

Public Architecture and Role of Local Contractors in Late Nineteenth Century Case of Poona

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Abstract: *Role of local engineers is largely neglected in the context of late nineteenth century due to lack of archival resources and primary sources. Though the Royal engineers were key persons worked in several parts of India they implemented their western ideas in collaboration with local engineers and masons at grass root level in the process of establishing British rule in India. Diverse projects from basic architectural interventions, railway, bridges, basic infrastructure, and services they coordinated in India. They worked on European models in local context with successful and unsuccessful efforts. [1] Till early nineteenth century simple and function based structures were built for residential and religious purposes. Engineers were experimenting and modifying European models considering local climatic conditions. From mid nineteenth century building construction activity received more attention as vocabulary of Raj. Which kept on changing adapting local climate, material and incorporation of local traditional art forms in architecture. Vasudev Bapuji Kanitkar worked with Charles Mant, Chishom [2], Trubshaw [3] and Walter Ducat in towns like Baroda, Bombay, and Poona as Indian local contractor. He was nominated as Rao Bahadur by British government for his important role in construction activity in Deccan. [4] Laxmi vilas Palace in Baroda, Secretariat Building, High court in Bombay and Reay or Phule market Poona are some of his major contributions in architectural development under Bombay Presidency as an Indian local contractor. His self executed projects in Poona left his mark as significant designer and engineer in late nineteenth century. Educational, official, Public, and domestic buildings show his advancement from local contractor to designer with his intricacy of work. His influences originated from the earlier work experiences of varied projects amalgamated with local traditional workmanship lead into the development of style could be named as local Indo-Saracenic architecture or in few cases local Indo-Neo Gothic architecture. This could be perceived in his own designs executed in Poona such as Fergusson College, Anandashram [5], Sangamashram [6] and Pune Nagar Vachan Mandir or Poona Native Library [7] and so on. His contribution as a local contractor and designer working in collaboration with Royal Engineers and local social reformists like Bhandarkar [8] and Apaté [9] is underlined in the further discourse. Main focus is on his role in the development of architectural vocabulary in late nineteenth century Poona which is quite neglected in the pages of architectural history of Poona.*

Keywords: Local contractors, Nineteenth Century Architecture, Royal Engineers, Vasudev Kanitkar, Anandashram, Sangamashram, Reay Market

1. Introduction

It is important to know what was the background of engineering and architectural education in Indian context. How the western knowledge perpetuated in Indian soil and reached to royal engineers and local contractors. The image and vision of British officers had in their mind tried to manifest in a real sense could be termed as "Indian colonial Public landscapes". There are several evaluations about the works shaped by royal engineers during British reign in India. Perhaps the criticism was quite negative from the point of view of architects and artists like J.L. Kipling during late nineteenth century. Indeed these royal engineers right from establishment of East India Company have helped to build British India. They were the key persons to handle local engineers, labor and several local communities in the process of building British sovereign. Sandes call these royal engineers, as "Excellent products of Addiscombe" [10] though this sounds a superfluous glorification of the ruling agent to some extent probably was quite a datum from ruler's point of view. Right from presidency towns, important trading towns, princely states, harbors to smaller towns the traces of their works could be seen at various levels in numerous types of tangibles in 19th century. Their intervention could be observed at various levels such as roads, bridges and railways to connecting towns for vigorous transportation and command on regions, services such as drainage, water supply, and government structures such as offices, hospitals, GPOs, mint, Railway stations, markets around us as a important architectural layer in 19th century.

Western and eastern scholars while writing about this specific period consider it as early modern period in Indian context. Many western concepts reached Indian subcontinent via these agents.

Standardization in the colonial educational patterns tried to inculcate in various ways in local engineers. They followed western patterns in larger context in all parts of India supported colonial construction activities. Numerous articles published in *Professional Papers on Indian Engineering* by Indian local contractors such as Teekaram who worked majorly in Lucknow, Babu Shumbhoo Dass works could be seen in Bahawalpur Pakistan, Rai Bahadur Kunhya Lal's and Sir Ganga Ram's [11] legendary projects in Lahore Pakistan, Muncherjee Beyzunjee at Hyderabad under Nizam reign are great resources indicating their contribution in architectural vocabulary in this period. Researchers such as Preeti Chopra states extraordinary works of Murzbaan in Mumbai in her book. On the other hand local engineers such as Narso Ramchandra, Vasudev Kanitkar from Poona and some other towns in Deccan were never got recognized and documented extensively for their contributions in the development of architectural character. These are important unexplored figures in the context of Poona. Their names and associations transiently appear in the history of Poona. This paper seeks to review account of who built Poona in colonial context on ground. Further discourse tries to detail out development of Vasudev Bapuji Kanitkar as an engineer and designer. Perhaps lack of resources and primary sources related to his own opinions for his projects he executed may

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lead in missing links in the few of descriptions. This is due to the negligence in documenting biographies of local engineers and exploring their influences in their social contexts.

2. Works of Vasudev Kanitkar

I could uncover details of Vasudev Kanitkar's family and his background, perhaps his contribution as an engineer to some extent with the help of books *Kanitkar Kul Vrittant* [12] by Shankar Kanitkar published in the year 1948 and *341 Sadashiv va amhi* by Moreswar Kanitkar published in 1992. As per the records mentioned in the book it had documented names and brief background of members of Kanitkar family in Maharashtra their decedents and family tree. The books refer to details about Vasudev Kanitkar and his involvement in the field of architectural landmarks in brief though he was not formally trained as an engineer or architect. Vasudev Kanitkar was born in Baroda Gujarat in the year 1829 or 1830. His father was in the service of Patwardhan the then minister of the princely state of Baroda. It is indispensable to mention that he had never went through formal engineering training like Murzbaan who was trained as an engineer in Poona Engineering College. Vasudev Kanitkar completed his education till old matriculation. He had good knowledge of engineering. He stayed in Karachi now in Pakistan for larger period of time where he worked on several construction sites and must have gained experience in the field of construction activity. Unfortunately this part of his life couldn't be traced much, due to lack of resources. [13]

Vasudev Kanitkar was honored as Rao Bahadur because of his proficiency in the field of architecture. The title was given to him as personal distinction on 1st January 1877, on the occasion of the Proclamation of Her Most Gracious Majesty as Empress of India. [14] This was great honor, which was received by very few local engineers during the period for their best service for colonial government. Preeti Chopra in her book mentions Vasudev Kanitkar's name contemporary to Murzbaan as one of the important personalities in the building of civic structures during the 19th century.

As per the brief document by author Shankar Kanitkar there were almost 15 important projects those could be listed down where Vasudev Kanitkar shared responsibilities at various levels. Those were of several typologies such as residential, public and temporary structures for public meetings as well. Perhaps it was difficult to trace exact details of his overall contribution in all projects but very important residential kinds were Laxmi Vilas palace at Baroda, Sangamashram residence of Dr. Bhandarkar. Whereas to mention cases of civic edifices significant to mention are Elphinston High school Mumbai, Secretariat building Mumbai, some part of High court. There were religious structures such as Sabhamandap of Tulashi Baug temple and Kasaba Ganpati temple considered as most paramount deities located at the heart of old core of Poona. Despite the fact that he worked on so many prestigious projects in the core cities of Bombay and Poona he is not well known in the field of architectural studies. Further emphasize is given on his works and the architectural

language he followed in the 19th century as the unique contribution in Deccan region.

To take a detailed review of landmarks of Kanitkar we need to understand his glorious career started in Bombay during Frere's administration. Bartele Frere the then Governor of Bombay and Conybeare (1823-1892) an architect and engineer had a great impact on the colonial image of Bombay built in the 19th century. Afghan Memorial Church (1847-58) imagined and built by both of them became prototype Gothic revival building in Bombay. Conybeare Gothic revivalist was the first architect to use polychromatic exterior facades using local Kurla and buff Basalt stone. Visiting British architect Thomas Roger Smith designed High Gothic dream around Maidans of the city based upon guidelines by George Gilbert Scott in the year 1870 and 1880. [15] While this image building was in process there were local crafts people, artisans, contractors were getting involved in the activity for actual site works, and out of those very few were recognized in the colonial historiography.

Major civic structures in the Fort area around *Maidan* of Bombay were actually implemented by the exclusive efforts of local engineers such as Mukund Ramchandra, Murzbaan, Vasudev Kanitkar and so on. These structures defined the skyline and contributed in building Frere's imperial colonial language in neo-gothic style some examples are Secretariat building (1867-1874) designed by Clair Wilkins, David Sassoon Library and reading room (1867-1870), University building (1868-80), PWD office (1869-72), High court (1871-1878) designed by J.A.Fuller. [16] These high Victorian Gothic erections expressed in Indo-European style followed European forms in terms of models and overall scale whereas details and materials were local to larger extent. This very unique image in Indian context was an effort by the ruler and local people. Very important of the sequence in Mumbai significant presidency town were built by Vasudev Kanitkar such as Secretariat (1867-74), High court (1871-78) and Elphinston College.

Vasudev Kanitkar is given credit for supervising the construction of the Secretariat. As discussed in the earlier chapter the symbolism and the language mainly adopted by Clair Wilkins for the Secretariat building (1867-1874) was Neo-Gothic in style. Sir Clair Wilkins was a royal engineer employed under PWD was the mastermind behind the project. This was Frere's initiative intently desired to avoid the import of materials and expertise from Britain. Indian craftsmen and local resources were utilized in the whole process of execution to establish that the government could rely upon these resources that were extensively experimented in later phase of development of the city. The building was situated at the edge of *Maidan* facing west running north to south with a plan following the shape of inverted alphabet 'E, a simplistic flat façade and spatial configuration encouraged building a solid mass. Narrow width of the building similar to Barrack plans allowed breeze to penetrate in all parts of the building. Main emphasis was given upon façade treatment, use of polychromatic stones, arches and central staircase tower intervened forming skyline of the area. Central tower above the staircase is of 170 feet high that marks its presence

predominantly. Polychromatic effect was achieved by the use of local stones such as buff colored Porbandar stone, Kurla basalt, local blue basalt, Poona red basalt, and Ransome's Patent stone. Minton tiles used for paving and Terracotta Broomhall tiles roofed over teakwood joists and planks. [17] Scant original resources and correspondence between the designer and Vasudev Kanitkar are missing links in understanding architectural development. Perhaps Vasudev Kanitkar in his own designs in Poona such as Reay market, Fergusson College, followed Bombay Gothic models. Architectural elements, material and techniques, Anandashram extensively shows his proficiency in workmanship.

Second iconic structure partly worked out by Vasudev Kanitkar was High court Mumbai (1871-1878). John Augustus Fuller R.E. prepared design with Massive central tower, Turrets and Basalt rock resembling much to medieval castle. Earlier chapter discusses project in detail to understand the model followed and iconography it represented. The prominent central tower is covered with steeply sloped roof with number of dormer windows. Main access is through porch on western façade adjacent to which two octagonal towers of spiral staircase and pinnacles are located. Christopher London criticizes the overall composition as "exaggerated massing in the muscular neo-gothic style". [18] Col. Fuller proposed Vasudev Bapuji Kanitkar, Mukund Ramchandra and Muncherji Cowasji Murzban to be designated as assistant engineer in 1869. Local engineers in colonial hierarchy were the important link between rulers and local workers, helped in the process of empire building. Vasudev Kanitkar might have borrowed inspiration from prominent central tower with dormer windows, finials at top and use of polychromatic scheme from High court and Secretariat for the model of Reay Market in Poona. Both of these examples mark their significance metaphorically as supremacy of sovereign. Being purely colonial structure built at the heart of the old town Reay Market followed similar language of prominence. [19]

Very unique structure designed and built by Vasudev Kanitkar was Reay market (1884-1886). It was the sixth market in the series of covered markets built in pre-independent India. [20] It is one of the best examples of colonial urban landscapes in late nineteenth century followed the western language under Victorian reign. Despite a lot of opposition from local communities the project was successfully raised at the heart of native town. Reay market later named as Phule Mandai was a unique design for a market in India. Spatial organization of market majorly resembles plan of a Jail. After studying various typologies and models followed in 19th century especially from *professional papers on Indian Engineering* and *Roorkee Treatise*, it could be observed that very simple plan of barrack and jail was preferred for designing this market. Its prominent central tower and rectangular flanges projecting out of eight sides indicates image of jail. Perhaps this was chosen with the concern of capturing ample light and cross ventilation in structure. Its probably expression of a bigger model of Lambert Market, Karachi detailed out in Indo Neo-Gothic style. As Lambert market was located at the center of town at a junction of roads market accessible

from all sides must have been the criteria in selection of that particular model. Unfortunately no much information is available on Lambert Market of Karachi so cant be discussed beyond certain point. Detail discourse on Reay market is explained in the next chapter. Prevailing form and fine stonework mark its exceptional presence in the medieval town of Poona. Grippingly, the building is visible from long distance on the main axis of old town connecting to the fortress of *Peshwas*. Residence of Vasudev Kanitkar is located at a close distance exactly behind Vishrambag Wada. [21]

On the same axis of the street a very important public library or *Nagar Vachan Mandir* (1884-1890) is located. Designed and built by Vasudev Kanitkar the library contains immense archival documents, books and various resourceful materials written in Marathi and English. In all the archival documents it was named as Poona Native General Library. As a part of inculcating modern education and governance amongst locals Sir George Clark the then governor of Bombay presidency proposed establishment of a library named as Poona Native General Library in the year 1848. Initially located in Budhwar Wada. The mansion was burnt down in 1879 that boosted a need for a separate space allocated to the library. Eminent personalities such as Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade [22], Lokhitwadi Gopalrao Hari Deshmukh [23], Krishnashastry Chiploonkar and so on contributed largely in the process of establishment and running of the library. The location was selected after long discussions and the space was borrowed from Belbagkar family [24] on 15th May 1882 at the cost of Rs 4000/-. Vitthalrao Vasudev Gujar proposed initial plan and estimate for the library. Later V. B. Kanitkar reworked on design and execution of the project. Library building was started in the year of 1887 and in two years two-storied building was completed. Symbolism of using clock as modern age and industrialization in front facades of public buildings was becoming trend in all parts of the country.

Institute of Anandashram was the next important project completely designed and constructed by Vasudev Kanitkar in the year 1891. The edifice is located in the same premise close to Reay market and Shaniwarwada. Reformist and Philanthropist Mahadev Chimanaji Apte founded the institute at the heart of old town. It comprises administrative office, library, and hostel for Brahmin boys from economically weaker families from nearby towns. Along with that a large temple of Sachchidananda Shiva a local deity is located at the center of complex. A property and trust record of institute shows Vasudev Kanitkar was one of the trustees of the center. Stone and iron building built is one of the fine works in the vicinity and credit was solely given to Vasudev Kanitkar. [25] He was involved in designing and execution of the project. Overall plan follows introvert spatial planning. Which include typical Wada plan with central courtyard followed as a model for design. The Architectural details are Indo-western in at several levels. Construction materials such as Iron, lime concrete, colored glass, imported Minton tiles and local stone are wonderfully amalgamated in the composition. Exclusive woodwork in front façade and on temple reminds indigenous floral forms worked out by local craftsmen. Very important spiral staircase built in stone and finished with Marble tiles is

exactly the same as one built in Reay market in wood. External façade of the whole institute resembles a Wada or royal mansion in Poona, whereas temple built in rectangular form with central nave and aisle on both sides. Minton tiles and glass windows remind old colonial structure in Bombay. Wooden arches at the joining point of columns and ceiling follows *Mahirap* or Maratha Style cusped arch form typically used in Royal mansions of Maratha ministers. Entry point to ground floor library adorned with segmental arch covered with ornamented overlooking gallery and three-arched door. On top of the sloping roof a small scale Shikhara is placed as representation of temple. It is interesting to note though Vasudev Kanitkar worked on restoration works of Tulasi Baug and Kasaba Ganpati temples he has not followed same pattern of language in this Shiva temple located at the center of the institute. As it was built entirely in stone, it has a very strong presence in the complex.

Two landmark structures built during the last decade of the century were residence of reformist Dr. Bahndarkar [26] was known as Sangamashram [27] (1892) and Fergusson College main building (1892-1895). Enterprise of education as an effort of the Government and Indian people resulted at the dawn of new education system that could be termed as formal Indo-western style perhaps reflected in architectural style. Education policies initiated by British Government in India and focus was upon creating more workforces to support empowerment of colonial empire. But eventually it appeared that educational empowerment helped in increased number of reformists who fought in the freedom movement in various ways. Poona was the education hub during the 19th century. Wood's Educational Despatch (1854) [28], the Educational Commission of 1882 and the Hunter Commission (1891) were suggestive of collective efforts of British Government and locals as enterprise of education. Several names of reformists such as Mahatma Phule, Maharshi Karve, B.G. Tilak, G.G. Agarkar and so on were associated in educational reforms focusing on philosophy of education for all despite of cast, class and gender of communities. One of the very important examples of those was Deccan Educational Society established by Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi, and Vaman Shivram Apte in 1880. In the year 1891 land of 37 acres was acquired at outskirts of old town on lease. Foundation stone was laid in the year 1892 was named after the then governor of Bombay James Fergusson (1880-1885). He donated Rs 1200/- for the construction of main building.[29] Fergusson College was one of earliest institute in Poona that was run in collaboration with Government and locals. Vasudev Kanitkar carried out design and execution of the main building.

Similar to other contemporary institutional models in India simple form of C shape was adopted. Porch is projected little out highlighted as entrance gateway. Semicircular arches are used throughout the structure. Rose windows are used on ground and first floor highlighted with lime plasterwork. Segmental arches are used at entrance porch. Unfortunately, as like the other structures designed by Vasudev Kanitkar original handmade drawings are not available to see. But one of the finest works in the institutional typology that is

fortunately preserved well by the management of institution that is in good condition. English tracery is used for window details and façade treatment. Decorative wrought Iron and wooden railing are used for upper floors adorning the elevation. Decorative elements such as windows arches and overall composition in elevation are very similar to the Reay market building.

3. Conclusions

In spite of not being architect or engineer Vasudev Kanitkar worked on landmark structures those represented urban public spaces in Bombay and Poona. While looking at the typology of projects both have carried out, mainly public oriented projects in association with government and local philanthropists. Reay market in Poona being a first of its kind stands out in whole, which marked its presence dominantly in old town that later triggered further extension of town towards south. It was built at the peak of career of both. This structure has importance in the context of urban landscape of Poona, as it changed the skyline and brought covered market as an important typology for citizens in the context.

Name of Vasudev Kanitkar was mentioned in the Bombay University Calendar [30] under the list of faculty of civil engineering in the year 1868 and 1874 simultaneously. Ascending graphs of him is noteworthy in the Bombay Presidency those are important cultural heritage sites in the context. I find works of local contractors are noteworthy in the context of late nineteenth century who built colonial Indian edifices later helped to produce Indian scholars nurtured concept of freedom and social reforms.

References

- [1] Sandes E. W. C. Lieut. Colonel, Preface *The Military Engineer in India, Vol II*, (Chatham: Institution of Royal Engineers, 1933), 35.
- [2] Architect Robert Fellowes Chisholm famous for Indo-Saracenic works in India. To mentions few of his important works are Bombay Yatch Club, execution of Laxmi Vilas Palace after Mant, University of Madras(1874-79), Lawrence Asylum building(1865)
- [3] Lieutenant colonel Trubshaw appointed on Bombay Rampart removal committee and worked on several remarkable projects in Bombay such as General Post Office, Elphinston College(1875), High court (1878), Plan for Bombay.
- [4] Lethbridge Roper, *The Golden Book of India*, (London, Macmillan and Co., 1893), 566. This is Genealogical and Biographical dictionary of the ruling princes, chiefs, nobles and other personages, titles or decorated of the Indian Empire.
- [5] *Anandashram* (1888) trust located in Poona, founded by Mahadev Chimnaji Apte for providing residential facility for middle and economically weaker class students. It also publishes books for Sanskrit and has collection of manuscripts.
- [6] *Sangamashram* was house of Bhandarkar built in Poona by Vasudev Kanitkar in the year 1890.
- [7] *Pune Nagar Vachan Mandir* (Poona Native General Library 1889) this was an effort of eminent scholars

- and gentlemen for collection books of local writers and providing facility of library for people around
- [8] Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar wellknown in late 19th century for his research work on Indian history and connected with freedom movement.
- [9] Mahadev Chimnaji Apte was a leading advocate of Bombay High Court, founded the Institute *Anandashram* in Poona.
- [10] Sandes E. W. C. Lieut. Colonel, *The Military Engineer in India, II...*cit.,87.
- [11] Preeti Chopra in her Book *A Joint Enterprise* on the page number 76 mentions name of Sir Ganga Ram as legendary figure who worked for PWD in Lahore now in Pakistan.
- [12] *Kanitkar Kul Vrittant* the name of book suggests tidings of Kanitkar
- [13] Kanitkar Shankar Ramchandra, *Kanitkar Kul Vrittant, (Pune, 915/1 Shivajinagar Vitthal Hari Barve, Aaryabhushan Mudranalay, 1948)*, 146; Kanitkar Moreshwar, 341 Sadashiv *va amhi/ 341 Sadashiv* and us, (Pune, Moreshwar Kanitkar, 1992), 89
- [14] Lethbridge Sir Roper, *The Golden Book of India*, (London, Macillan and co.,1893, reprinted 2013), 566-7,
<https://archive.org/details/bookofindi00lethgoldenrich>
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- [16] Ibid 37-53.
- [17] Chopra P.N. and Chopra Prabha, *Monuments of the Raj: British buildings in India, Pakistan and Myanmar...*cit.,27-29; Christopher W., *Bombay Gothic...*cit., 38,39; Samita Gupta, *Architecture and The Raj, Western Deccan, 1700-1900...*cit.,89.
- [18] London Christopher W., *Bombay Gothic...*cit., 53.
- [19] Kanitkar Shankar Ramchandra, *Kanitkar Kul Vrittant ...*cit.,146; Mehrotra Rahul and Dwivedi Sharada, *The Bombay Highcourt The story of the building 1878-2003...*cit.,39.
- [20] Before partition of 1947 Pakistan was part of India. Earlier examples of covered markets built were Lambert Market in Karachi (1864), Tollinton Market Lahore (1864) earlier built as community hall later converted in market by Rai Bahadur Gangaram well known local government engineer, Crawford market (1867) Mumbai designed by architect Sir William Emerson, Hogg Stuart Market Calcutta (1872) and Bolton Market Karachi(1883). Commencement year of Empress Market Karachi was probably same as Reay market (1886) it was 1884. In later decade of the century Connaught or Shivaji Market (1885-1886) and Moore market Madras (1898-1900) were built.
- [21] As Earlier residence of Kanitkar family was located behind Vishrambag Wada close to Pushkarni tank
- [22] Ranade: Mhadev Govind Ranade was social reformer, founding member of Indian National Congress, was judge in Bombay Highcourt
- [23] Lokhitwadi: Gopal Hari Deshmukh part of Freedom movement, scholar, social reformer. Taken strong stand against child marriages, dowry, caste system
- [24] Belbagkar Raosaheb Mahadev Ballal Phadnis was one of the Ministers of Peshwas was one of the owners of precious land in the old town.
- [25] Schedule "A" in will by Mahadev Chimnaji Apte, , Schedule "B" written in 1891, page no. 7, 11.
- [26] Bhandarkar: Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar wellknown in late 19th century for his research work on Indian history and his extensive contributions in freedom movement in terms of literature, lectures he conducted in several Indian communities.
- [27] Name "Sangamasham" residence of Dr. Bhandarkar suggests its picturesque location of site near the confluence of two rivers in Poona. *Sangam* is confluence and *Ashram* is a secluded building generally used as religious retreat or instruction in Hinduism.
- [28] Wood's Educational Dispatch (1854) speaks about right to education for all and discourse on inculcating western knowledge in "Natives". This was in order to create a class of civil servants for empire. Charles Wood was the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company.
- [29] http://www.fergusson.edu/upload/document/77939_History.pdf Sundaram M.S., "A Century of British Education in India 1857-1957", *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol.107, No.5035, (June 1959), 491-507, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41368746>.
- [30] The Bombay University Calendar for the year 1874-75, (Bombay, Thacker Vining & co., 1874)