



“Bombay, take it all in all, is the most picturesque city in India. Viewed from Government House on the Sea Point of Malabar Hill I have seen nothing finer.” James Caird wrote these words in his book Nineteenth Century, published in 1879 (Douglas 1883). The Government House of that time is Raj Bhavan, located within 44 acres of land at Malabar Point, jutting out into the Arabian Sea and surrounded by a stretch of thickly forested land. It is the official residence of the Governor of Maharashtra, the first citizen of the state.

Malabar Hill was named after the pirates of the Malabar coast who used to lie in wait of British fleets in the still waters of the northern parts of the Back Bay sea (Biddulph 1840). This area witnessed many major naval battles between the British Navy and the Maratha Navy. The Raj Bhavan was a significant seat of power in India since 1665 A.D., when Sir Humphrey Cooke took charge of the islands of Bombay from the Portuguese. Cooke was the first English Governor of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency, ruled by the British East India Company (Shah 2014).



The Governor's original home was not at Malabar Point but at Manor House, which was in the old Bombay Castle between the Town Hall (now Asiatic Society) and Old Custom House in Kala Ghoda at Churchgate. The Manor House was used from 1665 to 1829 and was at the entrance to the Bombay harbour within the Castle. It was in poor shape for several reasons. There was an attack by the Arabs in 1661, followed by consecutive controversies. A devastating fire also engulfed the entirety of the Castle from 17th to 19th February 1803, rendering it uninhabitable. It was also said to be bad luck to the Governors who lived there, including Governor Thomas Hodges, who claimed to be a victim of 'divination and astrology' and died in office in 1771, and John Duncan, who died there in 1811. Since the Manor House was deemed unlucky, a new home was built in Parel.

The last Governor who occupied the Manor House was Sir Evan Nepean from 1812 to 1819. Nepean had built a cottage for himself at Malabar Point, which he visited occasionally. He spent the majority of his time at the House, neglecting the Parel House due to his office duties. His successor, Mountstuart Elphinstone, elected to shift to the Parel House permanently, allowing the Manor House to be disused until Sir John Malcolm converted it into a multi-purpose house. The Manor House, in 1810, was witness to the inauguration and creation of the HMS Minden by Governor John Duncan, which was used in the American War of Independence and upon which Francis Scott Key wrote 'The Star-Spangled Banner', the United States of America's national anthem.

The second Government House was described by Mark Bence-Jones in his 1973 book, *Palaces of the Raj: Magnificence and Misery of the Lord Sahibs*, as "(evoking) the combination of magnificence and misery which was the keynote of the Raj in its younger days; for along with memories of vast reception rooms hung with crystal chandeliers, a noble staircase and a park full of exotic trees goes the sinister knowledge that the house was abandoned after a Governor's wife died here of cholera" (Bence-Jones 1973, 114). Also called the "Sans Pareil", French for "peerless", the Parel House, according to Jones, had a "splendid banquet hall and inviting dancing room, exquisite chandelier and other impressive decorations (along with) its imposing staircase". The Parel House also boasted of a menagerie which housed deer, rabbits, a tiger, a wild ass from Kutch and an ape from Sumatra. Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales and later King Edward VII, visited India in November 1875 and lived at the House between 8th and 15th November.



The Governors had increasing concerns about the growing population at Parel. The stench of garbage and manure was also a problem because of the lack of scavengers and cleaners. People began to share boundaries with the Parel House and use their wells to draw water. The last blow came when the wife of Sir James Fergusson died in the House due to cholera in 1883. The next Governor, Donald Mackay, 11th Lord Reay, shifted his residence to Malabar Point, leaving yet another Governor's House to disuse. However, this building saw its renaissance in 1899 when Dr. Waldemar Haffkine established his Plague Research Institute here, named after him in 1925.

The third and final residence of the Governor was at Malabar Point. James Douglas recalled about this place: "Malabar Hill seems, like Clive and Carnac, born to command." Even the great American author Samuel Langhorne Clemens, popularly known under his pen-name Mark Twain, praised this house, where he was apparently invited by Governor William Mansfield, 1st Viscount Sandhurst (Patkar 2023). The House is located in the area of Walkeshwar, named after a Shiva temple built here during the reign of the Shilaharas during 9th-12th century A.D. but ending in ruins when rediscovered by the English in the early 19th century. It is noted that Elphinstone built his cottage upon the ruins of the temple sometime between 1820 and 1825. Another temple is found here of Sri Gundi, which is said to be one of the Shakti Pithas (Chakradeo 2022). These two temples were rebuilt by the Governors and are currently installed within the premises of the Raj Bhavan, open to devotees at all times. The first Governor to occasionally reside here was General Sir William Medows. Sir Nepean had built a cottage here, whereas Elphinstone had a permanent bungalow. King George V also visited this place during his visit to India.

In the late 1950s, the Governor's House was renamed as Raj Bhavan, and the Governor was referred to as the Rajya Pal. When Maharashtra was conferred statehood, the then-Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, showcased the new state map at this site. There were three Governor Houses in Maharashtra, but they were used



only for short periods. The one in Pune was used during monsoon as a respite from the relentless winds, and the Mahabaleshwar House was preferred during summers. The Raj Bhavan was one of the stops in the Giant Apollo Step Tour organised by the US State Department in 1969, when Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin came to meet Governor PV Chelian on 26th October 1969, only three months after Armstrong and Aldrin became the first people to step on the moon (Laxman 2019).

The Raj Bhavan complex has several bungalows with varying uses, including Jal Bhushan, Jal Laxan, Jal Sabhagriha, Jal Chintan, and many more. There is a flagstaff in the complex, a mandatory standard for all Governor's residences in India, which hoists the tricolour when the Governor is in residence. A proper ceremonial event takes place during the hoisting and lowering of the flag every day at sunrise and sunset, including the sounding of the bugle and a presentation of arms. When the flag is lowered, it is kept in a flag room for the night. During monsoon, when the ferocious sea winds might damage the flag, the flagstaff is moved to the Jal Bhushan with the permission of the Governor.

The official residence of the Governor is the Jal Bhushan bungalow, built previously by Mounstuart Elphinstone as the Marine Villa next to the ruins of an old Shiva temple. Elphinstone, unlike Nepean, wanted his residence to face the sea and have an unobstructed view of the waters. The house has a Committee Room, a Reception Hall, often called the Cold Room, a waiting hall, a library, and a dining hall which could host up to 30 guests. The Committee Room was earlier an Indian-style sitting room called the Maratha Room. Elphinstone had used French furniture and artistic wooden carpentry to decorate the bungalow, which were repaired and are currently in use. Portraits of Maratha chieftains Trimbakrao Keshav Kurundwadkar and Luxumanrao Mahadeo, also known as Annasaheb Mirajkar, were commissioned from the artist Theodore Jenson in 1866 by Sir Bartle Frere after the 1857 Mutiny to appease the leaders and persuade them to accept British sovereignty.

Jal Chintan is a bungalow perched upon a cliff above the precipice. It was notably the favourite house of two Prime Ministers of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Smt. Indira Gandhi. From its balcony, one could see the Prongs Lighthouse, which indicated incoming ships of their entry into the Bombay harbour. It used to be earlier called the Signaller's House and then the Point Bungalow before finally getting its new name, Jal Chintan. The veranda hosts two sculptures, one of the Mahishasura-Mardini and another of a Gaja-Vyala.

The Jal Lakshan is the official residence of the President or Vice President during visits to Mumbai. It was previously a Sergeant's Quarters, later expanded into a permanent tiled bungalow by Sir Evan Nepean, making it the first residential house built by a Governor in Bombay. It was called the Royal Bungalow, most probably because it was the residence of the royals who visited Bombay. The furniture at the Royal Bungalow may have been brought from the Parel House after the Governor relocated. The furniture reflects the style of the period when George III ruled Great Britain and Ireland. There are more paintings here of the Deccan Sardars Raghunathrao Dadasaheb, chief of Kurundwad; Amritrao Saheb Daphle of Jath, Mudhojirao Naik Nimbalkar, chief of Phaltan in 1866, and an unidentified portrait, all made by Theodore Jenson in 1866. Scholars also infer that a portrait of a lady in the art form of Qajar was gifted by a visiting Persian dignitary.

The main banquet hall is the Jal Vihar, where Elphinstone is credited as the builder of a public breakfast room where he met anyone who wished to talk to him. It is the only building with colonial interior decor, with intricately carved Madras wooden jali doors ornamented with gilt work. The wooden floors are covered with Persian carpets with Mughal motifs. The Governor holds banquets for visiting dignitaries here on silver salvers, which reflect the light from the tiered chandeliers.

The Jal Sabhagriha is where the official ceremonies of the government, like the swearing-ins of incoming chief ministers, deputy chief ministers, judges of the High Court and felicitation of dignitaries and artists. The Jal Naik is now called the Darbar or the audience hall. The French windows of this bungalow are the first ones to get the light of the rising sun every day. The hall was designed by George Wittet, who had also designed the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (previously called the Prince of Wales Museum) and the Gateway of India (Gorakshkar 2002).



In 2016, some old-timers notified the then-Governor of Maharashtra Ch. Vidyasagar Rao about an underground bunker in the Raj Bhavan premises (Economic Times 2016). It was built for the purpose of conservation for the first citizen of Bombay during World War I and had a barrack with 13 rooms called Shell Store, Gun Shell, Cartridge Store, Shell Lift, Workshop, etc. IIT Bombay conducted a structural audit, and necessary reinforcements were made to house a museum. In 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kranti-Gatha museum to commemorate the lives of Indian revolutionaries during the Freedom Struggle like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the Chaphekar brothers, Vinayak and Ganesh Savarkar, Madame Bhikaji Cama, and many more. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's coronation is also featured. The museum is open to the public through a Raj Bhavan tour, which takes place early in the morning. The sunrise from Malabar Point evokes similar sentiments that the Governors experienced across the centuries.

The forests surrounding Malabar Hill are also a part of the Raj Bhavan complex (Rodrigues 2019). Visitors can see peacocks walking on the roads, with one even escaping the premises in July 2023, causing a five-day search mission to return the bird to its house (Nair 2013, Ashar 2023). A wide variety of trees, animals, birds, butterflies, and sea shells have been found in these premises, which have been noted in the book *Flora & Fauna of Raj Bhavan–Mumbai* made by the Bombay Natural History Society in 1997 (Chaturvedi 1997). Outside the bungalows are other facilities for the Governor and their staff. A residential complex for the staff is built within the premises, providing shelter for almost 260 employees and their families. A helipad, swimming pool, badminton court, gymnasium and clubhouse are open to guests.

The words of Bishop Reginald Heber ring true when speaking about the hold that Bombay, and notably Malabar Hill, had on the British, who made themselves comfortable here for the better part of two centuries.



“The Town, Bombay,
Gleam bright, they say,
Across the dark-blue sea” (Heber 1844).



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