

The Role of Cantonment in the Growth of Belgaum Urbanity

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I. INTRODUCTION

India is a sub continent of rich natural resources, which attracted many Europeans. When India became a colony of the British, many political and economic changes have taken place. The intention of British was to establish Imperialism and bring entire India under her sovereignty. They prepared their policies which could help their mercantile and missionary policies. The British followed the policy of imperialism and expansion policy towards the native states. After 1824, many revolts have occurred in one or the other place in India. In order to control these revolts and rebellions the British were in need of a strong army. As a result of this they established various cantonments. The term 'Cantonment' means a place where military was stationed. These cantonments played an important role in the process of urbanization on the models of European cities (James Campbell, p, 40) it was with this intention, the Belgaum cantonment was established in the Presidency. Cantonments were established for the purpose of defence, protection of trade, suppression of revolts and communal violence. The urbanity of Belgaum developed when the Cantonment was established and which became a boost for the growth of the city.

Establishment of Belgaum cantonment :

In 1818, after the Battle of Kirki, the Peshwas of Poona were finally defeated. As a result of this, the part of Northern Karnataka which was under the Peshwas fell under the hands of the British. The four districts of Dharwad, Bijapur, Belgaum and Karwar became the part of the Bombay Presidency.

The Belgaum cantonment was established in 1824. It is situated in the west of Belgaum, about half a km from the town. In the beginning, in the cantonment, there stationed two European regiments- local regiment and an artillery. They also built soldier barracks¹. In 1821, for military officers, a market was constructed. On March 2nd, 1827, the map of the entire cantonment was prepared. Belgaum cantonment became one of the major cantonments in one of the 5 cantonments established by the Bombay Presidency²

To provide facilities for the soldiers like education, health, ration, meditation centres were constructed. As a result of this a new type of colony was set up in Belgaum. Further the Belgaum cantonment became a training centre also.

CANTONMENT AREA:

After the defeat of Peshwas by the British in 1818, General Munro took over the city of Belgaum. Belgaum was made as a military cantonment by the British. Pleasant climate which is necessary for military training, proximity to sea shore, its strategic location for defence purpose, Belgaum became a military base.³

The total area of the cantonment was around 1524 acres. The cantonment is situated on the west side of the Belgaum town. According to the census of 1884, the population was 9852. The retired officers, soldiers stayed in the camp area.⁴ In this area we find the tomb of Asad Khan, officers' bungalow, church, hostels, two schools-St. Pauls and Beynon Smith, systematically led roads, inner drainage system, workshops, gymnasium, library, canteen, hospitals, for the soldiers and for officers, an European hospital was constructed in 1867.⁵ In the camp market, the British brought the best shoe maker, gun repairer, photo studio, sweet mart, bakers and barbers to serve the military persons.

HOUSES AND QUARTERS:

In the camp area of Sadar Bazaar, 1022 local houses for the local soldiers, 62 officers' bungalows and 42 commissioners' bungalows were built during this period. This new type of construction of Bungalows with many rooms, gardens with amenities facilitated in comp area.

ROADS, GARDENS AND CLUBS:

The roads of the cantonment were constructed in a very systematic and scientific way. The roads were broad and straight and dividing the camp area into various rectangular blocks. For Ex: Lytton road, Church road, Ripon road, North Brook road, Harris Road, Temple road, Convent road, South Bethgauf road, Madras A and B road, Picket road, Havelock road, Cattle street, Independence road, Cockers' Street, Beef merchants' street, St. Anthony's street, Court Street etc.

The camp area along with the officers' bungalow and houses, there are three gardens⁶ - Old station garden, new station garden and officers' garden. These gardens were maintained by the cantonment officers. Another interesting aspect of the gardens is that they have grown their own vegetables.

The cantonment of Belgaum was very systematically and scientifically planned. The architectural style of the British, with some little modifications, adding Indian elements of architecture was very much suitable for the climate of Belgaum. The best examples of this type are Post Office, Guest House, MLRC Building etc. The barrack artillery are influenced by the Indian styles, lofty and beautiful entrance, large guest houses, importance for the decoration, heavy and strong walls, lofty ceilings which suits the local climate. These buildings depict socio-cultural expressions.⁷ For the recreation of officers, Belgaum Club was established. It is a one of the earliest clubs in India.

The urbanization process of Belgaum is greatly influenced by the cantonment. For the first time they developed the camp on the model of European cities which could serve all military purpose and luxury.

RELIGIOUS PLACES:

In course of time many people belonging to different religions, speaking different languages, possessing different cultures settled in Belgaum. Temples and Gurudwara, church, masques were built in the camp area. Even today we find the culture and tradition of British in camp that's why Belgaum is called as 'Cradle of Indian military'.

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