

The 7 Islands of Bombay/Mumbai



Bombay, now Mumbai, more correctly Greater Mumbai, started out as seven small islands with villages of Kolis, the local indigenous people of this part of Western India. Their main means of living was from fishing and their goddess was Mumba Devi from which modern Bombay was finally renamed Mumbai.

Greater Mumbai includes the northern large island of Salsette or Vasai which remained a Portuguese territory for a longer time whilst the seven islands became English regions after 1661.

Some of the most ambitious reclamation ever undertaken in Asia involved not just joining these islands, but reclaiming huge parts of sea separating the islands as well as vast empty tracts of water in between.

These were seven islands when the Portuguese ceded these to the British as 'dowry' for the marriage of the English King Charles II to Catharine of Braganza of Portugal, in 1661.

For a very interesting history of Mumbai see this site: <http://theory.tifr.res.in/bombay/history/> that traces the history of this region from the Stone Age, through the Magadha Empire, to the Muslims of Gujarat to the Portuguese and the British, and finally the capital of commercial India.

There is some controversy on the origin of the word Mumbai-it is now claimed the word Mumbai is derived from the word for the local diety of the region, a goddess called Mumbadevi. The Portuguese who first claimed possession of the seven islands called these Bom Baie, meaning Good Bay, and the city was called Bombay upto the early 70's, when the name was changed to Mumbai.

Bombay or Mumbai, this great bustling city was developed by "migrants" from other regions of India, especially the Parsis and Gujratis from Gujrat, the Marwaris from Rajasthan who pioneered its growth. The Parsis, who helped the English develop Surat, came here first even before the English were given the islands; and this highly enterprising people helped them (the English) to reclaim vast stretches of water in order to join the islands, build its first causeways, docks and shipbuilding yards; followed by these Parsis, and Gujratis Marwaris develop business and trade. Today Mumbai receives several thousand migrants from all across India, every day, and the city is bursting to a breaking point.

Mahim:This westernmost island of the original seven islands of old Bombay and lying just south of the very large Island of Bassien or Vasai which remained Portuguese territory upto the early 1700s whilst the seven islands were gifted to the English as dowry for the marriage of the English King Charles II to Catharine of Braganza, Portugal. Still earlier, Mahim was part of the kingdom of a Hindu king in the 13th century. All information on the 7 Islands of Bombay courtesy of <http://theory.tifr.res.in/bombay/physical/geo/7islands.html>

Parel:This island, the second largest, also called Matunga, Dharavi and Sion, names still retained as postal regions of Greater Mumbai, was also inhabited by Kolis. geveNMazagaon, immediately to the north of old Bombay was again a Koli settlement, meaning 'my village' in the local Koli/Marathi language.

Worli:This narrow island, Worli, again from a Koli word, was separated from old Bombay by a sea breach.

OLD Bombay:This island was the largest and where the English built the Fort; eventually this area would grow to become the heart of commercial part of Mumbai.

Old Woman's Island:North of Kolbhat (Colaba) this tiny island was named from an Arabic derivation meaning Al-Omani because the fisherfolk, the Kolis, once fished all the way to the Gulf of Oman.

Colaba (Kolbhat): This was the southernmost island of the 7 original island of Mumbai. The word Kolbhat comes from a Koli word, the Kolis are the original indigenous people of Mumbai. They can still be seen in their dress meant for convenience and comfort during fishing- the men wear a loose shirt and a red and orange checked loincloth upto the knees, and the women in their very colourful saris tucked in between the legs. Their hard work at the wharfs give many of them well trimmed bodies and a very tanned skin from working in the sun.

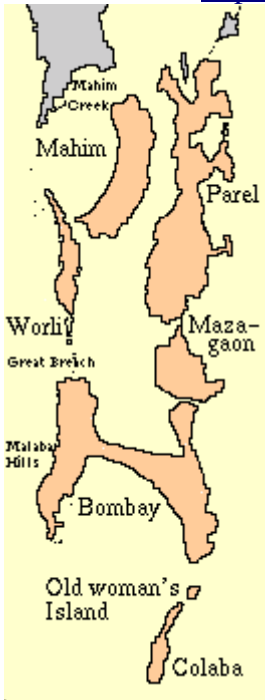
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see/ info from: <http://theory.tifr.res.in/bombay/physical/geo/7islands.html>



THE KOLIS OF MUMBAI & WESTERN INDIA:





all photos above courtesy of cbmphoto.co.uk

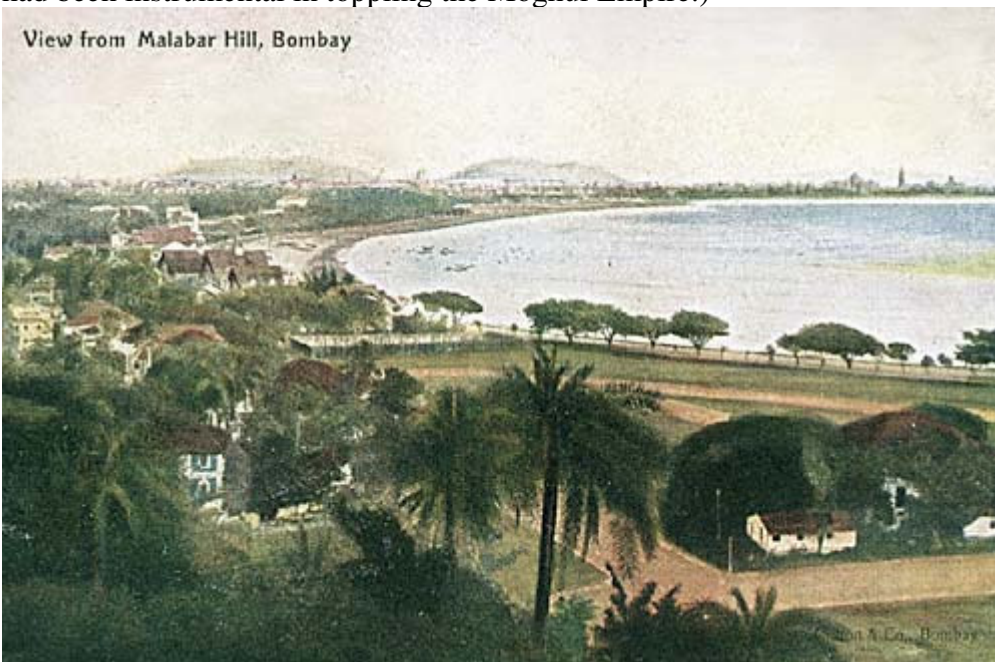
Old Bombay:



Old view of the harbour and the possible location now of Gateway of India and the Taj Hotel.



the buildings/structures you see on the right are still there; the width of the sidewalk/pavements have been reduced, the tramway in the centre scrapped somewhere in the early 1960s....I have travelled to school in tramways in the 1950s!! In the far distance the two domes are the Municipal HQ on the left and the famous VT Station on the right. (VT stood for Victoria Terminus now renamed the Chhatrapati Shivaji Railway Terminus after the great Maharatta Warrior Shivaji who had been instrumental in toppling the Moghul Empire.)

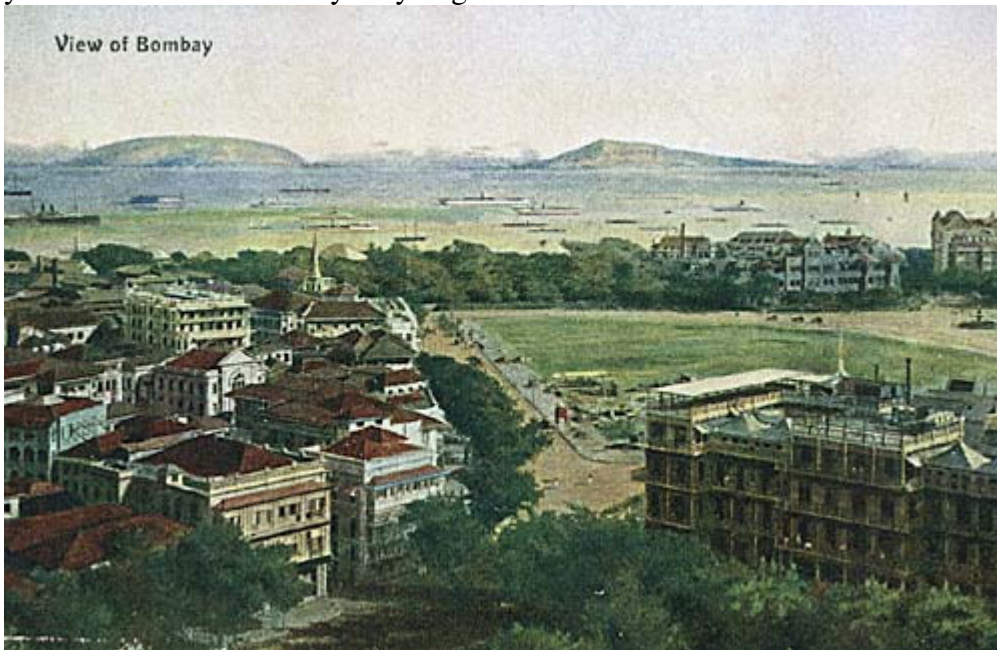


this view of Bombay from the Malabar Hill looking to the east, to hills called Uran on the mainland, the view has changed beyond recognition!!



Colaba Causeway, Bombay. (Copyright)

this is Colaba Causeway that was the line of reclamation from the the Colaba island to the Old Woman's island; the tramway you see was first drawn by very huge Australian horses before the line was electrified.



View of Bombay

I recognise this picture, this is the south end of Flora Fountain area, where the Bombay Museum now stands in that empty field; the building on the bottom right is still there, old and ramshakled!!

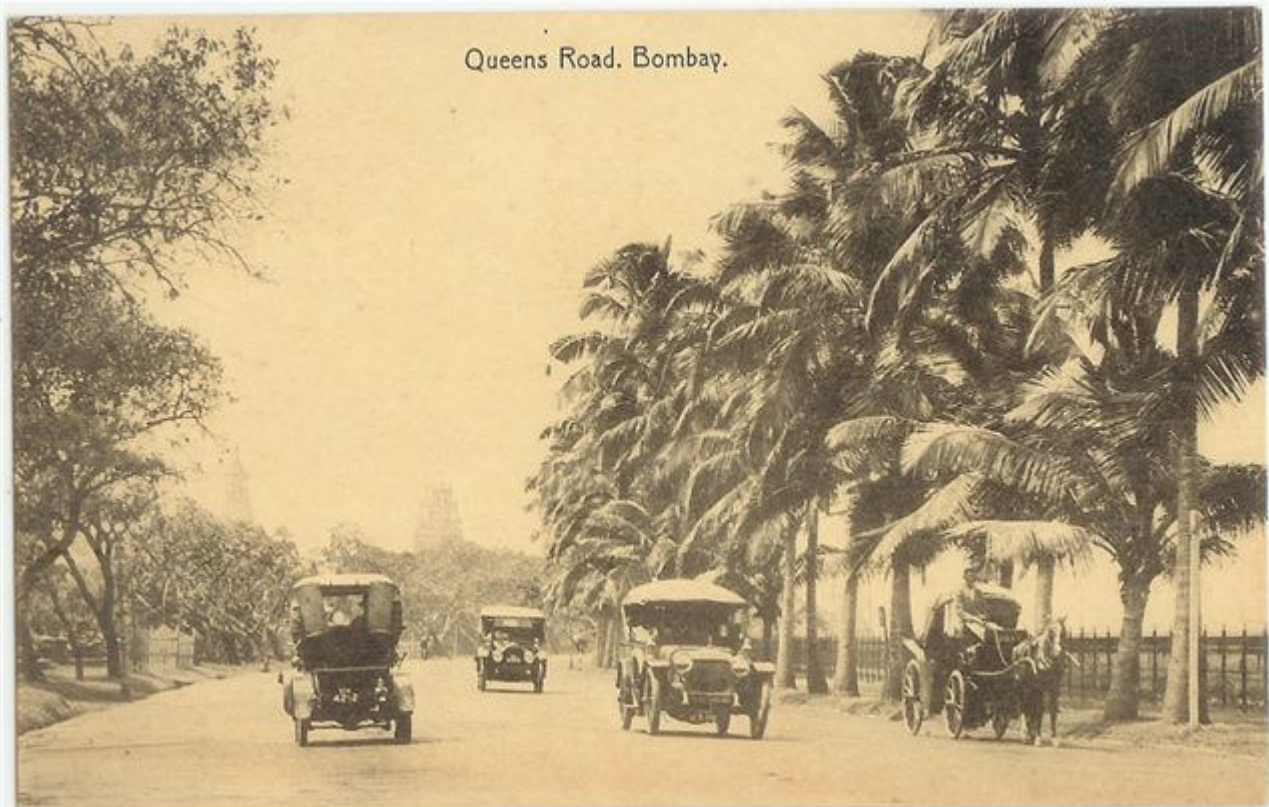


Crawford Market, Bombay.

This is Bombay's famous Crawford Market, still there and still a market for fruits, vegetables etc!



This is Bombay's Municipal HQ, the statue of Sir Phirozeshah Mehta, (no relation to Zubin Mehta, the famous conductor!) founder member of the Municipal Corporation came later.



This is the old Queen's Road, now renamed Mahatma Gandhi Road, the palm trees are still there!! The iron fence on the right encloses the railway tracks that run to the Churchgate Station at the far end of the photo.

photos courtesy archidev.org , harappa.com and flickr.com

Wealthy Bombay in the 1930s/40s:



This is Marine Drive, also known as the Queen's Necklace, all the buildings you see are very much there.

these are mansions of rich merchants of Old Bombay in Bandra, a western suburb of Bombay;.....there is a story about one of these mansions:.....they were just walled mansions in the past; one of these was bought from a Parsee Parsi Zoroastrian (Zoroastrianism) merchant by the very famous Indian actor Shahrukh Khan in the 1990s and he had it secured by a sophisticated electronic security system and sure enough his mansion was burgurled!!!
photos courtesy mumbai-central.com

Now, Mumbai:

modern and a concrete jungle! With an acute shortage of water since the 1960s Mumbai just keeps on building these monsters with special high powered pumps to draw water from the mains, some of these explore their grounds and dig very deep borewells thus weakening the subsoil underneath Mumbai.



comments!!!

see the above



Modern Mumbai, an ariel photo with a view of the Gateway of India and the Taj Hotel(both old and new wings) behind, with country yachts in the foreground. To the extreme right is the Yatch Club.



Mumbai traffic jam; its after the frustration of such situations that many Mumbaitees are shifting out of Mumbai to Pune or distant suburbs or towns along the shores of northern outreaches of Mumbai.



Away from the hustle of Mumbai, places like Dahanu, along the beaches north of Mumbai, are getaways or new homes for the city dweller, because regular trains are available to go daily to work to Mumbai. On week-ends these country lovers can really put their feet up!!!



a sea shore view in Dahanu, these migrant residents here have a great choice of fresh fish and also fresh fruit. Not far from the shore, Iranis, who migrated to India, own fruit orchards here.

photos courtesy archidev.org , columbia.edu, photoatlas.com, trak.in ,
travelmazza.com, trekearth.com
see more very interesting photos on : www.columbia.edu/.../bombay/bombay.html

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