

Colonial Urban Development in India - A Conceptual Clarification

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Abstract : *The two hundred and fifty odd years of European presence in India and its impact on the process of urbanization is an interesting feature of urban development. Understanding of present Indian towns must be derived in good measure from awareness of those processes, which were operative in the past. The pattern and process of urbanization in India have been so strongly stamped by its colonial history that contemporary reality cannot be properly understood without an analysis of the factors that were induced in the system during the colonial period. It is however debatable whether a completely valid conceptual framework can be formulated in an abstract sense, which would explain fully the effect of colonialism on Indian urbanization. This rather broad generalization needs to be tested on many more individual cities, Cantonments and Hill stations. All that one can say now, is that colonialism affected different urban centres in different ways and its effect on a particular city was often the result of specific historical circumstances, which affected the particular city and its hinterland. The evolution of colonial cities in the process of urbanization is the most important aspect of this study. The purpose of studying the colonial cities is to understand the global and regional development processes of which they were a part and the role they played in that process.*

Introduction

India retained after Independence many features of British rule. To mention a few they

are the parliamentary form of Government, legal and judicial system, unified civil service and the institution of cantonments. The last of these has the additional characteristic of not having taken roots in Britain, the source of British rule in India. These towns have a great impact on the Indian urban system from the 19th century onwards. The colonial rule in India, which changed the existing pattern of urban settlements were the cantonments, hill resorts, railway colonies and port towns.

After the end of colonial rule, one might have expected that these towns, at least their significance - to have diminished or even disappeared as a relict feature of colonialism. Instead, the main ports established by the British at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta have continued to grow as Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata metropolises. The hill stations are continuing to be centres of recreation and cantonments, being a unique institution remaining as pockets of orderliness and tidiness.

The British towns in India were established to fulfill their requirements. These requirements had played a major role in the location, morphology and functioning of the towns, which were developed by the British. The two hundred and fifty odd years of European presence in India and its impact in the process of urbanization have been largely ignored. Very few geographers have touched on these aspects as detailed subjects of study. Hence here an attempt is made to understand it.

British Influence on Indian Urbanization

The process of colonial urban development took place in many countries of the world, particularly in colonial India between the 18th and 20th centuries. The British influence on Indian urbanization has been manifold and far reaching. The British urban development in India is quite distinct from the indigenous kind. It has left its mark both on the physical and social aspects of urban development.

When considering the extent and implication of British influence on Indian urbanization, it should be noted that the actual numbers of new cities and towns established by them were not many and they would account for only a small fraction of the total number of towns in India. But British domination left a strong and lasting impression on the urban landscape.

The process of urbanization initiated during the colonial period bears a strong imprint of the effects of the exogenous factors such as administrative, commercial, recreational and military functions in response to political needs.

Meera Kosambi (1983) reported the British urban impact in three broad phases such as maritime domination, territorial domination and industrial domination. The chain of events leading from one to another, and the resultant urban changes i.e., creation of British urban centres, especially cantonments, port cities and hill stations

The earliest Europeans to settle in Western India were the Portuguese. They set up their first factory at Cochin. Soon a number of settlements were created along the western coast at Goa, Diu, Daman, Salsette, Bassein, Chaul and Bombay. By the middle of the 16th century, they had established their naval supremacy. By the beginning of the next century, other European nations became interested in the eastern trade and monopolistic companies were formed, (Gupta, 1985).

After a century of Portuguese head start, the second wave of European commercial expansion brought merchant companies mainly from Britain, Holland and France to India. The English East India Company was formed in 1600 A.D. in England. In 1608, Cap. Hawkins landed in the thriving Mughal port of Surat and travelled to Delhi to try and get an imperial *firman*, which would allow the company to establish factories in India. The *firman* was finally received, and the English established their first factory at

Surat. Soon after, the English established factories at Ahmedabad Broach, Rajapur, Karwar and Anjangao on the western coast. Between 1639-1690, other factories were set up at Patna, Cossimbazar, and Hughli as well as in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta.

The English East India company's merchants attempted to follow the same strategy as the Portuguese by establishing naval superiority, acquiring coastal bases, controlling indigenous oceanic trade, and trying to acquire a monopoly of export items. In view of these, the English East India Company's merchants were anxious to acquire a more insular site on the western coast, which would provide more independence and an opportunity to build adequate defences.

For that several coastal sites were considered and finally, Bombay Islands were received by Charles II of England from the Portuguese King as dowry in 1661. He gave these on lease to the East India Company in 1668. The East India Company's office was shifted here from Surat in 1678. But actually, the British could not really establish themselves here till the complete rout of Maratha power and integration of major native kingdoms in Maharashtra with British India between 1803 and 1827.

The rivalries of European nations had changed the economic situation of those traders, their strength and presence in India. Thus the Portuguese were no longer the main European traders and their territories were restricted to Goa, Diu, and Daman. The Dutch had also been pushed into the background in India as they concentrated on their far eastern possessions. The French had minor posts at Karaikal, Mahe and larger ones at Pondicherry and Chandernagore and the British were doing the best.

The initial plan of the English merchants was to establish trading centres and they established several trading centres known as "Factories". In the decade following 1757, a struggle for commercial supremacy broke out

between the English and the French in India. At the end of the decade, the English emerged victorious. The French were practically driven out of India. With increased commercial and military supremacy, the company's focus shifted to political power. British influence on Indian urbanization began only with this change of commercial interest to political supremacy.

Thus the preparations for British political expansion started in the last quarter of the 18th century and with further expansion by the mid 19th century. Within the next fifty years, the English were able to defeat all their Indian rivals and had gained a dominant influence over large areas. The rest of the 19th century saw the rapid consolidation of British supremacy in India.

The rise of British political, commercial and industrial power was directly responsible for the decline of indigenous cities. While old cities were in a state of decline, new urban settlements typically BRITISH and COLONIAL in nature were appearing on the scene.

Urban Growth and Development

The British established various new types of settlements in India. These were basically urban in character and reflected their predominantly urban cultural background. The English settlements went through a process of evolution, till they reached the fully developed forms. Even then, there were important differences between a fully developed metropolitan European city and those that came into existence in India.

Colonial cities were of several types. Some were literally new towns others were grafted onto pre-existing nuclei. Wholly British towns were very few in number, and the most important of them were the three presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.

The colonial port cities in India are generally recognized as the most important cities in the country. "The great port cities of Calcutta,

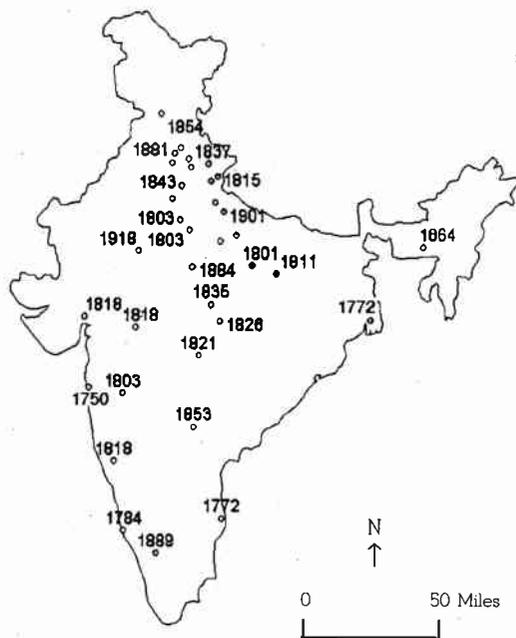


Fig. 1 : Development of Contonment towns

Bombay, and Madras, which developed exclusively under British rule, exhibit a remarkable blending of Indian and European urban traditions, producing a modified kind of European townscape in which Indo-British culture evolved and still continues to flourish" (Brush, 1962).

Bombay started its career as a port for maritime trade and a British naval strong hold. After mid 19th century, it became an industrial center and seat of western education. The rise of Bombay and its multifunctionality was inseparably linked with the rise of British power. Up to the mid 19th century then, Bombay presents the picture of a pre-industrial city while also fitting into the pattern of colonial cities. (Gupta 1985). The most important stage in the development of Bombay city took place in the four decades after 1860. During these years the city developed into a metropolis and shed its pre-industrial attributes. This growth was due to interrelated political, industrial, economic and other causes.

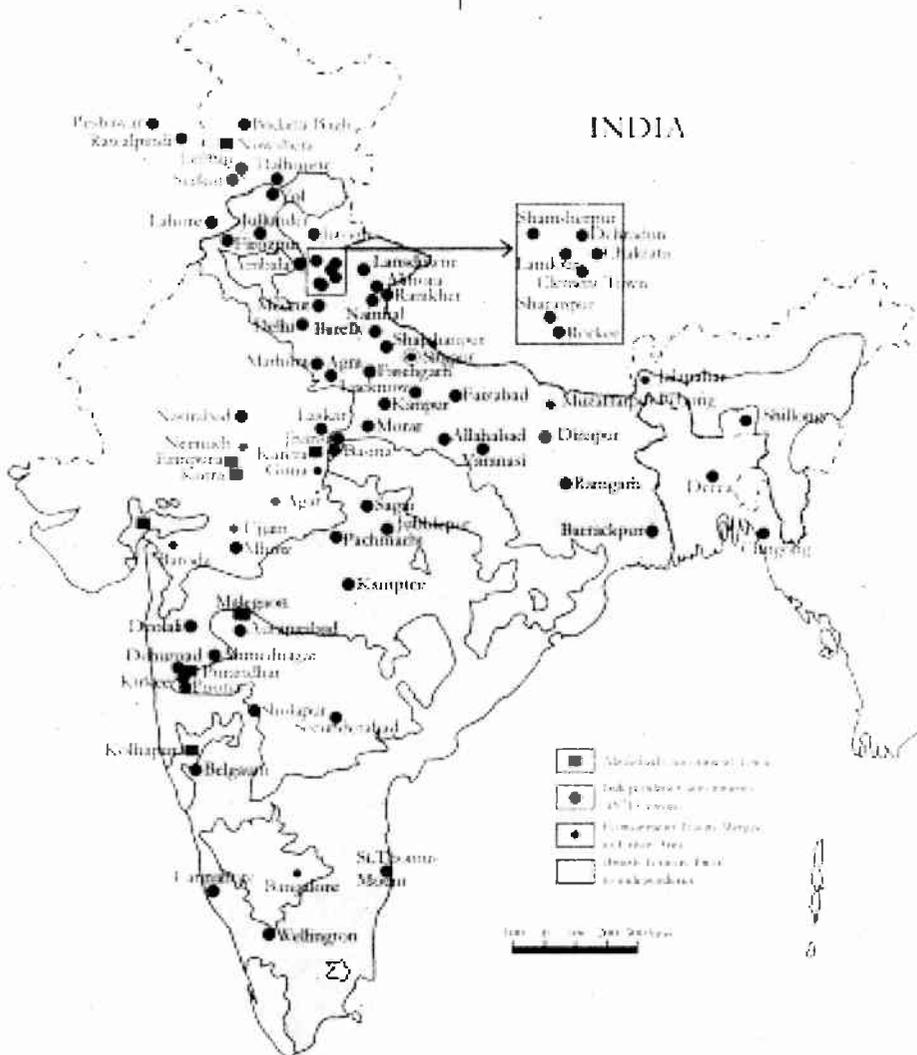


Fig. 2 : Location of Cantonment Towns (exsiting, abolished and merged)

Calcutta, the principal gateway of the empire in the east became the second city of the British Empire in course of time. It is well known that Calcutta had a distinct period of development from the establishment of Job Charnock's factory to the battle of Plassey in 1757. On August 24, 1760, Job Charnock entered the eastern bank of the Hoogly and since then Calcutta underwent many changes. In 1757, the city gradually became the first colonial city in eastern India. During the decades that followed, Calcutta

became more and more British. The raison d'être of Calcutta of the 19th century is aptly brought out by a correspondent in, "The Englishmen" of July 16, 1884—"Calcutta, is a purely English city. Its site was selected and the land taken up ... by the English. They founded it, built it, occupied it, maintained it, defended it, regulated it and it is still from their commerce and enterprise that its revenue are now developed." (Moonis Raza and Atiya Habeeb 1976).

In early colonial years Delhi was not a major administrative centre, merely a district military post for Punjab and the military cantonment was located to the north west of the city. The old Delhi was traditionally known as Shahajahanabad after the Moughul emperor Shahajahan founded this planned islamic city. The pressure of 19th century - colonial expansion erupted in India, in the mutiny of 1857 in which the Moghul emperor was dethroned. The consequent strengthening of military control of British rule resulted in a more powerful position of political power and cultural values. The great Mutiny of 1857 and its effect on urban change was so extensive that less than 20 years after that mutiny, Delhi was made to forget that it was a Moughal city, (Eckert Ehlers and Thomas Krafft). As colonial power over the subcontinent tightened, the capital of British India moved to Delhi in 1911, where a new European city was appended to the historic city.

The railways introduced by the British in 1853, brought in its wake the railway town. By the very nature of rail transport all the towns were located on the plains. The railway settlements in the plains became the focal point of urban development in a number of places. A good example of such railway town would be Kharagpur. Many of these towns were either at important railway junctions for example, Mughalsarai or at the terminus for example Haora. These railway settlements originally were built for British and Anglo-Indian railway employees.

A completely new trend in urban location was the establishment of a large number of hill towns. Although, the hill towns were not unknown prior to their founding by the British in India, they were few and had a small population. They were often visited seasonally for specific purposes, such as recreation, religious devotion and as local administration towns. However the development of a large number of hill towns over a wide area was a British introduction to India.

The excessive mortality of troops in the plains due to malaria and other diseases forced the British to transfer the troops to hill camps. The higher elevations with lower temperatures had a limiting effect on diseases associated with the plains. This was a major advantage. In the pleasantly cool and pine forested areas, the Britishers achieved emotional renewal and the troops experienced almost miraculous recoveries. Moreover, hill stations were seen as an easy possibility of segregation of troops from the indigenous society. By mid century, hill stations had originated as military and civil sanitarium. (The Colonial genesis of hill stations-Robert R.Reed)

Mitchell Nora (1972) has made an extensive study on hill stations. According to her, the hill stations were the product of European cultural perceptions, which held that, expected state of health could be attained more satisfactorily at higher elevation in the hills. According to Spencer, and Thomas (1948) in India, the hill stations were accessible to the major European centres of population. From Delhi and Calcutta they could reach Simla - Mussoorie group by rail. The second group in the north east of India included Darjeeling and Shillong. The third Poona-Mahabaleshwar group catered to Bombay, and the fourth cluster, included Ootacamund- Kodaikanal and Coonoor in the Nilgiris, close to the colonial city of Madras.

The military station or cantonment was an entirely new kind of urban centre introduced by the British on to the Indian landscape. It was either an independent new town or adjunct to an existing city. It was a completely novel phenomena in Indian urban development. Consideration of health and discipline of the troops weighed with the company, from the beginning of the 18th century. The concept of cantonment originated in the latter half of that century. Lord Clive initiated building of cantonments as a matter of policy in 1765.

The location and the distribution pattern of cantonment towns in India evolved during the

British period under the influence of the historic sequence of the expansion of colonial empire and the dual requirements of defence from external aggression and internal security. There were two broad categories within which the cantonments fell. One type was the military cantonment attached to the towns created by Europeans for example Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. The cantonments of the next category were attached to older indigenous towns. These had previously either been the centre of administration and military power or they had a great effect on the psychology of the Indian population as cultural centres. Towns like Pune, Delhi and Varanasi held a special place in the sentiments of Indian population. Therefore it was logical to set up the troops within the conquered town and especially in the existing citadel or fort. (Gupta, 1985)

By the beginning of 19th century the British controlled such a large territory that a new military strategy was evolved. The rapid growth of British imperial power meant that troops always had to be in readiness for quick mobilization and fast movement. The concentration of troops in city centres was replaced by separate camps and cantonments established either on the periphery of the main cities or on completely new sites. For example the cantonments and civil stations attached to major indigenous inland cities like Pune, Nasik, Aurangabad etc. While some isolated military cantonments were set up at strategic sites.

De-urbanization

The colonial spatial planning caused rapid urbanization in areas, which were economically important in the colonial, spatial organization. It is expected that the areas devoid of economic potentials in the colonial economic framework should have been neglected (Sharma, 1992).

Firstly, the old ports like Khambayat or Broach which had naturally grown over

centuries, were destroyed and in their place arose the port towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. The horizontal redistribution of population generated by the emergence of these ports greatly distorted the process of urbanization in India.

Secondly, large number of handicrafts, services and commerce based towns which had historically evolved were disrupted and were either allowed to die out like Murshidabad. (Raza & Habeeb, 1976).

British rule killed traditional urban industrial centres and gave birth to new centres of service and commerce. Under British rule several former trading towns such as Balapur, Junnar, Jejuri, and Dharangaon and sea ports such as Dasgaon, Bassein, Rajapur, Chiplun, Jaigarh etc. lost their trading importance and fell into decay.

In the mid 18th century, Surat began to decline due to variety of reasons. The commercial and political power of the English East India Company was employed in transforming the greater part of Surat's foreign trade to Bombay which could grow only after Surat had declined. (Kosambi, 1983)

In the 19th century, the importance and size of the coastal cities such as Madras, Calcutta and Bombay had far exceeded the importance of the older centres of administration (Murshidabad), religion (Benaras), manufacture (Dacca) and trade (Calicut). This period saw the stagnation of a large number of old inland urban centres. (Lahiri, 1990).

The functional specialisation of urban centres in the British period was the eclipse of religious centres like Mathura, Benaras and Kanchipuram. Old centres of craft like Tanjore, Ahmedabad, Khainabad, and administration towns like Lahore, Agra, Fyzabad and Hyderabad also declined.

Conceptual Clarification of British Towns

The towns of colonial India represent a special case in many ways. In the case of North America, as in Australia, or South Africa the European colonies were moved into an area, with no indigenous urban tradition, but such was not the case in India, where intrusion occurred into culturally alien areas with high densities of population with long standing urban cultures. The two cultures of colonizer and the colonized continued side by side certainly interacting but engendering a distinctive urban form i.e. the "colonial city". (Carter, 1983)

McGee (1971) has shown the most consistent awareness of the significance of the colonial city in any system of urban classifications, which purports to demonstrate an evolution of urban form. Perhaps the greatest fault of Sjoberg's industrial city model (1938), the pre-industrial model (1960) is that he has failed to take account of cities that have grown as links in the interactions of two civilizations. In such a context no better example exists of this type than the colonial cities brought about by British colonial rule in India (Brush, 1962).

In similar terms Horvath (1969) proposed that the colonial city is a discrete subtype of urbanization, having characteristics that distinguish it both from the industrial and pre-industrial models. It has also recognized that the technological variable, which tends to distinguish industrial and pre-industrial models, is not certainly relevant to the colonial city case. The colonial cities neither fit into the two-fold (pre-industrial and industrial) classification of Sjoberg (1960), nor the categories (orthogenetic and heterogenetic) suggested by Redfield and Singer (1954). They are distinct enough to deserve a category of their own.

McGee (1971) has proposed one framework within which the colonial city may be fitted.

- As a type of urban society intermediate to pre-industrial and industrial.
- 'Stable' or 'migrant' in terms of population change could characterize it.
- Colonial cities are more likely to have limited rural to urban migration, because of their tendency to be separate from the indigenous societies.

McGee (1971) distinguishes among three types of colonial cities :

1. The indigenous administrative city, which is taken over as the colonial administrative centre.
2. The town established for the exploitation of minerals and
3. The port city built in order to conduct sea trade with the mother country.

King (1976) focuses on two types of colonial urban areas in India.

1. The British civil station -military cantonment complex juxtaposed with the indigenous Indian city and
2. Hill station and the port city, which was the British commercial, naval base making inland penetration and territorial conquest possible.

Colonial cities are all products of culture-contact situations between an industrializing and industrialized European colonial power and a traditional agrarian or craft based economy. The colonial city model reveals characteristics of colonial foundations elsewhere, particularly colonial methods of British in the Indian sub continent. The main characteristics revealed by the model are as follows :

1. A water front location accessible to oceangoing ships. This facilitated trade and any necessary military intervention and provided the initial growth point of city.

2. A walled fort adjacent to the port, which offered protection for the colonists. It also often accommodated factories processing agricultural raw materials for export to the mother country, thereby providing a nucleus of the colonial exchange system.
3. An open space (maidan) around the fort for security.
4. Part of the open space between the fort and European town was reserved for military parades and recreational facilities such as racecourse or cricket ground.
5. Beyond the open space a native town developed, to service the fort and the colonial administration. This was an unplanned area of overcrowded, unsanitary living conditions.
6. A western-style CBD contained the major commercial and administrative functions, institutions and public buildings and low-density residential areas. A bazaar style of commercial area developed in the native town.
7. The planned European town comprising spacious bungalows along tree lined avenues developed away from the native settlements.
8. At an intermediate location between the 'Black town' and 'White town' there developed colonies of Anglo-Indians. The fact that those were Christian, and the offspring of mixed European - Indian marriages ensured neither the native or pure breed European communities accept them.
9. As the colonial city expanded new living space for the elites was provided by peripheral developments, mostly undertaken by private co-operation, housing associations and specially

designated improvement trusts supported by city revenues.

Calcutta, Bombay and Madras represent classic examples of these colonial based cities in India.

Changing Landscape from Indian to Typical Colonial Area

The English were fond of carrying their habits and institutions, wherever they went, across the continents and oceans. They were also adopting innovations to suit the local conditions or to meet special requirements. In the cantonments the British got a chance to create the kind of settlement they preferred. The kind of landscape that emerged was therefore necessarily different from the traditional Indian city. On the other hand, it was also very different from the contemporary cities of the metropolitan culture like London. It was the urban form unique to the colonial presence and a new norm of planning, which was evolved due to special needs.

Following the establishment of colonial rule, the landscape of colonial towns and cities in India, displayed distant plural characteristics. They consisted of at least two parts, the colonial section, where Europeans lived and worked and the 'indigenous' or Indian town, where most Indians lived and worked. The Indian town might have existed prior to the formation of the colonial town as a 'native' village or grown in response to the needs of the colonial town to provide services. Therefore frequently other areas, where ethnic groups from distant countries lived mixed communities formed an intermediate zone. The major military and civil government institutions were controlled by the dominant colonial white and separated from the indigenous culture area by sanitary gaps and bore features of a built environment similar to that of British according to King (1976).

The physical land use and landscape patterns that arose due to the military functions included the dent of military cantonments and separate barracks for British and Indian troops. The cantonment towns were established with separate British and Indian religious and social institutions. The social landscape saw the initiation of sport and game by the army for example, the Ootacamund hut. British customs, traditions and lifestyles were initiated at several urban centres.

In the hill stations the physical landscape saw the development of plantations for tea and other products. Bungalows were built for owners and managers of plantations and coolie lines for labour. The social landscape saw the creation of plantation culture as an extension of British social life into hill and jungle tracts. European culture was established there. The social landscape was increasingly demarcated by segregation. New system of water supply, sanitation, civic amenities and subsequently electricity were introduced. The social functions were extended with other facilities such as the recreational clubs, race-courses, botanical gardens and libraries.

There was an increased usage of hill stations and seaside resorts for health and recreational purposes. Schools and colleges were established for European and Eurasian children. Colonisation of European settlement and missionary activity were other motives responsible for hill station development. (Chaterji, 1997). The built environment of the hill stations resembled that of an English village. For example The Viceregal Lodge at Simla and The Ootacamund Government House were modelled on an English renaissance style. St. Stephens church in Ootacamund, the major Anglican Church and Tudor Cottage Library replicated English landscapes.

British domination left a sufficiently strong impression on the urban landscape of India during that period. The following factors were responsible for greater development :

1. The establishment of encamping grounds and cantonments.
2. The application of municipal acts to the towns.
3. The expansion of public utility services in the towns.
4. The establishment of administrative head quarters.
5. The expansion of transport network.
6. The opening of markets in the towns.

Thus the British customs, traditions and lifestyles were initiated at several urban centres.

Conclusion

In brief, colonial urbanization can be grouped under the following phases of colonial urbanization :

1500 - Mercantile colonialism:

Limited colonial presence in pre-existing settlements, linked to trade usually in national products of local regions.

1850 - Industrial colonialism:

It is the period of scramble for territory, the creation of new urban hierarchies and more extensive European settlements.

1920 - Late colonialism

Development of colonialism in depth, intensification of European urban settlement, increased scale of public building, introduction of town planning, build-up of indigenous urban population and segregationalism.

1950 - Neo colonialism

Rapid growth of indigenous urban population, limited employment opportunities and heavy pressure on basic needs provision.

Thus we can conclude that colonial cities are all products of culture-contact situations between an industrialized European colonial power and a traditional agrarian economy. The

colonial cities are distinct enough to deserve a category of their own. It is typically characterized by the physical segregation of its ethnic, social and cultural component groups, which resulted from the process of colonialism. Independence did not change this contrast very much. The roots of the present situation lie firmly in the segregationalism of its colonial past. It is however unfair to blame the present situation on the inadequacies of contemporary planners.

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