

THE HEART OF THE CITY

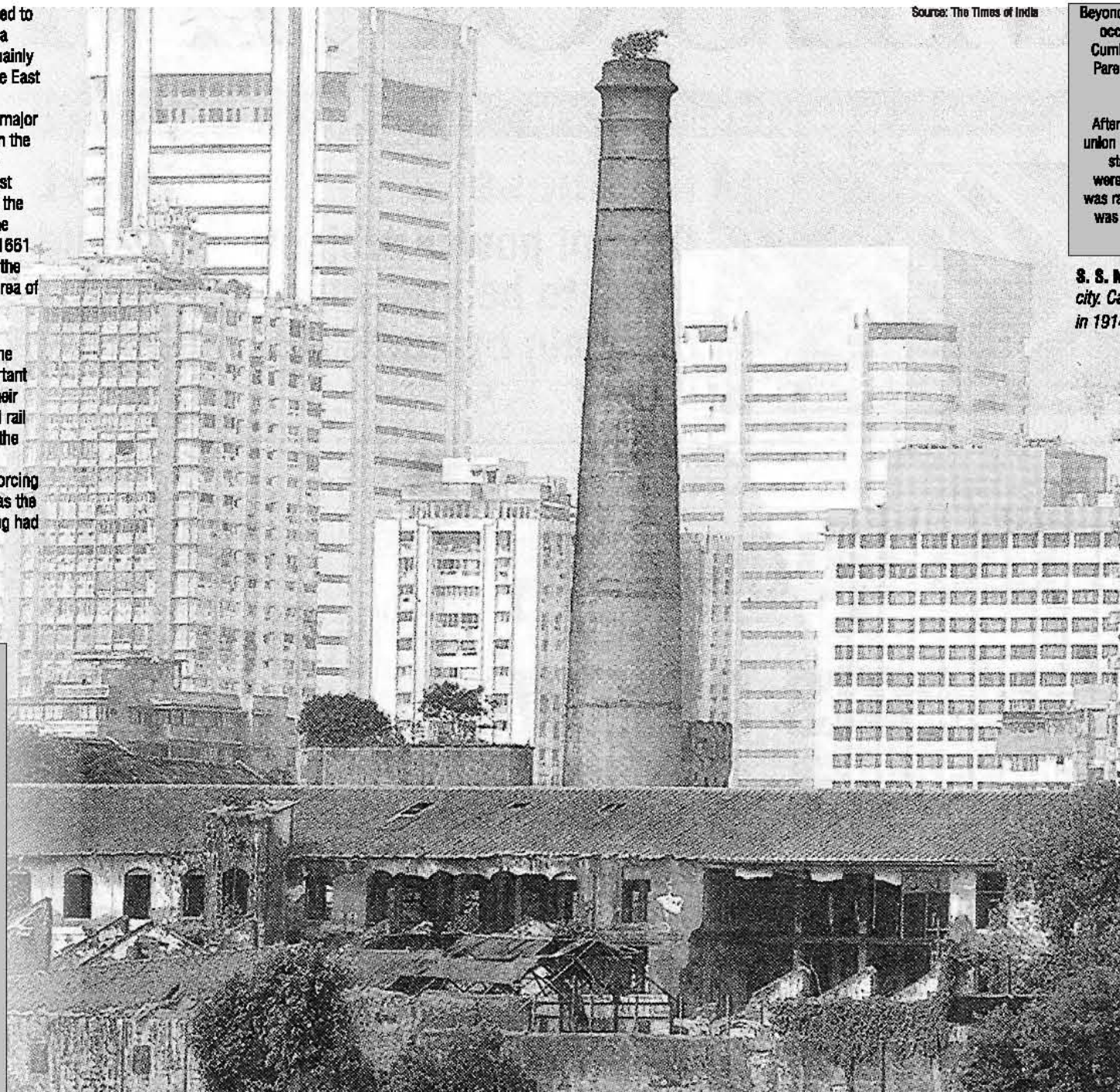
The seven fishing islands that constituted Bombay, which were gifted to the British Crown as part of a marriage dowry, evolved from being a neglected speck on the map into an important British colony due mainly to its natural harbour. In 1669, the Crown in turn transferred it to the East India Company which, after ignoring it for over a hundred years, developed it as a strategic naval base to curb piracy and then as a major trading port when Surat became less suitable for the purpose. From the latter half of the seventeenth century until 1817, by which time the British had established complete domination over the Islands against attacks by the French, Siddhis and Marathas, Bombay evolved into the biggest city in the Empire after London. Reclamations had linked the islands into a single entity. The population jumped from 10,000 in 1661 to 100,000 in the 1780s to at least 816,562 in the 1870s; in 1951 the census returned a number of 2.3 million people crammed into an area of 25.3 square miles.²

Several factors had contributed to the metamorphosis of the city: the destabilization of Surat which was, until the 1780s, the most important Company entrepôt, the increase in British power in the area after their victory over the Marathas, the establishment of telegraph, road and rail links, an overall increase in the volume of India's foreign trade and the opening of the Suez Canal. In addition there were factors like the agrarian crisis and the resultant impoverishment of the peasantry forcing migration to the city. Be that as it may, in the year 1900 Bombay was the most important Indian port and, to mix metaphors, the ugly duckling had turned into a golden goose.

I remember that coming from my village to Bombay was an arduous journey. My village was off the Bombay-Goa road in Konkan. From the village it took three to four days to get to Bombay. First, we had to go to Nagotane by bullock cart, and from there by ferry boat to Dhrantar pier and then by ship to Bhaucha Dhaakka (Ferry Wharf), Bombay. Today (he died in 1980) it takes eight hours. From Ferry Wharf we walked to Null Bazaar, my mother with a bundle containing all our belongings, and I, wide-eyed from the sights and sounds of the big city; both of us barefoot. My mother found a job as a cotton picker in the mills. The money was not enough to cover my school fees.

I loved the horse-drawn trams. The horses would be changed near Byculla Bridge. You still had to walk a long distance to get where you wanted because the trams did not go everywhere. I stayed at Null Bazaar. It was a poor neighbourhood. I would walk to Girgaum to the school.

I was impressed by the magnificence of the city—you could hear different languages, the people of different regions in India, all together, with their own identities and yet together—Parsi, Marwari, Gujarati, English, Christian, Bangali, Punjabi...they were all represented. This city had a unique character, a pace, a passion, an industriousness. This city could attract anybody.



Source: The Times of India

Meena Menon + Neera Adarkar

Beyond Parel there was no Bombay. Just trees, coconut trees, and some occasional houses belonging to Parsis and Gujaratis. The rich lived in Cumbala Hill and Hanging Gardens, while the workers lived in Lalbaug-Parel. The air in Parel was not so suffocating then. So the managers of the mills too lived in Parel.

After I started working (in a bank) and I had become active in the trade union movement, I would often get home late. It was dark outside Dadar station in those days. No lights, only coconut plantations, and if you were not careful you could collide into the coconut trees. Once when it was raining I walked from Churchgate to Dadar. When I reached Dadar it was four in the morning. There, I saw my mother sitting on the railway platform in Dadar Station, lantern in hand, waiting for me...

S. S. MIRAJKAR. *Leading union leader and, later, Mayor of the city. Came to Bombay at the age of 13 with his widowed mother in 1914.*¹

Mills And Migration

The raw cotton trade and the textile industry laid the economic foundation for commercial and industrial Bombay. Bombay's textile industry was established and it grew and flourished from the middle of the nineteenth century.

The city's first Indian cotton mill, The Bombay Spinning Mills, was built in 1851 in Tardeo, Bombay by Cowasji Nanabhai Davar, a Parsi³ entrepreneur. He was supported in his venture by a British firm, Platt Brothers of Oldham, with finances from 50 leading merchants of Bombay city supplementing his investment. The mill was inaugurated in July 1854 and went into production in February 1856. The second was Bombay Throstle Mills under the same management, later christened Alliance Mills in 1857 (operational in 1959). The success of these enterprises inspired another Parsi, Maneckjee N. Petit, to start Oriental Mills in 1858, the first composite mill, unlike the other two which were purely for the production of yarn.

This mill too was a success and soon other Parsis and later, wealthy Bhatias entered the fray. By 1862 at least four mills were in operation and six others under construction.

Before the American Civil War, Britain imported only 20 per cent of their cotton from India. With the blockade of the Confederate ports due to the Civil War, they became dependent on Indian cotton. By 1865, when the War ended in

America, Bombay had earned 80 million pounds sterling through the cotton trade. This money spurred a financial boom and the infamous 'share mania' in the city. The end of the American Civil War two months later had a devastating effect on the industrial growth of Bombay and the textile industry. Cotton prices plunged overnight, the share market crashed and a large numbers of speculators became bankrupt. It was only by the end of 1870 that normalcy returned and the mill industry began to revive. Jamshedjee Tata, then an emerging entrepreneur, started Alexandra Mills in 1869 and then the Central India Spinning and Weaving Company. Swadeshi Mills was set up in 1886 (Tata Mills was started by his family after his death in 1915). Morarjee Gokuldas established his first mill in 1870, followed by many more thereafter. Thackersay Mooljee's Hindoostan Spinning and Weaving Mills was started in 1873, and David Sassoon and Company set up the Sassoon Spinning And Weaving Mills in 1874. Khatau Makanji Spinning And Weaving Mills was established in 1875. The industry made rapid progress: 21 new mills came into existence in the next 10 years.

The impoverished districts of Maharashtra fed cheap labour in plenty to the city. The millowners sent supervisor-contractors (jobbers) into the hinterland, into the villages of the Konkan belt in the initial period and later to Satara and Sholapur, to procure workers for the mills. In 1865, 10 mills employed less than 6,600 workers, and the total population of Bombay was just 800,000. In 1892 there were 100,000 workers out of which 20,000 were women.⁴ Although millowners constantly complained about a dearth of labour, particularly in the period between 1908 and 1911, historiographers are mostly convinced that this was a myth, perhaps more a grouse against the kind of labour available: there were not as many docile and 'good' workers as they may have liked. Except for the period when the bubonic plague hit Bombay in 1896, the supply of labour never seemed to be a real problem.

The first wave of migration into the textile mills of Bombay was from the Konkan belt of which Bombay itself is a part. Konkan is the narrow coastal belt between the Sahyadri mountain range and the Arabian Sea. Although fertile, the land is unirrigated and unproductive. Being closer to Bombay and linked by boat, people could more easily be induced to come and work in the mills. Incentives were required to attract them because Bombay had the reputation of being a sickly and unpleasant city. Barracks called chawls were built to accommodate them and the certainty of earning a regular salary was held out as bait by the jobber-contractors. More often than not, the men's families continued to live in the villages depending on the money orders which came from the city, creating a money-order economy in

many—even most—of the Konkan villages.

The opening of the Bhor Ghat, the first major roadway through the Ghats (1830), the opening of the first railway line in the country between Bombay and Thane (1853) and the later spread of the railways after 1854, linked the city to the rest of the country, facilitating trade and communications. People from the Ghat districts—the area east of the Sahyadri mountain range, called western Maharashtra (comprising the districts of Pune, Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur)—also started to migrate to Bombay. Although the land of the Ghats was more productive, the produce from the small holdings was not sufficient to provide for expanding families. Bombay offered both opportunity and money to be earned.

Living And Working

The conditions of both work and housing for the textile workers were deplorable. The average age of the workers was 17 and they were rarely able to last until the age of 45. Child labour (below 13 years) was illegal and not particularly encouraged. The highest figure recorded of child labour in the mills is 5.6 per cent of the total in 1892.⁵ But according to our seniors interviewees, many families sent their boys to work when they were 10 or 12, if they were big enough to look older.

Wages were reduced or delayed at the will of the management. Besides, if work was not up to the mark, the worker would be

The workers would pay the jobbers money to get their sons work in the mills. But things have changed now. Millworkers were paid better than clerks then, but now they are in a bad state. Earlier, they did not even need much education. One millworker could look after 10 dependants. The millworker was closely associated with his village, physically and emotionally. He would go home for the harvest and for sowing. The Konkani would go home to cut the paddy and the Ghati, the sugarcane. It was an accepted practice for which the mills granted leave.

City in 1954, the pay was about 66 rupees and six annas⁶ (30 rupees basic and 36 rupees six annas Daily Allowance) per month. That was what I was first paid. I had to pay 17 rupees to the kharawal. The Konkani had to have fish, so in the kharawal there would be fish on two days and mutton on one day of the week. Food was unlimited. In one paise, you could buy so much bhaji that one person could not finish it.

I was working in Hindustan Mills in 1954. In the 50s, there were only two shifts in the mills, 12 hours each. The Lal Bawta (Communist) Union was powerful. A When Dange⁹ called a strike, the news would travel just by word of mouth and in a few minutes all the mills would be closed. This kind of communication still exists in the mills.

VASANT PARKAR (approx. 52 years). Ex-millworker. Runs the library of the Chinchpokli Ganeshotsav Mandal library (shop space under the Chinchpokli bridge, used by local residents as a meeting Place in the late Evenings) in the evenings.

Earlier, everyone worked in the mills. Since the mills worked in three shifts, we could accommodate more people. One would sleep when another went on the shift, but now with the closure of the mills, most people are on a general (day) shift. There are rules in the gala—no drinking, no gambling. Everyone has to come back before 9 pm and after that, the lights are not allowed to be switched on. Those who are on the first shift wake up at 5 am. The Dnyaneshwar¹⁰ is read from 5.30—6 am, then everyone goes to work. The second shift wakes up at 7 am, eats at 11 and goes to sleep in the afternoon. They go to work at 2 pm. The third shift comes home in the morning after having lunch at 10 and sleeps until 5 pm. Then they attend bhajan programmes and go to work in the night, at 11. No, this is not a rule, but everyone lives with this discipline, otherwise it is difficult to function. It's not that if someone wants to sleep late they can't, but they normally don't.

There are about 20-30 people in each room. How do we manage? Well, because there are three shifts. That is why there is a problem when the mills close down or even when there is a general holiday. Then people sleep outside on mats. Each has his own stuff which he

SHIVAJI DIVTE (55 years). Working in the Pimpalgaon Gaonkari Mandal. Tailor by profession. Runs a bhajan mandal with his wife and some friends, performing during Ganeshotsav and other festivals.

fined and the fines were heavy. The typical fine between the 1870s and early 80s was two-four annas and this constituted as much as a half or a full day's pay. The highest fines were imposed on 'bad work' and this often meant the worker responsible would have to buy the piece of cloth with the cost being deducted from his wages. One mill reported in 1892 that fines constituted about one per cent of the total wage bill.⁶

Hours of work were long. There were no clocks or watches either at home or in the mills. According to the Factory Commission Report 1890, sirens running on steam were disallowed by the Municipality. Thus, many of the workers would go to the mill gate as soon as they awoke; some would even sleep outside the gate in order not to be late for work. It appears that the first few mills worked only for 8-10 hours but when Oriental Mills initiated dawn-to-dusk working in 1858, all the others soon followed suit. A typical mill then worked for 13-14 hours in summer and 10-12 hours in winter. A millowner testified before the Commission that workers ate standing at the machines. When the machines tired and slowed down, the workers would know it had grown dark outside.

In the spinning department, hot steam was pumped in by boilers to keep up the heat and humidity which was good for the yarn. The temperature would be maintained at 90-100° Celsius. Workers worked bare bodied and the khaki shorts and singlet they wore became their uniform. The deafening roar of the looms in the weaving sheds often affected the hearing capacity of the weavers. Flying cotton dust gave rise to various respiratory disorders, mainly byssinosis. Toilets were either far away or non-existent which meant that workers had to go long distances to relieve themselves. The working conditions, the heat, dust, noise and lack of ventilation meant that workers had to take periodic breaks. Every mill provided barbers and water

hangs on a nail behind his place. During strikes, we had a real problem. Everyone was at the gala and everyone was unemployed.

Those who are in the galas have to find some employment because even if we allow them to live here free of cost, they have to pay for their food. So they try to find some small employment in a small factory or elsewhere. What else can they do? They have no one, but they have to eat. If someone is unable to pay the 25 rupees rent for the gala for two months in a row, he has to leave. Because the gala has to be maintained and programmes like the common pujas and the jatras paid for.

When someone retires, we give them a send-off. Some move up or get their families and stay elsewhere. But they still come for the pujas. We send out invitations and they all come. From the 1982 strike, things have changed; there are not so many programmes. Television has also made a difference. The mandal is not as active as it used to be.

for showers. Tea too would be available but no food. Food was brought in by family members or from the kharavals.

Jobbers were the representatives of the management with whom the workers were in daily contact. The jobbers were more than foremen and they implemented the standards and regulations inside the mill. They supplemented the authority they held within the mills by a system of favours including recruitment and even moneylending.

There was no channel at this time for redressal of grievances. At intervals, many social reformers both in India and Britain took up the issues of the conditions of textile workers and some reforms did come about due to these philanthropic efforts. N. M. Lokhande, a leading social reformer closely involved with millworkers' issues, was the first person in Indian history to organize workers in 1884, albeit in a loose association, quite different from the latter-day unions. He was a follower of the famous radical social reformer Jyotiba Phule,⁷ and therefore part of the Satyashodak movement led by Phule which, some maintain, was the first reform movement to give a class dimension to social discrimination even before the communists popularized it in the country.

Lokhande took up the issues of limited and regular working hours and weekly holidays and secured these rights for the millworkers by petitioning the British government. But the main motive force for change and reform was the collective strength of the workers themselves when they began to organize and fight. How they went about doing this is described in the next chapter.

Community, Family And Institutions

From the inception of the mills and the provision of cheap

accommodation by the millowners and the city planners for the workers, between 30 and 40 per cent of the population in Girangaon lived in single-room tenements or chawls housing six or more people, a situation which remains unchanged even today. Others lived in thatched huts and several were forced to sleep in the corridors and on the streets due to overcrowding. The Census of India 1911 revealed that 69 per cent of the population of Bombay had to live in single-room accommodations or barracks.¹⁰ These chawls are two or three storeys high. They have long common corridors and common toilets at the end of those corridors. Most workers lived close to the mills where they worked. The streets were extensions of the home, part of neighbourhood and social life.¹¹ The paucity of space made the corridors and the open space around the chawls important extensions of family—and therefore community—life and given the fact that most of the workers were migrants who had left their families back in the villages, the community and institutions created to fill this gap became substitutes for the family.

Since most of the workers in a particular mill would be from the same village, the same caste and often the same family, the community was already tightly knit.

Thirteen to 14 men of the same clan shared a gala or *jhilgyachi kholi*—a tenement measuring 10 by 12 feet. They only sleep there. The common toilets are outside and home-cooked meals are available on payment of a monthly sum at the khanavals—homes where food is cooked and served according to the shift timings. The khanavals are always run by women. They are not just dining spaces but meeting places as well. The khanawalwalis (women who cook and serve meals in their homes) function as a message and information bureau of sorts and are often friends and confidantes of the migrant worker.

VILLAGE associations or gaonkari mandals sprang up in order to compensate for family support and ties. They maintained continuous contact with the village and the family and could influence social and political life in their villages far away because those villages were, to a large extent, dependent on the money sent from the city. During major religious and local cultural festivals and fairs, the villages would come alive. Migrants visiting from Bombay (known as *chakamane*), rich and poor, would come together. In the early days, the identification with the villages had the effect of making workers comparatively tolerant of the abysmal conditions of work that existed in the latter half on the nineteenth century, in the first phase of the textile industry. As the community took root however, they started to think about improving their lives in the city

We are originally from Kolhapur (the Ghats). My father worked in Mafatlal Mills. My mother ran a khanval. The salaries were low and the family could not manage just on a single salary if one wanted to educate one's children. My mother said, 'What will I do at home? I'll start a khanval.' People living nearby and some relatives would come to eat. I used to help my mother even when I was in my third standard. I would wash the vessels, wash the smaller clothes, clean the grain or go and buy the odd provision from the provision store. I studied upto the seventh. My mother fell sick often. So I had to help out after I came back from the school at 1 pm. My school started at 7 am. I would light the sigdi at 2.30 in the afternoon and wake my mother. Then she would do the cooking. Dinnertime was at about 7 or 8 pmeveryone did not come at the same time. But the dabbas (lunchboxes) would have to go at the dot of 5 pm. for the workers in the mill, on shifts. If anyone came after 10 pm we would not servetheir food would be kept in the dabba for them. My father kept the accounts.

I got married in 1962. I was 17. He was a clerk in Bombay Gas. I too started a khanaval. There were about seven or eight in the beginning and then the numbers increased. I still run the khanaval. But there are very few. There were most people in the khanavals until 1972-73. There were about 300 khanavals here. And then they kept increasing until there were about 650. Earlier, there were three meals being served.

The children would help. To turn the chapatis, to take the dabbas to the mills.

Those who came to eat would talk about their problemswe would chat.

Someone would mention his wife was sick, someone would talk how he had to build his house, that kind of talk. Those who come to eatthey are eating here for five to six years so they've become family. During festivals like Ganapati there would be less people and we would cook special sweets too. During religious fasts we would not cook meat. And on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Things are more business-like now. People were like family then.

After the 1973 strike there was a wheat scarcity and the khanavals stopped giving chapatis in the morning with tea. It would be given only during lunch. One worker would require at least four to five chapatis. So for 12 people I would have to make at least 60 chapatis. Now people eat less too.

Khanawalwalis have no holidays. On ekadasi day we would go to the Pandari temple in Matunga. Otherwise whatever I have seen of Bombay was only when I was a schoolgirl, during excursions. Afterwards, we've only been to Ranibag (zoo in Central Bombay)—where is the time!

Now there are only two or three people who come to eat. Two are millworkers and two work elsewhere. My husband is dead.

There were women workers in the mills but they never ate in the khanaval. They would either cook themselves or else they had daughters-in-law.

My son is in the BEST [Bombay Electricity and State Transport] now, and the second has a temporary job in the State Transport.

INDU PATIL (55 years). Runs a khanaval as did her mother before her. Lives in Kohinoor Mills Chawls in Naigaum, near Dadar.

NIVRUTTI PAWAR (65 years). Popular Singer of Marathi folk songs. Also associated with many political movements.

My aunt used to run a khanaval in Naigaum. Many people used to eat there. There were revolutionaries who were underground who would ask me to sing after they had eaten their food and I would sing. We had to be careful because they were in hiding. I would sing songs of freedom for them. Then there were the men from the gymnasium nearby who were from my village. They were all living in the galas and their wives were in the village. They would meet only once a year, sometimes. They too would ask me to sing. I would sing this song: 'A simple village called Kolhapur, in the Sahyadri mountains—my husband has gone to Mumbai, almost a month ago. I check in the village post office but there is still no word from him. My child weeps for him, what can I say to console him? I think of my beloved every moment, I wonder how he is doing; where does he eat? 'Where does he sleep? This song would thrill my audience and they would make me sing it again and again. They would feel nostalgic for their homes.

I came to Bombay from Pimpalgaon (Satara district, in the Ghats) in search of a job. I was not very educated, like the rest, I had studied only upto the sixth or seventh. When we came here, we didn't have any close relatives but we knew there was a mandal called the Pimpalgaon Mandal. There were about 10-15 people from our village who had formed the Mandal. When I came here, I started working in a hotel, Santosh Dairy, for 15 rupees a month. I was there for about two or three years. Then I got a pass to work as an apprentice in Morarjee Mills No. 2, known as Sayajee Mills. The training period was three months. I was there for two years, during 1971-72. Then I joined Hindustan Mills, where I work till date.

The Mandal was formed because it was not possible for people to rent their own places individually. Each paid according to his capacity. There was one room in Lalbaug, one in Vakdi Chawli in Prabhadevi, one near Ganesh Talkies in Chinchpokli. At that time, you could buy a room for 4000- 7000 rupees.

The Mandal celebrated occasions like Independence Day and Republic Day. We would discuss many things—about history, about our problems. There were 10-12 members. We elected the office bearers. The shares of 165 rupees were later raised to 200. Now the minimum amount to be paid for membership is 4000 rupees. The rent of the rooms and other expenses have to be paid for as well as the activities of the Mandal.

The people who lived in the chawls only slept there. Food was eaten at the khanavals. Earlier, only millworkers lived here, but now that the mills are closing, there are others as well. We have six kholis and there are 25-30 people staying in each. Only people from our village are allowed to stay in those galas. There are people from all castes.

We have a bhajan mandal. We used to regularly hold lezime (athletic dance, performed with a string of small cymbals attached to a short rod) practice as well. There used to be a martial sport called sangram. There would be double barī—a bhajan competition in which the participants would ask questions and give answers and say a lot of

MARUTI GYANDEO SATKAR (approx. 50 years). Activist in the Pimpalgaon Gaonkari Mandal situated ner Lower Parel area, Girangaon.

and became more conscious of the injustices they had to endure. With the absence of trade unions, the mandals and other local organizations played an important part. These cultural organizations not only provided the recreation which was badly needed but also provided platforms for their creative expression. Every chawl had a committee and every locality had its gymnasiums or vyayamshalas, Ganeshotsav mandals, gaonkari mandals and bhajan mandals.

The bhajan mandals were particularly important. Bhajans consist of collective community singing of devotional songs. Each line is repeated several times in chorus, each word and emotion dwelt upon and improvised. The mill managements held bhajan competitions in the mills, like they did drama competitions. The poetry is written by Bhakti¹⁶ poets like Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, Namdeo and Eknath.¹⁷ Many of the

insulting things about each other in verse. All in bhajan form! Our Mandal was very good at this. We had very good classical singers, our artistes would even sing on radio. We had people who would sing bhajans, bharood¹⁸ and songi (bhajan-based song performance). We had dholkiwalas, petiwalas.¹⁴ Most of the programmes would be held on Sundays when everybody was free. Now they no longer live in the mandal kholis.

Our mandal also did a lot of good work for the village. It organized water, lighting and the installation of the idol of a goddess. We built two temples there. We organize a jatra for the goddess Lakshmi every three years in the village and we all go to participate. We take six days off and go there in a special bus. We hold programmes for six days, like lokmatya,¹⁵ kusti (wrestling), bullfights. Nowadays, to keep up with the modern times, we also organize cricket matches. We have a credit cooperative society and some people are employed to run that. Otherwise, all of us are employed elsewhere and nobody works full time for the Mandal. When any of the members faces a crisis—like a death in the family—the Mandal helps out financially, helps them return to the village immediately.

Most of the people from our region (the Ghat) are in the spinning department. Jobbers in our village would recruit youth from the village in the mills and then they would be made permanent. The people of the village were also supportive of workers.

My wife and children all live in the village. I did bring them here. They stayed here for two years but it was too difficult to manage, so I sent them back. I have land and cultivation in the village. But it is not enough for my family to survive on. Otherwise why would I come here, to live alone and work?

The villages still organize these competitions after the harvest and we all go along with our families. We meet our relatives, our village folk. But things are difficult in the village. The land does not give enough for the expanding families so in each family you will see that there is one son in Bombay in some company or other, one in the military, and the third somewhere else.

bhajan singers are part of a 700-year-old tradition of the *varkari*, a sect which has kept alive its tradition of oral poetry and literature and thus is very different from the exclusive and casteist Vedic tradition.¹⁸

Women Of The Mills

Bombay was predominantly a city of male migrants. In 1864, only 539 women to every 1,000 males lived in Bombay city. In 1921, the figure remained at 525. The famines of the 1870s and the expansion of the cotton industry in the 1880s were accompanied by a dramatic increase in the employment of women. In 1879, there were 8,553 women in 10 mills in Bombay. In 1881, there were 32 mills employing 31,351 women. In 1896, the number of mills had increased to 71 and the number of *women* millworkers was 78,455.¹⁹ Factory

legislation in 1891 limiting the hours of work for women and children served to check this initial expansion of female employment. Women constituted about 20-25 per cent of the total textile work force until 1931 when, with the introduction of the night shift (forbidden for women) and maternity benefits, the numbers declined. In 1884, the average daily employment of women was 8,816 against a total employment of 39,716, whereas in 1934 the figures were 24,319 and 128,420 respectively.²⁰

An interview with a woman worker born at a later time is still indicative of the life of a woman textile worker of those days.

The fact of being a migrant community created many seemingly unconventional relationships. The need for female companionship had to be addressed. Many men lived with a

I was born in a village in Pune. After my father died my uncle took my mother, my sister and brother and me to stay with his family.

I never studied. My mother and my brother's wife never got on. So my mother came to Bombay and started working in the mill. We were staying in someone else's house.

I was married at 12 but I continued to stay with my mother until I was older. My husband's family were in Worli Koliwada (literally, village of the kolis or fishing community). My sister- in-law kept complaining that I was sitting at home, doing nothing. So I went back to my mother's. There was a woman who was a mukaddam (supervisor) in the mill and my mother asked her to get me a job. That woman would get me yarn, ask me to make thread out of it. And I learnt the work. Then she gave me a job. The same mill as my mother. My mother never talked to me while we were working. She would say, 'What is there to talk about, we can talk at home. We are here to work.' They would weigh the cotton and give it to us and we had to turn it into yarn and give it back. The naikin would keep an eye on us, see that the machines were working and everything was going smoothly. The masters would come once in the morning and once in the evening. The naikin was a mukaddam. They were all women in the department. We wore aprons—cloth wrapped around us so that our saris would not get caught in the machine.

Then I went back to my husband's home—he fetched me. That was the time when Gandhi died. I took a tram at five- thirty in the morning and came back in the evening. The shift was from seven to five. I was temporary so I was not taken every day. I grew tired of it. They did this to the women particularly, not to the boys. They did not even like to employ women mainly because they did not like to give maternity benefits. I worked in the mill for five years. Finally I left.

My husband worked in Madhusudan Mills. After I had a child we moved out and started staying separately in Worli Koliwada itself. I had five children; two died and so there are three. My husband was in the habit of drinking and he did not give money regularly. Gambled too. He did not give us any trouble—did not beat us up or anything. Sometimes

there would be no money at all. It was difficult to manage so I started a khanaival. In the khanaival there were only people from the Ghats. I sent food also to people in Crawford Market. My son would take the lunch boxes from here to there.

I did that for some years, then I started selling fish. I also worked as a domestic help.

I could not educate my children. The teacher came home and asked me not to stop my daughter from going to school; she was good at her studies. But how could I? I had no money. My husband drank and gambled. When he got his salary he would just disappear for a week until he had finished it all. One son worked in a hotel and one worked in a shop. I took my daughter to help me with my domestic jobs. She loved music; later my grandson became a musician.

I do not remember any gate meetings or anything. My mother retired and went back to the village. She built a house there with the money she got from her service.

Later Annapurna started. It was started by Prema Purav (Communist Party activist) and she worked very hard to provide an alternative to the women. I joined her. We started by making batata wadas and selling them. We also participated in morchas against high prices. We went to Parel and stopped the traffic. Prema Purav was there and so was Dange's daughter, Roza (Deshpande, Communist Party activist). I have been to Dange's house to meet Roza along with Prematai. We went to demand proper ration on the ration cards—kerosene, rice, etc. There were many people. Police vans came to pick us up. We were taken to Azad Maidan and there they let us go. First we started Annapurna in Prematai's house, then we got a room and started sending food to various companies and offices. My son died suddenly. Of a heart attack. My other son was in the mill. He died too. He was active in the strike; he was arrested and then he lost his job. Then he did various temporary jobs. My daughter-in-law too is a millworker.

Now I am a supervisor in Annapurna.

RUKMINI AINPURE (app rox. 67 years). Supervisor, Annapurna Mahila Mandal.

My father was illiterate, a mukaddam in the mills. We are Konkanis. Like any worker family, we lived in one chawl, on Delisle Road. No electricity, only kerosene lamps. As boys we bathed under the common tap. I don't even know where and when I was born. My birth date was decided by my schoolteacher.

I was in Bombay except for the time in 1943 when, in one of the Sassoon Mills—India United Mills No. 4—the boiler burst. There was a wild rumour that the Japanese had dropped a bomb on Bombay. Many people evacuated the city by road, by boat. . . We did too.

I wanted to go back to school, so I went to Kudal in the Konkan and studied there for two years. There, when I was in the sixth or the seventh, there were two prominent people in the village—one was in the RSS²¹ and one was in the Rashtra Seva Dal (cultural and social service organization of the Congress and socialists). Fortunately I was influenced by the latter.

We came back to Bombay and I went back to Shirodkar Night School. We were a small family—I have one sister. Like many millworkers my father was fond of his drink. In those days, the shift was 10 hours—from 5 pm to 3 am—terrible working hours. My father worked for 35 years; he got the asthma-like disease²² and could not

BHAI BHONSLE (75 years). Veteran trade unionist. General Secretary of the RMMS during the 1982 strike period accused of having been the main person responsible for breaking the strike. Relieved of his duties in the union after the strike ended. Elected to the Maharashtra Legislature from Mazgaon (Bombay) in 1972 and in 1980. Member, Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) in New Delhi in 1993.

woman in Bombay while married to another at home, back in the village they visited only twice or three times a year. Prostitution was the comfort sought, although we could not get anyone to speak of this in much detail. We were also unable to obtain any information as to how the wives dealt with the problem of loneliness.

Ganeshotsav And Other Events

A remarkable feature of chawl life in Girangaon has been the number of community events. One chawl committee or another would be organizing a puja, which gave people an opportunity to come together and sing and dance and, most important, enact and watch theatre performances of various kinds. If it was a festival day then the entire community would explode into activity.

The most important festival was the Ganeshotsav the most popular festival in Maharashtra as a whole. This is the festival of Ganesha, the elephant god. During the 10-day-long Ganeshotsav festival, all the local institutions put up idols and organize various events every day. Although this is a Hindu festival and essentially religious, the programmes were, in earlier days, secular and more an occasion for the coming together of the community for social rather than religious purposes. Ganeshotsav mandals started in Girgaum in the middle-class locality and proliferated in the mill area. Today it is a feature of every locality in the city. The

work anymore. I had to work before I completed my Matric (eleventh and final year of school). I got a job in the Bombay Port as a tally clerk. Then I joined the telephone exchange. My father went back to the village. He never gave us any trouble. It was not an easy life. He would return from work at 3 am, sleep a little, then go to the market to get the provisions, drink a little, eat and then go to sleep before leaving for work again at 5. There was a different culture then. It was common to gamble, and also to 'keep' another woman. To have another woman was considered a sign of manliness. And these women were loyal. To the man, to the family, to the wife and children. She could be a widow or a deserted woman. At first people used to mutter a little, but later it would be accepted. She would become part of the family. She was not married to the man but she had her own status.

Yes, so my father had another woman. She was a widow and not of the same caste. In those days it would have been considered odd for them to marry. So she arranged the first marriage for him, and when the wife died, she arranged another one! My father married twice. My sister and I were from his second marriage. We all stayed together, the other woman, my mother, all of us. We also went to the village together. It was common. Accepted. I called her 'mother' too, and she was more of a mother than my own. My own mother died later and it was she who was always there.

community in the mills was mainly Hindu middle caste but participation in the Ganeshotsav festival was secular.

There is a history to the Ganeshotsav which forms the background for the way it began to be celebrated in Bombay. Lokmanya Tilak, one of the leaders of the freedom struggle who was most popular with textile workers, started the tradition of using cultural festivals for political mobilization. The fight was against the British and there was a need for the creation of a national identity. The movement needed national events and symbols—existing historical symbols that were Hindu as well as inclusive—and political myths of unity and hope for the construction of this identity. It was Tilak who in 1893 raised the Ganesh Chaturthi from a simple family puja to the status of a community event. He did this just after the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1893, possibly as a confidence-building exercise for the Hindus. N. M. Lokhande,²⁵ the other leading figure, was against what he considered a non-secular event, which would only serve to take the masses towards superstition and ignorance. He even attempted to get the British to ban it, although without success, for which he was severely criticized by many liberal reformists.²⁶ After the riots, Hindu participation in the Moharrum *tabut* or procession decreased and the Ganesh processions became a kind of Hindu *tabut*. So Lokhande's suspicion that the Ganeshotsav was a divisive idea was perhaps justified. Lokhande also criticized the Ganeshotsav for

I am 73 years old. I stay in Vakdi Chawl, an important centre in all the movements. My father was a police constable and he wanted me to become a police officer. But I got involved in politics. I liked the work that the Congress Party did although the communists were my friends. My mother was an illiterate woman, the wife of a police constable. My father used to gamble—he had all the bad habits of the police constable, you see. Drinking, of course. Sometimes he would sit to play cards and not move for a week. But somehow he never troubled us—he brought us up, looked after us all properly. He made us observe all the religious fasts but he never followed all that himself. Once I went to play cards with my friends in the chawl and he caught me there. He came up to me and kicked me hard. He would not allow me to gamble. He wanted to educate us too. He retired in 1936. Then he went to the village to live. My mother knew about everything I did, my work in theatre, sports. And that when I

came home there would always be some more people to eat, so she would keep extra food. Sometimes my friend would wake up my sister and say, 'Hey, make me an omelette.' A lot of times, my friends would stay over. I had a lot of support from my family. Often friends of mine got arrested in my absence—she would get them out—contact people, organize money. She would keep money for this purpose. We also had an 'aunt' staying with us who worked in Bombay Dyeing Mills. She looked after us too and loved us very much. She would sit outside and wait for me when I was late. My mother would go to sleep. She would wait silently and, without a word, follow me in when I got back. She was my second mother. No, she was not married to my father. But she lived with us. My father and I got her daughters married. When she died, it was my younger brother who cremated her.

GOVIND PHANSEKAR (73 years). Congress strongman, former President, F Ward Congress Committee. Clerk in Century Mills for 40 years. Lived all his life in a tenement in Vakdi Chawl, Prabhadevi. Interviewed in the offices of a film production company in Prabhadevi, owned by his son.

KHATU (first name unknown, approx. 60 years). Active in local Ganeshotsav mandal, retired millworker. Interviewed along with the Managing Committee member, Sadanand Kokate, and other activists of the Chinchpokli Ganeshotsav Mandal.

Our mandal was established in 1920, the year that Lokmanya Tilak died. The first Ganeshotsav mandal was established in Girgaum 100 years ago, and ours is the second oldest. We had a small Ganpati in those days. It was only in 1953 that the practice of making huge Ganpati idols started. In 1947, after the riots, the Ganeshotsav was stopped for two or three years. There were doubts as to whether it would ever be revived.

The Ganeshotsav was not just a religious festival but a means to gather people for a comparatively harmless purpose under the British Raj. In those days, the subscription was four annas and 25 paise. I still have the receipt. We used to go door-to-door to collect money just as we do even today, but people would sometimes give in kind rather than cash, like sugar, oil, gual, etc. People gave with that feeling of contribution to the community. There was a pride in one's own locality which is the case even today.

The Ganesh idol was installed for nine days before the immersion, and every three days it would be dressed in different clothes by professional costume artists. One day it

would be dressed as Ram, then Krishna. Everyday, different programmes like lezime, bhajan mandals, etc. would be held. People gathered every day and there was a festive atmosphere for those few days. At one time, there was only our mandal but now, there are many who have taken the initiative to set up mandals in their areas or chawls. They all work together and cooperate in each other's work. There are times when we have even shared the collections.

We had many kinds of programmes in the festival: bhajan, maldani khel (gymnastics), dashavatar,²⁸ naman (dance-drama form popular in North Konkan), tamasha,²⁹ gauri dance (associated with the elephant god Ganesha), bharood, that is we had the forms of both Konkan and Ghat.

During and after the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (1955-60) the programmes of shahirs became more popular. There were also chakri vyakhyanmalas on various subjects where political leaders were invited to talk. We invited socialists, communists, and Congressmen; once we called Datta Samant...

SHEIKH JAINU CHAND (63 years). Bard, leads a cultural group called Amar Kalapathak (in memory of the great Communist bard) along with wife Kesar. Among the few who still sing the old songs of the revolution. Living in a tiny ground-floor tenement flat in Saat Rasta, he is a Muslim and Kesar is a Hindu. Their son Nishant is also part of the troupe.

ridiculing the Hindu gods, and argued with Tilak's comparison of Ganeshotsav with the Pandharpur varkari gathering which, he pointed out, was genuinely religious and not political or communal. The festival, however, became increasingly popular and passed into popular tradition. The Ganeshotsav had a slightly different focus from that of the Shivaji Jayanti, being essentially a Hindu festival. It had as its objective, the uniting of Hindus across the barriers of caste. Tilak felt that festivals should entertain and instruct at the same time and should have a current social context.²⁷ From its inception as a community event, every year hundreds of thousands of people in the city walk in innumerable processions from their localities towards the sea and immerse the clay idols of Ganesh in the water. It is still in Girangaon that the festival is most enthusiastically celebrated.

Another festival, celebrated in Maharashtra and in its textile mill area, which has become more popular after the growth of the Shiv Sena, is Shiv Jayanti, celebrations honouring the birthday of the legendary warrior king, Shivaji. Shivaji fought a guerrilla war with the powerful Mughals and gave a call for 'Swaraj' or Independence for the first time. He popularized the use of Prakrit instead of Persian which was the language of the courts. He instituted economic and land reform and is credited with being a popular, fair and just king. Shivaji extended his kingdom from the Deccan to most parts of what is modern-day Maharashtra and Gujarat. He was a non-brahman, a Maratha (warrior caste) and he has been a popular icon in Maharashtra's history.

In a large public gathering organized in Calcutta in June 1906 to celebrate Shiv Jayanti, Tilak insisted that Shivaji was not a Hindu symbol alone nor was Shivaji's fight against Muslims in general, only against the Muslim rulers. He said that Shivaji spoke about and represented freedom and progress.²⁸ He was a popular symbol and has been used by different political streams for different purposes depending upon their agenda.²⁹ The first Shivaji celebration, which was attended by Tilak, was held in 1896, in Shivaji's historical fort where he was crowned king in 1673 Raigad Fort in Konkan. There were cultural performances, sports events, gymnastics and public speeches.³⁰ Tilak's attempt was to mobilize people and this tactic was utilized in a similar way some years later by the Shiv Sena (literally, army of Shivaji). The Congress and the left did not pay much attention to this event but the Shiv Sena used the Ganeshotsav to extend its influence, also popularizing other occasions like the Navratri and Shiv Jayanti by building committees and organizing events on the same lines as the Ganeshotsav.³¹ They emphasized and

We would put up new plays every Ganeshotsav. Girangaon was the centre of Marathi culture. The people of this area were the ones who really developed Marathi theatre and culture. They contributed not just to their locality but to the whole state. They were not only an audience but they were also performers; there were writers, poets, bhajani buas (bhajan singers), actors, dancers. From 1949 to 1951, I was not free for a single day every chawl committee was continuously holding functions of one kind or another. We never asked for money; we took whatever they gave us. Sometimes for an all-night programme, we would earn just five rupees. Later we started taking professional fees for the artistes. If we took 20 rupees, we gave each of the artistes three rupees or so per night.

I am half-Konkani and half-Ghati. There is a difference between the forms of Konkani and Ghat. Konkani has the dashavartari. Ghat has the tamasha. Mumbai brought the forms of both areas together. They learnt and borrowed from each other. I have mixed various forms in my shows, including koli.

The chawl committees which started functioning after Independence organized different festivals. The Satyanarayan puja is the most important. Then there would be Independence day, Parents' Day, Childrens' Day, and so on.

actively propagated the Hindu and religious aspect of these festivals. The left in Girangaon participated in the Ganeshotsav too in the early years. It was only later that both socialists and communists began to stay away on the ground that it was a religious festival, a stand that not only alienated them from an important local event but also helped to take from the essentially secular way that it was celebrated for a long time, before its take over by the Shiv Sena and Hindu chauvinists.

Caste And Religious Differences

The unity and integrated nature of community life in Girangaon in the mid- and late-nineteenth century does not mean that there were no conflicts over religion, caste or any other reason. Violence was a part of that life.

The Pathans,³² tall, fair, turbanned, clad in long flowing robes, canes in hand, were an intimidating presence. Moneylenders, they would make their appearance on payday, in a group, in front of the mill gates to collect their interest from the millworkers. They were known to extract sexual favours from their women clients and even to ask debtors to sell their wives to them.³³ According to Usha Dange,³⁴ the Pathans would put out their string cots on the roads and lie there, outside their chawls. People were terrified of them and would avoid passing that way. The fear turned to violence and the Hindu-Muslim riots of Girangaon in 1929 were known as the Pathan Riots.

I am Indian why should I go to Israel? Two thousand years ago during the Crusades, the Jews fled Palestine to various parts of the world. One ship docked off the Kerala coast and then came to the northern Konkan coast. The community settled here. I was born in a village, Gondghar, in Janjira district, now part of Raigad district. Janjira was ruled by a Muslim ruler called Sir Mohammed Siddhi. Muslims formed the majority community here. Many of these people went to Africa and made money which they used to buy land in the area. The land owners therefore were either Muslims or brahmans.

Our family was part of the agricultural labour community. My mother was a strong woman. She worked in the fields. She was big, taller than my father. My father earned six annas a day on the hire of our bullock cart. My father was a religious man. He regularly visited the synagogue in the town, They had 14 children, out of whom only four survived.

I studied up to the fifth standard. My sister was in Bombay, married there. It took six hours by boat to travel from Janjira to Ferry Wharf. One anna by tram, and I was in Girangaon. They didn't have enough money to educate me further so I had to return to the village. My brother was a millworker. He was a drawer, a badli worker, in Edward (now Bharat Textile) Mills.

There were many Jews in the textile mills. Jacob Sassoon who owned 14 mills in Bombay was a Jew. He belonged to the upper caste, Cohen, while my family were Israeli which is the third and lowest caste, The middle one is called Levi.

My brother tried to get me a job through a Jewish manager but that did not work. I worked in many different mills.

In those days the work of the weaver was more difficult the auto looms

SOLOMON SIMON KUDGAONKAR (89 years). *Jewish. Activist in the Lai Nishan Party. Worked in Standard (China) Mills for 33 years. Married with three children, one of whom is in Israel.*

Although the majority of people in Girangaon belonged to the Hindu middle castes, hailing mainly from Maharashtra, there were many who came all the way from Uttar Pradesh in the North and Andhra Pradesh in the South. There were Muslims and other minorities too, if in a very small ratio. Communities were not homogeneous. For instance there was a huge difference between the Pathans and the Julahas, both of which were Muslim communities. In the early years, Julaha Muslim weavers were sought after and they were also well organized on caste lines. They were jealous of their position and were known for their refusal to work night shifts. The caste workers did not seem to have a problem with them though they did with dalit weavers.

Others share Solomon's observation about the attitude towards Muslims, but more marked was the discrimination towards dalits, those the upper and middle castes considered 'untouchables'.

Dalits constituted a very small percentage of the mill workforce

came only later. The weaver had to hold the lever in one hand and pull the dhota (bobbin) with the other. And also remove the candi (spindle) from the dhota. We made canvas sheets for the British military during the war. Sixteen threads had to be made into one. The yarn was so thick it would stand on the machine. A five-reel loom had to be used. The cotton would go into your nostrils and rot inside. I had to be hospitalized for 10 days. They burnt out the cotton. For days the rot kept coming out of my nose and throat. This was common. At least 10-12 per cent of the workers would suffer from this tuberculosis.³⁶

In 1940 we used to get 40 rupees as bonus. Our minimum wage was 30 rupees per month.

Muslims stayed in Peru compound in Lalbaug. There was mosque there. There was a bazaar there too. The rent collectors for this market were Muslims. In Mohamedi Building there were 50 per cent Hindus and Muslims.

The Muslims in the mills were very skilled. They were in spinning and sizing and they were from UP. There was no feeling of illwill against Muslims in the mills. But the Hindu workers would not eat from the lunch boxes of the Muslims. I did. The Hindus accepted me as a Jew and I ate in their houses.

The dalits were not employed in the weaving department. But, in Jupiter Mills, one local communist leader got a dalit mahar worker into the weaving department and taught him to be a weaver. But the whole department went against him. Why? Because the communist movement came from Europe where they do not have a caste system. So the priority was the workers' issues. The leadership concentrated on class issues, not caste.

and very large percentage of the total population of the city 4.86 per 1872, 9.09 per cent in 1911, 11.53 per cent in 1921 and 8.15 per cent in 1941. Correspondingly, the percentage of dalits in the textile mills was 0.99, 9.05, 11.91 and 13.81. It was therefore only from 1921 that dalits began to be represented in the mills in a proportion slightly higher than that in the city.³⁶ This was perhaps because the opportunities for a dalit were not much better in the city than in the villages. The flush toilet was introduced slowly and, until as late as the 1920s, the system of *halalkhori* or carrying and emptying of buckets of waste was in practice a job expected to be performed by dalits only.

No mill had a specific policy of forced integration of dalit workers as they did for the more skilled Julahas. In some mills there was in fact a declared policy not to recruit dalits. For instance, in United Spinning and Weaving Mills the management declared that no one from the 'depressed classes' would be taken (1874). So also in Petit Mills (1908).³⁷ The job that was easily accessible to a dalit in the mills was perhaps that of sweeping, for which many dalits were employed. That there was

Casteism was quite common in the mills even 20 years ago. A few of us in the clerical staff once asked Vishnu, a mahar (of dalit caste) to fill up a water pot that used to be kept outside the office. The upper-caste workers would not touch that pot. When we questioned them, they said, 'Master,'³⁸ how can you drink water that has been filled by a mahar? They would sit and chew paan with him but they would not drink water from his hands! They never treated him badly, they were friends with him, but they would never go to his house. Or eat out of a lunchbox bought by any of the mahars. The funny thing is the Marathi workers were unable to judge the caste of the North Indian workers. So they could not practise untouchability with them!

You could not prevent a mill from employing mahars. But they would only be employed in the spinning section. Earlier when the thread had to be pulled out from the bobbin by the weaver with his lips, the non-dalit workers refused to work on a loom used by a mahar before him in the earlier shift. So the restriction on dalits being employed as weavers continued even later when the looms were modernized. Of course, they were paid the same wages as we were. Earlier in our mill, 80 per cent of the workers were from the mahar caste.

Once, when we were organizing the annual puja in the mill, another committee member who was with the CPI(M) and I nominated a mahar as the vice president of the puja committee. We didn't think about his caste, we chose him because he was a good organizer. The workers complained to us; they would not take the prasad from the puja. This became a big issue within the mill, but we stayed firm.

DATTA ISWALKAR (51 years). *Clerk in Modern Mills, main inspiration and founder of the Closed Mills Action Committee formed in 1989. Started his political career in the Socialist Party. General Secretary, Gimi Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti. President, Mill Chawl Tenants Association. Living in the Modern Mills Chawl.*

casteism in the mills is irrefutable, putting paid to the myth that caste differences automatically disappeared in cities where workers worked and fought together. It would have needed an external force of some kind.

Violence and violent clashes were an almost unavoidable part of the local life of Girangaon. In 1893, riots were set off in Bombay as a fallout of Hindu-Muslim riots in Saurashtra. On 11 August 1893, Muslims leaving the prayer at the Juma Masjid in South Bombay attacked Hindus. The next day Hindus, mainly hailing from Girangaon, staged a counterattack on Muslims. Mills and docks closed down and the riots which raged on for eight days left 80 dead (33 Hindus, 46 Muslims, one Jew) and 700 wounded.³⁹ Lokmanya Tilak held a meeting of Hindus outside Shaniwarwada in Pune, in which he called upon Hindus to be militant and defend themselves—unless both Muslims and Hindus know that they are well prepared to defend themselves against the other, the British would continue to foment riots. Lokhande criticized Tilak by saying that he should not blame the Muslims, that they were provoked by some mischievous elements who had come from Saurashtra, and he accused Tilak of playing the same role in provoking the Hindus. Whether this criticism was unjust or not, Lokhande's stand was that both communities had to be held responsible.

Art And Artistes

Festivals and the community life of the area encouraged the development of worker artistes of various kinds. Girangaon gave the city many singers, actors, writers, poets, artistes, and the city responded with warm appreciation as is borne out by what local artistes themselves say.

The fine arts were popular but by far the most popular form was theatre, in Girangaon as well as in the rest of the city Both the Konkan and the Ghat have their own cultural folk forms which were brought to Girangaon by the textile workers, especially during the festivals. Professional performing groups from Konkan and Ghat performed annually in Girangaon on the invitation of various gaonkari mandals and Ganeshotsav mandals. Since they are folk forms, they are region and caste-based and closely linked with the everyday life of people. The *ovi*, referred to below by Nivrutti Pawar, is a couplet sung by women while grinding the grain at dawn. The rhythm is the same as the movement of the grinding stone.

As with most other folk traditions, folk forms in Maharashtra can be divided into three kinds: a) expressions associated with everyday life and work, for instance *ovi*; b) art forms associated with religious rituals as part of worship and invocation of local deities like *bharood* and *gondhal*;⁴¹ and c) cultural expressions designed for performance for an audience,

I have stayed in Tejukaya Mansion all my life. My father came here from Mahad, Konkani, when he was 10 years old. We have lived in Bombay for three generations now. I took a diploma in textile design and worked in Swadeshi Mills for a while. When I started making idols and they started getting sold, I left that job.

I loved to look at Ganeshotsav decorations from the time I was little. I remember the Chinchpokli Ganeshotsav Mandal's Golden Jubilee where Shyam Sarang had made a scene from Shakuntala. Then there was Welling—he was a great artist. He was the guru for our generation, a perfectionist. You look at the idol from any side, there would be no distortion. I try to do that myself. My first idol was five feet high. Then I made a 14-foot idol for Jai Hind Cinema Mandal when I was 17 years old. My guru Welling congratulated me and that was such a proud moment for me. From that day I never looked back.

The culture of Girangaon was one of collectivism. This has gone and people have become alienated from the community.

Ganeshotsav means a joyful and collective celebration. From a month before the festival in August–September, the preparations start. The activists of the Ganeshotsav mandal worked on the building of gates and other arrangements with as much enthusiasm as they would for their own family. They would do everything themselves. Now it is all commercial and the work is professional, so there is not that personal touch. The collection of money was one of collective bonding, there was no question of extortion and threats. Even those who were giving the money would look forward to the collection. This was the situation until the 1982 strike. Then the workers started selling their homes and going elsewhere to live. There is no enthusiasm because the new middle class which is coming to live here is not interested in this collective celebration. Then, activists don't have time so the work is contracted out. Before, all the festivals were great events. Even if the

people were poor the festivals were occasions even the rich would envy. There would be bhajans, song and dance competitions, loknatya, one-act plays, fancy dress competitions and folk art on every street. There were painting competitions in Peru Chawl. Both the Konkani and the Ghat people would participate with their own cultural forms. Plays and naman, bhurood from the Konkani groups would be performed. There would be lezime groups from the Ghat accompanying the procession to take the idol to the sea. There was no difference between the Ganeshotsav of the two communities.

There was no involvement of political parties. The most famous Ganeshotsav mandals are in Lalbaug Market (called King of Lalbaug), Chinchpokli Mandal, Ganesh Gully and Rangaribadak Chawl in Lalbaug. People used to rent trucks and come to see these Ganesh idols. They would light fires and cook food on the roadside. Everyone stood in the queue, rich or poor, there was no 'pass' system as there is today.

Yes, Ganeshotsav is a religious festival, but we were never conscious of it being so. That word is used now. Earlier, all the programmes in the Ganeshotsav were social. Prizes would be given out for all the competitions held during the year, like debating, drawing and student activities. The religious element has been created by vested political interests.

There are awards for all kinds of art and sports in the state but there is no award for idol makers. There should be one instituted in the name of Lokmanya Tilak. Two or three of us are all right economically but what about the others? They are in need of support and encouragement. Another thing the state should do is to give space to the idol makers before the festival. This is all we ask, and it is not much. Look at all the building activity that is going on in this area now.

VIJAY KHATU (45 years). Best-known sculptor of Ganesh idols in the city.

All I inherited from my mother was my love for music. At dawn every day she would sit at the stone grinder, grinding grain and singing the ovi. I grew up with this memory, waking up to the sound of her melodious voice and the grinding of stone against stone. The songs were full of imagery, about nature, about sowing and reaping, about values. When I cut my first record in 1970, I sang the song that my mother used to sing.

I was eight when I sang with the leading kirtan singer in the village. He said, 'This boy will be a great singer.'

My father was a saltseller, going from house to house with the crystalline salt on a handcart. I would accompany him. The moment I heard the taal of the dholki somewhere—in any of the houses—my steps would falter and my father would chide me, 'Get out of this wasteful fixation with music, it won't get you anywhere. Do you want to dance in a tamasha or what?' He was convinced that artistes were degenerate alcoholics. He would say, 'If this happens to my eldest son, what will happen to my other children?' Still, without telling him, I went off to see the famous Pathe Bapurao's tamasha. The ticket was two rupees. What a crowd there was! With the very first beat of the dholak, I felt a tingling throughout my body.

Once my father took me to see his spiritual guru. There was an aarti in progress and I joined in. Maharaj asked, 'Who is this boy?' My father told him and complained that I was singing lavnis in the tamasha. The guru said, 'Let him sing anything but he should sing, this boy.' After that my father allowed me to sing whatever and wherever I wanted!

There was a shahir in Girangaon called Shahir Haribhau Bhandari whose profession was selling a savoury from Konkani called khaja. He would sing as he peddled, and I would accompany him. We would sing patriotic songs. I became popular with the local people and they would give me two or three rupees. Then I started getting invited to

NIVRUTTI PAWAR (65 years). Popular singer of Marathi

sing at functions. I will never forget how once they garlanded me with a hundred crisp one-rupee notes after a recital. The harmonium player who was accompanying me, said, 'Now why not make this a profession?' We were getting so many programmes and so much recognition.

Bombay was full of large clean open spaces then. It was common to not see a single vehicle for one whole hour in our bylane in Grant Road. Girangaon too was full of clean maidans. When you walked down the streets, you would hear bhajans and kirtans. We would go and watch the sculptors work on the Ganpati idols in Lalbaug for the Ganeshotsav in September. There were rangoli artists who made beautiful paintings. There were so lifelike, when you looked at them, you felt they would open their mouths and speak. They were drawn on the road, and people would come to see them. Where is the space to do that now, when the cars even climb the footpaths?

You will be surprised to know that Marathi people used to be afraid of the outsiders then. We were all poor and uneducated and we couldn't speak English. They were seen as English-speaking and educated babus or sahibs.

In Girangaon, I started being called 'mithwala shahir' ('the salt-selling bard'). 'Shahir' is a title people give you. It is not a title conferred by any institution. I was working in Jupiter Mills for a while but I left later. I started getting invitations from outside Bombay. I sang revolutionary songs and soon there was a warrant of arrest, so I had to go underground for a while. I joined the Peasants and Workers Party (Maharashtra-level leftist party) in 1949, and I was active for about 10 to 12 years. I started each of their meetings with my songs. I went to Sholapur during the time they had established a people's government there⁶⁶ under the leadership of Nana Patil, to sing at a meeting.

GUNVANT MANJREKAR (68 years). Well-known artist specializing in the traditional art of

My family was poor. My father was an artist in the court of the ruler of Baroda—Sayajirao Gaekwad. He died when I was a year old. I was an only child and my mother had to go through a lot of suffering to bring me up. She worked in the fields as a labourer. But she saw to it that I was educated. She wanted me to grow up to be an artist like my father. This was her dream. I was too poor to be able to go to art school. My mother used to wake up early. Before going to work, she would pray to the tulsi and around the plant, make beautiful rangoli patterns. Every day, I too would wake up early and watch while she drew the designs. There were no brushes or colours, so the only way I could paint was with the rangoli powder. After my mother left, I would amuse myself even as a child by drawing pictures with the powder. That was how I started. I never did traditional rangoli. The way all children draw the same pictures two mountains and a rising sun—that's what I did too. Then I started doing portraits. Of Shivaji, of national leaders. No one was there to teach me. I just did these on my own. But I practised and developed my style. I started enjoying what I was doing. There was no one to appreciate my work either, no relatives or friends. They were not so interested in art.

It was only in 1947 that I got some appreciation. When my drawing teacher asked me to exhibit some of my drawings on Independence Day, I said, 'Yes but I can do some rangoli designs as well.' He was amused that I wanted to do the rangoli that women do traditionally. I told him I wanted to do pictures of Gandhiji, Nehru, etc. He was surprised. I told him I had done it before but only at home. He wanted to know how much it cost. I told him, 'About 32 rupees,' so he agreed. We bought the colours. I did the rangoli and people were inspired and everyone appreciated what I had done. That was the beginning. They were amazed at how well I could do it, asked me where I had trained, etc.

One of the parents was a merchant and he commissioned me to do rangoli during the religious discourses. He wanted me to do pictures on Pauranic themes. The pictures I did were on the life of Shiva. I copied it from a picture, because I had not yet learnt to draw from memory. I was only 14 years old. People would show their appreciation by giving me things to eat, or some money. I was encouraged. Then I

was asked to create rangoli pictures in many places around my village. People had not thought that one could use rangoli to draw portraits and scenes.

Rangoli is a popular art. It can be appreciated by the rich and poor alike. It is a socialist art form. Abstract art is inaccessible to ordinary people. Only art lovers can appreciate it. For the rich it is often just fashionable to be art lovers even when they do not understand art. They say, 'Wonderful, wonderful,' and buy it to put it up on their walls. The real art lovers are different, those who understand and appreciate and enjoy the paintings. Rangoli is a popular art, a social art, one that is practised by every woman, rich or poor, outside the house. The main limitation is that it is temporary and it cannot be put up on a wall. You would have to use chemicals for that. I have developed the art. When you paint with water colours you start with light shades and go on to dark. In oils you start from darker colours and go on to lighter shades. In rangoli you use a combination. In some parts you use the former method and in other parts you use the latter. When doing portraits. This is not an art that is taught in art schools. I taught students on the weekends in a four-month course.

examples being the dashavata and tamasha. In course of time, these forms were used by the amateur artistes of the locality to express their own creative talents, leading to the evolution of new forms like the loknatya, which were also associated with political movements.

The tamasha became the most popular and lasting form, one that found its way into Marathi theatre and even film. There were many tamasha theatres in the working-class area in Bombay. The last surviving one was the Hanuman Theatre in Lalbaug.

At first, the millworkers, with their close links with the Konkani or the Ghat, invited troupes from the villages to perform in the city. Soon, troupes sprang up in the city itself. It was inevitable that given the mixed population of the city, new forms combining elements from the different forms should develop. Proscenium theatre and classical plays were popular with the middle classes, both Maharashtrian and Gujarati. Dashavata

My family came to Bombay when I was a baby. It was easy to get a place to stay then. My father started to sell vegetables. He would buy vegetables from the wholesale market at Byculla and sell in retail at Lalbaug. His was the only retail vegetable stall from Lalbaug to Dadar. My grandmother used to help him in the business. Our customers were mostly workers so the kind of vegetables that he sold were those that workers ate.

I could study only up to the eighth standard. There was not much money.

Mills were the hub around which the life of the community revolved. The siren told us the time and we didn't need to look at a watch. I used to wake up at 6 am and when the siren sounded at 7, I would rush to school. Once, while people were in the process of getting ready to go to work, just before the siren sounded, the Lalbaug gas turbine burst and a huge ball of fire flew up into the sky and dropped into the ocean. People immediately dropped whatever they were doing and rushed to the aid of those who were hurt. I remember many had their skin burnt off. The community bonds were that close and strong.

A friend of my father's came to him with the suggestion to organize tamasha programmes on contract. Where this Hanuman Theatre stands now, there was a vegetable farm. There was only jungle around that, no industries or anything. My father took this place on rent. There were many bullock carts in those days, in 1946. We would ferry goods in them. My father didn't have money to buy bamboo, thatch and metal sheets. So he put up a cloth tent supported by bullock carts. That was our theatre.

There were 19 tamasha theatres in Bombay, and the big contractors were Bangdiwala Seth and Abdul Rehman Seth. The cinema theatres you now see in Kamatipura (Bombay's red light district) were all tamasha theatres in those days. Abdul Rehman Seth bought up the whole of Batatyachi Chawl so that his artistes could live there. The working-class families loved tamashas. Cinema was more a middle-class medium.

Bangdiwala Seth was rich enough to take out a silver tabut during Moharram, but he was a big-hearted man. When the collections came in, all of it would be dumped into a box on which he would sit. When the artistes came to take money for their fees he would dip his hand into the box and give out the money without even bothering to count it.

The working class likes light entertainment which does not strain the mind too much, while the middle class listens to classical music, reads books, etc. Workers favoured loksangeet while middle-class people liked natyasangheet. Our theatre had nothing to do with any

MADHUKAR NERALE (65 years). Owner, Hanuman Theatre, Lalbaug, which staged tamashas for over 40 years before closing down. Interviewed at his house adjacent to the dilapidated theatre awaiting demolition and reinvention as a marriage hall. Involved in conducting tamasha workshops for young artistes, and actively trying to mobilize the shahirs in the state.

movements—it was purely light entertainment. The audience were mostly workers; when it was performed for the middle class it would be done differently. It was called 'baithakichi tamasha' in which the artiste sat down and sang, while the other usual one was called 'bahurangi tamasha' which had more songs and dances and dialogue.

This form was most popular in the rural areas. There was a lot of adlibbing, hardly any written script. For instance, if it was a story of Harishchandra, the performer would know about the character so he would simply improvise. So would Taramati, because the actress would know how that character would respond to what Harishchandra was saying. There would be topical comments, the language and the lyrics were colloquial, the music folk. Earlier in western Maharashtra, tamashas were performed in open spaces during religious fairs and festivals. The elite in the villages, the brahmans, traders, government officials, hardly went to watch these tamashas. The village would give supari and a coconut to the tamasha party as advance. The contractors came in later and became middlemen, especially for the town performances.

The millworkers loved theatre. In the early days, they were mostly from Konkani. They had little land. There was no employment either, so their links with Bombay were close. Almost the whole family would be forced to migrate to the city. They formed their own groups to perform plays which focused on various issues in workers' lives. The local Konkani form was dashavatar which was closer to theatre. It would be based on epics and other popular folklore that were part of our cultural heritage. Unlike the tamasha, the female roles were played by male artistes. It's done that way even today. Many legendary singers in Maharashtra, like Bai Gandharva, became famous for their female impersonations. Later, after the advent of cinema and the theatre went into a slump, women came in.

What was called dashavatar in South Konkani, was called naman in the North. In Rajapur district, it was known as khele, but there was very little difference in the actual form. There was a kind of tamasha in the north part of Konkani which was called gammat. They would also perform jakhdi or balya dance as it is known in Bombay, a group dance, where boys would each tie a set of ankle bells to one foot and dance in a circle. This last became most popular in the mill areas.

In those days, in my village, there would be plays during Hanuman Jayanti and during the Shravan month there would be pujas. Then there would be bhajans too. I started to participate in the plays. My uncle was the director. First I was given the female roles, because I had the features for it. Later I started doing other roles. People started to notice me. I also used to sing in the bhajan mandals. I learnt about taal and raag. Then Vishwas Narvekar, a friend of mine, included me in a play for the Ganapati festival.

The plays were performed in Girgaon and in Girangaon. Every chawl had some programme or the other where they would put up our plays. The bhajan mandals were very well attended and not just because of religious sentiments. It was also a way to pass the time. In those days there was no other form of entertainment. Let alone TV very few even had radios. If someone had a transistor in his hand, everyone would stare!

The people of Konkani brought these forms to Bombay. Dashavatar parties would be invited to Bombay, and they would stay for a week or two during festivals like Holi or Diwali and perform every day. The forms in the Ghat which were narrative like the dashavatar were the vaghya murali, (referring to boys and girls respectively who are 'given' to the popular deity Kandoba, an incarnation of Shiva), gondhal or bharood and taut (bhajan-based devotional songs). These troupes were also invited from the villages for pujas, naming ceremonies, etc. The areas in Girangaon where the people of Konkani and Deshi stayed were separate and distinct. The forms and performances were also therefore dependent on the area.

There were many bhajan mandals. There would be night-long bhajan competitions. There was no need to take police permission to put up performances then. Nor was there any danger to audiences returning home late in the night.

At Hanuman Theatre, we only held tamasha performances. The audiences consisted mostly of men from the Ghat. Some Konkani men would drop by just to see what it was like. Our tamashas would have as many as 10 or 12 groups or parties, called bans. They would be identified by the main dancer, for instance Yamunabai Vaikar or Shevantabai Jejuri, both of whom were famous tamasha artistes. The performances would go on from eight in the evening to four in the morning when Bombay was already waking up. On holidays, workers would queue up from 6 pm onwards, sometimes even without having dinner. Or else they would eat early, by 4 pm. Our tamashas were on throughout the year, whereas dashavatar and naman would come only during festival seasons.

Women never attended the shows. One reason was that most of the men were here without their wives who would be in the villages. In the villages, a few women would attend because there were few avenues

There was a great community feeling in those days. All these activities were forms of community activity. Now things are different. We are all in separate worlds and as a result we are not able to achieve anything, whether in culture or in politics. There is no unity.

Then I got a job in Century Mills. I don't remember which plays I have acted in because there were so many! The mills used to have inter-mill competitions—there would be as many as 40-50 entries. As soon as I joined Century Mills, just a year later, I acted in the Century Mills entry. That year we won the second prize and a year later, we won the first. The inter-mill theatre competitions were really prestigious. Many famous and talented people participated in them. Many mill people became top theatre artistes. They became famous through their performances during the Ganeshotsav.

The money for the mill drama competitions was donated by the Bombay Mill Owners Association. They would collect the money from contributions from all the mills. The actors would get time off

BAJIRAO POPALKAR (45 years). Worker in Century Mills and talented actor. Started his career in the mill theatre and went on to act in professional theatre and television. Lives in the Century Mill Chawl with his family.

of entertainment. There would be women attending the village fairs where the performances were held. Then, there were many items in one tamasha performance. One was the sangeet ban with the system of daulatjada: members of the audience would offer a coin and request a particular song or dance. The artiste would perform that number and then take the coin from the man.

Now there are hardly any mills running and very few textile workers. So our audiences have almost become extinct. The tamasha artistes are unable to survive. This artistic tradition is likely to die out. The younger leaders of the political parties are inimical to these art forms. They have no concern. Even the maidans which were available to us are no longer so. There is no patronage either from movements or from the state, and the only live entertainment in this area is orchestra. When the Shiv Sena, which talks of Marathi culture, was in power, they should have done something but they never did. They never held tamasha or folk festivals to encourage Marathi folk forms.

We as artistes also have to adapt to new forms, keeping what is important, which appeals to people. We must also create new tastes among people, bring in expression and literary merit. Instead of filling our plates with 50 items we should restrict the number, keep only what is appetizing.

I am now organizing tamasha workshops for young people. I familiarize them with tamasha and I call well-known tamasha women artistes, and I am realizing that there is still so much strength in this traditional form.

fromwork and a holiday on the day after the show and during the competition. There were many things that millowners and workers did together, and this continued until the 1982 strike. The attitude of the owners as well as the workers changed after the strike. They were estranged and the owners stopped encouraging activities of the workers. They would say, 'There is no need for so many actors, make do with less.' The mills were running losses and there was not so much money to spend.

In those days the millworkers were so fond of theatre that there would be a virtual stampede for tickets—there were 17,000 workers and the hall had a capacity of only 800-900. So we would do an extra show and that too would get a 'house full'. During competitions, it would be jam-packed. Families would come, everyone would discuss the plays, praise, criticize. The workers who acted were also very enthusiastic. A worker who worked on a loom in the day, would be a king in a play. The possibilities were endless!

Some of the mill plays would enter the state-level competitions too. And win. The mill plays were considered good plays. We won many prizes. We had one rule about picking our actors in the mill: he had to have completed 307 days in the mill. That is a year. This was a very strict rule.

SHAHIR KRISHNARAO SABLE (77years). *Popular singer, writer, performer, lokmatya producer-director, currently running an academy to train young folk artistes in his village near Satara. His Maharashtra Darshan was performed in theatres and also broadcast on television. His 'Garja Maharashtra Mazha' became one of the most popular songs in Maharashtra. Daughter Charusheela is a theatre artiste and son Devdatta is a well-known music director.*

We were basically farmers, but since we did not have too much land, my great-grandfather started working as a labourer in the Railways. My grandfather settled in Wai where he bought some land and cattle. That is where I was born. My mother was determined that I should be educated and since she felt I would not receive a good education in our village, she sent me to Amalner, in Khandesh, to her brother, a foreman in the Railway yard. I was interested even then, in music. At that time, 'talking' cinema had just begun. I would listen to records of film songs and I could sing them then and there. I knew the songs of films like Gopal Krishna, Sant Tukaram. I was 10 years old.

My grandmother did not like me singing and she would always say, 'This boy will be corrupted by all this'. But I wanted to sing and for people to hear me sing. Fortunately, there were many gatherings of famous musicians in Amalner, and I was affected by this culture. The other influence in my life was that of Sane Guruji.⁴⁵ He lived in Amalner, on the road which I took to school. He was a schoolteacher, but his interest lay in the workers' movement; he left teaching and went into full-time work with textile workers in that area. Many well-known leaders like S. A. Dange and Ushatai Dange (his wife, also an active Party worker) came to his meetings. But Guruji was not a communist. His stage would have both the tricolour as well as the red flag. Once, when I went to one of his meetings, there was a young boy singing a song on stage and everyone appreciated it. I thought to myself, I would like to be on that stage and sing. So I started to go to the meetings, giving my grandmother the slip, and one day I was told I could sing on the stage. And I did. I sang a praise of Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Bharat ka danka alam mein, bajawaya veer Jawahar ne. Aadheen bano, swadheen bano, sikhalaya veer Jawahar ne' (Brave Jawahar made the name of India famous throughout the world, He said, Lose yourself in the movement, be independent). How they clapped! I started collecting the lyrics of nationalist songs, like 'Charkha chala chala ke longe swaraj longe, nahin rakhta, nahin rakhta angrezi sarkar' (We shall win freedom while spinning on the charkha, we shall not tolerate the English Government). I was not a lyricist, but I was obsessed by these songs. Of course I started neglecting my studies, and my grandmother was really angry. So angry that she didn't allow me to take the final exams! All this only resulted in my growing closer to Sane Guruji and his thoughts and work. He was bringing out a weekly called Congress and I prepared a play to raise money for it. But my grandmother stepped in and sent me back to my parents. My mother was proud of me, but my father would say, 'Son, why do you sing? Don't you know the saying 'Bamnagharl Ilvana, kunbyagharl dana, anl Maharagharl gana (Education in the house of the brahman, food at the farmer's and music at that of the mahar)? We were in debt; the land was not enough to feed the whole family. I had to look for a job. I had not finished my education, so the only job I could get was in the mills. I set off for Bombay.

I came to Girangaon and got a job in the weaving department in Swadeshi Mills. Then, in the 1940s, the population of Bombay was 14 lakhs or so. The workers and Girangaon dominated Bombay then. It was lively and vibrant. Bombay was the industrial centre and the

caretaker of Maharashtra. Girangaon was the area of the workers and Girgaum and Dadar were where the middle class, the babus, lived. Fort was where the officers lived.

When Gandhi started his Quit India Movement, people were charged with patriotic fervour. They left their jobs, their factories, and leapt into battle. I heard Gandhi, Nehru and others speak at several meetings. I asked myself, what was the point in living only to earn two meals a day? I felt I had to do something. So I got another two-three young people and started my kalapathak. I left my job. I started collecting povadas⁴⁵ and group songs to propagate the message of Independence amongst illiterate rural folk. 'Chal utha sahiba, atapa bistara, neet vilayat gaath, bolchi tulja vatavata, deedshe varsha alkele neet, are khadituna halav tulhi boat, sahiba neet vilayata gaath' (Sahib, get up, pack your bedroll and go back to where you came from; we've heard your bragging for a hundred and fifty years, now take your ships away from our harbour, go back to where you came from).

Then I wrote another song on the tricolour, based on a song from the film Gopal Krishna. They were rather simplistic. Sane Guruji encouraged and appreciated me. But I thought that was not really creative. I later returned to Khandesh and gave grand povada recitals. I shunted between Bombay and Khandesh for a long time.

At that time there were many poets and singers but very few who were part of the freedom movement. They were all writing on historical themes. But there were some who wrote subversive songs secretly because there were in government service, working for the British. They wrote about martyrs like Babu Genu,⁴⁶ Shireesh Kumar, etc. The British could not ban religious povadas so they would use metaphoric language; they would sing about the killing of a raksasa like Keechaka, and people knew they were referring to the British. Famous poets wrote songs on issues like the Bengal Famine, on martyrs, on freedom and gave them to the shahirs to sing. On Independence Day, I wrote a song on our flag and hoisted it in my village. After Partition I wrote one on the communal riots. I was not in any party so I was comparatively isolated after Independence. My leader was Sane Guruji. I decided to look after my family. I went back to the mill, and the manager said to me sarcastically with folded hands, 'Well, well, you are now the masters. Why do you need a job?' And he sent me back!

I was unemployed, uneducated. I was on the streets. I collected people again and started another kalapathak. You need a certain amount of knowledge, education and skill to write. I had to learn, which I did. Now we had to sing a new kind of music. We started singing folk songs and performing for entertainment. I used humour and satire to convey what I wanted to say, to propagate a message. The form was loknatya—the use of the traditional tamasha with modern themes. In one of my plays for instance, the gods come down

from heaven along with Naradmuni, and when they see what is happening on earth, they are left wondering what to do. Shiva is asked to do his tandav dance but he has forgotten how to, he has been displaced from the Himalayas by the mountaineers and he is now learning break-dance. Narad brings each sinner before Lord Brahma—the religious bigot, the politician, the man who is struggling to collect his daughter's dowry.

We had a big campaign against alcoholism too when Prohibition was imposed. I did a play called 'Alcoholics in Chitragupta's Court'. Chitragupta (the gatekeeper of heaven) asks me, 'How did you die?' and I say, 'I used to put away a quarter (of alcohol) every day. Today I finished my bottle and fell into the gutter and reached here.' I tell my story—how I became an alcoholic—and give my message. But I don't think that had much impact. People drank in secret. I think drinking may even have increased because we talked about it so much! The bootleggers benefited from the Prohibition. It was a good way to earn money and black money increased, corruption increased. Open spaces were captured by these bootleggers to set up their factories. Mafia groups came into being who took money from the poor and homeless and protected the creation of slums near these areas.

There is a close relationship between politics and culture. The job of the writer or artist is to educate and reform society. In one play I wrote—'How Did You Lose Your Way?'—a village sarpanch gets the thumbprint of a poor farmer for a loan to dig a well on his land and blows it up on a tamashewali (female tamasha dancer). But the tamashewali falls in love with the farmer and marries him. She tells him to file a case in court saying the well was stolen. The last song in that play became very popular.

The modern shahir does not have the patronage that the poets enjoyed in the courts of the kings. It is during popular movements that modern poets come into their own. The poets of those days sang the praises of the king. The modern shahir has the patronage of the people and performs plays on their issues for them.

Everything has been swept away now. The cultural movement is almost dead. The shahirs of today are starving. If the government and society do not support them they cannot survive. Where I used to perform every night, I now have only one programme in two months. Today Marathi culture is almost gone from the city. TV has taken over. Every day some new channel comes up. On the streets you don't hear Marathi any more. Only Hindi. Now we are invited to foreign countries but in Bombay, there is very little encouragement.

was a theatre-oriented form. Girangaon combined the proscenium aspect of middle-class theatre and the theatrical aspect of dashavatar in the production of their new plays. This became extremely popular and a whole new breed of playwrights came into being. Each mill had its own theatre group and the inter-mill competition was an important event for the population of Girangaon, even for the city as a whole. There were almost daily performances at the chawl and street-level pujas and theatre groups mushroomed.

Social And Political Movements

Drama, music, theatre, art and culture in general necessarily have a close organic link with the daily economic, social and political lives of the people, and Girangaon was no exception. Besides the institutions that have been described above, there were two more institutions which exercised a decisive influence on the local community—the trade unions and the political parties which were active in the area. The Congress which was spearheading the Independence struggle, the communists from 1928 after the establishment of their millworkers' union (which became one of the most powerful trade unions in the country), the socialists who were part of the Congress Party until after the declaration of Indian Independence in 1947, the Ambedkarites⁴⁵ who had a wide influence among the dalits, all had their cultural troupes and played a role in the rich cultural life of the area.

Girangaon was the stage for many political movements and the people of the area were leading participants in the Independence struggle and later, the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement. Since Girangaon consists of six assembly constituencies making up one parliamentary constituency, it was a crucial area for all political parties. The sheer size of the community, integrated and well organized through their multi-layered institutions, made it inevitable that the area be the battleground for the growth of many parties and the clashes resulting thereby. The art and culture of Girangaon could not but be affected by this factor.

Cultural forms in Maharashtra grew not out of royal patronage but people's support.⁴⁶ This essentially meant that social and political movements, besides religion and ritual, played an important part in the evolution of art, culture and cultural forms in Maharashtra. The reform movements, an important part of Maharashtra's history, started with Jyotiba Phule's movement and its concern with issues of caste and gender. Phule established the Saiyashodak Samaj (literally, the community that is searching for the truth) in 1873. The form that was most adopted by social and political movements in the last century was the tamasha, especially the povada component. In Maharashtra, the social reformers and the Ambedkarites modified the tamasha to convey the message. Phule modified the tamasha as it existed but removed the lavni component which he considered derogatory to women. They produced

what was called the 'Satyashodaki tamasha' or Satyashodak jalsa or performance. The Satyashodaks sang to an omnipresent omnipotent Creator. The *vag* (portion comprising dialogue in tamasha) dealt with superstition, treatment of widows, alcoholism, brahmanism etc.⁴⁷

This inspired the Ambedkarites to create the Ambedkari jalsa in 1931. Folk music and performing arts in Maharashtra were traditionally the professions of the lower castes and tribes. The Ambedkarites were mainly mahars, traditional performing artistes, and the use of the forms came easily to them. Propagating Ambedkar's message, education and thoughts against casteism, they sang the *gan* (invocation in tamasha) to Bhimraya or Bhimrao Ambedkar, instead of the traditional prayer to Lord Ganesha.

The socialists and the communists in 1948 called their tamashas loknatya or 'people's drama'. The form was essentially the same as the Satyashodak jalsa. The *gan* in the communist productions was addressed to the workers and peasants. The message in the loknatya of the communists dealt for the first time with class issues.

The socialist bards were from the middle class, educated and literary figures. The content was more to do with morality, ethics, untouchability, alcoholism—issues that concerned the middle class, rather than portraying the reality of workers' lives which the communist cultural groups like their kalapathak and IPTA did.

Both socialists and the communists performed the tamasha with the lavni content intact and for the first time, middle-class women activists performed in the tamashas. So the loknatya had an appreciative audience in the middle classes as well. Shahir Amar Sheikh, Shahir Annabhau Sathe and Shahir Gavankar were the main stars of the communist squad, and they were all from a working-class background. Amar Sheikh's voice and performing skills have since passed into legend. Amar Sheikh started his life in Bombay as a cleaner on a bus. Tall and broad of build, a mane of wild hair, *duff* (tambourine) in hand, his picture is a familiar one in Girangaon as well as in Maharashtra's cultural annals.

Annabhau Sathe wrote and performed about 18-20 tamashas, seven- eight povadas. He came from a village near Kasegaon and he belonged to the matang samaj, a dalit caste. He came to Bombay with his father on foot when he was a young boy. There was a strike going on in the mill at that time. "When Annabhau came to the mill for work, Ushatai Dange writes that she was sitting at the gate with other women, and warned him not to go inside because the strike was on. But he went in anyway, because he badly needed the job. He later wrote that he started out as a strikebreaker and then crossed over to the side of the strikers and stayed there throughout his life!

MADHUKAR NERALE (65 years). Owner, Hanuman Theatre, Lalbaug.

The form of loknatya was brought in by Annabhau Sathe and Amar Sheikh. It was a combination of tamasha and theatre. Loknatya means 'people's theatre'. That is why they used a popular form like tamasha, through which they would address social and political themes. Writers like Acharya Atre or Narayan Surve wrote loknatyas and they were performed by Amar Sheikh and others. He was a great performer. When he went on the stage, this ordinary mortal became like a ball of fire, turning everything and everyone to ashes.

Shahirs like Amar Sheikh, Gavankar and Annabhau Sathe who were in the Communist Party did much to propagate the Party's politics among ordinary people. Songs like Annabhau Sathe's 'Majhi maina gavavar rahili, majha jeevachi hotiya kahili' (My beloved is left behind in our village and my heart burns for her) were popular because so many young workers were alone, and they responded to the song. There were also many songs which they wrote spontaneously on the problems of the workers who lived here and on political issues. They were fired up with the need to organize and mobilize people. The communists were able to reach workers this way. The socialists also had their writers and poets but they did not address the basic problems of the workers. They were more into sermonizing on moral and ethical issues.

The shahirs of Girangaon played an important role in all the political movements like Independence and Samyukta Maharashtra, especially the latter. This movement received an impetus due to the shahirs and poets. The poets would write and the bards would sing. Annabhau Sathe's song 'Mumbaichi Lavni' describing Bombay of those days was very famous. Pathe Bapurao had also written a song about Bombay but he described the Bombay of pre-Independence days. Annabhau wrote about the workers' Bombay. These were not professionals like the other parties. They would not demand big sums of money. Women too would take part in these performances. They were party activists, both socialist and communist, from middle-class backgrounds. Dada Kondke, who became famous later in Marathi cinema, was from Girangaon. He used the form of loknatya in his Vichcha Majhi Pun Kara (Fulfill My Desire). Cinema adopted and appropriated the tamasha form. The loknatya was popular till the 70s and 80s, but has now declined.

VASANT BHOR (70 years). Son of leading Communist Party textile union activist, the late Parvatibai Bhor. Retired, living in Thane district, near Bombay. Used to be a leading member of the Communist Party's cultural group. Continued to produce many professional plays with other colleagues from the cultural squad, even after leaving the Communist Party. Has a huge collection of memorabilia of the past which he shared with us readily.

My father died when I was in the sixth, when I was 16 years old. My mother decided that everyone should go out to earn. After I passed the seventh, I went to work in the Party press, where my brother was. At that time, it was difficult to get a job in Party institutions unless you knew or were related to someone in the Party. The Party could not pay very much, so it was hardly a job. Although the Party used to organize unions elsewhere, in the Party press the wages were very low. There was a muster and everything. There was no condition that you should be a communist to get a job there, but once you are in the movement, you start to develop. I used to work from nine to six, and then I used to go to night school.

I went to jail twice. My mother went to jail very often since she was an active union and Party activist. In jail, we used to play football in the evenings. There was a canteen too, in Worli Jail. It used to be where the dairy is now. We would dawdle over the food so that we could spend time there rather than in the barracks. This was near the sea, so Amar Sheikh used to sing and people who were walking along the sea face would stop and listen. That was towards the end of 1949. They released me just before my SSC exams, so I failed.

I used to run errands for my mother and Usha Dange. Take messages, things like that. I was not interested in becoming a leader. I did not read much political literature, only the daily newspapers. My mother was fond of reading and my brothers got the habit from her. Narayan Surve was looking after the Party office. He and my brother were close friends, and it was he who brought Surve to the Party office. If I recollect correctly, it was my mother who helped him get a job in the municipality.

There are three different levels among the communists. Some at the top whom you can't expect to live in a chawl. They do what is possible for them to do. Then there were others who earned money and worked free of cost for the Party. The third category consisted of those like my mother, who was not very educated, who lived in a chawl in Lalbaug and worked fulltime for the Party. The middle-class women cadres and leaders were different from her. They were not so involved. The ways of the middle-class woman are completely different; even if they become communists, this cannot change. The Party realized the value of someone like my mother and they promoted her. The women who work in the mills also differentiate between the middle-class women and those who come from a working-class background. Everyone knew my mother. The Party was small and well knit. There was a commune in Girgaum and everyone stayed together. Everyone did their own chores, washed their own clothes. There was someone to cook the food, but everyone ate together. Balraj Sahni (famous Hindi film actor) and Kaifi Azmi (well-known Urdu poet) were there too. Couples got separate rooms. There was a great bond between the members. The Party had different fronts, in each section, even for the children. Dina Gandhi, who became Dina Pathak, the actress, used to be in charge of the work amongst children. It was like a shakha.

The Party had its cultural group office in Parel. Once, two underground comrades came from Nagar, on the run from the police. They were to be taken to meet Dange the next day. But the police arrested them, and

I too was put in the lockup along with them. I was only 18 years old. We were arrested as dacoits and thrown into Byculia Jail. We were charged with dacoity and murder. I was there for seven-eight months. It was a horrible place. I was in solitary confinement and was allowed to go out only for an hour. There was no toilet, only a pot inside the room.

Many Party people were arrested during that time. One was a Wagh guruji, who advised me to study further. In working-class families, they do not pay so much attention to education. My mother did not even know which class I was studying in when I was doing my SSC. I was not interested either. But this guruji inspired me to study. He said I would amount to nothing if I did not. Then all the other comrades in the jail started to educate me. I was the only student there. Each one taught me one subject. That is how I passed my SSC in 1951 after I came out of jail.

Two people influenced me in jail: Krishna Desai⁴⁸ and Majrooh Sultanpuri, a poet who later became a well-known Hindi film lyricist. He would make very good food for everyone twice a week. These personal touches are what stay with you. What I remember about Krishna Desai is that he used to get irritated when others played chess. Then he learnt it and he started to defeat everyone!

There was a convict in that jail with us, a goonda called Gul-babu. He used to get food from home and he would get extra food for us. He helped me later through college.

I liked cultural activities and became a performer. I worked in Amar Sheikh's troupe. I would be given 20 rupees for a performance. This was for outside performances, in functions, in villages, in jattras, not for Party performances for which there was no fee. If there was a public meeting or if a guest was coming, we would sing in order to gather the public, then after the speeches, there would be a tamasha announced so that no one would run away during the speeches! Often people gathered just for the tamasha. I don't know what his financial arrangement was with the Party but I was paid by him. We toured Maharashtra so many times.

On festive occasions like May Day or someone's birthday, rallies would be held in Kamgar Maidan or Nare Park, where after some speeches, the kalapathaks would perform. There would be many people and the programmes were really popular. There were many political songs, many of which people may not have understood, but the songs were simple and straightforward. There was a general sympathy with Russia, and what we were saying was novel and interesting for them. The communists were active, and they would react and come out on the streets on every issue. By this time, the residents of Girangaon were no longer illiterate. They were reading newspapers like Navakaal and Sandhyakaal which were known as workers' newspapers even though they had no progressive ideology.

Krishna Desai and I became good friends while we were in jail. In Lalbaug we were famous as the quartet—besides us there were Vinayak Patil and Tungare. We formed the Lalbaug Kalapathak of young local artistes. Narayan Surve, Parab were there. There were festivals in the local area—rangoli exhibitions, dance, plays, etc. Once we had invited Balraj Sahani to inaugurate the rangoli exhibition. Without confirming with him, we announced his name. I went to fetch him, and he refused to come since he had not been told. I told him, 'I cannot show my face in Lalbaug anymore if you refuse to come now.' He felt bad for me and agreed. But he said he was too tired to come on his motorbike, so I would have to take him there by taxi and drop him home again. On our way back, he asked me my name. When he realized I was Parvatibai Bhor's son, he said, 'Why didn't you say so?' He asked me to come and meet him, but I didn't go. Then I met him again some where else and he asked me to meet him again. I thought he wanted to give me a job in the film industry, but he actually wanted me to study further. I joined Ruparel college for a BSc. I got a scholarship after that and I did my MSc too.

I was the one who got Jwala (Fire) written, based on the Goa liberation struggle. The play did very well. It was put up by Lalbaug Kalapathak and it came first in the state competition besides winning several prizes. When I was working with Amar Sheikh, I had a lot of time. I didn't have a job, and his plays did not require much rehearsal.

The performers were from both Konkani and Ghat. There was little regional or caste divisiveness in the cultural field. Talent and commitment were far more important. Amar Sheikh was a Muslim from Sholapur, Gavankar was middle class, Annabhau Sathe was a dalit, a mang.

The Party had one central squad which had well-known artistes and writers like Balraj Sahni, Prem Dhawan, Kaifi Azmi and others who were an all-India troupe, and at the Maharashtra level were Amar Sheikh, Annabhau Sathe and Gavankar. They were openly communist and their performances reflected the ideology clearly. The Congress had their Indian National Theatre. Mama Varerkar⁴⁹ was one of the main persons and he also wrote a play based on the mills. They had lots of money, unlike the other troupes. The socialists too had their kalapathak but it was of middle-class people and those who were originally of working-class origin, like Dada Kondke and Ram Nagarkar and Nilu Phule. Honest people, very upright. The troupes belonging to different political parties all interacted and appreciated each others' productions even if they competed with each other. Our Central Squad split into two later. There were differences in the Party

My village is in Ahmednagar. My mother worked on the land, my father was a bangle-seller in Bombay. He would send 25 rupees a month. My mother earned five annas a day. I have two brothers and a sister. I was educated up to the sixth. My schoolmaster, he talked to my mother and he said, 'You may want to educate your son but here in the village he can study only upto the seventh, and then he will have to go to high school in the town where only the rich go. So what is the point?' And other people said to her, 'Where do children in the Muslim community study further and go ahead in life? At the most he can become a schoolteacher.' My mother said it was more important to live than to be educated. So she sent me to Bombay, to my uncle. My father had died in 1948.

My uncle too was a bangle-seller and lived in Parel near Dharti Talkies, earlier known as Surya. This was after the riots of 1946–48 so Muslims lived together for security. Before that there were

and this extended to the cultural front. Amar Sheikh was with the radical section while Gavankar and Annabhau Sathe were with the right. When they parted to make two separate cultural groups they did not say this was the reason, they just said that it was necessary to expand the activities. Amar Sheikh trained different branches of the kalapathak like ours in Lalbaug. He also trained troupes in the rural areas. 'When the troupe would tour, like when we went to Marathwada (region in rural Maharashtra) we would give the local groups the main items and only Amar Sheikh and I sang a few songs. This was necessary because especially during the elections, there were so many programmes that the main troupe could not manage. If you look at it one way, the Party used the cultural troupes only for propaganda. But it did reach the mainstream on its own. For instance, our play Jwala was performed at Party meetings but we also entered the state competition and won a prize in the Dadar centre which had a middle-class audience. The people in the play were not necessarily Party affiliated. Shahir Sable and Raja Mayekar (Marathi actor) had their kalapathak in Delisle Road. Mama Varerkar had his troupe which was professional in orientation despite being Congress. 'When we did programmes during Ganeshotsav, etc, we received money. But we were not in a position to pay the artistes. The artistes were mostly amateurs. There was a commitment to a cause and to theatre, in all these troupes.

Cinema was not so popular then. The Konkani people liked theatre because of their dashavatar tradition, like the Ghat people liked lavni and tamasha. But although the audiences were different, the performers were from both the regions. The traditional troupes were either from Ghat or from Konkani, but in Bombay this division ceased. In the local groups Shahir Sable was from Ghat and Mayekar was Konkani. There would be nine-day-long festivals during Ganeshotsav and Navratri, street pujas in the summer and performances every day. After the bhajans, the play would begin at midnight. It was only afterwards that cinema became popular.

Amar Sheikh then settled down; he had a family to maintain, so he became a professional. He could not manage only on his funds as a fulltimer. What a voice he had! No one could sing like him.

I passed my MSc, got married, and then left the kalapathak.

people of all communities in the mills. Telugu, UP. During the riots, Bombay was the worst affected, so Muslims stayed away from the city. The Muslims in the mills were mainly from UP. The Ghat Muslims were farmers. There were very few Muslim millworkers. In any case more Konkani came to Bombay than Ghat. This is because the Ghat had more farming while in Konkani the agriculture was not good. Muslims became shopkeepers, they sold eggs, chickens, or out of desperation, they took to stealing. Among the Hindu workers, they educated their children, whereas the Muslims left their families in the village and the children too remained illiterate.

I was 13 or so. I was apprenticed to a bangle-seller near Damodar Hall. I earned 40 rupees a month, out of which 20 rupees went to the khanaval. I sent some money home. There were people of other communities also in the khanaval Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. The food was more than enough. The khanavalwaji was a Hindu from the Ghat. I ate little and she would say, 'You may as well eat free,' but I paid her all the same. The textile workers would all eat very well. No, there was no untouchability or casteism in the khanaval. They were all from the Ghat. I would go and see the plays in Damodar Hall. It was booked through the year by the workers' theatre groups. I knew the doorkeepers so I was smuggled in during the interval. They were historical plays. About great people in our history. This was all amateur theatre. There was professional theatre too, The tamasha theatre was mainly Hanuman Theatre and then Bangdiwala had theatres in all the areas where workers lived. He made a lot of money. Thousands of people depended on theatre for a living here.

I was working close to Kamgar Maidan. I used to see the morchas of the communists and would wonder about them. Once there was a big morcha to Kamgar Maidan and Dange, who was underground, was to appear. Everyone was curious. I went alone. I had not made many friends here; my mother had warned me against friends in Bombay—she felt they would influence me to become a criminal. There at the meeting I saw Amar Sheikh, Annabhau Sathe and Gavankar. They were singing without mics to this huge crowd. The communists were powerful then; they could do whatever they wanted. All this was new to me. It was an illegal meeting, no stage, no mics. If

the police came they would have to flee. I saw Amar Sheikh in his dhoti and shirt; the other two wore pants. There were some songs where the whole crowd would sing along. Dange was a small man, hardly noticeable. His name was announced, and he stood up and did namaskar and the firecrackers went off for almost half an hour. Then he started to speak. It was not a speech; it was as if a worker was speaking. Everyone was talking about his speech the next day in Girangaon. I had the songs in my head. I bought the songbook for two annas. Then I thought, I am here in Bombay and I must do something different. I would take off from the shop whenever there was a meeting. The shop owner realized—this chap is not ill, he is just taking off somewhere. He told me, 'If you are not well, stay at home and get medical help.' So I was thrown out.

I did not want to go back to the village but I did not know what to do in Bombay. Then my uncle said, 'If you cannot survive in Bombay you cannot survive anywhere. No one starves in this city' I felt that was true. I picked up the songbook I had and asked my friend Hassan (who sold eggs in the area where Amar Sheikh lived). 'That man? Everyone knows him; I know him,' he said, 'he buys an egg from me every day.' So I went as I was, in my khaki half-pants and bare feet. Hasan introduced me and said I could sing. Amar Sheikh called me in and I sat on the floor. He asked me sit on the chair. We talked and I told him I used to sing the prayer in school. My master would always ask me to be the one to sing the prayer.

The shahirs would meet every evening in the Party office—the three of them—Gavankar, Sathe and Amar Sheikh. We would all go there to meet them. IPTA people would be there too. A lot of new poetry and music came out of this movement. Narayan Surve was the first workers' poet, and they would sing his songs. Others followed later. Amar Sheikh lived here, next door. He was married to Jyotibai. Gavankar's wife had a job.

Annabhau Sathe had a hard life. He produced a lot of literature but he did not get due recognition. There are people who published what he wrote under their own names. He would walk barefoot everywhere. He drank a lot. If you tried to talk to him he would promise to stop but he never did. He spent whatever little he earned from his writing. He was married and had a son, who died only recently.

Amar Sheikh and Gavankar never drank. In 1958 Kesarbai came here and joined the troupe.

We got married in 1973. On the stage. In Akola. One day my adopted brother—he is in the PWP he said, 'Today you both will get married.' So right there, in front of all those people who had bought tickets for the show, we were married. According to Hindu rites. It was on May Day. We were working together in the troupe after Amar Sheikh's death. So we felt it would be good if we got married. We were already staying in the same house. We would be a support for each other.

My family had nothing to do with me ever since I joined the movement and also because I married a Hindu. Kesar's mother was supportive.

SHEIKH JAINU CHAND (63 years). Leads a cultural group called Amar Kalapathak.

KESARBAI (60 years). Singer, married to Sheikh Jainu Chand, working in Amar Kalapathak and among the few who still sing the old songs of the revolution. Despite her age, still performs with tremendous enthusiasm and spontaneity.

My father Gulabrao had a tamasha group. People told him, 'Make her something different. Don't make her a tamasha dancer.' We are from Satara district. That is where I grew up. Tamasha was part of my life. My mother Renukabi Kudchikar was an accomplished tamasha dancer. She would always be on tour. I would accompany her and my father and my teachers would say, 'This is a question of your livelihood' and they would allow me to finish my exams early so that I could go on tour. My mother was my guru.

My friends, who were all upper-caste people, did not approve of my joining tamasha. Then there came an advertisement about Amar Sheikh and his troupe. There was a communist in my village and he suggested that I be sent to Bombay to join them. 'You can do something meaningful,' he said and wrote to Amar Sheikh. Amar Sheikh sent someone to fetch me. I was very surprised. Then my parents asked me to go. My father accompanied me to Bombay. Amar Sheikh asked me to sing and he also asked my father to stay in Bombay with me. They gave me a room behind theirs to live in. So my father stayed back. I went with the troupe to Belgaum during the Samyukta Maharashtra struggle. I was scared when I saw all the crowds and the mood in the meetings. I said, 'I want to go back home.' My father told Amar Sheikh who talked to me and told me that I would make something of my life if I stayed. 'What future do you have in an ordinary tamasha group?' He asked me not to be afraid. He told me about politics. We would all gather in the room here and we would be told about political issues. We would learn the songs too. We sang at Kamgar Maidan and Shivaji Park. Senapati Bapat and Atre were present in the meetings.

Then the speeches would start. First there was another girl called Hema Prabhu and then she got married and I was the only girl. Then Annabhau's adopted daughter Shanta Dhodke started coming. We started a dance group also. Began using costumes and instruments.

Later Amar Sheikh had his own troupe and Gavankar and Annabhau had their own troupe. The communists did not create a new second rank.

SHEIKH JAINU CHAND (continued)

In 1969 Amar Sheikh died in an accident. We were both there, Kesar and I were going to Barsi where we had a programme. We had our food. It was raining. People there asked us to halt there for the night but Amar Sheikh refused. It was Rakshabandhan, 29 August 1969. Near Indapur, the station wagon skidded and turned over thrice.

Three of us were unhurt, Vasant Achrekar, Prerana and I. Amar Sheikh died on the spot. We took the others to Sassoon Hospital in Pune.

In Pune people heard what had happened and a huge crowd landed up. Kesar's father died the next day. I was sitting there with bloodstained clothes. They asked me and I told them. They brought Amar Sheikh's body to Pune. Pune almost closed down. The Mayor came and the body was brought to Bombay.

I was unconscious. My nose and lips were torn to pieces. I had stitches in three places and was in hospital for three months. I was again admitted in KEM (Hospital). I had three operations on my face to make it normal. I was 31 years old. My father was dead and so was Amar Sheikh. I had no one except my mother and sister who were living here with me. This room had been given to me to live in. After he died, Amar Sheikh's family tried to evict me from the house. Then I asked other Communist Party leaders to intercede. Gulabrao Ganacharya told Jyotibai, 'Are you mad? She has lost her father. Where will they go? You have a place to stay, why do you want to evict her?' That place too was given to them by the Party. He said, 'Kesar too has given her life to the Party.' Then they kept quiet.

KESARBAI (continued)

Three mills played by old rule and gave land but now want it back

By Nauzer Bharucha/TNN

Mumbai: Between 1991 and 2001, owners of just three defunct private mills—Matulya Mills at Lower Parel, Modern Mills at Mahalaxmi and Swadeshi Mill at Kurla—surrendered part of their land (about 15 acres) for open spaces and public housing to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and Maharashtra housing and area development authority (MHADA). This was done under the original Rule 58 of the development control regulations of 1991.

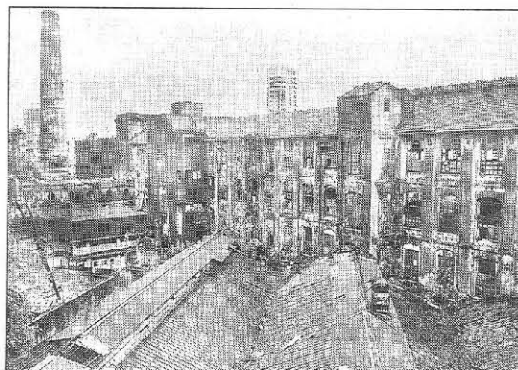
However, sources say that both Matulya and Modern Mills now want to reclaim the land they surrendered by submitting a fresh redevelopment proposal under the modified rule 58 of 2001, which allows mill owners to retain a larger share for themselves and leaves little for the BMC and MHADA.

Although earlier records show that Matulya Mills had given away 5,641 sq m to the BMC and another 4,616 sq m to MHADA under the original rule, the new proposal submitted by this mill under the amended rule shows the BMC's share from this land at just 474 sq mtrs and MHADA's share at barely 388 sq m. Similarly, in the case of Modern Mills, documents show it had surrendered 8,626 sq m to the BMC and 7,058 sq m to MHADA. However, in a fresh proposal submitted by this mill, the BMC's share has been reduced to a measly 1,168 sq m.

"These two private mills have realised the benefits of the government's modified (Rule 58) mill policy of 2001 and now want to retain a larger share for themselves," say sources.

Under the original Rule 58, none of the other private mill owners wanted to give up as much as two-thirds of their land to the two public agencies and retain just a small portion for themselves. It was only in 2001 when the then Vilasrao Deshmukh government controversially modified the mill policy by allowing mill owners to retain most of their land, that these owners rushed to seek permissions to set up malls and towers in the past two years.

The original Rule 58, however, had its loopholes. The owner was to surrender two-thirds of the land only if he demolished the existing mill buildings and structures. If he did not wish to raze those, then it was not mandatory for him to share the land.



THE STORY SO FAR

1991

DC Regulation 58 introduced, tripartite division of mill land development allowed

1991-2000

Only a handful of private mill owners encashed on the new provision

2001

DC Rule 58 amended to exclude "existing structures" from tripartite division

Feb. 2005

PIL challenging the legality of the 2001 amendment to DC Regulation 58 filed in the Bombay high court.

Mar. 2005

First NTC mill, Jupiter Mills, goes up for sale

The original rules strangely allowed the mill owners to use these ancient mill buildings for commercial purposes. Hence, the Phoenix and Kamala Mills at Lower Parel took full advantage of this by retaining the mill buildings and using them to set up shopping centres and food courts inside the grand structures. This way they didn't have to surrender any land to the BMC or to MHADA.

It was because no land was com-

April 1, 2005

Bombay high court stays mill land development

April 20, 2005

NTC and 5 private mills file an appeal in the supreme court

May 11, 2005

Supreme court grants permission to 7 NTC and 5 private mills to go ahead with redevelopment plans

June 20, 2005

Sale of NTC's Mumbai Textile Mills and Apollo Mill

July 21, 2005

Sale of NTC's Kohinoor Mill no 3 and Elphinstone Mill

Aug. 16, 2005

Bombay HC to begin hearing on PIL and pass final verdict

ing to the city that the government decided to modify Rule 58 in 2001. But the modification was such that only the open spaces of the mills were to be shared three ways between the BMC, MHADA and the mill owner. The controversy started when it was found that open spaces on most of the mill lands was negligible—most of them were covered up with mill structures. It is this 2001 modification that has now been challenged in the high court.

PIL to come up for final hearing on August 16

Mumbai: The legal fight launched by the city's green brigade to salvage the vast tracts of mill lands will come up for its final hearing on August 16. The hearing is then likely to go on for several weeks before the final verdict can emerge on whether the mill owners get to exploit most of the land or whether a more equitable distribution of the 600-odd acres of mill land is possible.

The Supreme Court had directed an expeditious disposal of the public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the Bombay Environmental Action Group that challenged a 2001 modification to Rule 58 of the development control regulations. The modified rule permitted mill owners to retain most of the land of the now defunct mills.

The mill owners including Bombay Dyeing, National Textile Corporation (NTC)—the largest owners of mill land—the BMC and the state all initially opposed the PIL on the grounds that the petitioners were late in approaching the court and that they should have done it when the government modified the rule more than three years ago. When the high court bench headed by Justice P. I. Rebello said the delay would not prevent the court from hearing the issue and stayed all further development plans and permissions, the mill owners rushed to the apex court. Mill land sales had come to a halt and NTC which had five mills on the block was peeved. The apex court granted NTC some relief and allowed transactions to complete, and even allowed construction on pre-approved plans but with a rider that all development would be at the mill owners' risk.

The high court which had kept the matter for final hearing on August 2 deferred the hearing after the state sought an adjournment saying many of its officials were on relief duty after the July 26 deluge and the devastation in the state. While many mill owners have intervened in the matter and filed their affidavits defending the development plans and rules, the BMC and the state have yet to file their say, if any. TNN

The communist squad became by far the most popular of the political cultural groups because of their close contact and engagement with the real issues of the people. The IPTA had stalwarts like their bards, famous Marathi poet Narayan Surve, Mulk Raj Anand, Hindi film personalities like Kaifi Azmi, Balraj Sahni, K. A. Abbas, Ali Sardar Jafri, Shahir Ludhianvi, Dina Pathak and Prem Dhawan among others. Popular Hindi cinema of the time reflected the influence of the workers and their lives. However, a sustained progressive cultural movement failed to materialize, the responsibility for which can be laid squarely at the door of the short-sighted Party leadership, whose main priorities lay elsewhere.

Heart Of The City

Over the hundred years of its existence Girangaon developed its own unique history, institutions and culture. The social, political and cultural life of the island city was situated in the central part—the middle-class area comprising Girangaon and the working-class belt. It was here that the songs were sung, the plays enacted, newspapers read, issues debated, political battles fought. The textile workers built the unity and consciousness that led to the creation of one of the most militant and conscious trade unions in the history of the working class in India. They also fought the most determined battles during the struggle for Independence. The institutions built over a century have lasted until today, despite the radical winds of change that have swept over the area. It was not just the intelligentsia of the country who created the imagination of modern India. Workers had an important though little documented part to play.

The social and cultural life of the community in Girangaon was a mixture of the Marathi culture and that of the cosmopolitan progressive instincts of the working class the world over. In turn, this 'compound culture' extended to the rest of the city. The cultural and community life of the city was in many ways an extension of the culture and institutions of Girangaon. The reason for the past tense, although these institutions and cultures are still evident in the area, and the city's cultural milieu continues to bear traces of the old, is because the 'globalized' winds of change that are sweeping over this 600-acre locality are strong and decisive. Although there are efforts to keep some of the art forms alive, as some of the artistes have said, audiences have changed, audience preferences have changed and a culture based on such strong kinship bonds has become irrelevant in a more alienated citizenry. In a city like Bombay and even in the country as a whole, both of which are going through confusing and cataclysmic changes, the need to weigh these changes is becoming increasingly evident. What is Indian? What constitutes the imagination of modern India? How much of what we have inherited do we keep, and how much is obsolete? What helps us move forward and what will only serve to pull us back? These are the questions that are thrown up by the history of Girangaon.

Notes

- 1 S. S. Mirajkar, *Andharakadun Prakashakade* (Marathi) (Bombay: Lokvangmay Griha, 1980).
- 2 Morris, *Industrial Labour Force*.
- 3 One of the first communities to settle in Bombay, encouraged by the British to migrate from Surat. Zoroastrians by faith and originally traders by profession, became one of the most significant and powerful communities in the city.
- 4 Morris, *Industrial Labour Force*.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., p. 111.
- 7 Jyotiba Phule (1827/1890): radical reformer, thinker and literary figure, took up issues of caste and gender. Advocated widow remarriage, female literacy. Was against the practice of untouchability as enforced by the brahmans. Regarding caste as both social and economic oppression, believed social change was possible only through concerted awareness programmes, struggle and the organization of the oppressed. Has left a large body of writing in colloquial Marathi as opposed to the classical language used by other reformers. Inspiration for later dalit and women's literature and continues to be so even today.
- 8 Approx. 1. 5 US dollars.
- 9 Shripad Amrit Dange (1889/1991): well-known communist, undisputed leader of the textile workers in Bombay for over 50 years.
- 10 Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India* (K. P. Bagchi and Co., 1977).
- 11 Chandavarkar, *Industrial Capitalism*.
- 12 Verse written by Sant Dnyaneshwar, popular Bhakti poet.
- 13 Songs and dances by individuals or groups, with lyrics borrowed from writings of the famous Bhakti poet, Eknath. The philosophical content is explained through metaphors from daily life. There is a lot of humour in the lyrics as well as in the style of expression.
- 14 *Peti*, literally box, refers to a harmonium.
- 15 Folk form explained later in the chapter.
- 16 The final path, that of devotion to god (or bhakti), has been the strongest influence on Indian religious life for the past thousand years. By drawing personal worth not from one's conventional social status but solely from the depth of one's devotion, it provided a spiritual path that was open to everyone thereby subverting the strongly entrenched caste hierarchy where only the brahman could show the path to god.
- 17 Dnyandev or Dnyaneshwar (1275–1296): born a brahman but his family was ostracized by members of his own caste. Wrote a monumental verse commentary on the *Bhagavadgita* called *Dnyaneshwari*.
- Tukaram (1608–1690): belonging to the trader caste, most important Bhakti poet after Dnyandev. His beautiful *verses Tukaram abhangs* are sung in all parts of Maharashtra.
- Namdeo (1270–1350): legend has it, was a thief and murderer until he reformed. Written both in Hindi as well as Marathi, some of his verses are included in the *Guru Gran'ti Sahib*, the holy book of the Sikhs.
- Eknath (1533–1599): scholar and poet, wrote several folk songs or bharoods which are sung even now.
- 18 *Vari*, literally pilgrimage, in this case to Pandharpur on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga in the Ghat. The deity Vitthal (an incarnation of Krishna) is a popular god, fondly called Vitthoba. The varkaris are non-casteist. Once a year, thousands of varkaris including a large number of women, journey on foot from different parts of Maharashtra to congregate at the Pandharpur temple on the eleventh day of Ashaadh, at the beginning of the monsoons, dancing to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums.
- At present, varkaris, including a large number of miliworkers, gather at the Vitthal temple at Wadala near Dadar. So important is this event that even the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and his wife perform a puja at that temple every year on that very day.
- 19 Morris, *Industrial Labour Force*.
- 20 V. B. Kulkarni, *History of the Indian Cotton Textile Industry* (Bombay: Mill Owners' Association, 1979).
- 21 Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Hindu-chauvinist cultural

- organization which also has a political agenda.
- 22 Byssinosis: common ailment affecting textile miliworkers due to breathing in of cotton fibres.
- 23 The main cultural form of the Konkani. Narrative, with epic characters using impromptu dialogues to make topical comments. Humour and satire are an integral part of the form. Performed during the rural fairs, it uses the theatrical device of alienation for the purposes of humour, innovation and topicality. The cast consists of male agricultural workers using colourful costumes and innovative sound effects.
- Another folk form associated with the Konkani which became popular with the people of Girangaon is the *Jhakdi*, a fast-paced collective dance performed by young men.
- 24 The Ghats were the birthplace of the famous tamasha. Like most folk forms it is performed by lower castes. A composite form, including bharood, gondhal, bhajan, povada, erotic song and dance, it is remarkable for its lack of any kind of religious content or significance. The traditional tamasha starts with an invocation either to Ganesha or the local village deity, followed by the *gawlan* and *batawnia* humorous interaction between the mischievous epic god, Lord Krishna and the gopis or milkmaids. The main items are the robust lavni dance (erotic but in reality can also have a spiritual or devotional air), the povada and the vag.
- 25 Tilak and Lokhande, brahman and non-brahman, freedom fighter and reformer, kept up a running feud through the pages of their respective newspapers, *Kesari* and *Dinabandhu*. Both were loved and respected by the millworkers.
- 26 Manohar Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande* (Marathi) (Bombay: Mahatma Phule Samata Pratishthan and Akshar Publications, 1995).
- 27 Tilak, *Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav* (Bombay: Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav Sanstha, 1992).
- 28 A. Samarth, *Shivaji and the Indian National Movement* quoted by Ashok Chausalkar in *Navratra* (Bombay: Lokvangmay Griha, 2000).
- 29 In Maharashtra there were three different viewpoints about Shivaji: the Hindutva perspective which saw him as a Hindu saviour, the Gandhian and the Marxist perspective which projected him as the king who abolished bonded labour and fought feudalism through guerrilla warfare. There was also the point of view of Jyotiba Phule who emphasized the non-brahmanical role of Shivaji and used him as a symbol for the fight against casteism and gender.
- 30 It is worth noting that this revival was also very masculine in orientation. Shivaji was the valiant male figure and all the activities associated with the festival had valour as the main theme.
- 31 See Chapter Four.
- 32 Originally Muslims from the tribal area of the northwest frontier of British India, now in Afghanistan. Many of them settled in India
- 33 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*.
- 34 Usha Dange, *Ushakaal* (Marathi) (Bombay: Granthali Publications, 1998).
- 35 Actually byssinosis, about which most textile workers had no knowledge.
- 36 Morris, *Industrial Labour Force*.
- 37 Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande*, p. 63.
- 38 The workers addressed clerical and managerial staff as 'Master'. The word is mostly associated with being literate (from 'schoolmaster').
- 39 Kadam, *Narayan Meghaji Lokhande*.
- 40 The Sholapur Commune (5–11 May 1930) where people controlled Sholapur city for a period of time. The struggle was brief but violent, and the millworkers played a very important role. There were incidents of rioting, stoning, barricading of railway tracks and attacking of police stations. Photographs of the Queen were taken down. Courts were burnt and people's courts set up in their place. British rule did not exist in the city for four days until martial law was declared on 12 May (*Golden Jubilee Pamphlet*, Bombay; Maharashtra State Council, Communist Party of India, 1975).
- 41 An invocation to the mother goddess and often, a folk interpretation of stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

- 42 Sane Guruji (1898–1950): teacher, known also as an activist and a literary figure. He wrote mainly for children, participated in several strike struggles with Dange, particularly in Khandesh (northern Maharashtra). Drifted away from the communists during the CPJ's boycott of the Quit India Movement after which he grew closer to the socialists.
- 43 A ballad with tales of valour as its main theme. The singers of povadas were called shahirs or bards. The original shahirs were in Shivaji's guerrilla army, soldiers as well as singers of inspirational battle songs. Since the shahirs were in touch with the people as well as Shivaji and his soldiers, the image that the povadas portray of the king are more humane and realistic than what we find in novels and plays.
- 44 Babu Genu (1908–1930): millworker, participated in the Sewn satyagraha during the Swadeshi Movement. Before being sentenced to imprisonment, was asked by the angry judge as to why he didn't hurl himself before the wheels of the trucks if he wanted to revolt against the import of foreign cloth. After his release, joined the struggle again and later, as groups of satyagrahis demonstrated before truckloads of British cloth, he threw himself under the wheels of the last truck and was run over. Has become a symbol of anti-colonial struggle for the miliworkers and for Maharashtra too, featuring as a martyr of the freedom struggle in Marathi school textbooks.
- 45 Followers of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891–1956), most important leader of the dalit people.
- 46 S. V. Ketkar in D. K. Bedekar, *Samyukta Maharashtra* (Marathi) (Pune: Chitrashala Prakashan, 1947).
- 47 Vishwanath Shinde, *Paramparik Marathi Thmasha ani Adhunik Vaganazya* (Marathi) (Pune: Pranima Prakashan, 1994).
- 48 Krishna Desai (1919–1970): extremely popular and militant communist leader in Girangaon, major bulwark of the Party in the 1960s, later murdered by Shiv Sena boys.
- 49 Bhaskar V. Varerkar (1883–1964): well-known writer and playwright, active in Congress politics, member of the Rajya Sabha in the 1950s.

Can Mumbai's mills do a Manchester?

While Girangaon's 600 acres get a posh, but skewed face, urban experts explain why—and how—Deshmukh's government must balance private claims with solutions to some of city's pressing needs

CHITRANGADA CHOUHDURY & RAJSHRI MEHTA
MARCH 1

IMAGINE an eastern waterfront to match that at Marine Drive. Or green spaces on the scale of the Byculla zoo.

If the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Bombay High Court, and a Vilasrao Deshmukh-appointed committee, find how part of the sprawling 600-acre millscape of Central Mumbai may accrue to the city, Mumbai will have a mega-opportunity for transport amenities, public spaces, fresh job generation and public housing (see box), a slew of experts told *Newsline*.

For example, the PIL estimates that the three-way division of land ordained in the now-sticky Development Control Regulation (DCR) 58 of 1991 would have provided for at least 25,000 housing units, reduced to about 4,000 by 2001's amendment.

Conservation architect Sandhya Sawant who's surveyed several mills said many structures, like the sprawling loom sheds, need only minor repairs.

"The government should recognize their great recycling potential as housing units, say by merely adding a mezzanine floor as has been done in cities like Manchester," said Sawant.

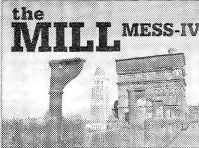
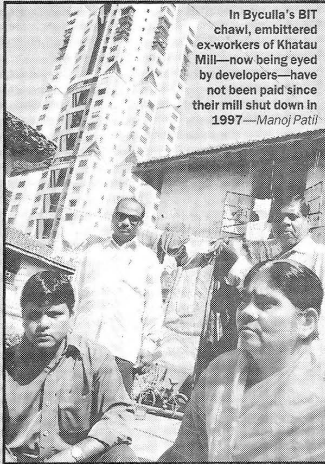
In the cramped one-room office of the Gitali Kaamgar Sangathan, ex-Modern Mill worker Datta Iswalkar worries about unemployment. On his notice board is a solitary government advertisement for railway constables.

"Millworkers' children are uneasy with English," said Iswalkar. "The call-centres and advertising agencies coming up here offer them few work opportunities."

Iswalkar argued that jobless youth are swelling the ranks of supporters of gangster-turned-Chinchpokli MLA, Arun Gawli.

Sharit Bhowmik, Mumbai University sociology professor, said there's been no social analysis of Girangaon's ongoing situation. Even late at-

In Byculla's BIT chawl, embittered ex-workers of Khatau Mill—now being eyed by developers—have not been paid since their mill shut down in 1997.—Manoj Patil



tion has been paid to re-equipping the human detritus of 50-odd dead textile mills through alternative training programmes.

mill's 1997 closure none of its 5,700 workers has received their dues—will not tell *Newsline* what currently keeps his home fires burning, but states

"When we conducted a survey in 2001, most workers were too ashamed to own up to their jobless status," said Bhowmik.

Sharad Jagtap (35) ex-Khatau mill worker—since the

committee re-examining DCR 58, which regulates Girangaon's redevelopment.

While several of the private mills are undergoing redevelopment and the first NTC mill was placed on the market last week, planners said land must accrue to the city.

The remaining mill owners could be compensated with increased floor space index, while being told that fresh public amenities and improved infrastructure will increase the value of their properties. "It's a hitherto unseen opportunity the CM cannot pass up," said architect and historian Neera Adarkar. "Because any redevelopment impacts not just the 600 acres of mill land but the entire city."

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TOMORROW: THE GREAT MILL DEBATE
The *Newsline* series concludes with two diverging views. The Secretary-General of the Mill

instrument in aid of the **October 2004 all plans w**
Constitution. Recent decisions of the Supreme Court emphasize that
Courts must carefully scrutinize whether their jurisdiction has been
invoked in furtherance of genuine causes and not for an oblique

urban planner must take a considered decision. The Government of Maharashtra shall take recourse to the provisions of Development Control Regulation 33(7) and determine whether appropriate modifications of the Regulation are necessary. In order to facilitate the exercise and in order to enable the State Government to have the

(7); vii) There is admittedly a serious deficiency of infrastructure. Consideration should be devoted by the urban planners and by the Government to the likely impact of an increase in the density of

order as to costs.
CHIEF JUSTICE
DR. D.Y. CHANDRACHUD, J.