UNIT 40 CASE STUDY: BOMBAY*

Structure

40.1 INTRODUCTION

Bombay (now officially known as Mumbai) was, like several coastal towns of the Indian subcontinent that developed into major urban centres during the modern period, a product of colonial intervention in the Indian Ocean. From its early importance as a port city, it became, by the late 19th century a major centre of industrial production, and soon after, the financial capital of India. Indeed it was to become the most important metropolis in the subcontinent, in colonial and post colonial periods as well – as it became the centre of the new film industry. What are the ways in which this transition occurred from a small nondescript set of islands to a major metropolis?

40.2 THE ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF EARLY BOMBAY

Not very long after the Portuguese had occupied Goa in 1510, they established themselves at Bassein, a short distance from the port of Surat, in the early 1530s. The several islands that collectively came to be called Bombay are located in the Arabian Sea, off the western coast of India, south of Bassein. These nondescript islands remained territorial possessions of the Portuguese till the mid-seventeenth century when they were transferred to the English crown (1665). The English East India Company, which was at that time one of the minor European trading companies operating in India, acquired the islands from the crown against a token rent of ten pounds per annum and a loan of fifty thousand pounds to the government. The islands were transferred by the crown to the company in 1668. Thus, the 'Bombay' group of islands came under the company's control from 1668 onwards.

Bombay comprises seven islands: Colaba; Old Woman's Island (or Little Colaba); Mazagaon; Worli; Mahim; Parel; and the large 'H'–shaped island Bombay (called Bombaim or Bom Bahia by the Portuguese). Over the next 250 years the physical geography of these islands was transformed by 'reclaiming' land from the sea to create the unified urban space designated as Bombay (in the following discussion 'Bombay island' refers specifically to the original 'H'–shaped island marked by Malabar Hill at one end and the Fort on the other).

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The main reason why the Portuguese, and subsequently the English, were keen to hold on to Bombay was its proximity to Surat, the premier port of the Mughal empire. After the islands passed into the hands of the East India Company they were placed under a deputy governor of Bombay who was subordinate to the English factory at Surat (the president of the Surat factory was the governor of Bombay). Although by the 1680s the Company had more or less opted for Bombay as its headquarters in western India, Surat was still thriving and continued to be the main focus of the Company's commercial activities on the west coast. Right until the end of the eighteenth century, Bombay 'was the Cinderella of the English settlements in India, the unhealthiest, the poorest, and the most despised'. (Spear, 1963: 66) In 1788 Lord Cornwallis (Governor-General, 1786-93) recommended a substantial reduction in the Company's Bombay establishment.

Ironically, it was around this time that the port was emerging as the centre of a flourishing export trade. From the mid-1780s sizeable quantities of raw cotton were being exported from Bombay to China. Pamela Nightingale (1970) dates this development to 1784. Raw cotton was required to pay for Chinese tea imported into England. As the Company (which had a monopoly of trade with China till 1833-34) sought to meet the demand at home for tea, shipments of raw cotton from Bombay to China grew steadily in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first two decades of the nineteenth century. It was in these decades that the scattered rural settlements of the seven islands became the city of Bombay.

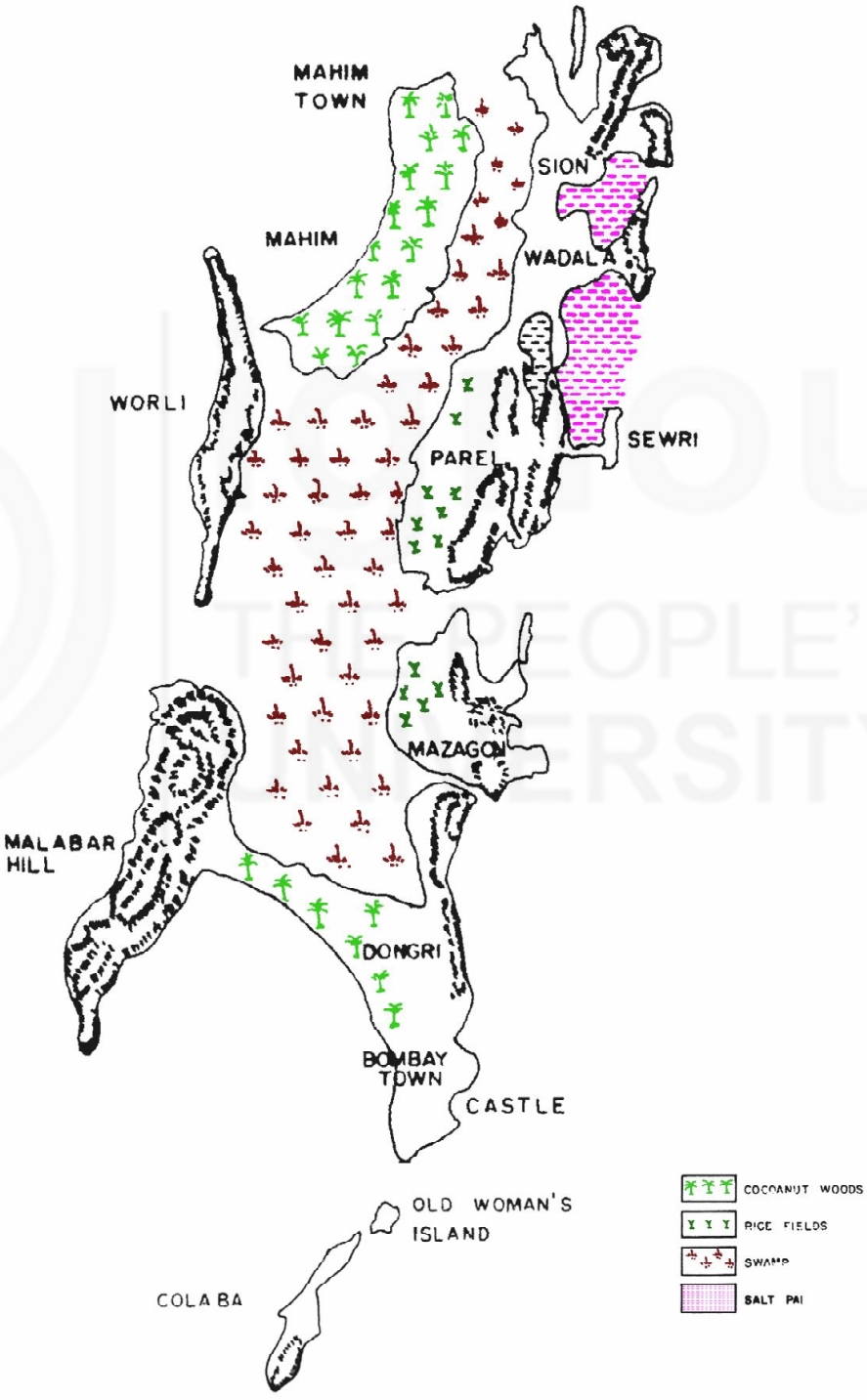
Until the late eighteenth century, Bombay was mainly inhabited by fishing communities, such as the Kolis. These communities also cultivated rice on a small scale and grew coconuts. The entire stretch from north to south, enclosed by Mahim–Worli–Malabar Hill in the west and Sion–Parel–Mazagaon–Dongri in the east was a huge swamp. There were some salt pans between Sion and Sewri. (see Map) In the initial phase of its colonial history, very few Europeans resided in Bombay. The celebrated physician and botanist Garcia d'Orta (1502-68) was among the few Portuguese who lived there. In the 1550s, he was granted possession of Bombay for life on the condition of encouraging the extension of agriculture on the islands and the payment of a nominal rent (*foro*). The East India Company later constructed its offices–cum–godown–cum–governor's residence, named 'Bombay Castle', at the site of his residence in the southeastern part of Bombay island. Subsequently, a wall built in several phases during the mid-eighteenth century protected the urban settlement that came up around 'Bombay Castle'. This area, which is known as 'the Fort' even today (though the Fort walls no longer exist) was the nucleus of early British Bombay. The 'Native Town' was the indigenous zone beyond the Fort—Girgaum and Dongri.

In the Portuguese era, the seven islands of Bombay were governed from Mahim. The island group was one of the various administrative units of the Portuguese territory of Bassein. Mahim, with its fort and customhouse, had been the head or *caçaba* (from *qasba* or small town, in this context the equivalent of a tahsil headquarters) of the administrative unit. The islands were rented or leased for varying durations to Portuguese individuals, who then collected revenues from the villages. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Mahim was still the most densely populated part of north Bombay.

After 1668, the centre of gravity of the colonial settlement gradually shifted to the island of Bombay, which, in the Company era, was the first portion of Bombay to be urbanised. Old Woman's Island and Colaba were soon incorporated with Bombay island. The fine natural harbour that the island possessed on its eastern shore gave it a distinct advantage. Subsequently, docks and shipyards came up in this part of the island. The swamp belt of central Bombay, in the vicinity of the harbour, was soon 'reclaimed' by filling up the marshes of Byculla, Parel, Worli, Dadar and Matunga. These were to

become densely populated localities in the industrial era. Mahim Creek, which separates Bombay from its northern neighbour Salsette, was the northern extremity of the settlement. A causeway linking Mahim with Bandra was constructed in the early nineteenth century, and the process of integrating the seven islands with Salsette began in right earnest. Today, the metropolis of Mumbai includes the localities of Bandra, Khar, Santa Cruz, Vile Parle, Juhu, and Kurla in Salsette, which are not suburbs but form part of Bombay proper.

BOMBAY - C. 1670, Showing the Seven Original Islands



40.3 THE CITY IN THE COTTON–OPIUM ERA

Raw cotton grown in western India was exported to China in very large quantities from the mid-1780s. This became a major reason for the emergence of Bombay as the foremost colonial urban centre of western India by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cotton imported into Canton in English ships jumped from 12,82,829 *piculs* (one *picul* is equal to 133.33 lbs. or 60.48 kg.) in the decade 1784-93 to 27,13,062 *piculs* in the decade 1804-13 and 42,59,724 *piculs* in 1824-33 (after 1833, the East India Company gave up the China trade). However, the Company found it difficult to raise the resources for purchasing raw cotton in this area, unlike eastern India, where the conquest of Bengal (including Bihar and Orissa) in 1757 made possible the plunder of resources for the purchase of goods for the home market without actually paying for them. The Bombay establishment was unable to sustain itself financially as the Company hardly had any territorial possessions in western India.

This lack of resources was the basis of what Lakshmi Subramanian has referred to as the 'Anglo–Bania alliance' in western India, namely, the Company's reliance on western Indian sarrafs for credit to solve the liquidity problem of the Bombay establishment. According to Subramanian, the 'implications of local credit intervention became more pronounced and its ramifications more extensive' in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. (Subramanian, 1987: 493) The complex network created by the Company that brought together Gujarati sarrafs, and Indo-Portuguese (indigenous inhabitants of Portuguese territories in India) traders, such as Miguel de Lima e Souza, who contracted to supply raw cotton to the Bombay establishment, facilitated the rise of Bombay.

Even more important for the emergence of Bombay as the commercial, financial and industrial capital of western India was the growth of seaborne exports of opium from the west coast, also to China, in the closing years of the eighteenth century. The relationship of this commodity to the city is a complicated one, especially for the first few decades of the history of the trade, and can only be understood with reference to the opium policy of the colonial state. Soon after gaining territorial power in eastern India, the East India Company established a monopoly over the opium produce of Bihar. The monopoly was extended to Banaras–Ghazipur and other opium producing areas of the Ganga region when these came under the Company's control towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1797, the Company introduced a policy under which all the opium produced in its territories in eastern India was directly appropriated from the peasants, and cultivation strictly regulated through the grant of licences. Opium was procured in the raw, semi-liquid, state from poppy cultivators and processed by the Company in its own establishments. The bulk of this opium was intended for export, mainly to China. The Company's export opium was auctioned at Calcutta to private dealers who then took the risk of smuggling the drug into China where import of the drug was banned.

The Company soon had to contend with competition from the opium produce of the Malwa plateau (western Madhya Pradesh and some of the adjoining areas of Rajasthan). The Malwa opium export trade was already well established in western India, with Bombay as its main centre, by about 1800. Although the Company initially placed restrictions on the export of Malwa opium via Bombay, from 1831 onwards private traders were allowed to bring the drug to the port for onward shipment to China on the payment of a moderate duty. The opium trade gave a fresh spurt to the development of the colonial economy of Bombay, and the abolition of the East India Company's monopoly of the China trade in 1833-34 gave it a further impetus, with several Bombay merchants working in close association with private British firms such as Jardine Matheson to push ever increasing quantities of the prohibited Malwa opium into China. This was

the backdrop against which Chinese officials tried to impose more stringent curbs on opium trafficking leading to the First Opium War (1839-42). The victory of Britain in the war implied that the Chinese market could now be flooded with opium both from eastern and western India.

Indigenous shipping and the opium trade were closely interlinked. Most of the leading opium merchants had their own ships, while most of the big shipowners of Bombay had investments in opium. The most well-known firms involved in the trade in the early nineteenth century, were Remington Crawford (which was a European company), Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Motichund Amichund, Nagardass Hirji Mody, Madowdass Ransordass, Mohammad Ali Rogay, Rogério de Faria, Cursetji Ardaseer and Aga Mohammad Suastry.

Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, for instance, owned seven ships, of which the biggest were *Fort William*, *Charlotte*, *Bombay Castle* and *Good Success*. Motichund Amichund had six ships, of which *Cornwallis* and *Bombay* were the largest.

The west coast had a long tradition of shipbuilding. Bombay had two dockyards, one in Bombay harbour and the other at Mazagaon. The association of the Parsis with the shipbuilding industry of Bombay is well known. The famous Wadia family laid the foundations of shipbuilding at Bombay in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Many of the ships that transported Malwa opium to China were built at Bombay in the early nineteenth century. (see Table)

Table : Ships Built at Bombay and Mazagaon Shipyards in the Early Nineteenth Century, Engaged in Carrying Malwa Opium to China

	Ship	Tons	Shipyard	Year	Owner
1.	*Anne*	788	Bombay	1812	Pestonji Bomanji
2.	*Ardaseer*	422	Bombay	1836	Cursetji Cowasji
3.	*Bombay*	602	Mazagaon	1835	MotichundAmichund
4.	*Buckinghamshire*	1731	Bombay	1816	Framji Cowasji
5.	*Caledonia*	710	Bombay	1824	Viccaji Merji
6.	*Charles Grant*	1253	Bombay	1826	Cursetji Cowasji
7.	*Charlotte*	691	Bombay	1802	Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy
8.	*Clairmont*	328	Bombay	1826	Aga Mohammad
9.	*Hannah*	457	Bombay	1811	Motichund Amichund
10.	*Lady Grant*	239	Mazagaon	1835	Motichund Amichund
11.	*Sir Robert Compton*	346	Bombay	1835	Aga Mohammad

It would be obvious from the names of prominent opium dealers mentioned earlier that businesspersons from several communities had a presence in the commercial world of Bombay in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were the Indo-Portuguese, Parsis, Konkani Muslims, Marwaris, Gujarati Banias, Bohras, and Armenians, to name only a few communities, giving Bombay a cosmopolitan character.

A significant feature of Bombay was that Indians were not entirely excluded from privileged urban locales, particularly the Fort. The southern portion of the Fort was inhabited by Europeans, while Indians tended to occupy its northern end. This was a reflection of the strength of indigenous elites in the city. On the other hand, they invested heavily in real estate, indicating their weakness rather than their strength: in a colonial society, opportunities for investment in other sectors were severely restricted. Investment

in real estate had increased in the latter half of the eighteenth century when a lot of property was bought by Indians in the Fort. Opium dealers and ship owners such as the brothers Pestonji Bomanji and Hormasji Bomanji of the Wadia family cornered much of the prime land in the area.

Bombay had over two lakh inhabitants by the second decade of the nineteenth century. The population grew at a phenomenal rate in the two decades prior to the middle of the century, by nearly 5.5 per cent per annum between 1826 and 1849. A census of 1849 recorded 5,66,119 inhabitants. After the mid-nineteenth century the rate of growth declined to about 2.5 per cent per annum. In 1864, over 8,00,000 persons resided in the city. The population was mainly concentrated in the Fort area, Dongri, Byculla, Girgaum, Mazagaon and Colaba. Almost one-fourth of the people who lived in Bombay were temporary migrant workers, mainly single males, who stayed in the city for a few years, put aside much of what they earned, 'and having saved from two to three hundred rupees', went back to their villages in western Maharashtra or Konkan. (Warden, 1861: 101) The development of the shipbuilding industry and the expansion of shipping provided opportunities for employment in the shipyards and docks. The cotton export sector created a large demand for casual labour for packaging the commodity (cotton screws used for pressing cotton were manually operated, requiring a large number of workers in the sailing season).

The distress caused by over-assessment following experiments with land settlements in the 1820s and 1830s, compelled peasants to supplement their agricultural income from other sources, bringing many of them to Bombay in search of employment for relatively short durations. The migrant workforce included peasant proprietors from this section who hoped to invest their meagre savings in land. In both cases, urban workers retained strong links with the rural economy of western Maharashtra, Konkan and Gujarat, with important consequences for the formation of new identities within the city.

Nevertheless, migration to Bombay speeded up the process of the integration of its hinterland with the international capitalist economy, exposing it further to colonial exploitation. The Bombay group of islands was physically isolated from western India till it began to emerge as the privileged focal point of the transport and communication infrastructure of the region during the course of the nineteenth century. These islands were separated from the mainland not only by the sea but also by the Western Ghats and the difficult terrain of the Konkan. The development of railways in the latter half of the century finally ended the geographical isolation of Bombay. Furthermore, as an administrative unit, Bombay Presidency had very few territorial possessions until the end of the third Anglo–Maratha war (1818). After, 1818 political control over large parts of western and central India, and the Deccan, gradually converted the entire region into Bombay's economic hinterland. It is no coincidence that there was a substantial increase in the population of the city in the two decades or so after the war. However, indigenous participation in shipping declined in the 1840s while new groups were taking over the opium trade. As we shall see in the next section, Bombay made a difficult transition to the industrial phase of its history.

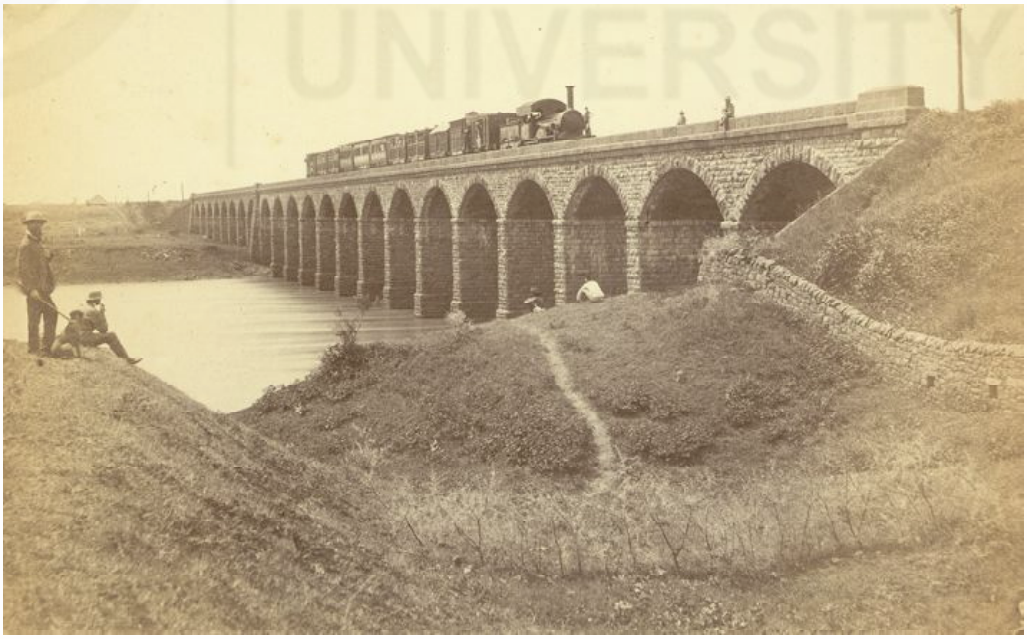
40.4 A CITY TRANSFORMED: EARLY INDUSTRIAL BOMBAY

In the late 1840s, indigenous merchants of Bombay began to withdraw from shipping and the opium trade. Asiya Siddiqi's seminal essay (1985) on the commercial activities of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy has highlighted the difficulties faced by opium traders in transferring their earnings from China to Bombay, leading to a crisis by the end of the

1840s. Investing in opium was no longer lucrative. Mercantile groups which had participated in the trade in the first half of the century were replaced by a new set of traders, mainly Baghdadi Jews, of whom David Sassoon was the most prominent. Due to the constraints imposed by colonial rule and the inability to compete with owners of a new type of vessel known as the 'clipper' that was much faster than earlier ships, the shipping sector too had to be given up by indigenous businesspersons.

Indians still had a strong presence in the raw cotton export trade. Initially, English textile mills had shown little interest in cotton produced in western India because of its poor quality. It was not cleaned properly and contained a lot of 'extraneous matter'. Moreover, what was known as 'Surat' (Gujarat) cotton was of short staple so that it was confined almost exclusively to the manufacture of the weft, that which runs across the piece, and not the warp. Yet, Lancashire was emerging as an important market for the commodity by the middle of the nineteenth century, and trade was sufficient by the 1850s to warrant the establishment of a rail link from Bombay to the cotton growing Vidarbha region.

In the 1840s, when the proposal for the Great Indian Peninsular Railway was under consideration, the speedy transportation of opium to Bombay by rail was put forth as the principal consideration for investing in the line. By the early 1850s, the supply of raw cotton to England via Bombay became the main priority. Subsequently, the Lancashire cotton 'famine' caused by the American Civil War of 1861-65 (when cotton grown in the southern states of the United States of America ceased to be exported to Lancashire) dramatically increased Britain's dependence on Indian cotton. The line connecting Bombay with Thane (a distance of about 21 miles) was opened in 1853, creating the route along which the local trains of Bombay began to ply. Bori Bandar, the locality from which the line originated is located at the northern end of the Fort area. The grand Victoria Terminus (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, a UNESCO heritage structure) was built between 1878 and 1888 at the site of the Bori Bandar station. The Bombay-Thane line passed through Parel which became the centre of the cotton textile industry in the latter half of the nineteenth century, connecting it with localities in which mill workers resided.



1. First Indian Railway: Bombay to Thane
Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/Dapoorie_viaduct_bombay1855.jpg
Original text : *http://ogimages.bl.uk/images/019/ 019PHO0000254S3U00041000%5BSVC2%5D.jpg(British Library)*

During the cotton boom in Bombay, a new breed of Indian entrepreneurs, who were mainly financial operators, came to the forefront. Premchand Roychand was the most

well known of these. Some of the wealth he earned from his cotton speculations went into the construction of grand public buildings in the Fort area, such as the magnificent Rajabai Clock Tower located in the Fort campus of the University of Bombay which was founded in 1857.

But the boom ended in 1865 leading to a financial crash in which several speculators were ruined. A number of banks and insurance companies that had been established during the boom were liquidated. Nevertheless, a class of Indian capitalists in Bombay commanded sufficient resources to be able to survive the crisis, since they already controlled part of the city's financial infrastructure, dominated the trade in raw cotton, and owned a substantial portion of urban land. Indians could no longer be entirely excluded from financial institutions set up under European auspices. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy was one of the six directors of the Bank of Bombay (established in 1840), while Juggonath Sunkersett and Ardaseer Hormasji were among the eight deputy chairmen of the Bank of Western India (established in 1842). Framji Cowasji was one of the three trustees of the latter bank. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Juggonath Sunkersett, Bomanji Hormasji and Framji Cowasji were on the committee of management of the Government Savings Bank (established in 1835). The Bombay Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1836, was the product of a joint British and Parsi initiative.

In the mid 1850s, Indian capitalists also established the first cotton textile mills in Bombay. A cotton spinning mill was first set up by Cowasjee Nanabhoy Davar in 1854 (the mill began functioning in 1856), at Tardeo in central Bombay, and was entirely owned by Indians. Within half a century, the city had more than a hundred mills, the overwhelming majority of which were the result of indigenous capital investment. Bombay thus developed into a great industrial centre. The setting up of new mills was preceded by the final phase of the draining of the marshlands of central Bombay. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the population of Bombay got concentrated along a diagonal running from Dongri to Worli. This diagonal was equidistant from the factories lying to the north and north-east of it and the commercial zone lying south and south-east of it. The area came to be known as 'Girangaon' or 'mill village' with its own distinctive social and political ethos.

These developments went hand in hand with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the expansion of the railway network linking Bombay with the rest of the subcontinent. The shift to the Suez route, coupled with the switch-over to steam navigation, revolutionised sea transport between Europe and India, particularly Bombay. With the expansion of traffic to and from Bombay from the 1860s it became necessary to provide more space and facilities at the port. The new dockyard at Mazagaon encouraged the development of a locality of dockworkers, where mill workers also began to live.

40.5 BOMBAY AS A WORKING CLASS CITY

Soon Bombay turned into a typical working class city, sharing the typical constraints, especially the challenge of housing. Equally linked was the rise of working class consciousness that led to trade unionism and *hartals*, a common feature of the industrial city life. Associations and loyalties based on community and ethnicity, as well as nation, also shaped collective actions in the city.

40.5.1 The Problem of Housing

As workers flocked to the textile factories of Bombay in large numbers, housing emerged as a major urban problem. The colonial state, as well as Indian elites, perceived urban development as a matter of confining the labouring poor, and apportioning as little

space and resources as possible for the huge wage-earning class that was required to sustain the city's industrial economy. Consequently millhands had to live in extremely congested residential localities that came up in central Bombay. These localities lacked basic civic amenities, were unhygienic, and overcrowded. As early as the 1860s, within a decade of the establishment of the first cotton mill, the local authorities found the situation alarming. An official report noted that workers were housed in ramshackle structures that had two or three floors, 'and the various rooms were densely peopled, and the floors of the verandahs were fully occupied, while to eke out the accommodation in some of the verandahs there were *charpaees* or cots slung up and screened with old matting to form a second tier of sleeping places for labourers that were employed in the day.' (Leith, 1864: 25) Sanitary conditions were abysmal, especially in shared facilities such as latrines where 'baskets which cannot retain liquid are used under the privy-seats, and those privies have a flat floor, and ... the accumulated soil is left to flow out on the pavement of the gullee.' (Leith, 1864: 13)

The main features of the typical *chāl* (*chawl*), Bombay's multi-storeyed workers' residential compounds, were already in place by the 1860s (Leith's report uses the term '*chāl*' for the structures referred to above). More systematic initiatives to provide accommodation for the labouring poor were prompted by the plague epidemic of the 1890s (the spread of the disease was particularly serious in 1896), which led to the formation of the Bombay City Improvement Trust (BIT), largely dominated by local elites, in 1898. Among other measures, the BIT was expected to take over for 'improvement' localities that were identified as the most unhygienic and congested. Workers were to be housed in tenements with sanitary conditions. However, the BIT ended up by providing accommodation that was even more congested than that from which the workers had been evicted. Moreover, whereas nearly half a lakh people were displaced by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century due to 'improvement' schemes, less than three thousand rooms were available in the new *chāls* constructed by the BIT. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 30)

2. Mumbai *Chawl*/*Chāl*

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chawl_-_Mumbai_2006.jpg

The housing shortage was acute on the eve of the First World War. After the war, a Development Department was set up in Bombay to construct fifty thousand single-room tenements for workers and the lower middle class. The target was never met and the city poor did not have the means to pay the rent for the miserable dwellings that were actually constructed. Nevertheless, the 'DD *chāls* (chawls)', as these dwellings built initially in Girangaon came to be known, laid down the norm for the kind of residential accommodation and urban space to which the toiling people of Bombay were entitled. The great sociologist and critic of colonial town-planning, Patrick Geddes, remarked that the *chāls* of the city were intended not for housing but 'warehousing'. It was everyday life in these *chāls* that Mulk Raj Anand described so vividly in his novel *Coolie* (published 1936): he portrayed a 'three-storeyed tenement, built without any planning of the space into a courtyard, garden, road or a playground, but closed in on all sides by other chawls [*chāls*] separated from it by gullies barely a yard or two wide'. Echoing Leith's report, a *chāl* resident states in the novel that, 'There are seven latrines downstairs for two hundred men.' (Anand, 1993[1936]: 195-6, 198)

40.5.2 A New Worker Consciousness

These very conditions of overcrowding created opportunities for class solidarity. Living together in such close proximity fostered a consciousness of belonging to the same class. This does not mean that the ties of religion, language or caste were suddenly rendered irrelevant. What is significant is that despite these ties, the experience of living in the *chāl* and sweating in the factory with people who belonged to diverse linguistic, religious or caste communities, developed a working-class identity. The fact that Girangaon was a compact space with mills interspersed with *chāl* (about 15-20 minutes was all it took for a worker to walk from the *chāl* to her/his workplace) allowed the entire area to evolve an identity that contended with other identities and sometimes overcame them. This immense concentration of workers in a small area that contained both places of residence and work was perhaps unique in the Indian subcontinent during the colonial period. The ties of community, religion, caste and ethnicity, often held ambiguous potential; they could form the basis for a strengthening of the class ties, and at other times undermine them. As Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay has shown, the first large scale action of the working class in Bombay was the communal riot of 1893; (Upadhyay, 2004) some big, and successful general strikes were followed by communal violence, as in 1929.

The few moments of leisure that the mill-hands could spare were spent with fellow workers on the street, or in new (all male) social bodies such as *mitra mandals* (friendship clubs) or *akhadas* (gymnasiums). The *tamasha* of (plays, acrobatics, story-telling) street performers was often the only entertainment available to the residents of these neighbourhoods. By the beginning of the twentieth century the mill district had produced a rich working-class culture mainly in the form of songs, drama and poetry. This culture created possibilities for working-class mobilization with the growth of unions of textile workers and of other labouring people of the city.

The 1920s saw the formation of three major unions of mill-hands: Girni Kamgar Mahamandal, Bombay Textile Labour Union, and Girni Kamgar Union. This decade witnessed several strikes, culminating in the great textile strike of 1928 after which the communist-led Girni Kamgar Union became the main working-class organisation in Girangaon. During the 1930s and 1940s the growing involvement of artistes and writers with the activities of the Girni Kamgar Union (Anna Bhau Sathe, Amar Shaikh, D.N. Gavankar, K.A. Abbas and, somewhat later, Kaifi Azmi), gave rise to a leftwing cultural movement that reinforced and was reinforced by organisations such as the Progressive Writers' Association and Indian Peoples' Theatre Association.

40.4.3 Community and Ethnicity

As we have seen, the business class of Bombay negotiated with colonialism from a position of relative strength, which in itself was a reflection of the success and confidence of the class. Nevertheless, given the constraints imposed by colonialism, it was essential for the indigenous capitalists of Bombay to build strong ties among themselves. These bonds, cutting across communities, were more important than, as has often been suggested, links with the British. Two additional factors, namely that a large number of these merchants belonged to communities that were miniscule minorities (e.g., the Parsis) and that many did not have their roots in Bombay, made the inter-community ties among them even more necessary. That this class was multi-religious, drawn from diverse social groups, and multi-ethnic, gave to Bombay its openness.

This is not to suggest that the city space of Bombay was free of all conflict and tensions. The street emerged as the space between the home and the public sphere, as new notions of private and public began to take shape. As many historians of the city have noted, the neighbourhood was a source of information about jobs, a source of credit, a space of festivity or leisure, a site of work solidarities at a time of strike, but also a site of conflict. (Chandavarkar, 1994) 'Dadas', such as Keshav Dada Borkar, were neighbourhood toughs, or big men, who could wield power on behalf of the mill, against the mill, or for the landlord, as circumstances demanded. The 'Dada' also provided credit, organised rations, controlled jobs and job information. Whether the identities of caste, ethnicity and religion were subsumed by the development of class as a mobilising factor is a matter of debate among historians, though most would agree that large scale mobilisations of labour could exist side by side with continuing attachments and loyalties to these other rubrics. The social and cultural milieu of Bombay did develop a unique proletarian cosmopolitanism, even in such working-class neighbourhoods, which drew equally from imbibed traditions of the port's hinterland as from the vistas opened up by the Indian Ocean.

40.6 SUMMARY

Bombay, a conglomeration of seven islands, owed its initial position to its proximity to the chief Mughal port, Surat. However, it emerged in the late eighteenth century as the chief port on the western coast of India with exports of raw cotton, and later, in the early nineteenth century of opium, to China. Bombay remained isolated for a large part of the early nineteenth century. This isolation was finally broken with the introduction of the railways in the region. Bombay till 1840s was largely an 'entrepot' and only after the 1840s, with the decline of the opium trade and of shipping, indigenous business moved towards it for setting up industries. From the 1850s textile mills came up in the city. Within no time the city had over a 100 mills. These were largely concentrated in central Bombay—in Girangaon or 'mill village'. Soon Bombay emerged as the leading industrial centre of the subcontinent, with a vast work-force, assuming the character of a 'proletarian cosmopolitan' city. The city saw the growth of working class consciousness and the emergence of 'class solidarity' which led to the formation of trade unions accompanied by conflicts, strikes and, at times, sectarian violence.

40.7 EXERCISES

1) Trace the process by which Bombay islands were converted into a unified urban centre.

2) In what ways did the 'Anglo–Bania' alliance and the 'Opium trade' facilitate the rise of Bombay during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? With what consequences?

3) What changes were brought about in the spatial pattern of urban locales of Bombay from the eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries?

4) Discuss the factors that contributed to the rise of Bombay as an industrial town in the late nineteenth century.

5) Examine the major issues faced by early industrial Bombay. What efforts were made to overcome the problems?

40.8 REFERENCES

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