

Educational and Medical Institutes in Colonial Agra as Sites of Global Knowledge Production

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Abstract

The colonial period marked a decisive phase in the historical evolution of Agra. Once the imperial capital of the Mughal Empire, Agra underwent profound political, social, educational and architectural transformations under British rule between 1803 and 1947. The establishment of colonial administration, military cantonments, educational institutions, missionary centres, hospitals, municipal bodies and civic infrastructure reshaped the city into an important administrative and intellectual centre of northern India. At the same time, Agra also emerged as a significant site of anti-colonial resistance, revolutionary activity and nationalist mobilisation.

This study examines the transformation of colonial Agra with special emphasis on its educational institutions, medical infrastructure, municipal administration and urban development under British rule. The paper analyses the transition from Mughal and Maratha authority to colonial governance and explores the role of missionary organisations, educational institutions and public health systems in restructuring urban society. It further highlights the expansion of professional education, women's medical training and municipal governance within the wider framework of colonial modernity. The study is based upon both primary and secondary sources, including administrative reports, municipal proceedings, gazetteers, missionary records and institutional histories. Through an examination of institutions such as Agra College, St. John's College, Raja Balwant Singh College, Agra Medical School and Agra University, the paper demonstrates how colonial educational and medical institutions functioned as important sites of global knowledge production and dissemination. The research argues that colonial Agra represented a complex interaction between imperial authority, indigenous society, missionary enterprise and emerging nationalist consciousness.

Keywords: Colonial Agra, educational institutions, medical education, missionary activity, municipal governance, urban history, Agra University, colonial medicine, public health, global knowledge production.

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Research Gap

Despite the historical importance of Agra during the colonial period, scholarly research has largely focused either on Mughal Agra or on broader political developments in northern India. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding Agra as an interconnected colonial urban space shaped by educational institutions, medical establishments, municipal governance and missionary activities. Existing studies often examine institutions such as Agra College, St. John's College or Agra Medical School in isolation rather than situating them within the wider framework of colonial knowledge systems and urban transformation.

The role of medical schools, hospitals, teacher-training institutions and women's educational initiatives in reshaping the social and intellectual life of colonial Agra remains insufficiently explored. Similarly, the relationship between municipal administration, urban sanitation and colonial public health policies has not received adequate scholarly attention. The contribution of missionary organisations and municipal bodies to the development of female education and healthcare also remains fragmented within existing historiography. This paper attempts to address these gaps by integrating educational, medical, architectural and municipal developments into a unified historical narrative. It argues that colonial Agra functioned not merely as an administrative centre but as an important site of global knowledge production where Western scientific practices, professional education, urban planning and colonial governance interacted with local social structures and emerging Indian aspirations.

Introduction

The city of Agra occupies a distinguished place in the historical development of northern India. Although its origins are often associated with ancient traditions linked to the Mahabharata period, the city emerged more clearly in historical records during the medieval era. Agra attained major political prominence under Sultan Sikandar Lodi, who shifted his capital there in 1504.¹ During the Mughal period, especially under Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the city became one of the foremost political, cultural and architectural centres of the Indian subcontinent. Magnificent monuments such as the Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj Mahal transformed Agra into a symbol of imperial grandeur and cosmopolitan culture.

Following the decline of Mughal authority during the eighteenth century, Agra passed under Maratha influence before finally coming under British control in 1803 during the Second Anglo-Maratha War.

²The conquest of Agra by Lord Lake marked the beginning of a new phase in the city's history. Under

1 Khwaja Ne'matullah al-Harawi. *Tarikh-e Khan Jahani wa Makhzan-e Afghani*. Vol. 1, p. 100.

2 The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5. Edited by H. H. Dodwell, Cambridge University Press, 1929. *Digitallibraryindia Jai-Gyan Collection*, pp. 220–235.

colonial rule, Agra gradually transformed from a declining Mughal capital into an important administrative, educational and military centre within the North-Western Provinces.

The British administration introduced new systems of governance, municipal administration, education, healthcare and urban planning that significantly altered the physical and social structure of the city. Cantonments, civil lines, churches, schools, hospitals, roads and railways reshaped the urban landscape of Agra. Missionary organisations established educational institutions that became important centres for the dissemination of English education and Western intellectual traditions. Simultaneously, hospitals, dispensaries and medical schools facilitated the expansion of colonial healthcare and scientific medicine.

The colonial transformation of Agra was not confined merely to political and administrative restructuring. British rule also reshaped the educational, architectural and urban landscape of the city through the establishment of colleges, schools, hospitals, libraries and municipal institutions. These institutions became important instruments of colonial governance and social engineering while simultaneously contributing to the emergence of a modern urban culture in Agra. Educational establishments, missionary institutions, hospitals and civic infrastructure reflected both the utilitarian priorities of the colonial state and its broader civilising mission.³

The growth of institutions in colonial Agra was closely connected with the expansion of cantonments and civil lines. Large tracts of land were allocated for schools, churches, missionary establishments and hospitals, reflecting the close relationship between religion, education and imperial governance. St. George's School received land on Garden Road, while St. Louis School was granted land on Mall Road. Similarly, the Baptist Mission, Havelock Church and other missionary organisations obtained extensive land grants for educational and religious activities.⁴ Such allocations formed part of a broader colonial strategy aimed at establishing institutional networks capable of reinforcing imperial authority and promoting Western education.

Municipal governance similarly expanded during the late nineteenth century. Municipal authorities increasingly assumed responsibility for sanitation, conservancy, drainage, roads, public education and healthcare. Urban improvement projects, including drainage systems, waterworks and conservancy operations, reflected growing colonial concerns regarding public health, epidemic diseases and environmental management in rapidly expanding cities.⁵ At the same time, Agra also emerged as an

3 Agra Historical and Descriptive with an Account of Akbar and His Court and of the Modern City of Agra. By Syad Muhammad Latif, Central Press, 1896. *Digital Library India JaiGyan Collection*, p.293

4 Agra Cantonment Before and After the British. By Arun Dang, Agra Rashtra Bhasha Offset Press, 1967, p. 34.

5 Nevill, H. R. 1905. *Agra: A Gazetteer*. Vol. 8 of *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, p.127.

important centre of anti-colonial resistance and nationalist mobilisation. The Revolt of 1857 deeply affected the city, while later decades witnessed the rise of nationalist politics, educational reform movements and public debate. Educational institutions such as Agra College and St. John's College became important spaces for intellectual exchange and political awareness.⁶

This paper examines the transformation of colonial Agra through the lens of educational and medical institutions. It analyses how colleges, schools, hospitals, municipal organisations and missionary institutions contributed to the production and dissemination of modern knowledge under colonial rule. By examining educational development, medical training, municipal governance and urban expansion together, the study demonstrates how colonial Agra became an important site of global knowledge production in northern India.

Educational Institutions and Colonial Urban Expansion in Agra

3.1 Colonial Urban Expansion and Institutional Growth

The colonial transformation of Agra was closely associated with the development of educational institutions and urban infrastructure. Colonial authorities regarded educational institutions not merely as centres of learning but also as instruments for producing trained administrative personnel and shaping colonial society. Consequently, schools and colleges were established alongside military cantonments, civil lines and missionary settlements.

The expansion of the cantonment significantly influenced the urban geography of Agra. Land grants were allocated for churches, schools, missionary establishments and hospitals. Educational institutions occupied prominent positions within colonial urban planning because they symbolised imperial authority, intellectual discipline and social reform. Schools such as St. George's School and St. Louis School emerged as important centres for European and Anglo-Indian education, while missionary organisations promoted English education among sections of the Indian population. Missionary societies played a particularly important role in the educational transformation of Agra. Through schools, colleges and charitable institutions, they introduced Western curricula, Christian moral instruction and modern pedagogical methods. These institutions contributed significantly to the emergence of a new educated middle class in northern India. At the same time, they facilitated cultural exchange and intellectual interaction between European and Indian traditions.⁷

The urban expansion of Agra during the nineteenth century also reflected broader colonial concerns regarding public order, sanitation and administrative efficiency. Roads, drainage systems, railway

6 Bālā Dube, *Mohalle Āgarā ke. Parāga Prakāśana*, 1990, p.92.

7 Sikandra 1840–1940. By F. J. McBride and F. W. Hinton, Sikandra Press, 1940, p 12

connections and municipal buildings were gradually introduced to modernise the city. Educational institutions formed an integral part of this colonial urban landscape and contributed to the transformation of Agra into an important intellectual centre.

3.2 Agra College

Agra College occupies a distinguished position in the history of higher education in northern India and remains one of the oldest educational institutions established during the colonial period. Founded in November 1823 by Pandit Gangadhar Shastri as a Sanskrit Pathshala, the institution initially reflected the continuation of indigenous systems of education while gradually adapting to the educational policies introduced under British colonial rule.

The institution originally focused on traditional subjects such as Sanskrit, Astrology and Philosophy. However, with the expansion of colonial educational policies during the nineteenth century, Agra College increasingly incorporated Western curricula and modern administrative structures. The institution gradually evolved into one of the earliest centres of modern higher education in northern India. Under colonial patronage, Agra College became an important centre for the dissemination of English education and professional studies. The institution later introduced legal education and became historically significant for producing the first graduate from the United Provinces as well as the first law graduate from northern India. These developments illustrate the pioneering role played by the college in the growth of modern higher education.

The growth of Agra College was closely connected with the evolution of the university system in colonial India. Following the establishment of the University of Calcutta in 1857, the college became affiliated with it for degree examinations and higher studies. After the establishment of the University of Allahabad in 1887, Agra College shifted its affiliation accordingly. Later, with the creation of Agra University in 1927, the college became one of its principal affiliated institutions.⁸

Architecturally, Agra College represents one of the finest examples of colonial educational architecture in northern India. The buildings, designed largely by John Theophilus Boileau,⁹ reflected the

8 *Apnā Āgrā*. By Prof. Shribhagwan Sharma and Pramod Kumar Agrawal, edited by Ashok Anu, *Apnā Pustakamālā*, 33rd Pushp, published by Udayan Sharma Smriti Foundation Trust, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, in association with Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Central Hindi Institute. P, 17 The History of the Church Missionary Society. By Eugene Stock, vol. 2, Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, London,

9 John Theophilus Boileau (1805–1886) was a British engineer and officer of the Bengal Engineers closely associated with the architectural and civic development of Agra during the early nineteenth century. Appointed Garrison and Executive Engineer at Agra in 1826, he designed and constructed several important colonial structures, including St. George's Church, barracks, a college, and the city jail. Renowned for his craftsmanship and integrity, Boileau also played a major role in the early conservation of Mughal monuments. He supervised repairs to the palaces of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the Jama Masjid, the shrine of Tomb of Sheikh Salim Chishti, and initiated

battlemented Gothic style associated with nineteenth-century colonial institutions. These structures symbolised the authority and prestige of Western education within colonial society.

Beyond its academic role, Agra College emerged as an important intellectual and political centre during the late colonial period. The institution attracted students from diverse social and religious backgrounds and became associated with wider debates concerning nationalism, social reform and political consciousness.¹⁰ The centenary celebrations of Agra College in 1924 proved historically significant because they provided the basis for discussions regarding the establishment of Agra University. Thus, the institution played a direct role in the emergence of university education in the region.

3.3 St. John's College

Among the most important educational institutions established in colonial Agra was St. John's College, founded in 1850 by the Church Missionary Society of England through the efforts of the Agra C.M.S. Association. The institution represented one of the earliest missionary colleges in northern India and played a major role in the spread of Western and Christian education.¹¹

The first principal of the institution, Reverend Thomas Valpy French, was a distinguished scholar from Oxford University whose missionary and academic vision shaped the character of the college. During its early years, the institution framed its own curriculum and conducted independent examinations, reflecting the experimental nature of higher education in colonial India.

Initially functioning from Katra Abdul Saleh near Hospital Road, the institution later shifted to larger premises designed by Major Kittoe. In 1861, students from the institution appeared in the Matriculation Examination, marking the beginning of the formal college department. From 1862 to 1888, the college remained affiliated with the University of Calcutta before later becoming affiliated with the University of Allahabad.

The academic curriculum gradually expanded to include law, science, telegraphy and signalling. These developments reflected the increasing demand for technical and professional education under colonial rule. Scientific education became particularly important during the late nineteenth century as

restoration efforts at the Taj Mahal. Fondly remembered by locals as "Balu Sahib" or "Burra Balu," he became respected not only for his engineering skill but also for his dedication to preserving the architectural heritage of Agra and the Mughal Empire. MAJOR GENERAL J. T. BOILEAU, F.R.S., R.E

Author(s): Anne Cavendish, p. 8. Source: Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, Winter 1995, Vol.

10 Dharma Bhanu Srivastava, *The Province of Agra: Its History and Administration* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company). P.157

11 The History of the Church Missionary Society. By Eugene Stock, vol. 2, Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, London, p. 169.

the colonial administration required trained personnel for engineering, communication and administrative services. A major architectural transformation occurred between 1911 and 1914 when a new Indo-Saracenic campus designed by Sir Samuel Swinton Jacob was constructed. Built largely in red sandstone, the structure combined Gothic and Rajput architectural elements and remains one of the finest examples of colonial educational architecture in Agra.¹²

St. John's College played a crucial role in the emergence of university education in northern India. The first convocation of Agra University was held in the auditorium of St. John's College in 1928, demonstrating the institution's intellectual prestige and regional significance. The college also contributed to the formation of a Western-educated Indian middle class. Through English education, missionary influence and professional instruction, the institution became an important site for the dissemination of global intellectual traditions in colonial India.

3.4 Raja Balwant Singh College

Raja Balwant Singh College, popularly known as R.B.S. College, represented another important educational institution within colonial Agra. Established in 1885 by Raja Balwant Singh of Awagarh, the institution was initially founded as the Balwant Rajput High School. The school gradually expanded into a major centre of higher education. It became recognised as a High School in 1899, an Intermediate College in 1928 and eventually a Degree College in 1940. Over time, the institution developed into a multi-campus educational complex associated with agriculture, science and technical education.

R.B.S. College became especially renowned for agricultural education and emerged as one of the earliest institutions in India to introduce postgraduate studies in Agriculture. The institution therefore reflected the broader colonial emphasis on scientific agriculture, rural development and technical training. The expansion of R.B.S. College illustrates how Indian elites also participated in the growth of colonial education. While missionary institutions played a major role in educational expansion, princely patrons and Indian landholders similarly contributed to the establishment of educational institutions aimed at promoting modern learning among Indians.¹³

3.5 Female Education and Normal Schools

The colonial administration gradually promoted female education in Agra, although progress re-

12 *Apnā Āgrā*. By Prof. Shribhagwan Sharma and Pramod Kumar Agrawal, edited by Ashok Anu, *Apnā Pustakamālā*, 33rd Pushp, published by Udayan Sharma Smriti Foundation Trust, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, in association with Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Central Hindi Institute. P, 19.

13 Agra: A Gazetteer. By H. R. Nevill, vol. 8 of *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Government Press, 1905, p. 129.

mained uneven and dependent upon social acceptance. Administrative reports indicate the existence of numerous girls' schools in and around the city during the late nineteenth century.

Missionary organisations played a particularly important role in encouraging female education. Schools for girls were established with the support of missionaries, municipal bodies and philanthropic organisations. Such institutions sought not only to educate women but also to reshape domestic and social practices according to colonial ideals of morality and discipline.

Normal Schools at Agra trained teachers and contributed significantly to the spread of modern education. The Agra Normal School was regarded as one of the best-equipped teacher-training institutions in the North-Western Provinces. More than seven hundred teachers reportedly received training annually within these institutions.

Educational authorities increasingly emphasised discipline, professional instruction and pedagogical efficiency within teacher-training programmes. Reports also indicate that educational reformers sought to introduce practical activities such as horticulture and organised outdoor occupations in order to improve residential training.

Municipal authorities supported scholarships for female students, particularly those pursuing medical education. Such initiatives reflected broader colonial concerns regarding women's healthcare, female literacy and social reform. Although conservative social attitudes often limited the participation of women in formal education, the gradual expansion of girls' schools and teacher-training institutions represented a significant development in the educational history of colonial Agra.¹⁴

3.6 Queen Victoria Inter College and Secondary Education

The spread of secondary education in colonial Agra was further strengthened through institutions such as Queen Victoria Inter College. Established by Pandit Ajudhia Prasad, the institution reflected the increasing acceptance of Western-style education among urban Indian elites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The college building was designed in an elaborate Victorian architectural style that resembled a European castle. Its imposing structure symbolised the prestige associated with English education and colonial modernity. The institution contributed significantly to the spread of intermediate and secondary education among middle-class families in Agra. Queen Victoria Inter College also reflected broader transformations in educational aspirations within colonial society. English-language instruction, modern science and university-oriented curricula became increasingly important for social mobility

14 report on the administration of north western province, 1863., p 164.

and employment within colonial administration. Consequently, institutions such as Queen Victoria Inter College emerged as bridges between traditional Indian society and the expanding world of colonial professional education.¹⁵

Medical Institutions and Public Health

4.1 Thomason Hospital and Agra Medical School

The Thomason Hospital, established in 1854, emerged as one of the most important medical institutions in colonial Agra. The hospital steadily expanded and included surgical wards, operating theatres and separate accommodation for women observing purdah. It functioned both as a charitable institution and as an important centre for clinical instruction. Closely connected with the hospital was the Agra Medical School, founded in 1855 for the training of native hospital assistants and medical practitioners. The institution gradually developed into one of the leading centres of medical education in northern India.

Administrative reports from 1889 recorded 196 students enrolled in the institution, including 39 women students. The curriculum combined theoretical instruction with practical medical training. Students studied anatomy, surgery, practical pharmacy, chemistry and materia medica while also participating in clinical demonstrations and hospital practice. One of the most notable developments at the Agra Medical School was the increasing emphasis on practical instruction. Earlier methods of teaching materia medica relied heavily on rote learning and written descriptions. By the late nineteenth century, however, students were required to prepare medicinal compounds themselves using materials obtained from local bazaars and dispensaries.¹⁶

The examination system similarly reflected growing emphasis on professional competence. Practical examinations in surgery and pharmacy accompanied theoretical instruction. These developments reveal the increasing institutionalisation and professionalisation of Western medical training within colonial India.

The social composition of the student body reflected the administrative priorities of the colonial state. Students were divided into military, civil and private categories. Military students received intensive training designed to meet the immediate needs of colonial cantonments and hospitals, while civil students followed a longer course associated with public healthcare administration.

4.2 Female Medical Education

15 Agra: The Architectural Heritage. By Lucy Peck, Roli Books Lotus Collection, 2008, p. 132.

16 Government of India. *Report on the Administration of the N.-W. Provinces and Oudh for the Year 1889*. Government Press, 1890,,p 149.

One of the most significant developments within colonial medical education was the expansion of female medical training. Colonial authorities increasingly recognised that social customs such as purdah restricted women's access to male physicians. Consequently, the colonial administration promoted women's medical education and established separate facilities for female students.

Administrative reports indicate a substantial increase in the number of women receiving treatment at dispensaries in Agra during the late nineteenth century. Female attendance reportedly rose from 4,583 patients in 1885 to more than 7,000 by 1888. Agra emerged alongside Lucknow and Benares as one of the leading centres for women's medical treatment in northern India.

Female students at the Agra Medical School performed exceptionally well in examinations. Reports frequently observed that women students surpassed male students in subjects such as Midwifery. Separate teaching arrangements and residential facilities were introduced to encourage women from respectable Hindu and Muslim families to pursue medical training.

Municipal bodies and the Dufferin Fund actively supported female medical education through scholarships and financial assistance. These initiatives reflected broader colonial concerns regarding women's healthcare, maternal welfare and social reform.

The female division of the Agra Medical School represented a remarkable experiment in professional women's education during the colonial period. The majority of female students belonged to Native Christian communities, though Hindu, Muslim and Eurasian students were also represented. This diversity illustrates the gradual expansion of educational opportunities for women across different social backgrounds.¹⁷

4.3 Lady Lyall and Dufferin Hospital

The Lady Lyall and Dufferin Hospital, established in 1901, specialised in women's and infant healthcare. Supported initially by the Dufferin Fund, the institution became an important centre for nursing and midwifery training.

The hospital formed part of a wider colonial initiative aimed at improving healthcare for Indian women observing purdah. Female doctors, nurses and midwives trained within these institutions played a major role in expanding access to institutional medicine among women.

The establishment of lying-in hospitals and female dispensaries also strengthened practical training opportunities for women medical students. Clinical instruction in midwifery, obstetrics and infant

¹⁷ Government of India. *Report on the Administration of the N.-W. Provinces and Oudh for the Year 1889*. Government Press, 1890, p 151,

care reflected the increasing professionalisation of women's healthcare within colonial India.¹⁸

4.4 Mental Hospital, Agra

The Agra Lunatic Asylum, later known as the Mental Hospital, was established around 1869 at Billochpura. It eventually became one of the largest psychiatric institutions in northern India.

The institution reflected the emergence of colonial psychiatric administration and the increasing use of medical institutions for regulating social order. The asylum emphasised open-air treatment, occupational therapy and supervised recreation. Administrative reports recorded rising numbers of admissions during the late nineteenth century.

Separate accommodation for European patients reflected the racial hierarchy characteristic of colonial medical administration. The institution therefore illustrates how colonial healthcare systems were shaped by both medical theories and imperial social structures.

The asylum also performed important administrative and penal functions within colonial governance. Criminal lunatics from prisons across the North-Western Provinces were frequently transferred to Agra for treatment and supervision. Thus, psychiatric institutions became closely linked with colonial legal and penal systems.¹⁹

4.5 Other Hospitals and Charitable Institutions

Additional medical institutions included the Cantonment General Hospital, Infectious Diseases Hospital, Tajganj Hospital and Sri Madan Mohan Garg Eye Hospital. These hospitals contributed to the expansion of public healthcare and disease management in colonial Agra.

Charitable institutions such as the Dayanand Orphanage, St. Vincent's Home for Foundlings and Orphans and St. Joseph's Orphanage played important roles in providing shelter, education and vocational training. Such institutions reflected the intersection of philanthropy, missionary activity and colonial welfare administration²⁰.

Missionary medical work further contributed to the spread of vaccination campaigns, maternity care and epidemic relief operations. During outbreaks of cholera, plague and influenza, hospitals and dispensaries became central to colonial responses to public health crises.

18 Government of India. *Report on the Administration of the N.-W. Provinces and Oudh for the Year 1889*. Government Press, 1890,152.

19 Government of India. *Report on the Administration of the N.-W. Provinces and Oudh for the Year 1900*. Government Press, p 26.

20 Christology of Independent Pentecostal Churches of Agra U.P. (India). By Surendra Kumar. *Master of Divinity thesis*, India Bible College & Seminary, advised by Dr. Shaibu Abraham, March 2017,p.2.

Municipal Administration and Urban Infrastructure

The growth of municipal administration formed an important aspect of colonial urban governance in Agra. Following the reforms associated with Lord Ripon, municipalities increasingly assumed responsibility for sanitation, drainage, roads, education and public health.

Municipal authorities devoted substantial expenditure towards conservancy operations, drainage systems and public sanitation. Reports indicate that large sums were spent annually on street cleaning, waste disposal and the maintenance of urban hygiene. Such measures reflected growing colonial concerns regarding epidemic diseases, overcrowding and environmental management.

Municipal institutions also became involved in educational and medical initiatives. Scholarships were provided for female medical students, and financial assistance was extended to schools and dispensaries. These developments demonstrate the increasing integration of education, healthcare and municipal governance within colonial administration.

One of the most important urban projects undertaken in colonial Agra was the establishment of modern waterworks. Land near the Yamuna River was acquired for water-supply systems, and contracts were signed with British engineering firms for the construction of waterworks infrastructure.

The municipality also invested heavily in drainage systems, pavements and public buildings. Urban improvement projects reflected the growing influence of engineering expertise and scientific planning within colonial governance. Water supply, drainage and sanitation became essential components of colonial public health policy.

Municipal reforms further reflected broader colonial policies of limited local self-government. Although ultimate authority remained with the colonial state, elected members gradually assumed greater participation within municipal institutions. Agra Municipality therefore emerged as an important institution of colonial urban administration.

The construction of roads, bridges and railway connections further strengthened Agra's position as a regional administrative and commercial centre. Railway expansion connected the city more closely with Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi, thereby integrating Agra into wider colonial networks of trade, administration and communication.²¹

Secular Buildings and Colonial Architecture

6.1 John Public Library and Paliwal Park

21 Peck, Lucy. *Agra: The Architectural Heritage*. New Delhi: Roli Books Lotus Collection, 2008.p.132.

The John Public Library, constructed in 1925 in Paliwal Park, represented an important intellectual and civic institution within colonial Agra. The structure reflected Indo-Saracenic architectural influences with its domes, arches and chhatris.

The library became a significant centre for public reading, intellectual exchange and civic activity. Paliwal Park itself emerged as an important recreational and intellectual space within the colonial city. Libraries and reading rooms became increasingly important during the late colonial period because they facilitated the circulation of newspapers, journals and political literature. Such spaces contributed significantly to the growth of educated public opinion and nationalist consciousness.

6.2 Colonial Educational Architecture

Colonial Agra witnessed the construction of numerous educational and civic buildings in Gothic, Victorian and Indo-Saracenic architectural styles. Institutions such as Agra College, St. John's College and Queen Victoria Inter College reflected attempts to combine European architectural traditions with local Indian elements.

The Indo-Saracenic style became especially popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because it symbolised imperial authority while simultaneously incorporating Indian decorative motifs. Red sandstone, domes, chhatris, arches and Gothic towers characterised many colonial institutional buildings in Agra. Such architecture was not merely aesthetic but ideological. Educational institutions and hospitals were designed to symbolise discipline, authority and modernity. Monumental buildings reinforced the legitimacy of colonial rule while also representing the expansion of Western scientific and intellectual traditions.²²

6.3 Industrial Development and John Mills

Industrialisation during the colonial period was represented by enterprises such as the John Mills of Agra. The John family established spinning and weaving mills that connected Agra with wider colonial commercial networks.

These industries contributed to the economic transformation of the city while also reflecting the role of European merchant families within colonial India. Industrial growth further strengthened Agra's integration into global systems of commerce and production.

The emergence of mills, printing presses and commercial establishments also encouraged urban growth and labour migration. Consequently, Agra increasingly evolved from a primarily historical and administrative city into an important centre of colonial commerce and industry.

22 Peck, Lucy. *Agra: The Architectural Heritage*. New Delhi: Roli Books Lotus Collection, 2008.p.132.

Agra University and the Expansion of Higher Education

The establishment of Agra University, later known as Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, represented a major milestone in the educational history of northern India. The demand for a separate university in Agra gained momentum during the centenary celebrations of Agra College in January 1924.

Prominent citizens and educational reformers strongly advocated the creation of a university at Agra. The proposal received support from Tej Bahadur Sapru and other intellectual leaders. On the recommendation of Ziauddin Ahmad, the Education Minister approved the proposal in the Legislative Council at Lucknow. A formal bill for the establishment of the university was approved in 1926 and subsequently received the assent of both the Governor and the Governor-General. Consequently, Agra University officially came into existence on 1 July 1927. The first Vice-Chancellor of the university was Reverend A. W. Davies, formerly Principal of St. John's College. His appointment reflected the close relationship between missionary educational institutions and the development of higher education in colonial India.

Initially functioning from Bharatpur House, the university later shifted in 1933 to a newly constructed campus at Paliwal Park. Canon Davies donated substantial funds for the development of the campus, while colonial officials and local citizens also contributed financially. At the time of its establishment, the university exercised jurisdiction over a vast region extending across present-day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and parts of Nepal. Owing to its enormous territorial jurisdiction and the large number of affiliated colleges under its authority, Agra University was at one stage regarded as the largest affiliating university in Asia.

The university initially consisted of the Faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce. Over time, additional faculties including Medicine, Agriculture, Education, Engineering, Ayurveda and Homeopathy were introduced. This diversification reflected the expanding scope of higher education and professional training during the twentieth century. The first convocation of the university was held in the auditorium of St. John's College in 1928. Graduates from fourteen affiliated colleges participated in the ceremony, illustrating the broad academic influence of the institution from its inception.

The origins of Agra University can, however, be traced back much earlier. Educational reformers during the nineteenth century repeatedly demanded the establishment of a university at Agra. Early proposals associated with Dr. Frederick John Mouat and later educational discussions before the House of Lords recognised Agra's importance as a regional intellectual centre. When universities were established at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857, Agra was excluded despite earlier proposals. Consequently, colleges in Agra remained affiliated with Calcutta University and later Allahabad

University for several decades. The eventual establishment of Agra University in 1927 therefore represented the fulfilment of a long-standing educational aspiration within northern India.

In 1996, the institution was officially renamed Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University in honour of B. R. Ambedkar, reflecting post-independence efforts to associate educational institutions with national leaders and social reformers. Agra University represented the culmination of nearly a century of educational development within colonial Agra. The city's network of colleges, missionary institutions, professional schools and municipal organisations had already transformed it into an important centre of intellectual activity. The establishment of the university further consolidated Agra's role as a regional centre of higher learning and knowledge production.²³

Conclusion

The transformation of Agra during the colonial period illustrates the complex relationship between imperial governance, urban modernisation and knowledge production in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India. Once celebrated primarily as a Mughal imperial capital, Agra gradually evolved under British rule into an important centre of education, medicine, municipal administration and professional training.

Educational institutions such as Agra College, St. John's College, Queen Victoria Inter College and Raja Balwant Singh College played a decisive role in introducing Western curricula, scientific education and professional instruction within northern India. Missionary organisations contributed significantly to the spread of English education, teacher training and women's education, while institutions such as Agra University consolidated the city's position within the wider framework of colonial higher education. Medical institutions including Thomason Hospital, Agra Medical School and the Lady Lyall and Dufferin Hospital became important centres for the dissemination of Western medicine and scientific healthcare practices. The expansion of female medical education represented a particularly significant development, facilitating the gradual entry of Indian women into professional medical training.

Municipal institutions similarly transformed the urban environment of Agra through drainage systems, sanitation projects, waterworks and public health administration. Such initiatives reflected the growing importance of engineering expertise and scientific planning within colonial governance. The architectural landscape of colonial Agra further embodied these transformations. Educational institutions, libraries, hospitals and civic buildings constructed in Gothic and Indo-Saracenic styles symbol-

²³ Apnā Āgrā. By Prof. Shribhagwan Sharma and Pramod Kumar Agrawal, edited by Ashok Anu, *Apnā Pustakamālā*, 33rd Pushp, published by Udayan Sharma Smriti Foundation Trust, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, in association with Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Central Hindi Institute. P, 30.

ised the authority of colonial modernity while also incorporating elements of Indian architectural traditions. At the same time, these institutions became important spaces for intellectual exchange, social reform and political consciousness. Educational establishments contributed to the emergence of an educated Indian middle class that later participated actively in nationalist movements and public life.

Colonial Agra therefore functioned not merely as an administrative city but as an important site of global knowledge production. Through educational institutions, medical schools, missionary networks and municipal organisations, the city became integrated into wider imperial systems of scientific, professional and intellectual exchange. The legacy of these institutions continues to shape the educational and cultural landscape of modern Agra, demonstrating the enduring impact of colonial educational and medical infrastructure upon urban society in northern India.

The study further demonstrates that colonial institutions in Agra cannot be understood simply as instruments of imperial domination. They also became spaces of negotiation, adaptation and intellectual transformation. Indian students, teachers, doctors and reformers actively participated in these institutions and contributed to the emergence of new professional identities and social aspirations. Educational and medical institutions in colonial Agra therefore occupied a dual role. On the one hand, they served the administrative and ideological requirements of the colonial state by producing trained personnel and disseminating Western scientific knowledge. On the other hand, they facilitated the growth of new forms of public consciousness, social reform and nationalist thought that eventually challenged colonial authority itself.

The interaction between missionary activity, municipal governance, higher education and public health policies transformed Agra into one of the most important intellectual centres of northern India during the colonial period. The city's colleges, hospitals, libraries and municipal institutions collectively contributed to the creation of a modern urban culture linked to broader global networks of knowledge production. Thus, the history of colonial Agra reveals how local urban spaces became deeply connected with wider imperial processes of scientific exchange, educational reform and administrative modernisation. Through its educational and medical institutions, Agra emerged as a significant centre where global knowledge systems were produced, adapted and disseminated within colonial India.