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Colonial Bombay's (Mumbai) crossroads: Trade, Religion and Lifestyle

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Abstract
Bombay's growth into a major colonial city due to its geographical position resulted in intersection of trade, religion and lifestyle of the colonists. Bombay (now Mumbai) was a group of seven islands and a natural sea port, which became an important point for trading in the Arabian Sea with Europe, Middle East and eastern countries. It is this geographical advantage that first attracted the Europeans to Bombay. The entry of the Portuguese and the British in Bombay as traders and later settling as colonists changed the cultural dynamics in Bombay. The colonial period, spanning roughly from the 17th century to 19th century, saw many changes in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Bombay. Bombay during the colonial period was a trading port which was transformed into a major commercial hub by the British Colonists. Trade led to not only economic growth, but also urban expansion, growth in infrastructure and promoted exchange of ideas, materials and lifestyles. The European Colonists also brought to Bombay a new religion which also led to cultural changes particularly in the lifestyles of the locals. Simultaneously, the lifestyle of the European Colonists also underwent changes due to climatic conditions, indigenous customs and cultural diversity in the city. This paper will study the influence of these changes in the lifestyle of the European Colonists in Bombay and also their new lifestyle back in England. The study will focus on the intersections between the European traders, the new religion they brought in and its effect on their lifestyle in Bombay and also back home in England.
***Keywords**: Trade, Religion, Lifestyle, Colonial, European, Bombay*

Introduction

The Europeans came to Bombay and settled here, but in order to feel at home they tried to recreate their western lifestyle from back home. However, due to the climate, the religious agendas and trade policies, the Europeans had to integrate local elements in their houses built here. The officers of the Company and merchants working as agents for the Company, eventually returned back home to England and had to settle again. A comparison between the European lifestyle in Bombay and the new lifestyle adopted by them back home would throw light on the changes their lifestyle underwent in both scenarios.

The objective of the paper is to understand the trade and religious policies of both the Colonists of Bombay, the Portuguese and the British. Also, to explore the influence of the religious agenda of the European Colonists on their lifestyle. The effect of the trade policies of the Portuguese and British on their way of life. Finally, to examine the return migration of the British officers back home to England and observe their lifestyle back home.

The literature reviewed consists of a balance of both primary sources, like the Gazetteers and contemporary books, and secondary sources like articles from journals.

The first Europeans to enter Bombay were the Portuguese in the mid-16th century (Campbell 1909:19). They made it a trading center and called it Bom Bahia meaning Good Bay. The English were the next set of Europeans to occupy Bombay. They entered as traders became colonists and

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stayed in Bombay till independence of India as imperialists.

Bombay City was the capital of Bombay Presidency and a major seaport of Western India. It was composed of seven islands, Colaba, Old woman's Island (Little Colaba), Bombay, Mazgaon, Parel, Worli and Mahim. These scattered islands were disconnected by the sea water during high tide and would be salted flats in low tide. Colaba was the southernmost part and Mahim was at the northern end of Bombay City. The Salsette island, Bassein and Thana also became part of Bombay. The landmass of the seven islands that was disconnected, saw consolidation only after the British established themselves and Gerald Aungier, the Governor of the Bombay Presidency, reclaimed land to increase the landmass of Bombay for the growing needs of the increasing immigrant population. Bombay was merged from Colaba in the south to Mahim in the North. Unifying this landmass helped the Britishers to clearly demarcate areas for European settlements and the native settlements. (Campbell 1909:14)

A study of the history of Bombay from the European point of view will help understand their religious agendas and trading policies that affected the kind of settlements that developed. The Portuguese and the British came to Bombay initially for trading, however later both the European settlers had different agendas for holding Bombay. A study of the reason behind their settling in Bombay and under what circumstances is important as it influenced their lifestyle and housing on this island.

1. PORTUGUESE PERIOD

In the 16th century, the Portuguese acquired Bombay from the Sultan of Gujarat as part of the treaty of Bassein. The Portuguese had only two political agendas, one to convert the maximum population of Bombay to Christianity and the other was trading (Enthoven, Edwardes, Jackson, Grammie, Berthod and Hodgson 1909: 216,217).

1.1 Religion and Lifestyle

The Portuguese divided the land into manors or fiefs and gave these to individual or religious orders as rewards. These individuals in exchange gave Military support to the Portuguese King. The Portuguese used the territory of Bombay for agriculture but for them the religious motive overrode the trade. Their focus was to convert the local population to Christianity rather than trade. (Campbell 1909:143:13-22) They forcibly converted the Kolis to Christianity which led to the emergence of the East Indian Catholic community. The Christian population increased in 1661 as other communities like Mhars, Bhandaris, Kunbis, Agris were converted either forcefully or through marriage while others fled the city to avoid conversion. Their strong religious policy gave rise to two religious orders, Jesuits and Franciscans (Edwardes 1902).

Franciscan Churches: By the end of 16th century, the Franciscans built four churches viz., Esplanade (Marine lines), Parel, Mahim and Dadar. In Mahim, the St. Michael church, with a large verandah and big wooden cross on the road on a brick pedestal, was built by Antonio de Porto. This church was rebuilt many times as Mahim had seen the advent of many rulers Sultans of Gujarat, Marathas and the British (Edwardes 1902: 75)

Jesuit Churches: The Jesuits built a lot of churches in Bassein, Thana and Bandora (Bandra), Parel, Sion, Matunga and Vadala in Bombay (Da Cunha 1900). They built the St. Andrews Church in Bandra in 1570, Nossa Senhora de Bom Conselho in Sion in1596 and Our Lady of Salvation in Dadar. The Jesuit priests built chapels at Parel, Worli and Matunga which had a large house for Portuguese Bishops' residence (Edwardes 1902: 77: 3-4).

This religious policy of the Portuguese had an adverse effect on the population and thus the settlement (Edwardes 1902). Eventually most of these churches were confiscated by the British.

1.2 Trade and Lifestyle

Vasco Da Gama's words "We come to seek Christians and spices", (Edwardes 1902: 75: 21-26) sums the outlook and approach of the Portuguese in India. Clearly, their focus on the "Christians" was far greater and this affected the trade. In 1570, when Garcia Orta was Lord of the manor, the Portuguese exported coconuts and coir from the Island of Bombay and rice from Salsette island (Bhave 2015: 58-61).

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Mandovis: The Portuguese built "mandovis" or custom houses at Mazgaon and Mahim, which were rented to Portuguese officers or individuals (Da Cunha 1900: 208).

The Transition:

In 1664, when the Portuguese Rule was ending, outside the fort lay a town which was occupied by English, Portuguese, Topazes (Indo-Portuguese), Gentoos (Hindus), Moors (Muslims), Coolies (Kolis) and Christians (mostly fishermen). The Portuguese had houses and churches with an adjoining orchard of Indian fruit on the Esplanade. The English made the custom houses and warehouses which had tiled roofs and plastered walls and instead of glass, oyster shells were used as panes for the windows. The old woman's island was home not just to the Kolis but had barracks and separate bungalows for officers of the battalions (Campbell 1909: 5,6).

2. BRITISH PERIOD

In the 17th century, the Portuguese were forced to give Bombay as dowry to King of England, Charles II, who married the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. Even though the Portuguese handed over Bombay to the Crown, they still kept their hold on Bassein, Parel, Worli and Mazgaon. The Crown found this landmass they had acquired too expensive to maintain and the King leased it to the East India Company for 10 pounds a year (Chopra 2007: 109).

2.1 Trade and Lifestyle

East India saw Bombay as a port for trading. Gerald Aungier, the second Governor of Bombay contributed to the island through his policy of strengthening the defence, liberal trade policy and freedom of worship (Douglas 1883: 87: 6-18). These policies exempted export and import duties which encouraged the Parsis, Banias, Bhattias, Vanvaris from Gujarat to immigrate and settle in Bombay and this increased the stronghold of the East India Company in Bombay (Enthoven, Edwardes, Jackson, Grammie, Berthod and Hodgson 1909: 217,218). To promote trade, they encouraged people from different parts of India to come and settle in Bombay eg. Banias from Diu, the silk weavers from Chaul, the Parsis from Navasari, Surat and other parts of Gujarat who were shipbuilders and merchant Bhatias from Kutch. The British exported predominantly cotton from Gujarat and Khandesh to England (Kosambi 1985: 35: 12-21) and opium from Gujarat and Malwa and in a small amount spices from Malabar. They imported finished cotton goods, machinery, sugar, kerosene oil, raw and finished silk, and liquor (Campbell 1909: 421).

The 19th century was a time of progress and prosperity. For the growth of both local and international trade, the British laid the first section of the Peninsular railway at Thana (Thane) and the first tramway commute was set up in Colaba, which made it easy to reach trade goods from different parts of India to the major port on the west of India. The Bombay Port Trust, in charge of development of Bombay, increased the landmass by reclamation, which helped in agriculture of cotton. The cotton trade saw tremendous growth during this era as America staples stopped due to the Civil War therefore the Company turned to Bombay. The first cotton weaving and spinning mill was established in Bombay. (Enthoven, Edwardes, Jackson, Grammie, Berthod and Hodgson 1909: 221)

Factory to Fortification*:* British as traders built "factories", which were actually accommodations for company agents and factors. They fortified the factory and the residences with a wall for protection from invasion from the sea front. As people from different parts of India started settling in Bombay for economic reasons, the factories began to grow and the European people lived within the fort, whereas the Indians settled on the periphery. European settlements were found within the Fort whereas the local residents had settlements outside the Fort. Thus, according to the British, the settlements were clearly divided into two parts: the English town and the Black town (Chopra 2007: 110). There was no clear marked physical demarcation, but more of a lifestyle arrangement. In the mid-16th century, large warehouses, a fort and a shipbuilding yards were constructed. The factories were constructed in areas which had easy access to docks from where ships could easily be loaded with trade goods like, silk, chintz, rice, cotton, timber and tobacco.

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Mandave or custom house was provided at every bay or port area of Bombay eg. Dongri, Mahim, etc. It was the residence of the custom officer who kept account of the import and export of goods that took place at the bay. The house of the officers had different types of rooms and a large hall. Behind the house was a small garden with fruit bearing trees and floral plants (Campbell 1909: 194).

Residential houses: The British officers' residential quarters were either a villa or a bungalow. The temporary villas were built on the Esplanade to enjoy the cool sea breeze. During monsoons they moved inland or to the Deccan region in permanent bungalows. Some of these permanent houses were built within the Fort for officers who needed to stay close to the Government house (Campbell 1909: 13). These housing accommodations were western in design but needed to adapt to the local context and materials.

2.2 Religion and Lifestyle

The British had initially had a very tolerant religious policy in order to encourage immigrants from other parts of India to contribute to the growth in trade and economy of Bombay.

In the 17th century, the British had no church, instead they had two prayer rooms in the Governor's House within the Bombay Fort.

Churches: Later, in the 19th century they built the Christ Church, Byculla, St. Johns' Church, Colaba, All Saints'Church, Malabar Hill and St. Thomas Cathedral (Campbell 1909: 215, 216).

To encourage conversion to the faith, the British constructed a Roman Catholic, St. Thomas Church. It had no ornamentation, an arched roof supported by rows of columns and pilasters on each side, and a large semicircular dome on the east side (Mitter 1986: 109, 110).

3.Migrating Back Home

The migration of British officers associated with the East India Company was dual in nature: an initial movement from England to India, where they accumulated power and wealth as officers or merchants, followed by a return migration to Britain, where this wealth was reinvested. Benefiting from the Company's political and commercial corruption, many officers amassed fortunes in India, which enabled them to purchase large estates, secure parliamentary seats, or obtain influential government positions upon their return. However, reintegration into English society posed challenges, as these returnees carried altered identities and tastes shaped by their colonial experiences (Foremen 2023: 167).

These individuals were referred to as "*nabobs*," a term derived from the Urdu word *Nawab*, denoting Mughal governors known for their opulent lifestyles. Nabobs were characterized by their newly acquired wealth and preference for luxury (Finn, n.d.: 37- 45). While some invested in grand estates and pursued political ambitions, others adopted quieter lives, investing in scientific or financial enterprises (Holzmann 1926: 70).

During the eighteenth century, numerous British civil servants, military officers, surgeons, and surveyors migrated to India. High-ranking Company officials occupied furnished residences that reflected their hierarchical status and incorporated both European and "oriental" luxuries. This exposure to hybrid lifestyles influenced their tastes, which they later carried back to England. For instance, William Hornby, Governor of Bombay, returned to England in 1784 and constructed Hook House in Hampshire, modeled on the Government House in Bombay (Foremen 2023: 70: 25-29).

Returning Company officials typically settled in country houses reflecting the cultural intersections shaped through colonial migration.

Conclusion

After the detailed study of the trade and religion of the European Colonists in Bombay, and how it has influenced their lifestyle and architecture, a clear conclusion can be drawn that there was a very different mindset and agenda that attracted these European colonists to Bombay. The Portuguese had a more clear religious policy than trade, so their architecture included predominantly churches and pastoral residences. On the other hand, the British had a more economically beneficial relation with Bombay. Their agenda was more trade driven and had liberal trade and religious policies, to encourage the immigration of locals from the neighbouring states who would

help boost British trade and economy. The development of Bombay and the structures they built were an outcome of the intense trading done by the British colonists. So they built factories near docks and fortified the sea front for protection from attacks by other Europeans or Muslim and Maratha rulers. The houses of the British officers were also either close to the docks or within the Bombay Castle which was the fort. This also gave rise to socially demarcated areas of residence, one within the fort for British colonists and other outside the fort for the native residents. Also, studying the two- fold migration of the British officers helped to understand the extent to which their Western lifestyle was Indianized. It also gives us a new perspective about the hardships the British colonists faced when they migrated back home.

The Europeans were determined to settle in Bombay as it is a natural harbour and they saw it as a very lucrative port city. Their religious and trade agendas can be seen through the settlements they created not only for themselves but also for the local people. The Portuguese came as colonists and left as religious tyrants whereas the British came as traders, stayed as colonists and left as imperialists.

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