

**SPACES OF POWER: THE URBAN AND SOCIO ECONOMIC IMPRINT OF
COLONIAL CANTONMENTS IN INDIA**

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Abstract

This paper investigates colonial cantonments in India as strategic spaces of power that played a pivotal role in shaping urban landscapes and socio-economic structures during the British rule. Designed as controlled environments to house military personnel, these cantonments were marked by rigid spatial segregation, infrastructural planning, and distinct governance mechanisms. By examining the impact on adjacent civilian areas, this paper explores how cantonments catalyzed the growth of infrastructure, trade, and employment, while also reinforcing social divisions along lines of race, class, and occupation. Cantonments are established primarily for military purposes by the British during the colonial period, they evolved into distinct urban entities characterized by unique administrative structures, planning norms, and segregated living spaces. The study examines how these cantonments influenced the development of surrounding civilian areas, altered patterns of land use, and introduced new infrastructural and institutional frameworks. It also investigates the long-term socio-economic effects, including employment opportunities, commercial growth, and demographic shifts triggered by the presence of military settlements. Through historical analysis and case studies of prominent cantonments, the paper highlights how these colonial legacies continue to influence contemporary urban governance, spatial organization, and socio-economic disparities in Indian cities.

Keywords: cantonments, space, power, urban governance, spatial organisation