UNIT 33  DEPENDENT URBANISATION AND NEW URBAN FORMS IN COLONIAL INDIA*

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33.1 INTRODUCTION

The development of towns and cities in India was significantly affected by the introduction of colonial rule but there were elements of continuity from the past as well. The medieval towns and cities in India were founded as centres of administrative and military power or of trade and commerce or as places of religious importance. This pattern continued during the colonial period as well. The changes that came with colonialism led to the decline of some of the centres of power such as Delhi and Agra or of places of artisanal production like Dacca and Murshidabad, and of older port cities like Surat. The British were responsible for changes in the organisation and development of cities and towns on the basis of the needs of a European colonial power. Thus, the colonial port cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta supplanted Surat, Calicut and Dacca. While many old centres of industrial production declined, new market towns and towns fulfilling new needs emerged during the colonial period. To this, scholars such as Atiya Habeeb gave the term “dependent urbanisation”.

Christopher Bayly has argued that there were new towns like Mirzapur and old ones like Benares which flourished because of the demand for Indian commodities created by the East India Company in the early 19th century before the formal incorporation of these territories. Bayly emphasises the role of Indian merchant capital in creating vibrant corporations in old towns or small new ones. Yet, the British were responsible by the late 19th century for the decline of artisanal production and of many urban centres. Some new centres, such as Moradabad which produced brassware, emerged in the twentieth century due to railway transport at reasonable cost and an increase in consumer preference for brass utensils. There was also the movement of some dispersed or rural traditional industries to bigger centres or towns as in the case of leather goods. The

* Dr. Rohit Wanchoo, St. Stephen’s College, University of Delhi, Delhi.
traditional textiles in rural areas employing unskilled workers declined. In such towns the textile producers improved their chances of getting better terms for credit, a better price for their products and they could also draw on the resources of skilled dyers, as pointed out by Tirthankar Roy.

The rise and growth of port cities has been examined more fully in other Units in this course: let us turn our attention to the small scale, but new, settlements that emerged under colonial rule, such as cantonments, railway and canal towns and hill stations.

### 33.2 CANTONMENTS

The British need to recruit and maintain a substantial army led to the creation of cantonments and urban centres close to such military stations. In Madras, the British had a fortified area of European settlement called the White Town that was separated from the Black Town where the Indians lived. Carl Nightingale writes:

> In support of the walled division of residences, governors felt it necessary to either pass or propose laws in 1680, 1688, 1690, 1698, 1706, 1743, 1745, and 1751 that regulated where various groups could live, sometimes ordering English residents to restrict the resale of their houses to other Englishmen. Because of all these measures, a dual housing market, and even a version of what South African historian Paul Maylam calls “fiscal segregation” developed in Madras by the eighteenth century, if not before. Property values were deemed much higher on average in White Town – even taking into account Indian merchants’ palatial dwellings and temples in Black Town – and tax rates for European property were set lower than those levied in Black Town to avoid excessive burdens on Englishmen. (Nightingale, 2008: 55)

The idea of racial segregation developed in India because of the need to maintain European superiority as well as to ensure regulation of inter-racial contacts for reasons of health and avoidance of diseases.

In Madras the British officials first used the word Black Town in the 1670s. This was in contrast to the Christian Town, though after 1720 the term White Town came to be used for the first time in Asia. Racial segregation and its consequences varied over time. In Calcutta the distinction between Black and White town was not so important. Swati Chattopadhyay says, ‘From the Bengali point of view, the city was divided into a host of paras, tolas, and tulis, all terms used to distinguish localities. The paras extended over an area approximately one-quarter by one-half mile, a space that was easy to cover on foot and cognitively constituted a territory.’ (Chattopadhyay, 2000: 157) The area where the prosperous Europeans lived was called sahibpara and was one of the eighteen paras in 19th century Calcutta. The speculative nature of the property market in Calcutta, where houses were built to suit official, commercial and residential requirements at the same time, did not allow for racial segregation and even privacy in conformity with contemporary British preferences. The presence of innumerable servants, even in houses built in the latter part of the 19th century, ensured that blacks were always there in the White town, although they were not always visible.

The cantonment inhabitants in the early years of the 19th century were often victims of cholera, an illness which principally devastated the lives of the poor in rural areas. As David Arnold observes, ‘Troops were particularly susceptible to a disease that flourished in the unsanitary and crowded conditions of barracks and encampments; and they, in turn, were among the principal agencies by which the disease was disseminated throughout India. Large-scale troop movements across northern India from cholera’s homeland in Bengal in 1817-18 facilitated the epidemic invasion of the rest of India.
There was a similar correlation forty years later during the Mutiny campaigns of 1857-8. To speak of the “invasion” of cholera was thus more than a verbal analogy. (Arnold, 1986: 126-127) Between 1818 and 1854 more than 8,500 British soldiers died of cholera, and between 1859 and 1867 a third of all deaths among British troops in India were due to the disease. The 1861 epidemic caused particularly heavy mortality. At Mian Mir near Lahore, 880 out of 2,452 soldiers and their wives and children were afflicted by cholera and 535 died. The European soldiers and not the European officers were particularly prone to cholera. The common Indian soldiers were less affected. After improvements in sanitation and water-supply, introduced following a parliamentary enquiry in Britain in 1863, the mortality among troops declined considerably by the 1880s. David Arnold argues that the defeat of cholera helped in the consolidation of British power in India. But the fear of provoking popular reactions to interventionist measures as well as the high cost of medical and sanitary improvements led to the neglect of such measures for the cities and small towns until the late 19th century and mid-twentieth century respectively.

The cantonments were meant to protect the European soldiers from contact with Indian society but that proved difficult. This was partly because of the proximity to markets which played an important role in meeting the needs of the soldiers. The British tried to define the limits of the cantonment by a regulation in Madras in 1809. Regimental markets were set up to reduce dependence on the local bazaars near the cantonments. The bungalows of the officers in the cantonments were surrounded by barracks of the European soldiers. There was a “prodigality of spatial use” that compensated the Europeans in exile with residential facilities much larger than what they would have enjoyed at home. (Nair, 2002: 1228) The provision of large bungalows for the officers in the cantonments, whether in Madras or Bangalore, was done to demonstrate the superior position of the rulers and their social distance from the local people. The Indian soldiers or sepoys lived in huts in the outer circle of the cantonment and the camp followers were left to fend for themselves further away. The needs of the European soldiers drove them into the local markets or the Black Town in search of liquor and prostitutes. The British tried to provide for the soldiers by setting up Lal Bazaars where the prostitutes were regulated in order to prevent the spread of venereal diseases, a major scourge affecting thirty per cent of European soldiers in early nineteenth century India.
It has been pointed out that the British were perturbed by the fact that the Indian soldiers were less affected by venereal diseases than the European soldiers which was partly attributed to the enforced singlehood for short service recruits introduced in 1870. In 1866 in Bengal the ratio of European soldiers admitted for treatment was four times higher than for Indian soldiers. This could be attributed also to the fact that the proportion of European soldiers who were married compared to the Indian soldiers was lower. This was because the army authorities did not encourage the soldiers to marry because they did not want the added financial responsibility of caring for women and children or to make arrangements for them. The restrictions on marriage were less in the case of soldiers of the Company as compared to those of the Crown regiments. According to Douglas Peers the levels of skill and education and prospects for promotion of Company soldiers were better than that of soldiers of the Crown army. Drunkenness was handled partly by providing liquor superior to the local variety and partly by encouraging temperance. The idea of segregation was meant to protect the health of the soldiers and to maintain discipline among them. According to one estimate, there were three toddy sellers and one supplier of ganja for each regiment of soldiers. The Cantonment Act of 1864 was meant to curb alcoholism in the army, but the effort to segregate the soldiers from these corrupting influences by geographical segregation was not very successful until the very end of the 19th century.

The British recruited a large number of Indians and trained them to accept military discipline. The extent of the discipline in the army might have been exaggerated since in many cantonments, European officers could not enter the barracks after dark without an escort. The soldiers of the Bengal Army were drawn from the Hindu upper castes – Brahmins and Rajputs – and Muslims. These upper caste soldiers, who had joined the Company army to supplement their incomes from land, were more susceptible to caste and religious appeals, as Seema Alavi has pointed out. Interference by missionaries in the lives of the soldiers and the resentment against the British policies regarding caste and religion had led to the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 much before the Revolt of 1857. Nevertheless, the soldiers recruited by the Madras and Bombay Armies did not have such a pronounced upper caste bias as those of the Bengal army. In the Bombay army the Mahars, a subordinated caste who claimed a martial tradition going back to the days of the Marathas, were recruited by the British until the end of the 19th century.

The British faced an uprising in the Bengal army partly because the proportion of Indian to European troops in the cantonments from Kanpur to Calcutta had become way too high during the 1850s. After the Mutiny of 1857 the ratio of Europeans to Indians, which was roughly 1 to 6, was increased to roughly 1 to 3. Further, the caste and religious feelings of the Bengal army soldiers were inflamed by British policies which propelled them towards mutiny. Nevertheless, British military training continued to have an impact on their behaviour and outlook. Tapti Roy has argued that the Army was among the most modern institutions in 19th century India and the Indian sepoys did not forget the military training that they had received in the British camps and cantonments even after they had become rebels.

In Lucknow, one of the key centres of rebellion, the British altered the layout of streets in the city after the revolt to enable the easy movement of troops. Land near Dilkusha was acquired without adequate compensation to the owners to build one of the largest cantonments of the 114 in India. Nearly three quarters of the PWD budget of Oudh was spent on military construction to ensure British military dominance and to prevent any repetition of the siege of the British Residency in Lucknow during 1857-1858. All railway stations in British India were subsequently converted into military posts. The Charbagh railway station in Lucknow, which was close to the cantonment, also included
a fort, arsenal, and barracks, and extra accommodation for the evacuation of Christians in the event of another outbreak in the city.’ (Oldenburg, 2006: 44) The pattern of urbanisation after the uprising against British rule was dominated by security concerns. The Arms Act and its subsequent modifications eventually disarmed the population. The widening and broadening of the streets in Lucknow led Sir Patrick Geddes in 1916 to criticize the mindlessness and insensitivity of this British policy.

33.3 IRRIGATION AND CANAL COLONIES

The British were in favour of promoting irrigation by means of canals and embankments because it would increase the land revenue and provide proof of the benign nature of British rule. In many areas the British improved or remodeled the existing canals as in the case of the Ganges and Yamuna canals in the United Provinces. In Bengal the Eden canal was not very successful partly because the demand for water was not as acute as in the dry regions of India and peasants did not want to pay for water unless it was absolutely necessary. The areas which were most suitable for irrigation were those where there was both the demand for water and the possibility of providing water by irrigation schemes. Unlike the railways, for which the British government guaranteed a five percent rate of return to investors regardless of actual performance, the irrigation projects were expected to give a minimum rate of return before they could be undertaken. Therefore, the pace of irrigation development in India was slower than what it might have been if the social rate of return on investment had also been taken into account.

There was the happy coincidence of both the demand for water and the possibility of designing irrigation projects which yielded an adequate rate of return in the Punjab. The central dry region of the Punjab needed water and the snow fed rivers which traversed through the Punjab could be harnessed by irrigation projects. The Chenab, Doaba and Jhelum canals were developed to provide much needed water for which the peasants were willing to pay. The fact that the Punjab became the main recruiting ground for the Indian army in the post-1857 period also made the British keen to promote irrigation and the allocation of land in what came to be known as the Canal Colonies of the Punjab. Lyallpur became an important town of these colonies. Imran Ali has highlighted the connection between military recruitment, settlement of colonists in these lands recently brought under the plough by irrigation and attempts to promote loyalism in the Punjab.

The settlement of the ‘surplus’ population in the newly settled areas, used by pastoralists earlier, was an important factor in providing stability to the Raj. Some of these colonies had allotments made to soldiers and some areas were devoted to providing fodder to the army. A colonial observer, C.H. Buck noted in 1906 the elements of colonisation thus: ‘the colonization officer has to arrange for the sites of the towns and villages; for those of buildings, such as hospitals, schools, police-stations, and other public offices; space has to be reserved for factories along the railway; and plots have to be kept for arboricultural plantations and nurseries, and for an experimental farm.’ (Buck, 1906: 65) Roads and railway lines, postal and telegraph offices, schools and hospitals, courts and police stations and other government departments came up in the canal colonies. New districts were carved out where such colonisation proved successful.

The towns in these areas were important centres for merchants and moneylenders who moved the agricultural output to the market and the centres of consumption. Nevertheless, the power of the merchants and moneylenders in the Punjab, and in the canal towns in particular, was less pervasive than in the Bombay Deccan or Bengal, since they were unable to exercise the kind of influence over the rural population through debt and loan advances that they did in other parts of India. Mridula Mukherjee has
pointed out that in a backward district like Attock compared to a canal colony district like Lyallpur the influence of the merchant moneylenders was more substantial. The backward regions that cultivated wheat were more dependent on loans than the better off regions like those in the canal colonies that produced cash crops like cotton.

Colonial legislation to protect the interests of the agricultural castes was also responsible for limiting the power of urban merchants and professional classes who emerged in canal towns and elsewhere. On the other hand, canal colonies were better linked to the world market than the local market which left little for capital accumulation among the peasants. The rise of agricultural output and productivity led to the growth of market towns and urban centers which catered to the needs of the more prosperous sections of the region as in the western districts of the United Provinces compared to the impoverished eastern districts of the province.

The irrigation policy of the British was not very effective in areas where the geophysical conditions were not conducive for state intervention to control river flow. In the unstable delta region of the Mahanadi in Orissa the attempt to train and regulate the river actually increased its destructive power whenever it was in flood and burst the embankments built to prevent flooding of land close to the river. Although the policy was meant to increase the productive capacity of the land, to ensure the regular collection of steadily rising land revenue and an increase in the value of agrarian and urban property, the protection of the town of Cuttack also became an important objective. The embankments built to control inundation of land by the river in flood ended the periodic enrichment of the flooded region by the silt deposits left behind by the receding river.

In the Indus region, the application of scientific knowledge and engineering expertise proved unsuccessful in controlling floods and providing irrigation from the 1840s to the 1930s. It was only the Sukkur barrage which produced a large viable irrigation scheme eventually. The British were perplexed by the fact that before they arrived on the scene there were no embankments to protect towns like Thatta and Dera Ghazi Khan. Richard Burton, the adventurer and orientalist, noted in the mid 19th century that ‘most villages could be razed to the ground, transported to the requisite distance, and re-erected in a week, at an expense of probably a couple of rupees per house.’ According to Benjamin Weil, ‘This gives some idea as to the general mobility of towns along the Indus.’ (Weil, 2006: 14) Dera Ghazi Khan was protected since it was an important cantonment town with both an infantry and cavalry garrison stationed there. It was also a hub for trade both by land and water. The Kosi river in Bengal Presidency was also subjected to control by a system of embankments in accordance with the engineering wisdom of the day but it led to devastating floods. Sir William Willcocks, who had designed a project for the Aswan Dam in Egypt, asserted that the British did not focus on irrigation in Bengal because it would have interfered with its system of embankments and rail transportation, which was vital for the ‘continuing flow of raw materials to the industries in Britain.’ (Hill, 1990: 16) The canal and embankment building strategy of the British was responsible for the growth of new towns as well as the increase in the size of old towns. Nevertheless the periodic devastation of such towns by floods was also a consequence of British irrigation policies.

### 33.4 RAILWAYS AND RAILWAY TOWNS

The British were the pioneers in railway building and became major exporters of wagons and locomotives during the second half of the 19th century. They developed the railways in India to facilitate the movement of British manufactured goods into the country and the export of raw materials from India. The import of railway equipment and skilled
manpower to run the railways was a consequence. The railways were built on a substantial scale and imported a large number of locomotives and wagons until 1947, although the Tata Iron & Steel Company began providing the railways with wagons after protective tariffs were introduced by the Government of India during the 1920s. It has been estimated that only 700 locomotives were built in India between 1865 and 1941 while 12,000 were imported. Therefore the railways did not lead to the development of an indigenous manufacturing sector in steel and engineering that could have led to modernisation and urbanisation, although, as Ian Kerr has argued, even the production of 700 locomotives in India revealed its immense technological possibilities. Rajat Ray has argued that if India had been an independent country, railway development could have promoted rapid industrialisation by the early twentieth century.

Like the Army, the railways were major employers and instruments of colonial modernisation and domination. The introduction of railways immediately led to the decline of many centres of artisanal production in the late 19th century, since the railway network in India, primarily connected a raw material-producing hinterland to coastal cities. The decline of traditional industry in Rajasthan was delayed because the railways did not reach the region until the First World War. Yet, centres of raw material production in the interior were connected with the major ports at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, giving rise to market towns in the interiors. When the Southern Mahratta Railroad commenced operations along short segments of line in 1884-85 it enhanced the existing differences between Dharwar and Hubli and centralised economic functions in the latter town. In Dharwar, cart hire services disappeared, its population grew slowly to only 31,270 at the 1901 census and it became a purely local market. Hubli, on the other hand, nearly doubled its 1881 population to 60,214 in 1901, and by 1907, the city employed 40,000 persons in 19 factories. Of them, half were employed in the workshops of the Southern Mahratta Railway, and about 1300 or 1400 in the two mills of the Southern Maratha Weaving and Spinning Company. According to Gumperz, ‘The handloom industry survived primarily in the city in workshop-like arrangements where yarn was supplied to the weavers on credit by a jobber who sold the finished product, deducting the cost of supplies. Thus the handloom weavers had lost control of their capital in the city, while the country devoted itself almost entirely to commercial agriculture.’ (Gumperz, 1974: 591)

It has been argued that the sub-optimal alignments of the early railroads were the product of ‘the arrogant belief that traffic would come to the railways rather than vice versa.’ (Derbyshire, 2007: 291) Lines were built on the shortest routes between ‘obligatory points’ like Delhi, Agra, Kanpur and Allahabad in the United Provinces. The East Indian Railway built its line in such a way that only seven of the thirty six stations between Allahabad and Delhi were near a town. Railway stations were five to ten miles away from Khurja, Hathras and Bulandshahr though they were market towns that could have been linked on this route: they were bypassed because the British wanted to get enough clean water, acquire land at low cost and ‘to site stations at a distance from the “native city” in fortified defensible locations, as a last line of retreat for the European Civil Station.’ (Derbyshire, 2007: 292) Therefore the railways led to the decline or slow development of some towns and the rise of others.

Initially, the railways were built on a scale that some felt was not efficient in its use of resources. For instance, the idea of a uniform gauge was abandoned throughout the country, and a narrower gauge was introduced on some lines to reduce costs, creating problems for the railways later.

Workshops and railway housing colonies were constructed in many parts of the country
particularly for European and Eurasian employees who constituted about seven to ten percent of the total railway workforce. According to the Report of the Indian Industrial Commission of 1916-18 there were 70 workshop complexes which employed several thousand people. The Jamapalpur shops of the East India Railway were the biggest single employer with more than eleven thousand employees. The railways employed about 800,000 employees according to the Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India in 1931. About 136,000 persons were employed in 145 railway workshops although Kerr believes that there were only 22 large workshops at that time. The workshops for locomotives and for wagons and coaches were in close proximity to each other and may have been counted as separate entities together with the smaller running sheds.

The neat railway colonies with their recreational complexes were built to house the European employees who occupied the upper echelons and technical branches of the railways. The salaries they were paid were much more than what was given to Indian employees and this resulted in the ‘racial’ divide both in the big and small urban centres that they created. In Lahore the railway workshops and station together with the cantonment and civil lines were the nucleus of the city. Although a scholar has thought it fit to differentiate between the pre railway and post railway urban settlement patterns he does not hold the railway colonies in high esteem. Smailes asserts, ‘The railway colony was the meanest, most drab and regimented element among the Western components, its dreary tone sometimes emphasised by the use of uniform paint throughout, but at least it offered certain minimum standards of sanitation and residential amenity, both in its streets and buildings, that were quite foreign to the neighbouring indigenous city.’ (Smailes, 1969: 184)

In the Moghulpura area in Lahore more than 12,500 employees worked in the workshops in 1929. About the same number of workers were employed in the major workshop at Jamalpur in eastern India. Europeans and Eurasians trained the Punjabi workers who learnt how to maintain 150 locomotives and 4000 carriages and wagons by the 1880s. There were about 180 Europeans and Eurasians at Lahore in 1872 and about 1100 by 1916. The Railway Technical School set up in 1889 and the North-Western Railway Apprentices’ Technical School which opened in 1898 helped in providing technical skills and training to a large body of workers in Lahore. The railway workshops and schools thus helped in the training of industrial workers and the diffusion of technical knowledge throughout Punjab.

The railways were important in the colonial port cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras where they were in close proximity to the Indian localities that grew up as residential or business segments. The railway stations, tunnels and bridges were built to signify imperial power. Writes Kerr, ‘Colonial power threatened but determined to keep its emergent communication life-lines secure’ opened the fortress-like Lahore railway station in 1862 ‘just a few years after the mutinies and civil uprisings of 1857-58. In the Lahore station outward form represented an imperative of colonial rule: security. Bombay’s luxuriant Victoria Terminus opened in 1887 represented power, pride and a certain forced naturalization of the British-imposed railway system.’ (Kerr, 2003: 291) Small railway stations on the journey from Mettupalayam in the plains to Ootacamund in the Nilgiri hills with English names like Lovedale, Hillgrove, Runnymede and Wellington sought to ‘create a home away from home’ for the Europeans. (Kerr, 2003: 293) The railways were the symbols of British superiority and civilisation and bigger stations such as Victoria Terminus signified the monumentality of the railways.
Railway Workshops and Main Railway Lines in British India

33.5 HILL STATIONS

The first British hill station was built in 1819 and by the 1860s, many of them served as the summer capitals of the British government in India. In 1864 Simla became the official summer capital of the Viceroy and in 1870 Ootacamund that of the Madras presidency. Nainital served as the summer capital of the United Provinces for five months in a year and Darjeeling as that of the Bengal government for three months. As a result of protests from Indian petitioners against this practice, (which reached a peak in Madras in 1884 when thirty thousand petitioners wrote to Parliament) the duration of the official ‘flight’ to the hills was curtailed. These hill stations were shaped by the need to make suitable spaces for European officials and their families. English medium private schools, sanatoriums and churches dotted the landscape of the hills, which had a lower population density than the plains, so the British were free to re-create an English atmosphere and promote an architecture that was closer to what they were familiar with back home. They could also ‘overlook’ the Indian elites and ordinary people in these mountain retreats. Although there were differences in their size and importance, the British created about eighty hill stations in different parts of the subcontinent.

The Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton, who visited Ootacamund in 1877, compared the rain there to English rain. He found features reminiscent of the English landscape: ‘Imagine Herefordshire lanes, Devonshire downs, Westmoreland lakes, Scotch trout streams.’ (Kenny, 1995: 702) The Indians in Ooty outnumbered the Europeans ten to one but they were somehow invisible in social circles, despite the fact that the real estate was primarily owned by them during the late nineteenth century and there were some significant Indian men of commerce in the station. The European presence was heightened by the fact that Ooty became the permanent headquarters of the Madras army in 1884. The British in the late 19th century were not too keen to let even Indian princes build their summer houses in Ooty. Even the Nizam of Hyderabad faced opposition in 1886 when he wanted to buy the house in which the Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army had once lived. This was partly because the colonial authorities feared that the entourage of the princes would bring various diseases in their wake. In 1907, the Hill Sanitaria Municipal Act authorized hill municipalities to raise taxes and control land uses in order to keep these European enclaves free from disease. Another factor was that the British wanted to maintain European superiority and therefore to thwart the transfer of houses owned by Europeans to the Indians.

Simla became an important hill station because it served as the summer capital of the Viceroy and the Headquarters of the British army in India. The stamp of British architecture on Simla was substantial, partly because of the absence of indigenous and Mughal architectural traditions in the region. The Church at the end of the Mall was Gothic and the Town Hall and Public Library were Tudor and half-timbered. The Viceregal Lodge, built during 1884-1888, used ‘grey stone in an eclectic Elizabethan style, reminiscent of a hotel in a British seaside resort, and with Jacobean interiors which must have reminded the Viceroy of his Ulster seat, Clandeboye.’ (Stamp, 1981: 366) In Simla the officials who came during the summer months hired houses in the town for many years before the construction of official buildings and residences. The valuable property in Simla was controlled and owned by a handful of Europeans. Indian princes too were important buyers of premium properties. In 1886 the Indian princes owned one-seventh of the houses considered appropriate for Europeans. Thereafter a policy of discouraging Indian princes from acquiring property emerged and by 1907 the number of houses that they owned had come down to seven. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army was not allowed to sell Snowden to the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1890. The Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne in 1890 wrote that the princes were not to be encouraged to hang about in Simla.

The government came up with schemes to restrict the inflow of people into Simla after the railway came up to Kalka in 1891, but the attempt to control the character of the town and its population growth was abandoned after the rise of political agitations in Simla and its neighbourhood led by the Indian National Congress and the Praja Mandal. After the Lee Commission in 1925 allowed the British officials to spend their vacations in England the popularity of Simla declined, bringing down the demand for and prices of large properties. The British became indifferent to the increasing control of the town and its properties by middle class Indians during the inter-war period. As Pamela Kanwar has argued, it was possible to create a ‘British haven at Simla “given” a politically quiescent Indian population’, but growing nationalist awareness amongst the functional groups which were crucial in the town undermined British control over Simla even before 1947. (Kanwar, 1984: 236)

The British in India were only interested in temporary ownership or control over housing as they did not intend to settle down permanently in India. Although they used strong measures to regulate the private housing market in Simla, they did not adopt measures that were used in African or American cities. Argues Carl Nightingale, ‘Most whites in suburban civil lines and cantonments did not own the houses they lived in at all; the Raj provided the typically temporary shelter there as partial payment’ for ‘colonial service. … Faster steam ships ultimately made the trip home to England just as easy and much more desirable than a summer stay in the hill stations, underscoring Britons’ relative lack of commitment to real estate investments in India. Independence movements in Asia and Africa of course eventually sent most of all the whites in a “White Town” home by the middle of the twentieth century.’ (Nightingale, 2006: 682)

33.6 SUMMARY

The British in India were responsible for the decline of many urban centres associated with traditional industries but they also founded new towns based on the needs of British commerce and European ideas of race and climate. The urbanisation during the colonial period has sometimes been called parasitic or dependent because it was based on the exploitation of the peasants by urban and commercial interests. The new urban centres were principally the port towns, the military cantonments, the railway towns and the commercial centres or market towns. Urban centres grew not because of the
rise of modern industry but because of exports of agricultural commodities to which the railways contributed immensely. The overdeveloped tertiary sector was a product of the slow development of the secondary sector and high levels of underemployment in the primary agricultural sector. The canal towns encouraged some growth and urbanisation but even in the Punjab a lot of the prosperity was linked to the remittances by soldiers who served in the British army. The limited economic development under colonialism did not adversely affect the level of urbanisation in India as much as the social and economic role of these urban centres. The difference in the nature of urbanisation in the colonial periphery and the metropolitan centre was substantial.

### 33.7 Exercises

1. Discuss the emergence of cantonment towns during the colonial period. In what ways did it lead to the segregation and compartmentalisation of the urban population?

2. Why did the British segregate urban centres in ‘Black’ and ‘White’ Towns? What kind of new urban space was produced here?

3. Describe the emergence of canal colonies. What was its impact? How did it alter the urban spaces?

4. Examine the connection between military recruitment, settlements of colonies, irrigation and loyalism.

5. How did the railways alter urban settings?

6. What lay behind the creation of Summer Capitals? Could the ‘segmented’ city be reproduced in these ‘hill stations’?

### 33.8 References


