

COLONIAL RULE AND URBANIZATION: A STUDY OF KARACHI'S EVOLUTION FROM SINDH'S PORT TOWN TO PROVINCIAL CAPITAL

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Abstract

This study examines the urban development of Karachi under British imperial governance from 1843 to 1947, tracing the city's transformation from a modest town into a thriving metropolis. The development of Karachi is explored in three distinct phases. The first phase (1843-1847) focused on establishing military and police authority in the city. The second phase (1847-1936) saw significant architectural and infrastructural growth as part of the Bombay Presidency's broader colonial strategy. In the final phase (1936-1947), Karachi emerged as an independent imperial metropolis within the newly established Sindh province. Using historical, and qualitative methods, this study explores the political, institutional, and demographic shifts that shaped Karachi's urban landscape. The paper also highlights Karachi's strategic importance during World War II, when it became a vital economic hub for the British Raj. This research reveals how Karachi's development was influenced by both local needs and imperial priorities, shedding light on the lasting legacies of colonial governance on the city's social and architectural fabric. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on colonial urbanism by underscoring Karachi's unique trajectory, particularly its role as a military and trade hub.

Keywords:

Imperial Governance, Urbanization, Karachi, Bombay Presidency, and Sindh.

Introduction

Urbanization is a global phenomenon historically driven by industrialization in the West. However, in colonial contexts like British India, it was shaped by trade, administrative requirements, and military needs, reflecting the distinct priorities of imperial governance.¹ Unlike Western industrial urbanization, British colonial urbanization in India was state-driven and focused on constructing new towns and cities as imperial centers of power. British investments in infrastructure, such as roads, railroads, and public utilities, contributed to the growth of cities.² The regions of Sindh and Punjab supplied essential raw materials, while Karachi emerged as a central hub for their production and distribution. This functional interdependence between urban and rural areas understood the extractive nature of colonial urbanization, where cities served as nodes for resource exploitation and imperial control. Most towns and cities that emerged were either rural or peripheral. Industrialization created a few highly urbanized industrial regions surrounded by large, underdeveloped rural zones.³ Colonial urbanism, characterized by process of interaction and accommodation leading to the development of several coastal cities, including Karachi.⁴

Karachi, a coastal town of Sindh, was established by Sir Charles Napier as the capital after the annexation of Sindh in 1843. Within less than a century, it transformed into a city with the first airport and became the third-largest port city of British India.⁵ Much like other Asian cities, Karachi grew as a bustling port metropolis. The development of colonial Karachi can be divided into three distinct phases: the first phase (1843-1847) focused on establishing military and administrative control; the second phase (1847-1936) saw significant infrastructural and architectural growth under the Bombay Presidency; and the third phase (1936-1947) marked Karachi's emergence as an independent provincial capital. During the Bombay

¹ Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge, 2007), 212.

² Susan M Neild, "Colonial Urbanism: The Development of Madras City in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979): 243.

³ Eric Lewis Beverley, "Colonial Urbanism and South Asian Cities," *Social History* 36, no. 4 (2011): 490.

⁴ Neild, *Colonial Urbanism*, 218.

⁵ Maneck B Pithawalla, *An Introduction to Karachi: Its Environs and Hinterland*. (Karachi: The Times Press, 1950), 1.

Presidency (1847-1936), Karachi's governance was heavily influenced by imperial priorities and military needs. Colonial settlements were organized racially and ethnically into diverse communities yet interconnected zones. Military installations (cantonments), civil stations (especially the famous imperial residence from home), and hill stations were established away from the local population.⁶ These segregationist practices reinforced British control over the city. New institutions were established, including cantonments, social control mechanisms that bolstered by technology advances such as the construction of railways.⁷ These developments reshaped indigenous settlements and prioritized imperial needs over local considerations⁸ with Colonial rulers occupying prime locations and eventually defining the city central purpose.⁹

This paper explores the urban development of Karachi under British imperial governance from 1843 to 1947, focusing on the relationship between colonial policies and local agency. This study aims to answer the following key questions: Why did the British choose to shift capital from Hyderabad to Karachi, a small fishing town? In what ways did the separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency in 1936, influence urban life in Karachi? And finally, what role did local actors, such as indigenous merchants, laborers, and political leaders, play in shaping Karachi's urbanization?

The period between 1936 and 1947 is particularly significant, as it marks Karachi's transformation into a provincial capital and its strategic role during the World War II. The war had a devastating impact on the colonial structure, compelling the British Empire to reassess its priorities and shift its focus from Bombay to Karachi. This study address a gap in the literature by exploring the urban development of Karachi during

⁶ Ronald Lewcock, "Colonial Urban Development; Culture, Social Power and Environment. By Anthony D. King. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1976," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1979): 164-167 as cited in Beverley, *Colonial Urbanism and South Asian Cities*, 485.

⁷ Hira Ovais, "The lost Camp of Karachi: A Case Study of Saddar Bazaar-the Earliest British Settlement," *Journal of Xian Shiyu univeristy* (2022): 1025.

⁸ Ilhan Niaz, *The State During the British Raj: Imperial Governance in South Asia, 1700-1947* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 77.

⁹ Amar Farooqui, "Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1996): 2747.

this critical period, shedding light on the city's unique trajectory within the broader context of colonial urbanism in British India.

This paper is framed within the theoretical approaches of colonial urbanism and postcolonial urban studies. Drawing on Anthony King's (1976) concept of colonial urban development, this study examines how British imperial governance shaped Karachi's urban landscape through racial segregation, infrastructural investments, and administrative control. By applying this framework, the research contributes to broader discussions on the production of urban space in both colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Additionally, this paper takes a comparative approach by placing Karachi's urban development within the broader context of colonial urbanism in British India and the British Empire. By comparing Karachi to other colonial port cities such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Singapore, this study highlights the unique aspects of Karachi's transformation, particularly its role as a military and trade hub. This comparative analysis provides a deeper understanding of how colonial policies influenced urban spaces across different regions, revealing the distinctive trajectory of Karachi's development.

Karachi During the annexation of Sindh

During the middle Ages, towns were organized into guilds that focused on handicrafts and local trade.¹⁰ In the medieval period, cities had limited connectivity with rural areas, leading to minimal economic and cultural exchange. New factory technologies altered the functionality of medieval cities and accelerated the process of urbanization.¹¹ Similarly, Karachi had limited connectivity with other cities¹² Over time, Karachi has had various names, each corresponding to a particular period of its governance. During

¹⁰ Karl Marx and Frederic Engels, *Collected Works, Vol.5* (Moscow: Progressive Publisher, 1976), as cited in Abanti, Kundu, "Urbanisation in India: A Contrast with Western Experience". *Social Scientist* 11, no. 4 (1983): 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517022>

¹¹ Kundu, "Urbanisation in India," 38.

¹² Muhammad Usman Damohi, *Karachi in Mirror of History* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 2016), 1.

Alexander the Great's reign, it was called *Morontobara* and Alexander's Heaven. In the Arab era, it was referred to as *Deebal* and *Darbo*. The *Tarkhan* and Mughal dynasties named it Karashee and Moonhara, respectively.¹³ On February 7, 1839, the British took control of Karachi with small scale resistance from the locals. Representatives from the British side, such as Rear Admiral Maitland and Brigadier Valiant, along with representatives from the Talpur rulers of Sindh, including Hassel Butcha and Khair Muhammad, signed an agreement that emphasized the importance of maintaining dignity.¹⁴

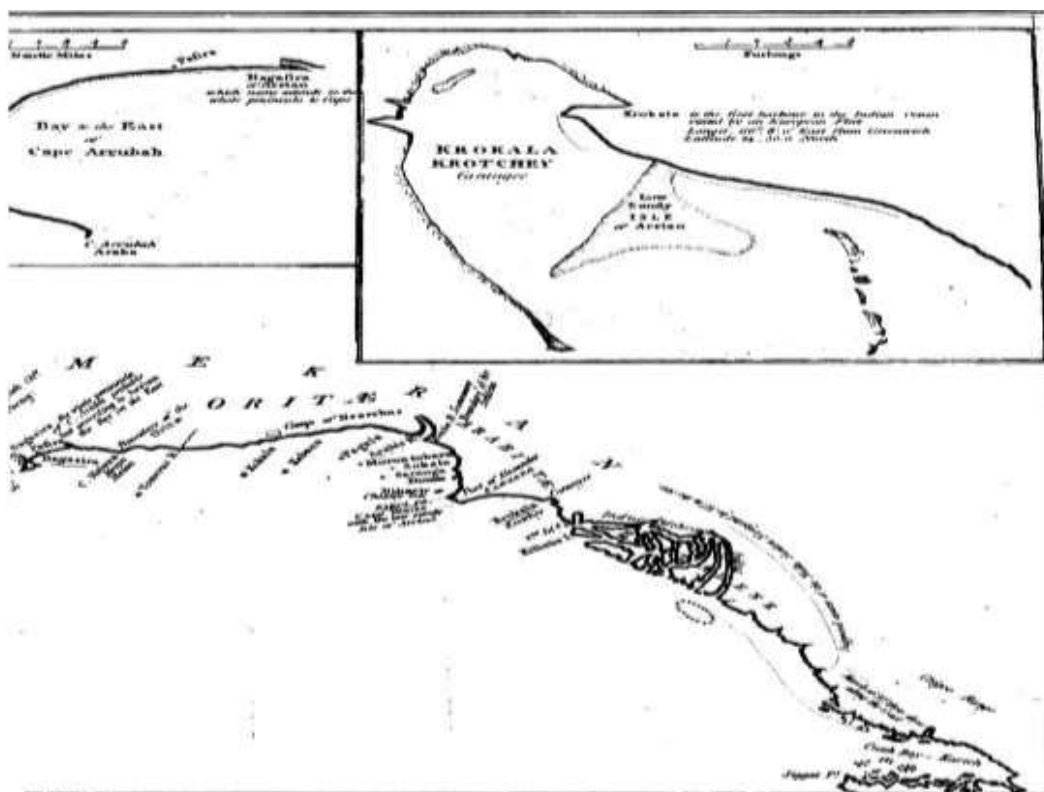


Figure: 1. Map of Karachi with name Krokala and Krotchey.

Source: William Vincent, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Oceans Vol I*. (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davis, 1807), p. 188.

The architecture and urban development of Karachi changed significantly during the British rule.¹⁵ The British Army General T. G. Careless shared his perspective on Karachi in his 1838 memoir.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴ Naseer Dashti, *Tears of Sindhu: Sindhi National Struggle in the Historical Context* (North America: Trafford, 2018), 123.

¹⁵ Ovais, "The lost camp of Karachi," 1.

Karachi is a town built on an elevated spit of land that projects a short distance into the swamps and flats on the harbor's eastern side. It is fortified with a mud wall with round towers at each angle, however, the structure is in poor condition. The city has 14000 residents, half of whom are Hindus and the rest are *Balochs*, *Jokhias*, *Mowanas*¹⁶, and *Bod*. Outside the walls, the suburbs spread for some distance and contain nearly as many dwellings as the town itself.¹⁷

Karachi was insignificant until 1843 and was barely mentioned after annexation.¹⁸ On April 12, 1843, Major General Sir Charles Napier was appointed as the Governor by Governor General of British India Lord Ellenborough. He then relocated the government's headquarters from Hyderabad to Karachi.¹⁹ Additionally, Karachi was divided into four regions: Riverine, Kohistan, and Riverine, with Kohistan having the highest population density.²⁰

Karachi's development as a colonial port city shares similarities with other British colonial cities, such as Bombay and Calcutta, which also served as key hubs for trade and administration. However, unlike Bombay, which emerged as a significant industrial and financial center, Karachi's growth was more closely tied to its strategic military importance and its role as a gateway to the northwest frontier. Similarly, while Calcutta was the capital of British India and a center of cultural and political activity, Karachi's significance lay in its proximity to the Arabian Sea and its ability to facilitate trade with the Middle East and Central Asia. These comparisons highlight the unique position of Karachi within the British colonial network.

¹⁶ *Mowanas* are a Sindhi tribe who live along the coast or on the banks of the Indus River. They are also known as Mohanas, Mallahs, Mirbhars, and Meeranis. The majority of their territory is made up of Karachi, Thatta, and Kati Bandar. Mirbhar, which means "Lord of the Sea/River," was their title.

¹⁷ T. G. Careless, *Memoir on the Trade on the Bay, Harbour, and Trade, of Kurrachee, in Memoirs on Sind: Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, Vol.I* (Karachi: Karimsons, 1979), 196.

¹⁸ Alexander Francis Baillie, *Kurrachee (Karachi) Past, Present, and Future* (London: Thacker, Spink, 1890), 2.

¹⁹ *A Hand Book of the Government Records Lying in the Office of the Commissioner in Sind and District Offices*. (Karachi: The Commissioner Printing Press, 1933), 20.

²⁰ P. J. Mead and G. Laird Macgregor, *Census of India, 1911: Bombay vol. VII, pt. I, Report* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1912), 8.

Land Use and settlement patterns

Developing colonial countries often created dual cities that were racially segregated between indigenous peoples and Europeans during urbanization.²¹ This segregation was evident in both urban architecture and land distribution, enforcing colonial rule by physically separating the colonized from the colonizers. This racial segregation in terms of urban architecture and development was utilized to reinforce colonial control over the native population.²² The urbanization and land settlement led to a separation of native residents from the city centers. The urban areas designated for indigenous peoples were shaped by pre-colonial land-use patterns, while the city center adopted Western Urban planning principles, reinforcing social stratification. The racial segregation of land use in Karachi reflects Anthony King's argument that colonial cities were designed to reinforce imperial power and racial hierarchies. The establishment of cantonments and civil lines physically separated European colonizers from the Indigenous population, creating dual cities with stark disparities in access to resources and infrastructure.

The racial segregation of land use in Karachi mirrors patterns seen in other colonial cities, such as Singapore and Hong Kong. In Singapore, the British established European enclaves like Tanglin and Orchard Road while confining the Chinese and Malay populations to crowded neighborhoods like Chinatown and Kampong Glam.²³ Similarly, the British reserved the Peak for European residents in Hong Kong, while the local Chinese population lived in densely populated areas like Sheung Wan.²⁴ However, Karachi's segregation was unique in its emphasis on military cantonments, reflecting its strategic

²¹ Catherine Bauer, "The Optimum Pattern of Urbanization: Does Asia Need a New Type of Regional Planning?" Working paper for the UN Seminar on Regional Planning Tokyo, as cited in Abanti Kundu, "Urbanisation in India: A Contrast With Western Experience." *Social Scientist* 11, no. 4 (1983): 37-49.

²² Maansi Parpiani, "Urban Planning in Bombay (1898-1928): Ambivalences, Inconsistencies and Struggles of The Colonial State," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 42 (2012): 64.

²³ Subramaniam Aiyer, "From Colonial Segregation to Postcolonial 'Integration': Constructing Ethnic Difference through Singapore's Little India and the Singapore 'Indian'" (PhD diss, University of Canterbury, 2006), http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/2782/1/thesis_fulltext.pdf.

²⁴ Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 15.

importance as a garrison town. This comparison underscores the role of local context in shaping colonial urban policies.

Segregation of indigenous and European colonizers impacted public health and sanitation. The separation contributed to disparities in access to resources infrastructure, and public health services, with colonial elites enjoying higher living standards. Inconsistent growth of residential areas resulted from municipal funding preferences for colonial elites.²⁵ Elected municipal members in Karachi had limited authority compared to government officials, requiring them to seek approval from the commissioner who held absolute power over decision-making.²⁶ However, a small group of affluent Indian merchants and landowners emerged as the colonial elites, amassing significant wealth and power. Urban planning was frequently used to achieve colonial and imperial development objectives and to reinforce racial supremacy, and was deemed a crucial fundamental goal.²⁷

Karachi's inhabitants resisted British invasion from 1839-1843. The city was not simply a passive recipient of British influence; local resistance played a significant role during the annexation. The cantonment grid divided the population following conquest.²⁸ Before the British invasion, the Talpur rulers of Sindh were widely believed to be unjust towards Hindus. Seth Naomal supported the British in invading Sindh, while resistance against the British in Karachi is worth mentioning.²⁹

British officers' quarters in colonial India evolved into cantonments initially established to control the cities. These cantonments were designed to maintain British authority and segregate military personnel from the local population. It was provided with gardens, clean metal roadways, streetlights, schools, and

²⁵ Susan J. Lewandowski, "Urban Growth and Municipal Development in the Colonial city of Madras, 1860–1900," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (1975): 341.

²⁶ "Memorandum from the Commissioner in Sind, No 1030", 15 May, 1896, GD No, 25, ACC 2129, *Sindh Archives*.

²⁷ Ambe J. Njoh, "Development Implications of Colonial land and Human Settlement Schemes in Cameroon." *Habitat International* 26, no. 3 (2002):401.

²⁸ Ovais, "The lost camp of Karachi", 1025.

²⁹ Akhtar Balouch, "Traitor of Sindh Seth Naomal: A case of Blasphemy in 1832." *Dawn* <https://www.dawn.com/news/1116294> (accessed December 24, 2023).

hospitals. They established a municipal organization to oversee maintenance of the area and provide support for European forces.³⁰ These cantonments were institutionalized by the colonial authority in India.³¹ The civil bureaucracy of the British Raj was structured based on civil lines. Cantonments and civil lines in Karachi and Lahore were innovative initiatives. British officers' quarters in colonial India evolved into cantonments initially established to control the cities.³²

The construction of the cantonments was followed by strategic railway lines connecting Karachi to key locations across British India. Military cantonments were connected via railways and roadways to protect colonial interests.³³ In addition, the railroad arrangement aided British commercial interests.³⁴ In 1855, the formation of the Sindh Railway Company was authorized by British Parliament in London. The company aimed to acquire land in the East Indies for the construction of additional Indian railways. Its operations began with the construction of a railway line from Karachi to Kotri city³⁵ which alongside Hyderabad was the only big city of Sindh at that time.³⁶ The British Indian government provided free land and cheap labor for railway construction.³⁷ In 1889, Karachi became a significant grain exporting port due to its railway connection to Punjab and Delhi.³⁸ In addition, the British established English schools with Westernized educational systems and new institutions with cutting-edge medical and hygienic

³⁰ Taranveer Kaur and Tariq Ahmad Sheikh, "Growth of Urbanisation in Punjab during Colonial period (1849-1947)," *Ilkogretim Online* 19, no. 4 (2020): 2782.

³¹ Muhammad Ali Nasir, "Reading Malir Cantonments in Karachi, Pakistan: Some Notes on Residential Barracks and Spatial Dynamics," *Contemporary South Asia* Vol.22, no. 4(2014): 364.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bhupinder Singh and Kaur Amandeep, "Railway Development in Colonial Punjab: Social and Cultural Assimilation," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 3, no.1 (2015):81.

³⁴ Laxman D. Satya, "British Imperial Railways in Nineteenth Century South Asia." in *The Railways in Colonial South Asia: Economy, Ecology and Culture*, ed. Ganeswar Nayak (London: Routledge, 2021), 88.

³⁵ Kotri is the town on the left bank of river Indus. It was a port city of River Indus.

³⁶ Alexander F. Baillie, *Kurrachee (Karachi) Past, Present, and Future*(London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1890), 75.

³⁷ Satya, "British Imperial Railways in Nineteenth Century South Asia," 70.

³⁸ Ian J. Kerr, "Bombay and Lahore. Colonial Railways and Colonial Cities: Some Urban Consequences of the Development and Operation of Railways in India, c. 1850-c. 1947," in *II Congreso de Historia Ferroviaria [Recurso electrónico]: Aranjuez, 7 a 9 de febrero de 2002*(Madrid: Fundcion de los Ferrocarriles españoles, 2001), 10.

standards.³⁹ The construction of roads, provision of water, electricity, railways, and establishment of English schools led to substantial growth in Karachi's population and institutions.

Karachi Under the British Raj

From 1843 to 1947, the government was closely intertwined with the Sindhian system, a social and political structure with ruling landlords and caste divisions before the British Raj. The population noticed minor shifts, particularly the appointment of a few key figures to protect them from robbers, as opposed to the previous system where each Ameer had a host of favorites.⁴⁰ The government was made up of four branches: the military, irregular horse force, police, and civil branch. Although government work was initially not divided into departments, in October 1847, following Sir Charles Napier's retirement, the Province was annexed to the Bombay Presidency, forming a Commissionership.⁴¹ In 1851, the Bombay Government divided its responsibilities among three departments: Revenue, Political, and General. They introduced a systematic record-keeping compilation, overseeing both the Commissioner's and District officers' offices.⁴²

The municipalities were established to administer cities and towns. In 1891, the population of municipalities had grown to over 5,000. Any city with a population of more than five thousand falls into the category of a municipal town.⁴³ Between 1839 and 1945, Karachi's population grew from 8,000 to 86,000 due to the establishment of educational institutions and construction of railways.⁴⁴ In 1854, Karachi began its transformation into an urban metropolis, marking the start of its journey towards becoming a bustling city.⁴⁵ The city had experienced growth not only in terms of population but also in

³⁹ Kaur and Sheikh, "Growth of Urbanisation in Punjab," 2782.

⁴⁰ Ameer, a title used for the rulers or princes of Sindh, specifically the Talpurs, before the British annexation in 1843.

⁴¹ *A Hand Book of the Government Records*, 20-21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2778.

⁴⁴ Baillie, "*Kurrachee (Karachi) Past, Present, and Future*," 29.

⁴⁵ Laurent Gayer, "Guns, Slums, and 'Yellow Devils': A Genealogy of Urban Conflicts in Karachi, Pakistan," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2007):517.

terms of commerce. Its imports and exports had increased from 1,200,000 rupees in 1843 to 3,550,000 rupees in 1845, 46,500,000 rupees in 1865, and finally reached 90,000,000 rupees in 1885.⁴⁶ International trade in Karachi attracted European and indigenous traders, fostering the city's development and leading to investment in its harbor, barracks, roads, banks, and other key infrastructure.⁴⁷ In 1860, Karachi's port played a role in the city's commercial growth.

Karachi's architecture under British rule includes notable structures like Frere Hall, Trinity Church, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Merewether Memorial Tower, Flagstaff House (now Quaid e Azam House Museum), and Mohatta Palace. The Empress Market, established in 1889, became one of the city's oldest and most significant markets, and *Edulji Dinshaw* Dispensary in the Saddar Bazaar Quarter also contributed to the city's evolving urban landscape.⁴⁸ Establishing in 1889, the Empress Market, expanded Karachi's role as a significant trade hub, becoming the second-largest vegetable market in the region, competing with Bombay and Kolkata.⁴⁹

During World Wars I and II, Karachi provided logistical support to the British and allied armies. In World War II, Karachi's port functioned as a ship hospital, repairing over 1,000 vessels.⁵⁰ These institutional changes, alongside the expansion of infrastructure, had a significant impact on Karachi's population growth and urban development, fundamentally altering the city's infrastructure and role in the region.

Population Growth and Migration

The rapid population growth in Karachi during the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be understood through Henri Lefebvre's concept of the 'production of space.'⁵¹ British investments in railways, ports,

⁴⁶ Baillie, "*Kurrachee (Karachi) Past, Present, and Future*, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸ Syed Hamid Akbar, Naveed Iqbal, and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, "Saddar Bazar Quarter in Karachi: A Case of British-Era Protected Heritage Based on the Literature Review and Fieldwork." *Heritage* 6, no. 3 (2023): 3183-3210.

⁴⁹ Gayer, *Guns, Slums, and Yellow Devils*, 517.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre, "The Production of Space (1991)," in *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, ed. Jen Giesecking et al. (New

and educational institutions transformed Karachi into a hub of economic activity, attracting migrants from Punjab, Gujarat, and other regions. This process of urbanization was not merely demographic but also spatial, as the city's infrastructure and institutions were designed to serve imperial interests.

The growth of urban areas involves creating diverse and interdependent communities. The development of urban spaces, therefore, entailed a reconfiguration of social and economic interaction.⁵² The British decision to develop Karachi as an alternate port to Calcutta and link it via railway to Punjab and Afghan border attracted Parsis, Jews, Christians and minority sects of Islam like Bohras and Ismailis.⁵³ Consequently, Karachi experienced a comparable situation due to urbanization and population growth. The population growth in the presidential "presidency" cities during the late 19th century was due to advancements in technology and commerce⁵⁴ Karachi experienced significant growth in the 1880s, culminating in a higher urbanization rate in Sindh (12.6% in 1891) than in India (9.6%). The gap in population growth continued to broaden, reaching 6-7% between 1921 and 1941. Sindh's urbanization rate reached 19.6% in 1941, surpassing India's rate of 12.4%.⁵⁵ Therefore, its population density was 2,139 people per square mile, almost three times that of Bombay Island. The Population's religious composition was 49% Muslim and 44% Hindu.⁵⁶ Colonial operational strategy favored urban areas, resulting in unequal access to public facilities and insufficient support for indigenous institutions and practices in rural areas.⁵⁷

York: Routledge, 2014), 289–93,

<https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/chapters/edit/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9781315816852-56&type=chapterpdf>.

⁵² Thomas Elmqvist, Charles L. Redman, Stephan Barthel, and Robert Costanza, "History of Urbanization and the Missing Ecology," in *Urbanization, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Challenges and Opportunities: A Global Assessment* (2013): 13-30.

⁵³ Suhail Zaheer Lari, *A History of Sindh* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 116.

⁵⁴ Lewandowski, "Urban Growth and Municipal Development," 336.

⁵⁵ Michel Boivin, ed., *Sindh Through History and Representations: French Contributions to Sindhi Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44.

⁵⁶ Mead, and Macgregor, "Census of India, 1911, 12.

⁵⁷ Kundu, "Trends and Processes of Urbanisation in India," 3.

Karachi's population increased in 1913 despite a devastating plague that killed over 25,000 people by 1901. The first official census of the Bombay presidency was conducted on March 10, 1911.⁵⁸ Between 1911 and 1941, urban areas grew faster than rural regions. Specifically, between 1923 and 1931, while the pastoral population grew by 10%, the urban population grew by 19.1%. From 1931 to 1941, urban areas grew 32%, while rural regions grew 33%.⁵⁹ The city experienced significant urbanization between 1921 and 1951 due to a large influx of migrants. The migration rate increased from 29% to 42%, as shown in figure three of the population growth chart.

Karachi's population growth during the colonial period was comparable to that of Bombay and Calcutta, both of which experienced rapid urbanization due to migration and economic opportunities. However, while Bombay's population growth was driven by industrialization and the textile trade, and Calcutta's by its role as the capital of British India, Karachi's growth was fueled by its strategic location as a port and military hub. Additionally, unlike Bombay and Calcutta, which attracted large numbers of workers from rural areas, Karachi's migrant population included many traders and merchants from Punjab and Gujarat, reflecting its role as a commercial gateway to Central Asia. These differences highlight the unique economic and geographic factors that shaped Karachi's demographic trends.

⁵⁸ Mead, *Census of India, 1911*, 12.

⁵⁹ Ashish Bose, "Six Decades of Urbanization in India, 1901—1961," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 2, no. 1 (1965): 32-33.

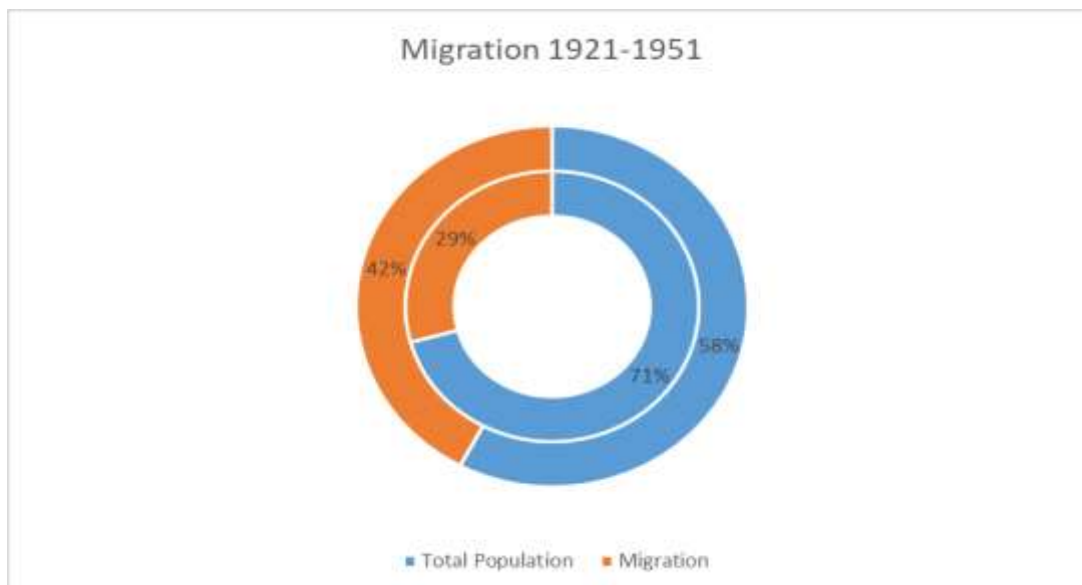


Figure 2. Migration to Karachi (1921-1951).

Source: see, Laurent Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered disorder and the struggle for the city*. (USA: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25

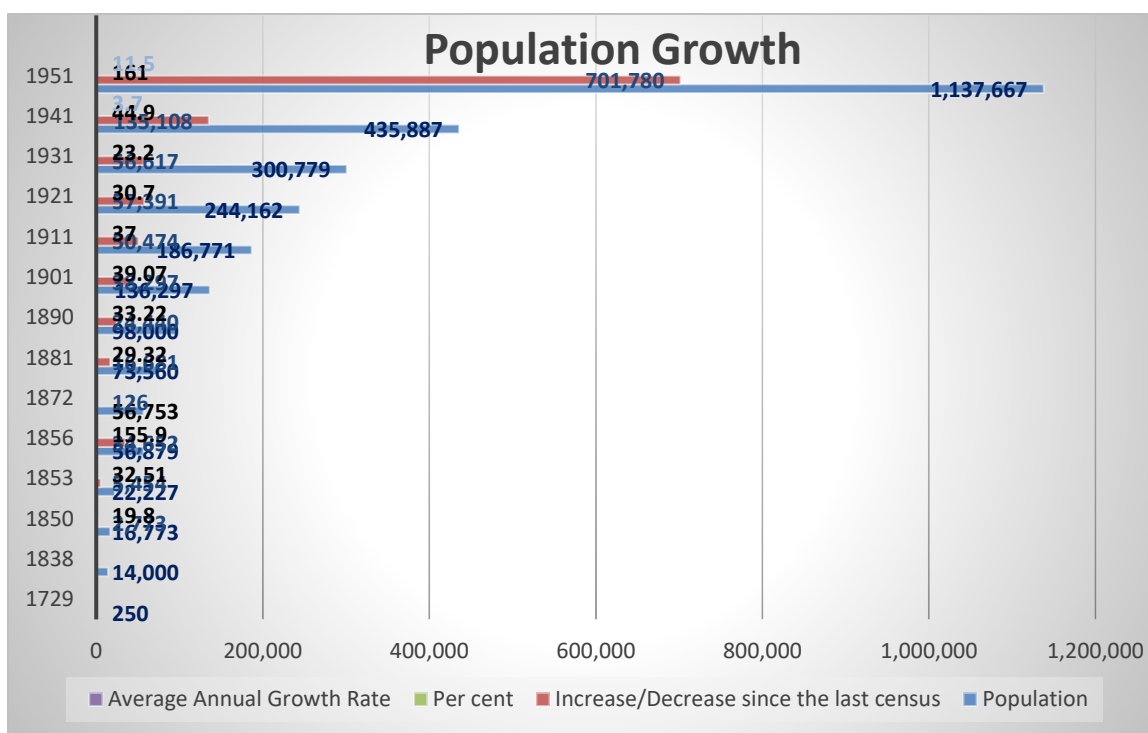


Figure 3. Population growth

Source: See S. Akbar Zaidi, "Politics institutions poverty: the case of Karachi." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1997): 3282-3293.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the population growth has never decreased in any year. Karachi's population nearly doubled between 1881 and the end of the century, as it served as a port and route for products from Punjab, northern India, and upper Sindh. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made Karachi Britain's closest Indian port. In 1886, Karachi exported more wheat than Bombay. As Karachi's population grew, water and drainage infrastructure was created in the old town on the outskirts in the late 20th century. Karachi Port Trust was established.⁶⁰ Karachi's population increased by 37% between 1901 and 1911. This was due to the completion of a number of irrigation initiatives in Punjab and Sindh, which increased exportable agricultural produce.⁶¹ Sindh and Punjab's agricultural prosperity, as well as Karachi's trade and industrialization, contributed to the city's population growth over the first 45 years of the 20th century. Migration from undivided India drove Karachi's expansion. The port and railroad connections to India boosted expansion. Karachi had a population of 4.5 million during the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, with Sindhis constituting 51 percent of the population, followed by Baluch, Urdu-Hindi speakers, Punjabis, and Gujaratis. The majority of Karachi's population consisted of Muslims (42%), followed by Hindus, with smaller communities of Christians and Parsees.⁶²

The proximity of domestic animals and congested living conditions contributed to the spread of diseases such as plague, smallpox, measles, and cholera.⁶³ The overpopulation of Karachi during urbanization caused the spread of dangerous diseases. European institutions were established in safer colonies.⁶⁴ Karachi faced health risks due to population growth. Despite obstacles, the city committee established the General Library and Native General Library. The European systems are seen in First Church now used as

⁶⁰ Arif Hasan, Muhammad Younus, and S. Akbar Zaidi, *Understanding Karachi: Planning and Reform for the Future* (Karachi: A city Press, 1999), 19.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² S. Akbar Zaidi, "Politics Institutions Poverty: The Case of Karachi," *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, no. 52 (1997): 3282-3293.

⁶³ Elmqvist et al, "History of urbanization and the missing ecology", 9.

⁶⁴ Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, "Institutions as a Fundamental Cause of Long-Run Growth," in *Handbook of Economic Growth*, vol. 1, ed. Philippe Aghion and Steven N. Durlauf (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), 26.

St. Joseph's Convent School Assembly Hall. Trinity Church and CMS Church are notable. The Collector's *Kutchery* and *Khanrdar* (court) police station still function.⁶⁵ From 1942 to 1945, temporary settlements were established in Malir and Gulshan-i-Iqbal to house over 30,000 Polish refugees in tented accommodations.⁶⁶

Administration under the Raj

After 1857, the British administration and politics transformed, as a permanent and influential civil service elite was established, the British administrative bureaucracy expanded.⁶⁷ By the 1880s, local officials had acquired considerable power, and the municipal government.⁶⁸ In 1882, seventy-five per cent of municipal councils had elected members, and voters in Bengal and Madras favored non-officials as chairmen/presidents. By the middle of the 1880s, Indian taxpayers and ratepayers had semi-participatory representation with bureaucratic leadership, as did rural residents' bodies.⁶⁹ In 1892, there were 362 nominated members, 281 elected members, and 126 officials on the local boards of the Bombay presidency. Deputy and assistant commissioners, respectively, led the district and sub-district committees.⁷⁰ In the early 1900s, colonial urbanist plans significantly impacted societal development. In the 19th century, cities were instrumental in establishing orderly societies.⁷¹ Napier introduced police reforms after Sindh's conquest, which became the model for British India. These changes culminated in 1861 with the creation of the All Indian Police Service (IPS), which remains unchanged in India and Pakistan (Police Service of Pakistan, PSP).⁷² In Sindh, Napier's solution was to create a distinct and

⁶⁵ Hasan et al., *Understanding Karachi*, 17.

⁶⁶ "Karachi Cemetery Renovated," *Dawn*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/164695/karachi-cemetery-renovated> (accessed August 29, 2023).

⁶⁷ Ilhan Niaz, *Old World Empires: Cultures of Power and Governance in Eurasia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 329-30.

⁶⁸ Beverley, *Colonial Urbanism*, 490.

⁶⁹ Niaz, *The State During the British Raj*, 156.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷¹ Beverley, *Colonial Urbanism*, 491.

⁷² Niaz, *The State During the British Raj*, 119.

independent police force where the officers had no other duties.⁷³ Karachi used to be a colonial port city that was overseen by a local municipal administration.⁷⁴

Urban expansion in colonies, driven by metropolis for various reasons, did not always result in economic growth. These urban centres were important for the European Navy and communications.⁷⁵ Sindh was annexed in 1843 by Sir Charles Napier (Governor of Sindh from 1843 to 1847), who moved the capital from Hyderabad to Karachi in 1840, establishing Karachi as Sindh's first capital.⁷⁶ In 1847, Sindh lost its sovereignty and became a division of the Bombay presidency with a commissioner stationed in Karachi as its chief.⁷⁷ However, during Bombay's presidency, the administration was complex due to the distance of approximately 1,050 kilometers and a lack of awareness regarding the people's problems. The commissioner acknowledged delays in education and engineering-related correspondence delivery.⁷⁸ Sindh faced a twofold challenge as it was a part of the Bombay Presidency until 1936 before becoming a province. This resulted in its geographical distance from the political and economic hubs of the British Empire, like Calcutta, New Delhi, and London, which put it at a potential disadvantage.⁷⁹

Colonial port cities in Asia, such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Colombo, were centers of rising national elites and contributed to revolutionary transitions.⁸⁰ The movement for Sindh's separation from Bombay presidency began in the 1920s, significantly impacting the region's politics by promoting ethnic

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Sheetal Chhabria, "Citing the Poor: Commercial Sovereignty and Capitalist Integration in Colonial Karachi," *Journal of Urban History* 45, no. 5 (2019): 987.

⁷⁵ Baillie, *Kurrachee (Karachi) Past, Present*, 5.

⁷⁶ G.M. Syed, *Sindh Jee Bombay Khan Azadi* [Eng. Trans.: *Separation of Sindh from Bombay*] (Hyderabad: Roshni Publication, 1989), 5.

⁷⁷ Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, *A Story of the Sufferings of Sindh: A Case for the Separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency* (n.p.: n. Publisher, 1930), 16.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Sarah Ansari, "At the crossroads? Exploring Sindh's Recent Past from a Spatial Perspective," *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 1 (2015): 7-25.

⁸⁰ Rhoads Murphey, *The Outsiders: The Western Experience in India and China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), cited in Louis T Sigel, "Review Essay: Urbanization, Modernization, and Identity in Asia: A Historical Perspective," *Modern China* 4, no. 4 (1978): 471.

enterprises and parties before the Partition of 1947.⁸¹ Karachi witnessed the emergence of advocates for Sindh's separation from the presidency in 1913.⁸² The administration of Bombay was overseen by a Collectorate, which was divided into various divisions headed by deputies and magistrates. The Deputy Collector of *Hazur* had primary authority. Civil officers were responsible for the administration of headquarters, while the police enforced the law. It is important to note that before being appointed to the presidency, the subordinate officials in Bombay were typically trained in Sindh. This contradicts the commonly held belief that they were marginalized in administrative and political matters.⁸³

Karachi became the capital of Sindh province after gaining independence from Bombay in 1936. The Karachi Municipality Corporation evolved after the municipal reorganization in 1911, with the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Karachi Port Trust, citizen committees, and philanthropists joining the council. However, the organization was undemocratic, with the commissioner holding more power than the elected mayor and members.⁸⁴ The municipality prioritized public health and sanitation. Their authority had been increased by sections 46 and 48 of the bylaws. The municipality passed ordinances allowing them to lease agricultural or residential land, regulate cooperative housing organizations, and set rental and occupancy rates.⁸⁵ Karachi faced numerous challenges during the epidemic that took place from 1896 to 1905, while Mr. Tahilram was the president of the municipality. The most pressing issues were related to water and malnutrition. The city experienced sixteen plague outbreaks starting in December 1896, which led to the loss of 39,826 lives and forced the relocation of many others to different parts of Sindh. The epidemic was particularly severe in Karachi, and it had a significant impact on the city.⁸⁶ The Bombay presidency provided finances to the Karachi Municipality

⁸¹ Asma Faiz, *In Search of Lost Glory: Sindhi Nationalism in Pakistan*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2022), 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸³ Ansari, *At the crossroads? Exploring Sindh's Recent Past*, 10.

⁸⁴ Noman Ahmed, "From Development Authorities to Democratic Institutions: Studies in Planning and Management Transition in the Karachi Metropolitan Region," *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 7 (2010): 123-4.

⁸⁵ Karachi Municipality, *Rules and Bye-Laws: Under Sections 46 and 48 Respectively of the Bombay District Municipal Act III of 1901*, (Karachi: Karachi Union Press, 1922), 282.

⁸⁶ J. Forrest Brunton, "Karachi," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 61, no. 3148 (1913): 484.

on a temporary loan basis, which included an annual interest rate of 60%. However, if the municipality of Karachi could pay within three months, they would have to pay four-and-a-half percent interest rate. Despite this, there were occasions when the Municipality was unable to obtain the necessary funds from the financial secretary of Bombay. During the pandemic, Karachi municipality suffered greatly due to financial constraints.⁸⁷

In 1866, Karachi had a population of 56,789 and a gross income of Rs. 2,40,914. The city was divided into distinct quarters and the establishment of a new chamber led to an increase in trade shows. The municipality was funded through taxes on octrois and commodity terminals. Additionally, the Erskine Wharf boasted six mooring berths.⁸⁸ The municipality faced development obstacles due to healthcare, water supply, sanitation, and finances. Inadequate sanitation at the fort facilitated the spread of water-borne illnesses such as cholera.⁸⁹ Karachi faced similar issues as other port cities, such as Bombay, which were under the direct administration of the presidency of Bombay. However, the biggest challenge faced by Karachi was the scarcity of water. The majority of the water supply was obtained through the subsurface bed of Layari using wells. For supplying water to the residents of Keamari and the harbor vessels, camp wagons were utilized. To produce ice, Kotri water was transported via train. In the year 1882, an underground aqueduct of 18 kilometers was constructed from the Malir River to provide Karachi with purified water.⁹⁰ Despite this, many areas of Karachi still suffer from severe water shortages.

The Transition from Township to Divisional Capital

When the British took control of Karachi Harbour in 1843, it was difficult for even small boats to navigate the creek leading up to the city due to treacherous conditions. The English ships were forced to anchor

⁸⁷ “Application for loan to the Indian Government,” November 4, 1898, ACC 5005, Sindh Archive, Karachi.

⁸⁸ Vera Anstey, *Karachi Through a Hundred Years: The Centenary History of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1860–1960*, by Herbert Feldman (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1960), 238.

⁸⁹ Farooqui, Urban development in a colonial situation, 2754.

⁹⁰ Gazetteer, *The imperial Gazetteer of India*, 184.

outside *Monora* Point, and then men and supplies were transported in boats as far up the Harbour as possible before being transferred to small boats or canoes. These small boats and canoes had to be transported through liquid mud to the Hardinge Bridge.⁹¹ Karachi became capital of Sindh in 1843 and later became a part of the Bombay Presidency from 1847 to 1936. Presently, Karachi serves as the capital of Sindh province, which is divided into seven divisions, each managed by a commissioner. In the past, Sindh was one of the divisions under the presidency and was administered by a commissioner stationed in Karachi. Today, Karachi is a bustling city with a population of seventeen million.

During British rule, Sindh experienced significant communication and transportation developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This transformation was particularly evident in Karachi.⁹² The lower Indus valley was gradually incorporated into new regional, all-India, and international communication, trade, and idea systems even though the river Indus did not transport people and goods into and out of northern India as the British had expected. In the early 1850s, commercial interest and colonial policy intersected when then-commissioner-in-Sindh Bartle Frere became worried that Russian chintzes were outpacing British products in Kabul, Kandahar, and Karachi bazaars. Karachi was an ideal location for new British markets because of its proximity to land, river, and sea. Merchants from Bombay and other regions could easily transport their goods to the port, while those from central Asia followed their caravan routes south to make purchases.⁹³ As a result of trade with neighbouring regions such as Punjab, Karachi was urbanized as a divisional capital Collectorate during the Bombay Presidency.⁹⁴ The district stretched over 200 kilometers from north to south and covered a total area of 64,080 square miles based on revenue estimates.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Hamida Khuhro, ed., *Documents on the Separation of Sindh from Bombay Presidency*, vol. 2 (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1997), 528.

⁹² Ansari, *At the crossroads?*, 12.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Khuhro, ed., *Documents on the Separation of Sindh*, vol.2., 526.

⁹⁵ Albert William Hughes, ed., *A Gazetteer of the Province of Sindh*. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1874), 33.

Karachi transformed from a town to a metropolis due to its reputation for preserving and exporting seafood, such as prawns, salmon, pomfrets, Bombay ducks, and sardines, and the thousands of fishermen who worked there.⁹⁶ The expansion of Karachi's institutions and urbanization boosted its economy. The Raj strengthened it further by improving port infrastructure, lowering taxes, establishing the police force, and building roads.⁹⁷ The construction of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to an increase in trade in Karachi. Throughout the 1880s, numerous European corporations established offices in Karachi to export products from Sindh and Punjab to Europe.⁹⁸ Karachi emerged as a significant center of commerce and industry as investors from Sindh and Punjab heavily invested in these sectors. Before the British occupation, the city was known for manufacturing a diverse range of goods, such as caps, hats, children's toys, cotton cloth, coarse cloth, *lungies*,⁹⁹ leather, and leather accessories.¹⁰⁰ By the mid-1920s, Imperial Airway signed a five-year agreement with Karachi which enabled passengers and mail to reach London within eight days through biweekly service by the end of the 1920s.¹⁰¹ When Imperial Airways began offering service in South Asia, the city's airport became the most important airport and international aviation hub of the subcontinent.¹⁰² Karachi was an essential hub for both trade and transportation of individuals in 1939.¹⁰³ Karachi also served as a supply depot with cargo and passenger flights, drawing visitors and expanding communication networks.¹⁰⁴ The industrial evolution of certain industries can be summarized as follows.

⁹⁶ Pithawalla, *An Introduction to Karachi*, 22.

⁹⁷ Damohi, *Karachi in Mirror of History*, 173.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹⁹ The lungi is a traditional garment commonly worn by men in South and Southeast Asian countries.

¹⁰⁰ Damohi, *Karachi in Mirror of History*, 178.

¹⁰¹ Ansari, "At the crossroads?," 17.

¹⁰² Herbert Feldman, *Karachi through a hundred years: the centenary history of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1860-1960* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1960), 143-4.

¹⁰³ Ansari, "At the crossroads?" 12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

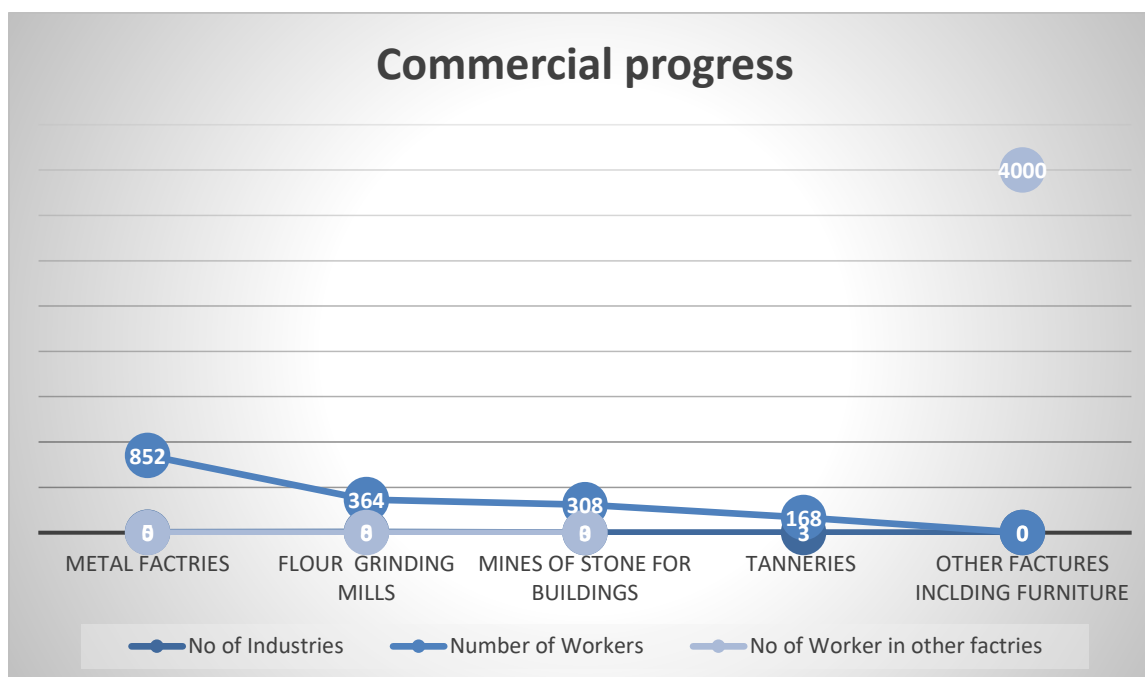


Figure: 4. Commercial Progress

Source: During the Raj, Karachi experienced a commercial and industrial expansion. These are several of the most vital industries. See *Karachi in Mirror of History* (Damohi).

Political Drivers in Karachi's Move to Provincial Capital

Karachi encountered communication difficulties during its transformation from a divisional headquarters to a provincial capital. The Sindh Commissioner's Act V was enacted in 1866, and at that time, the railway was the primary mode of transportation between Karachi and the Bombay presidency. This facilitated closer integration between Karachi and the rest of Sindh.¹⁰⁵ India had no railways before 1850. In just 50 years, substantial capital investments turned them into a symbol of the British Raj's civilizing influence.¹⁰⁶ During World War I, the Port of Karachi and the North Western State Railway proved to be important links in connecting the maritime power and defense of Quetta-Zhob as well as the defense of Peshawar-Khyber. Karachi's significance in military and maritime affairs should not be overlooked in any imperial defense strategy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Hamida Khuhro, ed., *Documents on separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency*. Vol. 1. (Islamabad: Institute of Islamic History, Culture, and Civilization, Islamic University, 1982), 9.

¹⁰⁶ Mishal Khan, "After the Railways Are Built: Makrani Labor and Illegible Claims to Land and Belonging in Sindh." *Journal of Sindhi Studies* 3, no. 1 (2023): 5.

¹⁰⁷ Khuhro, ed., *Documents on the Separation of Sindh*, vol.2. 802.

The administrative challenges faced by Karachi under the Bombay Presidency were not unique. Similar issues were encountered in other colonial cities, such as Madras and Colombo, which also struggled with centralized governance and a lack of local autonomy. However, Karachi's situation was exacerbated by its geographic distance from Bombay, which delayed decision-making and resource allocation. In contrast, Madras and Colombo, closer to their respective administrative centers, experienced more efficient governance. This comparison highlights the impact of geographic and administrative factors on colonial urban development.

In 1920, an airmail service connected Karachi to Bombay. Karachi became the hub for passenger expansion due to its location. By the late 1920s, passengers could reach London from Karachi in just eight days through Imperial Airways.¹⁰⁸ In the middle of the nineteenth century, local leaders were permitted to participate in municipal organizations following a decision by Viceroy Ripon in 1882. Indian representation in municipal bodies was frequently limited to fifty percent or less, and variables such as land ownership affected the franchise. In theory, colonial subjects could engage in official political action within the municipality by 1882.¹⁰⁹

Between 1847 and 1908, non-natives dominated the administration of the Bombay Presidency. Since 1909, when four Karachi natives were elected to the Bombay Council in response to the Minto Morley Reforms, there appears to be a minimal number of indigenous individuals who can advocate for Sindh-related issues.¹¹⁰ Institutionalization denotes widespread recognition of the game's rules, which are defined by society through constitutions and laws enacted by democratically elected governments. Meaningful participation necessitates subsystem autonomy and an understanding of the importance of government to individuals.¹¹¹ However, all the administrative institutions in Sindh were managed by

¹⁰⁸ Ansari, "At the Crossroads?," 17.

¹⁰⁹ Beverley, "Colonial Urbanism," 491.

¹¹⁰ Syed, *Sindh Jee Bombay Khan Azadi*, 9.

¹¹¹ Black, *Development and Modernization Theory*, 53.

individuals residing hundreds of kilometers away in Bombay, and most of them were oblivious to the issues faced by Karachi.¹¹² In 1857, the Bombay University was established, and in 1887, the first college in Karachi was founded. Before establishing the college, all students from Sindh studied in Bombay. Over a period of thirty years, only fifteen to sixteen students were graduated by Bombay, averaging to one student per year.¹¹³ Furthermore, the Commissioner had complete control over the province, whereas commissars lacked similar authority in other regions of the Bombay presidency.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, this distance causes significant inconvenience and unacceptable delays in decision-making. The Capital can be reached in four days by rapid rail or mail boat.¹¹⁵

The Municipal Acts of 1865, 1872, and 1888 produced a contentious alliance between the elitist, selective urban ambitions of the local colonial authority and the local colonial government's urban ambitions.¹¹⁶ The municipal commissioner had conflicting loyalties due to the appointment by the government and the Indian-dominated Corporation. Corporate participation and municipal franchise required substantial property requirements.¹¹⁷ Consequently, elites were a member of the Karachi municipal corporation. Property owners, mill owners, and merchants want lower taxes. Indian and European property owners oppose taxes that hurt them.¹¹⁸ They were primarily following the lead of the Bombay administration, which received a 20% discount on the rateable value of its properties in exchange for designating Bombay as the presidential capital under Municipal Act of 1888.¹¹⁹ It is imperative for the Bombay government, including its executive, ministers, and council, to demonstrate heightened concern for the prevailing

¹¹² Khuhro, *A Story of the Sufferings of Sindh*, 13.

¹¹³ Syed, *Sindh Jee Bombay khan azadi*, 13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁵ Khuhro, *A Story of the Sufferings of Sindh*, 13.

¹¹⁶ Sandip Hazareesingh, "The Quest for Urban Citizenship: Civic Rights, Public Opinion, and Colonial Resistance in Early Twentieth-Century Bombay," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (2000): 799.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 800.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

circumstances in the region of Sindh. Wool exports were banned in 1914, causing economic devastation in Karachi with 8000 bales waiting to be shipped.¹²⁰

In 1914, Karachi's business suffered from government-imposed export restrictions on wheat. By 1915, wheat exports were only allowed under official guidance, creating a government monopoly.¹²¹ However, Karachi's housing crisis during the Bombay presidency caused rent increases and difficulty finding accommodation for businesses and staff. The Chamber of Commerce suggested building more homes and a Cooperative Housing Association, but progress was slowed by town planning issues.¹²² The port became a centre of competition as a result of Sindh's autonomous status from Bombay, and the increased profitability of Karachi following the year 1936 and onwards.¹²³ Sindh was part of the Bombay Presidency under British colonial rule until 1936 when it became its own province. Its separation from major political and economic hubs impacted its development.¹²⁴

During the late 1800s, cities in Australia, Europe, and North America started to be linked through networked municipal procedures. This led to an increase in local political activism, while British administrators used colonial urbanization strategies to maintain social control. In India, the municipal authority played a vital role in enabling local and provincial domains during the Raj.¹²⁵ The Karachi Municipal Corporation offers free military services and wheel-tax exemptions for vehicles used by the military.¹²⁶ The Raj required municipal authority to release local and provincial areas for the development of British India.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Feldman, *Karachi Through a Hundred Years*, 132.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 137.

¹²³ Syed, *Sindh Jee Bombay Khan Azadi*, 12.

¹²⁴ Ansari, "At the Crossroads?," 10.

¹²⁵ Beverley, "Colonial Urbanism and South Asian Cities," 491.

¹²⁶ Khuhru, *Documents on the Separation of Sindh from Bombay Presidency*, vol. 2, 287.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 488.

It is commonly believed that the nationalist movements' triumph resulted in the decolonization of the subcontinent, signifying the end of these processes. However, the rise of cities as centers of social control and political autonomy followed various trajectories that are difficult to categorize as distinct nationalisms.¹²⁸ The movement for Sindh's separation from the Bombay Presidency, which gained momentum in the early 20th century, was a significant example of local political agency. Led by figures such as G.M. Syed and Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, this movement sought greater autonomy for Sindh and highlighted its population's unique needs and aspirations. The eventual separation of Sindh in 1936 and establishing Karachi as the provincial capital were direct outcomes of these efforts. This political mobilization influenced Karachi's administrative status and paved the way for greater local participation in urban governance. The similar situation developed in Karachi in which it got separation from the presidency in 1936. In accordance with the Government of India Act of 1935, issued from Buckingham Palace in London on March 3, 1936, the British Government issued instructions separating Bombay from Sindh. Sindh became an independent province on April 1, 1936. Sir Lancelot Lord Graham was designated the first governor of Sindh, restoring Karachi's former prominence following its merger with Bombay. Formerly located in Bombay, important Sindh administration officials have relocated to Karachi to carry out their duties.¹²⁹ Karachi became significant during World War II (1939-1945) due to Japan's involvement, with the city's air transport unexpectedly becoming crucial during the East Asian crisis.¹³⁰ Karachi served as a crucial trans-shipment hub during World War II, facilitating the transportation of American and British personnel and equipment to the China-Burma-India Theater. New technical facilities were established in Karachi to assemble and test aircraft before delivery to combat units. The city also

¹²⁸ Ibid., 493.

¹²⁹ Damohi, *Karachi in Mirror of History*, 290.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17.

functioned as a supply base with many cargo and passenger flights, leading to the development of new communications networks and attracting temporary guests.¹³¹

The cities underwent a shift from colonial to indigenous elite leadership, showcasing the impact of political movements, social norms, and global relations facilitated by the growth of the city's governing body and surrounding area. This section delves into some of these relationships, starting with the recognition of cities as official autonomous political zones.¹³² The South Asian urban area was reconstructed as a site for political negotiation through a prolonged and incoherent process of colonial devolution of institutional power. In 1947, Karachi Port became the world's busiest port.¹³³

Conclusion

Karachi's urbanization under the British Raj was primarily driven by imperial priorities, which shaped its land use, infrastructure, and governance. The racial segregation of land use, prioritization of infrastructure for imperial needs, and centralized administrative control reflect broader colonial urbanism patterns. Moreover, these colonial legacies continue to influence Karachi's urban development today.

The urbanization of Karachi compared to other colonial port cities like Bombay, Calcutta, and Singapore, shows shared patterns and unique characteristics. At the same time, these cities experienced racial segregation and infrastructure development during British rule. Karachi's distinct emphasis on military and trade functions set it apart. These insights underscore the importance of local context in shaping colonial urbanism and highlight areas for future research on colonial and postcolonial cities in the Global South.

Karachi evolved from a small fishing town into a bustling city. The change of capital from Hyderabad to Karachi was driven by its strategic position in Karachi. This transition reflected the British preference for

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 490.

¹³³ Ibid., 174.

port, positioning Karachi as an essential hub of trade and military functions. Karachi's rapid growth can be attributed to infrastructural developments like the railway, road networks, and educational institutions. However, the institutional development of Karachi and the indigenous people's participation in municipal politics began with the movement for Sindh's separation from the Bombay Presidency.

The urbanization and transformation of Karachi into the provincial capital of Sindh were shaped by both opportunity and challenges. While its strategic location made it an important trade hub, particularly during World War II, the city also faced serious issues like cholera outbreaks and administrative struggles during its time under the Bombay Presidency. The emergence of a local political class led to the separation of Sindh in 1936, marking a significant turning point for the city. Two major waves of migration—first involving non-natives, followed by local residents—further impacted the city's dynamic demographics.. Today, Karachi is a bustling metropolis with a population of 22 million, but it still faces challenges like informal settlements and uneven development, a lasting legacy of its colonial past.