

Social Areas of Pune Cantonment: Sadar Bazaar

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Abstract : Cantonments are special function towns established by the British during the colonial period to suit their felt or perceived needs to rule over India. Pune Cantonment, like other cantonments, having similar layout and character was set up close to the city in 1818, after its conquest by the British. The social areas of Sadar Bazaar in Pune Cantonment which is the focus of study here is an attempt to give a qualitative account of the peopling history, its social configuration and settlement structure.

Introduction

The British set up cantonments in India for their own special purposes. At first, serving purely military needs, they grew into suburban settlements of a unique kind and hence of special interest to the urban geographers. (Allen, C, 1975)

Cantonments all over exhibited similarity of plan and character and tended to look alike. Pune Cantonment was like others and was set up close to Pune City in 1818. It ultimately grew into not only a very large camp settlement but soon acquired a conglomerate nature as two other smaller cantonments were also set up to its north and northwest. Thus Pune-Khadki-Dehu Road even today, forms a vast area under the charge of Southern Command. (Anklesaria, P.T., 1975)

Pune Cantonment is divided into three major areas- military, bungalow, and the *sadar bazaar*. The first two were planned on a grid with broad straight streets lined with trees and the bungalows each in their large compounds.

There were also military requirement of parade grounds and ranges all of which required huge open spaces. This type of planning later cast a strong influence on the city planners and became a new type of model for other developments in the city. The building rules and planning patterns were regularized in Cantonment codes and other statutes and these are still valid today. The Sadar Bazaar area settled by Indians showed a more traditional pattern. Though the street grid and building by-laws were strictly adhered to, the houses exhibited a more interesting street façade. The space behind them and away from the main roads replicated the old urban pattern, secluded, quiet pedestrian and human in scale. (King A. D., 1976)

The Sadar Bazaar: A Functional Unit

In the pattern of urban development introduced by the British in India, political and administrative units were located in Cantonment towns and Civil Lines at the head-quarter, while the economic services at lower levels were performed by the native population in an area indigenous in name as well as in physical form i.e., '*the sadar bazaar*'. The perception of the *bazaar* by the European community was largely negative and that of a necessary evil, irrespective of the fact that the maintenance of the colonial life style depended very much on the existence of the *bazaar* and its inhabitants as a functional unit. Daily provisions like grain, fuel, luxury goods and imported articles required both by the troops and the officers required interaction between Indians and Europeans. (Moledina M.H., 1945)

The *sadar bazaar* in the Pune Cantonment gradually increased in area as a result of immigration of traders from the neighbouring states of Maharashtra and from the city of Pune, besides the natural increase of population. As a result, the level of residential crowding was very high as compared to the military area within Pune Cantonment. The

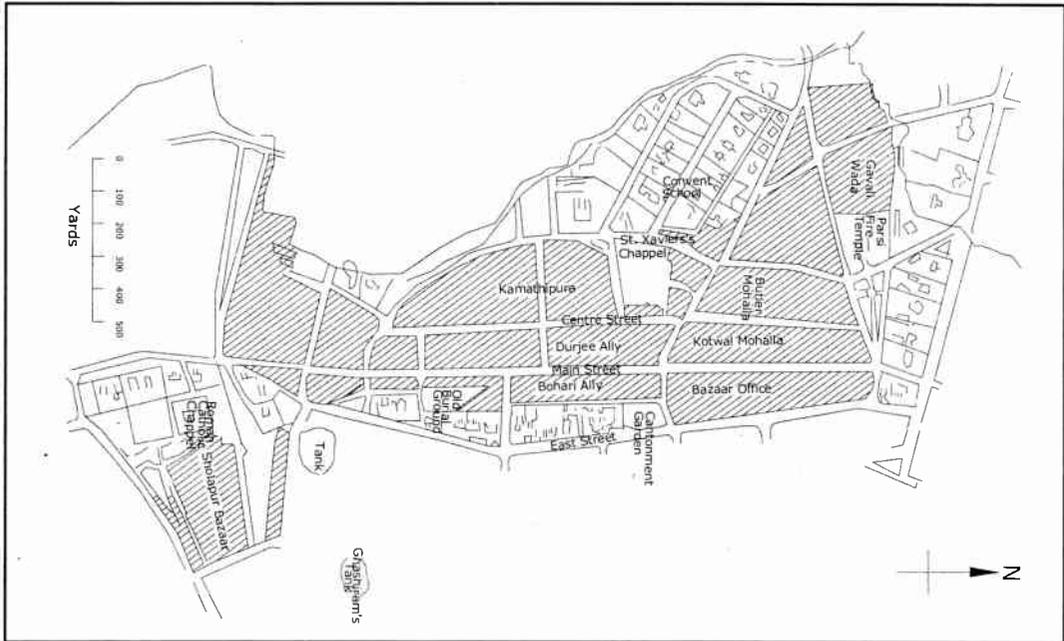


Fig. 1 : Sadar Bazaar about 1890, after the Plan of Cantonment and Part of Suburban Limits, Pune 1891. Source: British Library, London (After Mira Kosambi)

Cantonment authorities developed the *bazaar* area as an almost self-sufficient functional unit as it is evident from the clear division as well as multiplicity of many amenities such as schools, markets, libraries, hospitals and gardens. Basic health and medical services like the police station, fire brigade and other amenities meant for indigenous population were located in the *bazaar* area. (Fig.1)

Though the *bazaar* section of Pune Cantonment was the counterpart of the traditional Pune City, yet the division of social space in Pune City was primarily in terms of caste, while in the *bazaar* section of Cantonment it was based on class and profession. The only distinct social areas in the *bazaar* section are the *Shimpi Ali*, *Bhimpura*, *Kamathipura*, *Butler Mohalla*, *Kotwal Mohalla*, *Gavaliwada* etc.

The Cantonment Board had certain duties and discretionary functions to perform as per the funds at their disposal. They were also to adopt all measures to provide the safety, health

and other conveniences for the inhabitants. such as lighting of and watering of streets and other public places, to construct and maintain streets, culverts, markets, slaughter houses, drainage and sewage works. The imposition of heavy fines led to the maintenance of a clean and hazard-free environment in the *bazaar* section. Yet due to the overcrowding and the general lack of awareness for cleanliness among the settlers, there was a grave danger from zygotic diseases which arose from stagnant water, excreta and decaying vegetable matters, through a process analogous to fermentation. The Pune Cantonment has from time to time enforced rules, relating to sanitation practices, embodied in the Cantonment Act of 1864, Metropolitan legislations particularly the Public Health Act, 1848 and Nuisance Removal and Disease Prevention Act of 1855. However, the strict control of Cantonment rules did not exert such an influence so far as the internal residential streets with narrow width in the *bazaar* section were concerned and they remained as areas of dirt and squalor. (Cantonment Act, 1902)

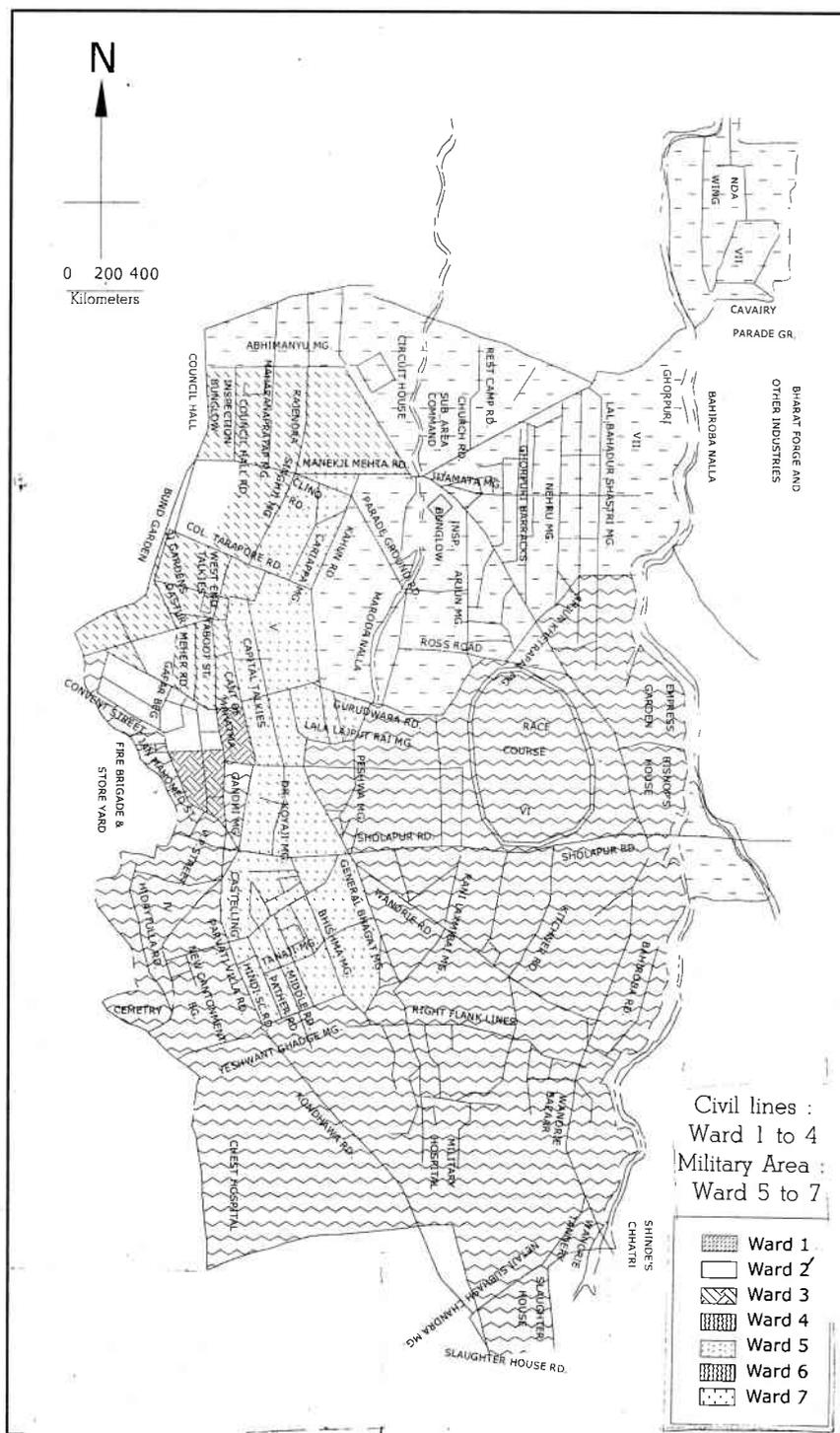


Fig. 2 : Ward-wise Map of Pune Cantonment : Source : Pune Cantonment Board

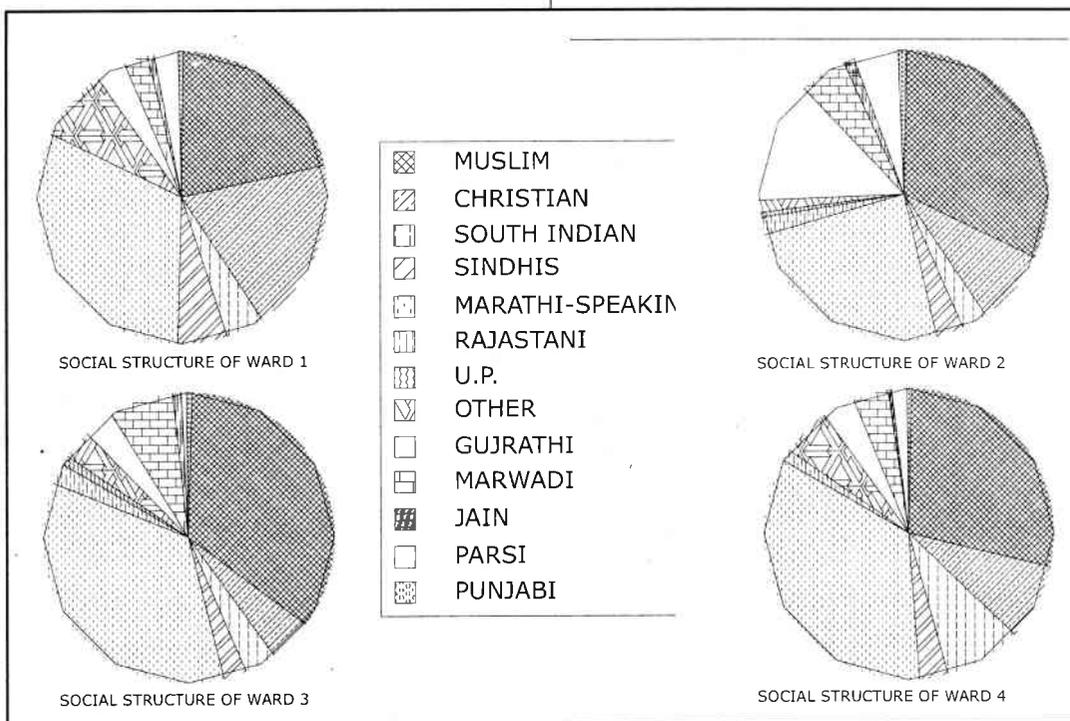


Fig. 3 : Social Structure of the Four Wards in Pune Cantonment

The Sadar Bazaar: A Vibrant Commercial Area

The Pune Cantonment Board has, for the sake of administrative convenience, divided the entire Cantonment settlement into seven wards. The wards 1 and 2, 3, 4 belong to the Civil Lines and the *sadar bazaar* area respectively while the wards 5, 6 and 7 comprise the military and the bungalow area complexes. The population in the latter category has been of a transitory nature and therefore, not been compatible with the rest of the permanent population of the Cantonment town. (Fig.2).

Since the purpose of this analysis is to analyze the stable population of the Cantonment town and determine their social structure, it was thought prudent to restrict this analysis to wards 2, 3 and 4, which fall within the jurisdiction of the *sadar bazaar*. It may be mentioned here that the basis for delimiting the ward boundaries is population size. Due

to this, it seems that the boundaries thus drawn end abruptly and cut across social areas, thereby segregating areas, which really belong together. For example, a single street may run into several wards. To overcome these problems, in addition to Ward-wise analysis of social composition, an analysis of street-wise composition has also been undertaken. This would bring out the finer details of inter and intra-ward distinctions in social areas. To obtain a generalized notion of the ward's social composition, the first exercise undertaken was to determine the concentration of different ethnic groups on the basis of the voters' list. This gave a fairly clear idea of the castes and the regional/linguistic affiliations of the population. This distribution pattern of population was then used to identify the contemporary pattern of social composition. In addition to the secondary data, obtained from the voters' list, a primary survey was also conducted, using the street as the basic unit of investigation. On the basis of interviews of old residents of the area,

and attempt has been made to reconstruct the contemporary social structure. This helped in assessing the changes that have occurred in the social patterns and the processes which were responsible for the contemporary residential structure of the Pune Cantonment. (Fig.3) A spatio-temporal perspective can be constructed by comparing and contrasting the differences in the pattern, over the last fifty years. This period spans an important phase over the last 50 years since independence. (Sawant, S. B., 1972).

Though the Europeans segregated their residential areas from those of the indigenous population, it was necessary for them to have interaction with the native population to fulfil their daily requirements of groceries, perishables and other goods as well as their need for personal services such as cooks, bearers, chokra boys (helper to the cook), butler, gardener, dhobi (washerman), coachman, watchman, lampman (mashal), bishti (water-carrier) and sweeper (mether). As already mentioned, the Cantonment authorities allocated a place to the west of the military area, for the indigenous population to reside and carry out the commercial activities for their livelihood. This area later developed into the *sadar bazaar* with its commercial and economic base located in the Pune Cantonment. Besides the *main sadar bazaar*, other *bazaars* also developed like, *Ghorpuri bazaar*, *Sholapur bazaar*, *Wanorie bazaar*, which were comparatively smaller in size. These bazaars were also established to cater to the needs of the Indian sepoys and the camp followers in the respective areas. The area of *sadar bazaar*, about three hundred and fifty acres, leads from the Cantonment to the city. It has a large concentration of indigenous population that settled here during the colonial period and has remained virtually intact even today. With some additions and further crowding and congestion in the lanes and alleys acts as a buffer between the Indian city and the colonial settlement. (Poona Guide and Dictionary 1853-1908)

The Peopling of the Sadar Bazaar

TRAN. INST.
INDIAN
GEOGRAPHERS
Vol.23
No.1&2
2001

Early records show that the Parsis - an important business and service community, migrated to Ghodnadi-Shirur where the British Garrison was earlier located. However, in 1818, when the Peshwa was defeated by the British, the military authorities thought it fit to disband the encampment of Ghodnadi-Shirur and shift it to the Old Gar Pir in Pune, the place declared ideal for the encampment. The Parsi community also left Ghodnadi-Shirur and resettled at Pune along with the troops. Therefore it can be asserted that the association of the Parsi community with the Cantonment was right from its establishment. The other important communities that moved into the Cantonment area were the Muslims - both, Shia and Sunni, the former having migrated from Gujarat while the latter from Kutch.

Initially, the Cantonment authorities permitted only the grain-dealers and traders to settle in the camp for the purpose of supplying goods to the troops. Traders along the Main Street (M.G. Road) and the Taboot Street set up two rows of thatched huts. As the street patterns were laid out, the thatched huts became permanent structures, with four wide roads running more or less parallel to each other in the north-south direction and these were named as the East Street, Main Street, Center Street and the West Street. Narrow roads in the east-west direction intersected these four main streets. The Indian traders, which included the Maheshwari Baniyas, trading in cloth and grocery (immigrants from Rajasthan), Marwari Baniyas (from Jodhpur and Sirohi in Rajasthan) and Gujaratis trading in cloth as well as grains from Gujarat, were given small pieces of land to build their shops and houses according to their plan and tastes. The Parsi community, along with the Muslim Boharas and Iranis did trade in hardware, European goods and foreign liquor and also owned taverns. Among the early settlers, the Parsi community was the

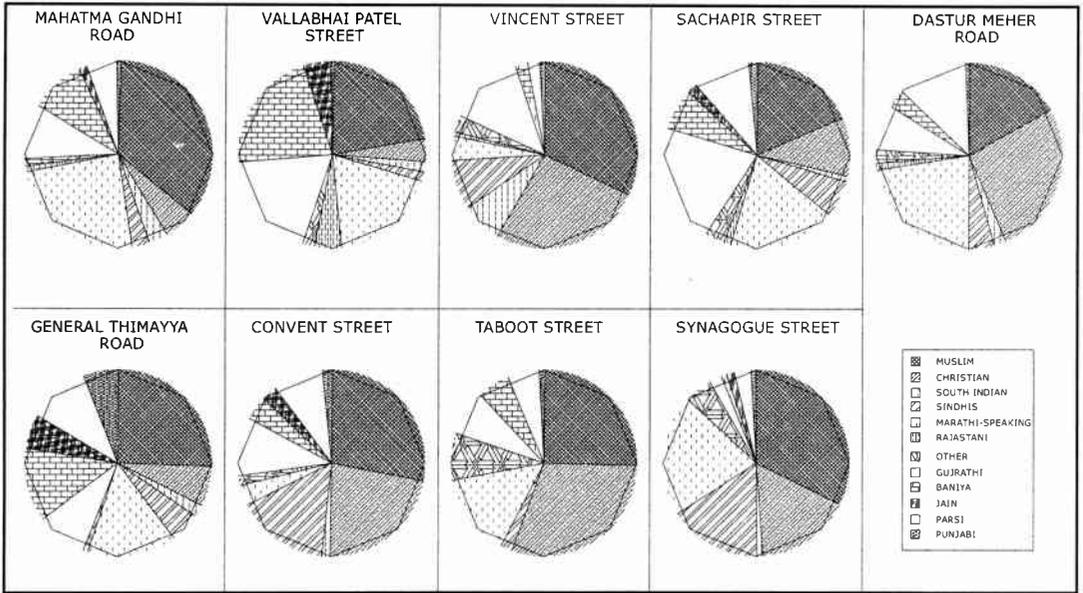


Fig. 4 : Street-wise Ethnic Composition of the Population in the Cantonment

richest and owned landed property in the Cantonment. The Parsis were also perhaps the first community to be allowed by the British to reside in the posh bungalow areas of Arsenal Road, Neutral Lines and along the Napier Road. Other members of the Parsi community, who were not involved with business did jobs such as watch repairers, painters, clerks, carpenters and school teachers. Some of the Muslim Boharas who traded in hardware, were also buyers of the scrap material auctioned by the British government. The scrap was later repaired and sold to the native population. The Saifee Lane, resided by the Bohara community was known as "Lover's Lane" since it was a very calm and quiet place - though the garden was not maintained properly. The entire row of houses in this area, where now people of different communities had settled formerly had the stables for the horses of the racecourse. This is evident from the existence of iron rings still attached to the plinths of the houses that were earlier used to harness the horses. One Mr. Jaffer Sayyed, the richest man among the Bohara community dealt with the horse business. (Raza and Habib, 1976)

Another group, which was also found in large numbers, was that of Goan Christians and the Eurasians. They not only lived in the Sholapur *bazaar* area or Ghorpadi and Wanorie *bazaar*, but also had establishments of grocery, bakery, cigars, tea and coffee - shops. Here too, the owners of the shops had residences above their shops. All the streets of Pune Cantonment had a large element of Christians, which were spread throughout the Cantonment town in general and especially around the church areas in particular. The Bene-Israelis who were soldiers in the British army, stayed back in India after their retirement and settled in Pune in the 1850s. They set shop in the *bazaar* area and were known by their former profession of oilpressers or teli. The Jews a minor community were quite wealthy and had settled outside the Cantonment area in the Rasta Peth. Here a Jewish street still exist with a synagogue, (which unlike David Synagogue in the Suburban Municipality), that still holds prayer services. (Mitchell, N, 1972)

It is interesting to know that even today after 50 years of independence the original population structure has remained virtually the same as is evident from the voters' lists. Certain

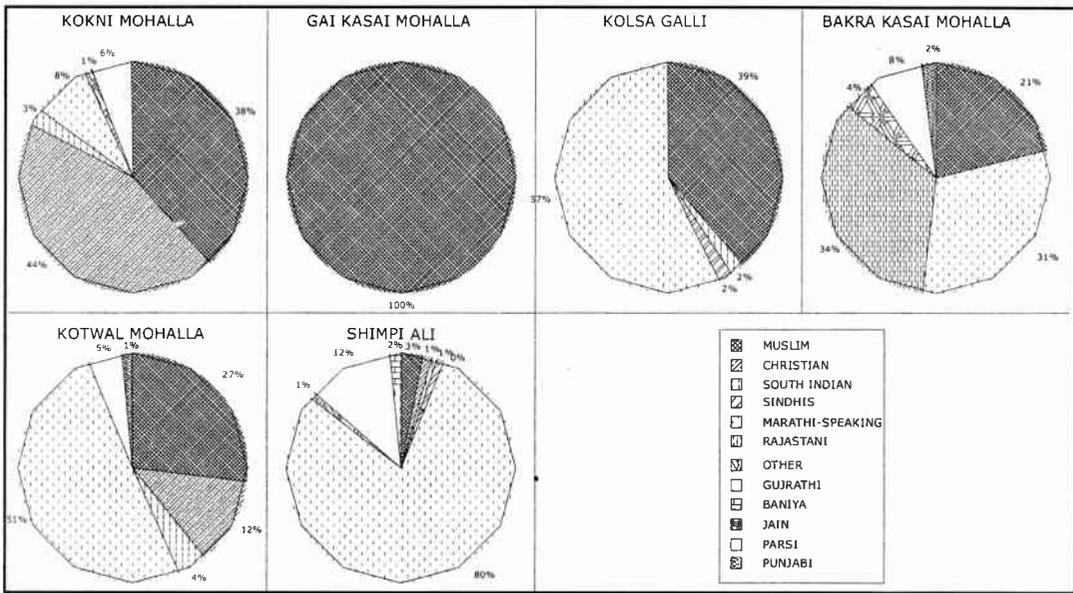


Fig. 5 : Different Mohallas in Sadar Bazaar

additions, however, have been made with the arrival of displaced persons from Pakistan there by introducing the Sindhi, Punjabi and Muslim ethnic elements in the Cantonment population, and consequently adding to its diversity. (Kosambi, M 1980)

Also, with the migration of the Anglo Indians to England after Independence, their properties and residences which were located on the East Street and on the other streets, adjoining the Civil Lines were purchased by the Parsis, Boharas and Iranis. The street-wise distribution of ethnic groups reveal some interesting patterns, certain streets being the preserves of certain communities. For instance, the major streets namely, the Main Street, Center Street, East Street, Sachapir Street, Vincent Street, Dastur Meher Road and Gen. Thimamayya Road, have high concentrations of Parsis, Muslims, Boharas, Memans and other non-Marathi speaking communities like Gujaratis, Jains, Marwaris, Sindhis, Punjabis and Christians. (Fig.4).

During the 1820s, the grain-trade in the city flourished and the Gujaratis and Marwaris

along with the Lingayats formed the largest group of traders. The majority of them dealt in the business of grain and pulses, buying in bulk, from the wholesale traders in the Pune city and selling in retail in the cantonment area. Some of the Gujaratis and Marwaris also dealt with European piece goods brought from Bombay. Some Gujaratis and Marwaris perceived money landing as a profitable business and gave loans to the native population, for instance, Bhopla Chowk, on the Center Street had licensed moneylenders for the army officers. These still continue to exist even today (Hira Bankers) and carry out brisk business as the army officers are always in need of cash for the races. The other example in this regard is of the present R.S. Kedari Road, which at one time, was a Muslim dominated locality. The Muslims here were engaged in the business of meat and beef. However, as the Muslim butchers (*Gaikasais* and *Bakrakasais*), were perpetually borrowing money from the Gujaratis for all occasions like festivals, weddings, sickness in the family and for all emergencies, their properties were taken over by the moneylenders. As a result, it is seen today that the majority of shops and houses on the R.S. Kedari

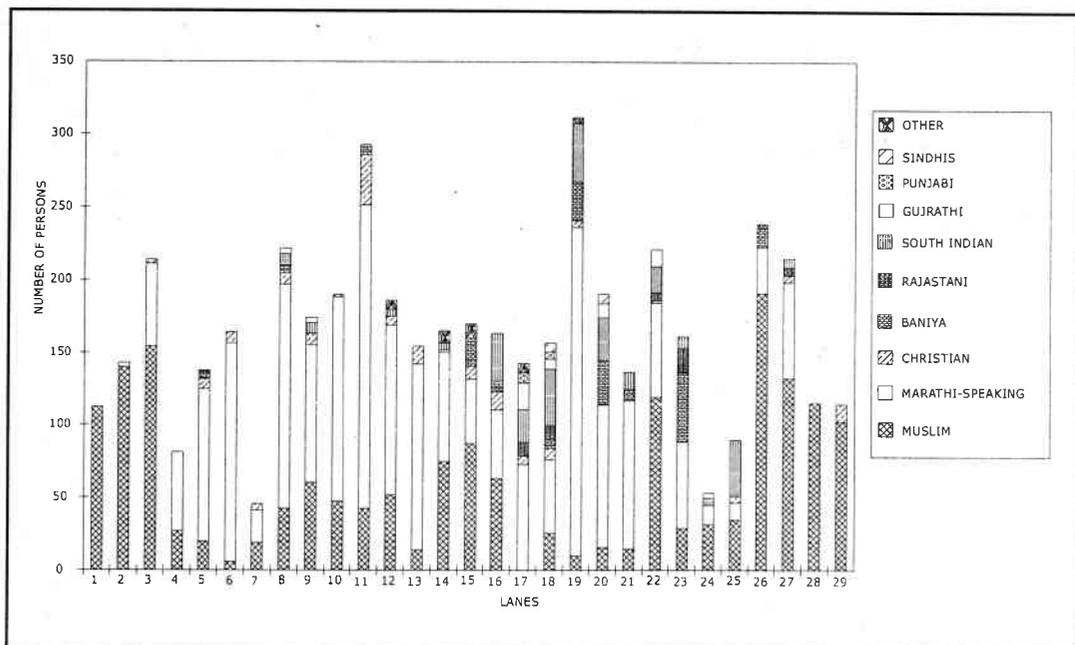


Fig. 6 : Social Structure of Bhipura according to lanes

Road which formerly belonged to the Muslims, now belong to the Gujarati and Marwari communities. The other streets, which still show a concentration of Gujarati, Marwari and the Jain communities, are the Vallabhai Street, Synagogue Street, Moledina Road and Dastur Meher Road. (Parasnis, 1921)

In contrast to the main roads and streets, the side lanes have a mixture of the lower castes from neighbouring states of Maharashtra, as well as from the native city of Pune. But these are mainly the artisans and untouchable castes, who are engaged in menial and other lowly occupations. Thus, besides the migrant communities in the Pune Cantonment, there were a number of *mohallas* or enclaves which were the exclusive domains of other caste groups named after the professions or castes. For example, *Kokni mohalla*- where *Kokni* speaking Goan Christians stayed, *Kotwal mohalla*-where the *Kotwals* stayed, *Butler mohalla*- where the cooks, waiters and *khansamas* stayed, *Kolsa Galli* is the locality where the coal merchants who belonged to the Bohara community dealing in the business of

coal and now replaced by glass framemakers and other glass dealers stayed, *Shimpi Ali*- where the *derzi* i.e., the tailors stayed, *Gawaliwada* was another locality where the dairy cattle- mainly buffaloes were maintained. The *Kamathis* (masons) were from Andhra Pradesh and did the masonry and construction work. Most of the Public Buildings that were constructed in the Civil Lines in the early period after the establishment of the Cantonment have been constructed by the Kamathi community. (Fig.5).

Also there were immigrants from North India, especially from Uttar Pradesh, who were *mochis* (cobblers). They not only made leather boots for the army personnel and for the local market but also exported them to Europe. Goldsmiths and silversmiths had migrated to Goa, Ratnagiri and from Pune City to the Cantonment. Much later, Gujarati goldsmiths called *sonis* also joined the immigrant goldsmiths. These goldsmiths had a large clientele, which included native as well as the European community. (Patel, 1955)

The above mentioned areas formed an enclave of the native elite in the social structure of the *bazaar* area of Pune Cantonment. However, in the lanes and by-lanes, adjoining the main streets starting from the Shivaji Market, right up to the Sholapur Road in the west is the blighted area called *Bhimpura*. This is an area, quite unique in character, having a diverse ethnic population, extremely congested and dense. The entire area is interspersed with twenty-nine lanes which run more or less parallel to each other and perpendicular to the four main streets. This could be cited as a unique example of a slum-like settlement in the Cantonment area.

Bhimpura : AS lum-like Settlement

The *Bhimpura* of the *sadar bazaar* in Pune Cantonment is named after Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar the great leader of the oppressed community. The place presents an unbroken line of houses, not very attractive, and though it has a distinct appearance, it is interspersed with small shops, shrines, small industrial units and even schools - all competing for the limited space available in the lanes. Almost all the lanes of *Bhimpura* have common utility services, which include public toilets, latrines, open drains, water taps and open areas serving as community space for festivals. All the twenty-nine lanes of *Bhimpura* are congested irregular and vary in length and width. The shops generally open into the lanes, while the residences are located behind, within internal courtyards. The Muslims are concentrated in the lanes numbering from 18 to 20. There is a special lane for the beef trading Muslims, the *Gaikasais* known as *Kureshi-line*. The lanes numbering 1 to 8, are the strongholds of the *Kureshis*, while the scheduled castes, namely the *Mahar*, *Mang* and *Chambhar* castes inhabit lanes, 9 to 15. The people residing in some of the above lanes are popularly called 'Jai Bhim' as they wish one another with this greeting. In some cases groups were formed on the basis of

class, region of origin and occupations rather than castes per se. This is reflected in the social structure of the population of lanes from 23 to 29. Here the lanes present a mixed bag - with Muslims in the centre and Christians, Hindus and Jains occupying the two ends of the lanes. (Fig.6) The *Bhimpura*, since colonial times, was a settlement, which developed almost spontaneously - by accretion, many people just strayed into it, to eke out a living in the informal sector. These were mostly the lower castes/classes who came from the fringe areas of the native city. The *Bhimpura* was constituted by essentially the native population belonging to the downtrodden section of the society supplying cheap labour to be exploited by the British for their various services and comforts. The *Bhimpura* was a ghetto like settlement, a preserve of the urban poor. A large number of people residing here were those displaced after the fall of the Peshwa. Also, the local artisans and untouchable communities preferred to live in the Cantonment area as they were free of social discrimination and stigma that had reached its peak during the Peshwa period.

In the overview, one can say that the *Bhimpura* in the Cantonment can be likened to a melting pot, since there was nothing like the 'caste system' - which governed the distribution of various communities in space. It was more or less a conglomerate of people on the basis of class, obviously poor class, which presented a continuum in an unbroken landscape. The *Bhimpura* area of the *bazaar* in the Pune Cantonment can be compared to the indigenous native *mohallas*. It was a replica of *alis* and *gallis*, lanes and by-lanes, transferred from the old city on a smaller scale. The natives thus replicated their own townscape in their own special way and created a distinct landscape in an otherwise alien environment. The *Bhimpura* can be described as a scaled down version of the indigenous city. A 'microcosm' of the old city as it existed in the old *peths* of Pune City minus the higher castes. Another salient feature of the *Bhimpura* area is a virtual

lack of open spaces - except for some space surrounding the mosques and the temples. In fact, the narrow lanes of *Bhimpura* are totally inadequate for the traffic which passes through it, especially the two-wheelers and the use the people make of the streets. All attempts of the Cantonment Board to control the violations and encroachments by unauthorized structures have failed because of the mounting population pressure. The dwellings abutting the lanes have been converted into shops and in some cases in the interior of the lanes also one comes across a grocery shop, ration shop, cycle repair works or a two wheeler repair garage or even small units of manufacture, like plastics and fabrication units.

Significantly, *Bhimpura's* spilled-over character tends to merge into similar fringe areas of the native city, which is within walking distance from the Babajan chowk - which marks the last outpost of the camp and the beginning of the native city.

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