief Commissioner of Mysore from 1862 to 1870, succeeding Sir Mark Cubbon, and he played a significant role in shaping Bangalore's administration during the British Commissioner's rule. In Bangalore, Bowring continued many of Cubbon's reforms but also introduced new measures. He strengthened the judicial system by establishing the Bowring Civil and Military Hospital and setting up better law courts, which improved healthcare and justice in the city. He promoted education by supporting English schools and encouraging missionary institutions, thereby modernising learning in Bangalore. Under his tenure, the city saw the introduction of more civic amenities and municipal regulations, laying the foundation for organised urban governance. He also took interest in public works, continuing the expansion of roads, communication systems, and administrative infrastructure, which helped Bangalore grow as a modern cantonment town and administrative hub. Bowring was also known for his literary interest and documented Karnataka's history and culture through his writings, which gave Bangalore and Mysore recognition in colonial scholarship.

R. J. Meade (1870–1875):

He Served as the British Chief Commissioner of Mysore after Lewin Bowring and continued to strengthen Bangalore's administration. He paid special attention to education and public health, encouraging

the establishment of schools and improving medical facilities. During his tenure, the Bangalore municipality was further empowered to handle civic services like sanitation, roads, and drainage. Meade also worked to streamline the judicial system and kept strict supervision over law courts to maintain efficiency and fairness. His period of administration helped consolidate earlier reforms and ensured that Bangalore developed as a well-administered and orderly city, preparing it for the final phase of Commissioner's rule.

C. B. Saunders (1875–1881):

He was the last British Chief Commissioner of Mysore before the Rendition of 1881, when power was restored to the Wodeyars. During his tenure, Bangalore saw notable improvements in municipal administration, particularly in water supply, sanitation, roads, and drainage systems, which enhanced the city's civic life. He strengthened the police force to maintain law and order in the fast-growing cantonment and city areas. Saunders also encouraged public works and civic reforms that made Bangalore one of the best-administered towns in British India by the end of the Commissioner's rule. His administration effectively prepared the city for the transition back to princely governance under Chamarajendra Wodeyar X.

Impact and Legacy

The Governor-Generals of India left a lasting impact on Bangalore by shaping its political, administrative, and military framework. Lord Wellesley established British authority after Tipu Sultan's defeat, stationing a Resident and introducing the Subsidiary Alliance, which made Bangalore a key administrative and military centre. Lord William Bentinck further strengthened governance by annexing Mysore in 1831, creating the Mysore Commission, centralizing revenue, judicial, and police systems, and promoting infrastructure development. Their policies laid the foundation for modern administration, improved civic order, and enhanced Bangalore's strategic importance. Collectively, the Governor-Generals ensured that Bangalore evolved from a regional town into a well-planned colonial administrative hub, which's institutional and civic structures influenced the city's growth well into the late 19th century.

Conclusion

The roles of Governor Generals, Residents, and Commissioners in

Bangalore reveal the layered nature of colonial governance. Their policies subordinated Mysore to British interests, but in doing so, they transformed Bangalore into a major administrative and military hub. The city's evolution into a modern metropolis was rooted in this colonial legacy, where imperial strategies of control unintentionally produced enduring urban and civic institutions.

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