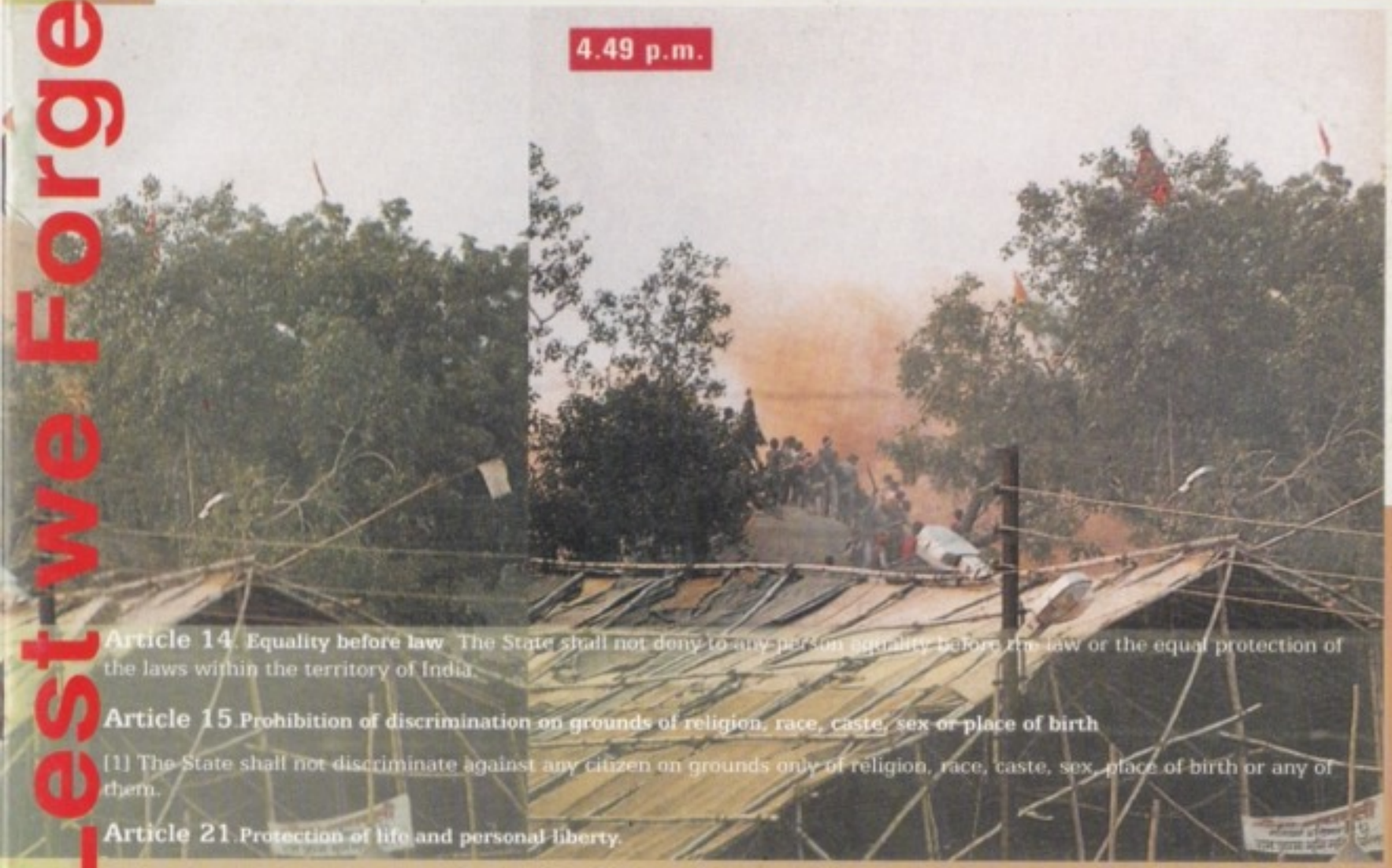
Lest we Forget



Article 14 Equality before law The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 15 Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

[1] The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

Article 21 Protection of life and personal liberty.

No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law

Constitution of India


Parsee, Chinese
Homes in Mumbai

India Sabka.

We, the citizens of India; have been watching in silence for a long time. We have been watching the gradual indignity to which our land has been subjected: the Rathayatra (1990 and 1992) to the Babri Masjid demolition (1992) to Bombay riots (1992 and 1993) to Bombay bomb blasts to the attack on Christian churches to the revival of Ram Janmabhoomi rhetoric in 2001-02 to the Godhra train burning to the four month long carnage against Gujarati Muslims to the attack on Akshardham temple. We realise that in this regime of violence in the name of religion, no value, no work, no tradition, nobody is safe. We have realised that the society that cannot provide security to its own minority community is bound to fail as the moral and physical custodian of all its citizens. As citizens, we find it imperative to protest, and to defend our multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious civilization. This is our country, our abode, and our neighbourhood, India Sabka. Our country is celebrated because it is not bigoted and is instead, a cultivated, sophisticated and a plural civilization. Let us protect this national pride. We shall not allow anybody to snatch away our heritage of multiplicity and plurality. We do not want to be orphans in this culture of neo-Hindutva. Let us remember the national shame of the Babri Masjid demolition on 6th December 1992 and pledge not to let such an act happen again. The voices of those who destroy are generally louder than those who protect and those who build and create. But the time has come for the silent majority to regain its voice and actively protect the wonderful Hindustani heritage against the destructive powers. Our weapon against violence will be our creativity, our protest will be our art and our slogans will be our music.

Convenors: Madhusree Dutta, Neera Adarkar, Tushar Joag Publication Design: Archana Hande, Shilpa Gupta Videos and Art Curator: Sharmila Samant Festival Consultant: Flavia Agnes Programme Coordinator: Veena Gowda Competition Coordinator: Vibha Nijhawan Administration: Daisy Rodrigues Outreach: Mitra Mukherjee Parikh, Rahee Dahake Brochure Editing: Meher Pestonji Photo feature: Avijit Mukul Kishore, Tushar Joag

content

"Theories of faith are the inventions of the privileged ones. They justify usurped power, riches and superiority by the help of these theories"

Why I am an Atheist
by Bhagat Singh

Sharmila Samant

Artist/Filmmakers: Ajay Raina, Anand Patwardhan, Archana Hande, Farjad Nabi, Madhusree Dutta, Nalini Malani, Navjot Altaf, Rohena Gera, Rumanna Hussain, Reza Afshar, Setu Films, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Shared Footage Group, Sharmila Samant, Shilpa Gupta Simantini Dhuru, Tushar Joag, Valay Shende, Navin Joshi, and others Video Editor: Jabeen Merchant

The Twice-Forgotten: Meeting Gujarati Dalits in a Karachi Slum

Nandita Bhavnani

In mid-2001, I sent a parcel of gifts for friends in Pakistan, with an acquaintance who was flying to Karachi. The parcel contained mostly ordinary things -books, letters, etc but the heaviest and the most unusual item was a brass idol of Durga, sword raised and seated on a tiger, ready for battle.

The idol of Durga was for Kavita, a young Gujarati Dalit woman, whom I had met in Karachi a few months earlier. Kavita was an energetic 35, with flashing eyes, a broad smile and a colourful sari. She was so happy that I had wanted to meet her, that I had come to her home, to drink tea there, that she held my hand firmly in hers for a long time. The first thing she had asked me was, "Have you brought me a murti from India?"

Kavita and her family, Kathiawadi Dalits, have lived here for longer than any of them can remember. As part of Karachi's exponential growth in the late 19th century and the early 20th century as India's westernmost port closest to the Suez Canal, Dalits from Kathiawad in Gujarat had played a significant role in keeping the city clean: in sweeping city streets, in clearing night soil, in cleaning public buildings.

Sweepers and dhobis were forbidden by ordinance to leave Pakistan after Partition: who else would clean the country? In fact, as early as July 1947, government officials had visited Rajkot to recruit sweepers for Pakistan. Today, the Kathiawadi Dalits continue to be an often overlooked but nevertheless integral part of Karachi. During my visit I frequently saw women in the typical Gujarati-style sari, often holding a broom, in a hotel bathroom, in an office building, in a school compound.

After Partition, it became difficult for these Dalits to visit their native villages in Kathiawad, to pray at the family temple or to arrange marriages. "But why should we miss the village?!" Kavita's mother-in-law exclaims. "Anyone whom I know would be dead by now, and the children don't know anyone there at all."

Over the last half-century, marriages have been arranged within the community in Karachi itself, and apart from their temple in the colony, they have also begun to believe in Sindhi pirs, in the local Sufi tradition. Kavita tells me that now her generation feels that, "Everything is here: our birthplace, our family, our home, our city."

Although they have been able to make occasional visits in the last few decades, the few who have tried to resettle in India find it difficult, not only because of the financial costs but also especially because they are often rejected as 'polluted' by the Hindu haven that they perceive India to be.

Kavita's is a small home, spic and span, clean floor and gleaming utensils, this one-room tenement in a narrow dirty lane of Narayan Seth Colony that is home to about 80 Kathiawadi Dalit families. The Gujarati language with its Kathiawadi lilt, the Gujarati-style saris, and the temple with all possible Hindu deities: I almost forget that I am in Pakistan it could easily be Surat or Rajkot.

"Our Muslim neighbours are better than you Hindus," says Ramesh, Kavita's neighbour, with more than a little aggression. "At least they don't treat us like untouchables. And they are there for us in difficult times." Ramesh, dressed in a white salwar-kurta, looks like any other Pakistani; he works as a sweeper in a government office, a job he inherited from his father

Unfortunately this Muslim-Dalit amity hasn't always been the case. Shortly after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, the colony was stormed by a furious mob of "outsiders" which, although it didn't kill anyone, looted the place bare. The sweepers lost their TVs, fridges, everything they had worked so hard for. But then the Kathiawadi Dalits decided to go on strike. After fifteen whole days Karachi began to stink and the civic authorities were brought down to their knees. A deal was struck: compensation was given to the Dalits and the city went back to normal. More recently, when the Quran Sharif was burnt in India in March 2001, the Karachi authorities posted a police van outside the colony gate to prevent a sequel from taking place.

"Would you ever want to leave?" I ask Kavita, on our way back from the temple. She shakes her head vigorously. "We are here because of the devi, she looks after us," she says. "This is our vatan now."

Varkari: People's Religion

Neera Adarkar and Meher Pestonji

For the health conscious morning walkers at Marine Drive, Tulsabai, clad in a nine yard Maharashtrian saree, walking briskly in heavy sneakers is a familiar figure. Though a regular, her routine is flexible as she has to complete household chores including looking after her newborn grandson. But twice a year she takes a break of three weeks. That's the time for her Pandharpur vari.

Baban who sells bananas opposite Mantralaya and Yashwant who distributes lunch dabbas, also take time off for this bi-annual pilgrimage. Tulsabai, Baban and Yashwant are all Varkaris, people who regularly participate in Varis, pilgrimages on foot from Alandi to Pandharpur to meet the deity Vithoba.

Legend has it that Lord Vishnu/Vithal, fondly called Vithoba, came to meet the devotee Pundalik who was busy serving his parents. He threw a brick for Vithal to stand on and wait. That dark idol of Vithal on the brick with both hands across the waist still stands at the Pandharpur temple.

We climb three stories up narrow stone steps to a landing heaped with footwear in Tuldabai's house at Dhobi Talao. As we enter a rectangular room where mats have been specially laid out, everyone comes to touch our feet. A young man arriving after us greets and is greeted the same way - even by elders twice his age. Zunbar Shinde, Tulsabai's brother-in-law, explains "Varkaris believe every person has a tiny part of the universal Paramatma within him or her. By touching their feet we pay respect to each person's connection with the Universal God."

"We do not worship Vedic gods but bhakti poet-saints. Most of them were from the lower castes and rebelled against the rigidity of Brahmanical tradition in defiance of Brahmin monopoly over the scriptures and their mediation in human beings access to god",

Said Yeshwant Balwat Kshirsagar, an elder of the family "Gyaneshwar, founder of the bhakti movement in Maharashtra, fondly called Gyanoba mauli, belonged to a Brahmin family which had been ostracized for breaking norms," continues Kshirsagar. "The Gyaneshwari is his translation of the Bhagwadgita into Prakrit-Marathi. Eknath, Gora Kumbhar (potter), Sena Nhavi (barber), Narhari Sonar (goldsmith), Chokha Mela (mahar - untouchable) are some of the other bhakti poets."

We were repeatedly told the two-week vari had to be experienced, not described. "We walk for fifteen to eighteen days with each day starting as early as 3 or 4 am," Tulsabai elaborates. "Everything is meticulously planned. Villages along the road provide drinking water, food, and facilities for overnight stay." Traditionally, palkhis containing the padukas or silver sandals of the famous bhakti poets Tukaram and Gyaneshwar were carried from Alandi to Pandharpur by the Varkaris chanting Gyanba Tukaram to symbolize the presence of the bhakti poets among them.

"The whole procession clashes cymbals chanting "Gyanba Tukaram" as we march along the river Chandrabhaga," continues Tulsabai. "As the rhythm reaches a crescendo people embrace total strangers in ecstasy as they celebrate the joy of an accomplished pilgrimage. All the palkhis enter Pandharpur on Ashadh Ekadashi (the day farmers plough their fields) and Kartik Ekadashi (when the farmers reap the harvest)."

Not surprisingly, Brahmins have been trying to appropriate this rebellious tradition of the Varkaris. But Kshirsagar said emphatically, "Today's Hindutva is a negation of human religions where the broad vision of Vivekananda is perverted for narrow political ends. It is only a matter of time before people recognise how they are being manipulated in their political charade."

Nilima Sheikh

Living in the Fringes, to Worship

Barnita Bagchi

Sudhanya and Kaushalya sit in one corner of the station. Sudhanya sings with the two-stringed 'dotara' in hand.

'amar apon khobor aponar hoi na, ekbar
aponare chinle pore ochenare jae chena'.

'my self doesn't have any news or knowledge of itself it's only once you know your self that you can get to know the unknown.'

There's quite a crowd. The song by Lalan Shah, the most famous of Bengal's syncretic songmakers, ends. Kaushalya takes Sudhanya by the hand and helps him get up. He is blind. He is also a 'baul', and a singer. She has come from a lower middle-class family in the suburban town of Ranaghat, and has defied social strictures to marry this singer. 'Aul, baul, fakir, pir', performers and singers, practitioners of mysticism and syncretism, householders and mendicants, all these form a rich spectrum in what we might call the bhakti movement in Bengal, current even today.

The songs of bauls are some of the most powerful mystical works of art found in the world. The term 'manush' or 'human being' recurs in Bengali syncretic songs, as a condition to be attained by men and women by being humane, loving, and actively altruistic towards other humans. Fairs and village festivals, masjids and mandirs, all in turn host the song performances, which are the most visible expression of Bengal's syncretism. These performances are only the tip of some very complex, rich, earthy, philosophical ways of life.

Bengali syncretic songs express a spiritual and esoteric worldview, which is written in 'sandhyabhasa', or 'twilight language'. But this metaphorical twilight language is deeply rooted in earthiness. The marvels of the human body, a vision of the bodily union between men and women as the acme of synthesis, unravelling the metaphors of the body to get a sense of the mysterious workings of the universe such themes are central to 'baul' lore. As is syncretism, a commingling of sufi and vaishnav and their own distinctive beliefs.

Not all bauls sing, though. And while some bauls wear a sufi-like habit of saffron cloth, many consider this merely an upstart, trendy fashion. Many bauls live ordinary lives of householders, like many other members of important Bengali syncretic sects, such as the Shahebdhanis, the Balaharis, and the Kartabhajas. Pirs and fakirs, like sants and gurus, are a part of this syncretic world. Created mainly by lower-caste Hindus and poor Muslims, these sects have members whose identities aren't readily discernible as different from the mainstream religions. Sometimes also practicing more traditional religious customs, they identify others who know their lore by terms in their twilight language. Non-singing bauls, like other members of religious sects, usually have a powerful hidden life of spiritual practices, which in a major way involve their learning to make the body an instrument of spiritual attainment and ecstasy.

Initiates into syncretic life and lore say report that the glamorization of the 'baul' has inevitably often led to the glitziest and cheapest and shallowest forms of baul performance and practices being peddled to an urban and Western audience. But faced with terrible poverty, an already hard to maintain regimen of inner control and discipline, and the lure of mike and francs, it is no wonder that many succumb to the lure of bright lights, often facing brief careers in limelight that end in tragedy.

Meanwhile, singers like Sudhanya sing Miyajan Fakir's song, at once about the transience of pleasure and about the processes of fertility and the conception of new life:

'Once every month, a flower blooms in the ghats of pleasure;
If it is not the auspicious moment, the flower fades and goes.
It comes and it floats away, and no one can find it then...'

N.N. Rimzon

The Sidis, from Badshah to Beggar

Gulammohammed Sheikh

The Sidis

The Sidis or Habshis of African origin have been in India for nearly seven hundred years. The tiny Sidi population, less than a few thousand, is settled in small hamlets in Junagarh district of Saurashtra and Rajpipla region of South Gujarat. Other groups are scattered in parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Goa.

Sidis were brought to India as slaves

There are many examples of slaves who acquired military ranks, rose to positions of power and played significant roles in Sultanate and Mughal politics. The Slave Dynasty, one of the earliest dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate, was so called because its founder Qutbuddin Aibak (after whom the Qutub Minar is named) was originally a slave. Qutbuddin was not a Sidi however. The erstwhile Nawabs of the port town of Janjira south of Mumbai known for its maritime legacy - were Sidis of Abyssinian descent. One of the finest mosques of Ahmedabad with its world-renowned, intricately carved jalis was built by a Sidi, and is known as Sidi Sa'id's mosque. Representations of Sidi nobles and military officers appear in Mughal portraiture. Nineteenth century paintings from Kachchha portray high-ranking Sidis.

Sidi Badshah'

Sidis now live in a few isolated villages in Western India. The condition of Sidis today is a far cry from that of their privileged predecessors. From available accounts it appears that they eke out a living either as labour or by performing a dance called 'Dhamaal'. Few Sidis are educated and most live in extreme poverty. Recent accounts from rural and mofussil Gujarat describe Sidi beggars who would perform a frenzied dance wearing a headdress, and carrying a staff and a drum adorned with peacock feathers and cowrie shells. These beggars would ironically be called 'Sidi Badshah'.

In the agate mines of Ratanpur...

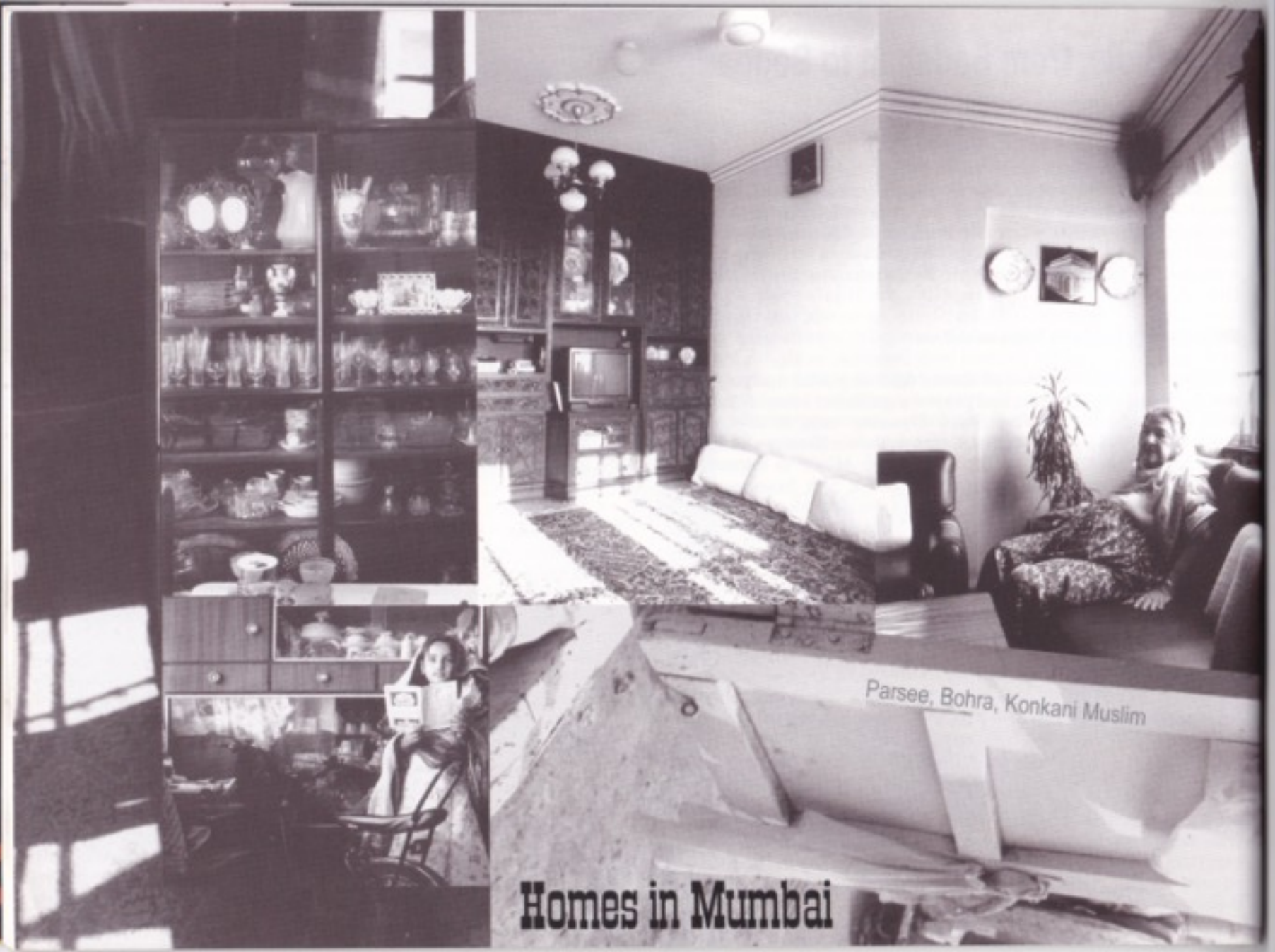
...near Rajpipla lives a group of Sidis who may have been brought to work from East Africa as (slave) labour. They live alongside the shrine of Bava Gor, a Sufi saint of North African descent. The Sidis hold a mother goddess Mai Mishra (sister of Bava Gor) and Bava Habash in high esteem. The Sidi holy figures are venerated by local communities who visit the shrine of Bava Gor near Ratanpur for cures and blessings. Urs and other festivals are observed at this shrine. Sidis can be said to be included broadly within the Sunni fold of Islam The Sidis of Gujarat speak Gujarati with a smattering of Hindi and a few words of Somali. Their life and beliefs seem to combine some ritual and religious practices of Muslims and Hindus with shamanistic African traditions.

An instinct for dance and music

Sidis appear to have a natural instinct for performance, especially dance and music. Several types of drums are used in accompaniment to dance. Dance movements of spinning around and taking rapid small steps forward or backward in 'Dhamaal' indicates a pan-African origin. Dancers tap the ground to the beat of drums, spin and whirl, and improvise accelerated movements, often reaching an ecstatic trance-like climax. The movements of the dance indicate some absorption of local Indian traditions, but its spontaneous virtuoso, and the dancers' body language and footwork evoke the Sidis' unique African heritage.

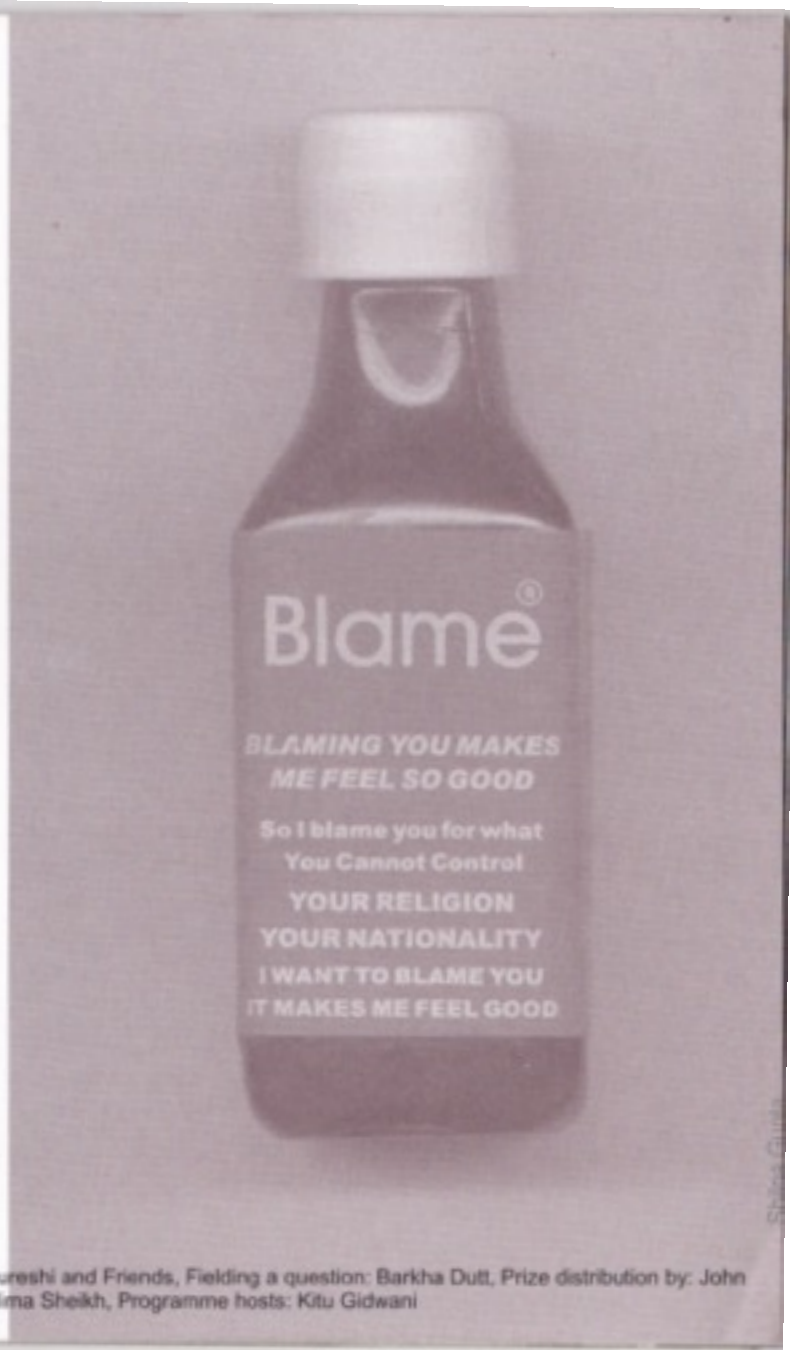
Based on research and accounts of Helene Basu and Amy Catlin

Nalini Malani


Parsee, Bohra, Konkani Muslim
Homes in Mumbai

An eye for an eye
only ends up
making the whole world blind.

Mahatma Gandhi



Romeo & Juliet: Q Theatre Productions, Directed by Alyque Padamsee, India Sabka Concert: Taufiq Qureshi and Friends, Fielding a question: Barkha Dutt, Prize distribution by: John Abraham, Taufiq Qureshi, Festival Guests: Gulammohammed Sheikh, Farhan Akhtar, Javed Akhtar, Nilima Sheikh, Programme hosts: Kitu Gidwani

When us Become Them : The Marginal of the Indian Film Industry

Gayatri Chatterjee (Film studies scholar)

The dawn of filmmaking in India sees a variety of people pitching in: Jewish people and Parsees, Armenians and Eurasians. Esther Victoria Abraham belonging to a prosperous Jewish family in Calcutta became an actress under the name Pramila (now lives in Bombay). A brilliant student and later the headmistress of Talmud Torah Jewish Boy's School, Pramila joined the Imperial studios her sister Sophie (Romilla) and cousin Rose were already in the industry. Pramila later produced films with her husband, Kumar, who migrated to Pakistan after independence, but she stayed on. Similar is the example of Farhat Ezekiel, famous today as Nadira. Did these actresses truly receive the prominence they deserved as compared to their Hindu counterparts is what we need to study.

Born in Pune, telephone operator Ruby Myers (again Jewish) had chosen her own screen name Sulochana. Hers is another tremendous success story. Similarly, Marcia Solomon had become Vimala (Ezra Mir brought her to cinema). Why were they compelled to change their names to Hindu names? It was thought audiences would not be able to familiarize these 'foreign' names. Who were these audiences the target audience was essentially Hindu, then! Did not they have Jews, Christians, Armenians or Anglo-Indian/Eurasians as neighbours? If not the others, surely they couldn't have had problem with Muslims names; and yet Yusuf Khan had to become Dilip Kumar or Begum Mumtaz, Zehan Madhubala but that is another story. Here we are looking beyond the Hindu-Muslim polemic. It was also presumed these audiences would not accept women with 'foreign' names in familiar roles of mother and sister or wife and lover or as Hindu goddesses and mythological characters.

With the advent of the print medium, representation of 'Indian' faces and figures were moulded according to European standards; With cinema, Hollywood standards were an addition. The marginalization of the dark complexion was happening through other mediums, too. For example, porcelain figures from Dresden, Germany replaced idols made out of dark hued ebony or rosewood or the touchstone (Basanite or Jasper the stone goldsmiths use to test gold). This trend (somewhat understandable chez Iranian, Parsee or North Indian directors-producers) was the same in the South. Nataraja Mudaliar chose Marain Hill as Draupadi. Himangshu Ray could imagine a dark-skinned Gautam-Buddha he played that role in Prem Sannyas (The Light Of Asia 1925) and did not use make up. But he had the Anglo-Indian Renee Smith (Seeta Devi) playing Jashodhara. Men can be or should preferably be dark and so, is that the reason why men from Eurasian and other communities were not encouraged as heroes?

The list of early Indian cinema female actors is replete with names of Eurasian female actors (Anglo-Indian is the earlier epithet). Patience Cooper, the legendary star of Indian silent cinema, had begun her career in Madan Theatres, Calcutta in their social (Patni Pratap, 1923) and mythological (Savitri, 1922) films. Then there was Effie Hippolite who acted as Kapalkundala. It is often argued that since it was not possible for women from respectable Hindu families to join films, girls from Anglo-Indian and other communities came forward. Incidentally, Anglo-Indian Iris Gasper (Savita Devi) wrote an article 'Why Shouldn't Respectable Ladies Join the Films' (Filmland 7 November 1931).

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This phenomenon of marginalization through representation and praxis is highly interesting. These people actively participated in the Indian film industry but were soon erased out of existence and memory. They belonged to communities, earlier very much a part of the mainstream, but ultimately totally marginalized or eased out of existence on this soil. The women of these communities were instrumental in establishing the politics of colour emphasizing our (supposed) desire for 'the whiteness of our being' and designing the contours of seduction. But once these were achieved, they could be abandoned. Cinema was not invented in this country. And so training in foreign lands or getting help from foreign technicians was important. But the times were such that there could be certain bonhomie and sharing of kindred spirit. We regret the loss of such features of our social life as manifest through our cinema.

Green is Neither Wholly Yellow nor Blue

Kesang Tseten

For long I have thought myself an exile. But when I was in "exile," I was somewhere.

Much of it was at a Presbyterian boarding school in a Himalayan town. My parents were greatly relieved when the school took my siblings and me in on scholarship. They had left their home in Southeastern Tibet because of the Chinese communist takeover. What money or gold they had carried out was finished, the last of it gambled away by my father. Their anxiety was eased that their children would get an education.

The school was set on the beautiful crest of a hill, Mt Kanchenjunga above, below the quaint ramshackle hill town of Kalimpong, once the centre of a bustling trade between Tibet and India. A Scottish missionary, John Anderson Graham, had founded "the Homes" for Anglo-Indian orphans, outcast from both Indian and British society. Earlier, Dr. Graham's Homes had been named St. Andrew's Colonial Homes.

We were products of colonial institution in a post-colonial time. It was a universe unto itself, with rules and regulations and a culture. Unlike most Indian boarding schools in the region though, many of its pupils came from poor and fractured families. It was un-Indian, very Anglo, yet a poor man's school. For the first 60 years, children went around barefoot, were fed tasteless food and never enough. I went hungry for 10 years.

For as many years, I went to church six days a week, praying before and after meals, singing hymns, and attending bible study. What memories of prayer wheels, monasteries and Buddhist pilgrimage sites I had slowly faded. Not permitted to speak our own language, and separated from my family for years at a stretch, I lost most of my Tibetan. I spent my vacations with British and Scottish families, working in Calcutta, who took us into their homes as an act of charity.

Looking back, we had to have had an idea of who we were, and thought of ourselves as different from our Bhutanese, Nepali, Sikkimese, Naga, and Assamese schoolmates. The norms for what was good and proper and desirable were, however, set by the predominantly Anglo-Indian staff and students, who aspired to the European. We admired and aspired to be like them. Rarely was it that I felt the absence of what was my own. In short, identity was a non-issue; the Homes gave and exhausted our need for an identity.

It was only after completing school, when I shifted to Kathmandu to live with my mother and sister, in the intimacies of home, that I felt myself inept, unpracticed, and alienated.

When I went to study in America, the question of identity began to take even a bigger hold of me. How could it not when, one way or another, everyone was preoccupied with it and attached to it the gravity I had never encountered. In describing myself an exile, I realised I was making vague what was vivid, generalising what was particular. Exile as a notion was amorphous, even a mis-notion, considering, for example, my total immersion in the immense tangibility of my Homes experience.

I have realised that it wasn't that I had no identity; rather, I had many, or aspects of several. I had not known how to reconcile this with my earlier enterprise of constructing an identity, which had seemed to call for one banner, in which one invested one's all. Could I ever wholly be a singular entity, Tibetan or Buddhist? Did I even want to, in the kaleidoscope of multicultural reality we live and breathe in, and must?

As a Buddhist might say, green is neither wholly yellow nor blue, but both; the sprouted bean is neither wholly the original bean nor entirely another.

My Grandmother Speaks Portuguese

Sonia Filinto

Portuguese Goan? Now I've been described variously Goan Catholic, Konkani, Indian(rare) - but Portuguese Goan? It made me sit right back, the creases on my forehead multiplied, thinking yet again if there is at all a single appropriate description of myself with regards to where I come from.

Where do I come from? Goa. Before it conjures images of sand and sun, let me say that for me it has been a struggle to go beyond this worldwide response. Being the first generation, in my family, to be born in liberated Goa, it has been a straddling of two worlds. One where my family has deep links - religion, language, food, clothes, culture, and the other, living in correlation with the rest of the country where one carries all the baggage that comes from being non-mainstream.

Personally I have grown up in an environment where quite frankly nothing was strongly encouraged or discouraged. This has been fortune for me but at the same time thrown me to the wolves not been complacent with what I am, not flowing with the tide has its own set of headaches. So talking with my grandmother only in Portuguese was the most natural thing to do at home but in school I made friends with kids who didn't know P of the language. My family is deeply religious but my friends were from other religions. Language has given me quite many sleepless nights. I don't really have a language I can call my mother tongue. Portuguese was the language of the rulers my forefathers might have studied and been fluent in it, but being born over a decade after the liberation of Goa, I can hardly call it my mother tongue. Konkani was the language of the ruled, the working class. I rue the fact that I am not fluent in it. English, the link with the rest of India and the world. Hindi was, for me, essential only to pass my school exams. I finished my graduation and came out of Goa for further studies. Apart from struggling to communicate in Hindi there were jibs from classmates as why, being Indian, I didn't know the language. Then I didn't have a response - I used to go to my hostel room and cry. Thinking back I did some really ridiculous things in my attempt not to stand out. I began growing my inch length hair. I packed off all my skirts and short tops and began wearing any salwaar kameez I could lay my hands on - now I think I must have looked like a funny clown.

I plunged into the wide-open cosmopolitan arms Mumbai after my studies. It seemed more receptive towards me. After four years of interacting with such different kinds of people, languages, sights and sounds I can say that I too wore blinkers. I was only looking inward how wrong my history was, how wrongly everybody perceived Goa, I realised I need to be more proactive, I need to know where I come from because that is going to be the basis of my strength. Of course all this is easier said than done. I know that if I want to create something the choice of spoken language is going to be another struggle. I also fear for Goa - the writing on the wall is clear - shape up or ship out. Mainstream concerns like the place of worship of which religion stood here four hundred years back - temple or church - has already deeply penetrated the state. If you are not of the national religion you are now on the back foot.

My little niece is in class one and has a friend who is the son of a government official posted in Goa. It already bothers her that she cannot talk like he does. I wish that I could tell her it's OK it will come to you in good time. But I know the feeling of inadequacy that it can throw up outside of the state. I want to protect her from what I know is in store. But all I can tell her is what I once read let the winds from all four sides blow into your home but have your feet firmly planted on the ground.

Homes in Mumbai

Konkani Muslim, Bohra Muslim, Parsee, Maharashtrian Protestant Christian

Excerpt from **In an Antique Land**

Amitav Ghosh published by Ravi Dayal, 1992

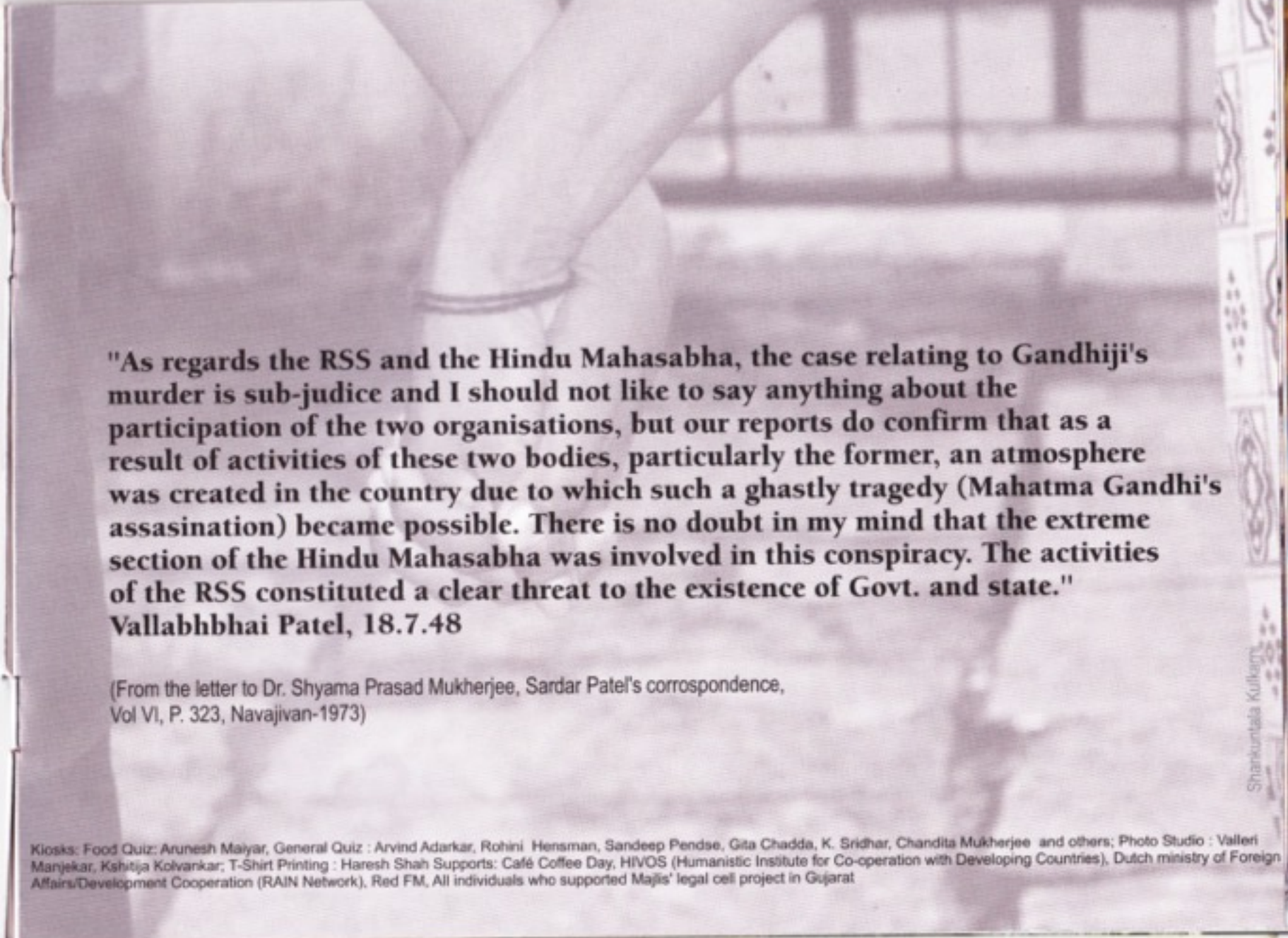
In matters of business, Ben Yiju's networks appear to have been wholly indifferent to many of those boundaries that are today thought to mark social, religious and geographical divisions. Madmun, for instance, is known once to have proposed a joint venture between himself and three traders in Mangalore, each of different social or geographical origins one a Muslim, one a Gujarati Vania, and the third a member of the landowning caste of Tulunad. Equally the ships that Ben Yiju and his friends used for transporting their goods were owned by a wide variety of people. Among the many nakhudas or ship owners who are mentioned in Ben Yiju's papers, there is one Pattani Swami, probably the head of a merchant guild or caste, a man called Nambiar, Evidently from Kerala, and many others, including of course 'Abd al-Qasim Ramisht of Siraf. The ties forged by trade were so close that Madmun's kinsman, the makhuda Mahruz (in a letter written for him by Ben Yiju), once remarked of a ship-owner called 'Tinbu', probably of Tamil extraction, that, 'between him and me there are bonds of inseparable friendship and brotherhood.'

Ben Yiju's closest affiliations in Mangalore would of course have lain with the community with which he shared his spoken language and his taste in food and clothing, the expatriate Muslim Arabs, who were resident in the city indeed, for most purposes he would have counted himself as one of them. Muslim traders figure frequently in his papers, as do the names of the Arab Sailors and ships' captains who carried his letters and brought him news from other parts of the world.

Ben Yiju's business interests also brought him into contact with a large number of agents and retailers, and those relationships seem to have often overlapped with the kinship networks of his household. In addition, Ben Yiju was also closely connected with a group of metal workers specializing in certain bronze objects and utensils, which were much in demand in Aden. The names of these craftsmen, who appear to have been Brahmins from Tamilnad, often figure in Ben Yiju's household accounts, and it is possible that their workshop was attached to his warehouse.

The vast network of relationships that Ben Yiju fitted himself into in Mangalore was clearly not a set of random associations, on the contrary, it appears to have had a life of its own, the links being transmitted between generations of merchants, just as they were from Madmun to Ben Yiju. Membership in the network evidently involved binding understandings of a kind that permitted individuals to commit large sums of money to joint undertakings, even in circumstances where there was no legal redress understandings that clearly presuppose free and direct communications between the participants, despite their cultural, religious and linguistic differences.

Some of Ben Yiju's closest business connections, for instance, lay with a group of merchants whom he and his friends in Aden referred to as the 'Baniyan of Mangalore' Hindu Gujarati of the 'Vania' or trading caste. Long active in the Indian Ocean trade, Gujarati merchants had plied the trade routes for centuries, all the way from Aden to Malacca, and they exerted a powerful influence on the flow of certain goods and commodities. They evidently played a significant role in the economy of Malabar in Ben Yiju's time, and were probably instrumental in the management of its international trade. Madmun, for one, was on cordial terms with several members of the Gujarati trading community of Mangalore, whom he kept informed of trends in the markets of the Middle East. He, in turn appears to have handed on those connections to Ben Yiju when he setup his business in Mangalore. Over the years, Ben Yiju often served as a courier for Madmun, delivering letters as well as messages and greetings to the 'Baniyan of Manjalur', and on occasion he even brokered joint entrepreneurial ventures between them and Madmun.

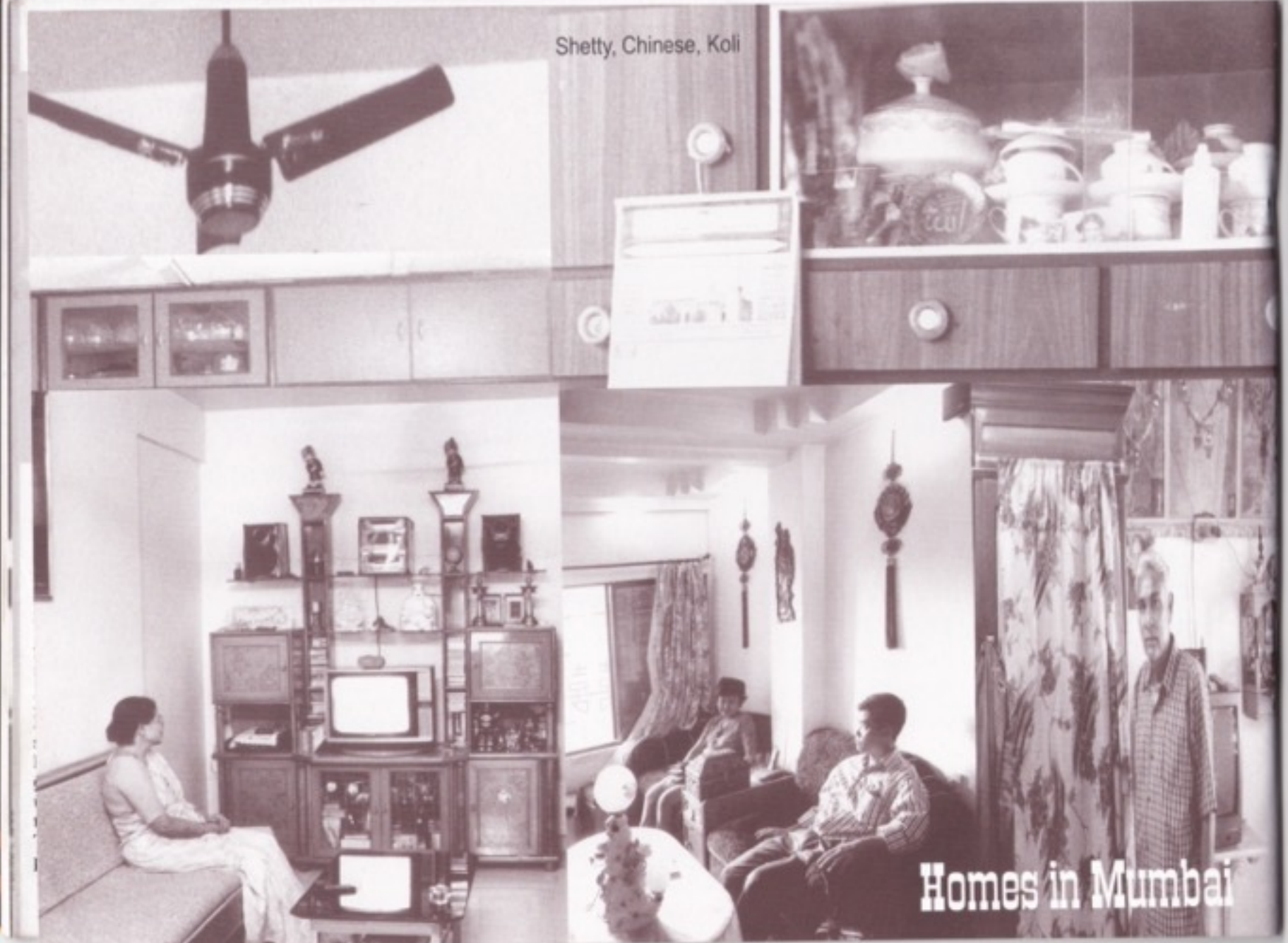


"As regards the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha, the case relating to Gandhiji's murder is sub-judice and I should not like to say anything about the participation of the two organisations, but our reports do confirm that as a result of activities of these two bodies, particularly the former, an atmosphere was created in the country due to which such a ghastly tragedy (Mahatma Gandhi's assasination) became possible. There is no doubt in my mind that the extreme section of the Hindu Mahasabha was involved in this conspiracy. The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of Govt. and state."
Vallabhbhai Patel, 18.7.48

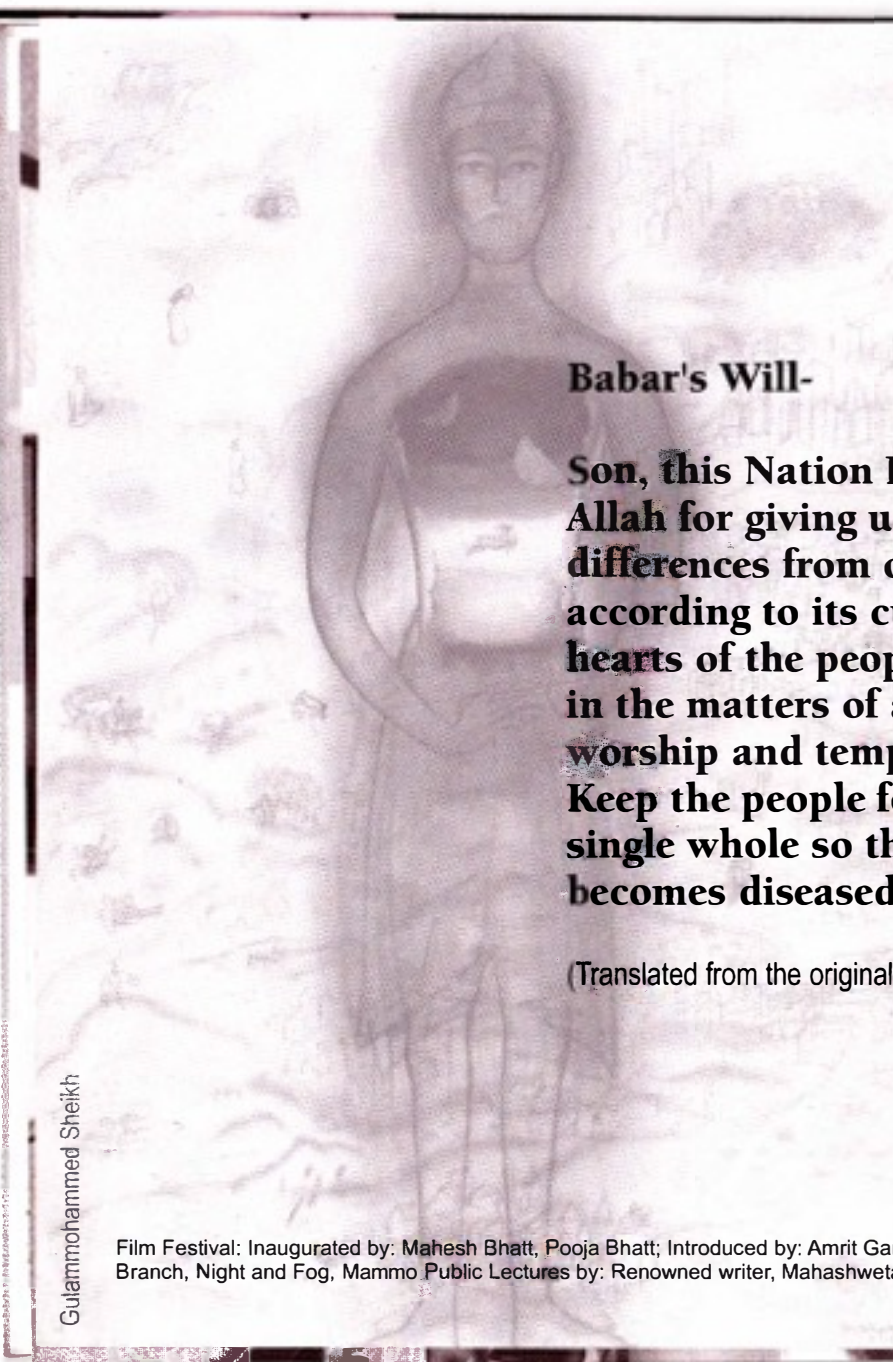
(From the letter to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Sardar Patel's corrospondence,
Vol VI, P. 323, Navajivan-1973)

Shakuntala Kulkarni

Kiosks: Food Quiz: Arunesh Maiyar, General Quiz : Arvind Adarkar, Rohini Hensman, Sandeep Pendse, Gita Chadda, K. Sridhar, Chandita Mukherjee and others; Photo Studio : Valleri Manjekar, Kshitija Kolvankar; T-Shirt Printing : Haresh Shah Supports: Café Coffee Day, HIVOS (Humanistic Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries), Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation (RAIN Network), Red FM, All individuals who supported Majlis' legal cell project in Gujarat


Shetty, Chinese, Koli
Homes in Mumbai


Homes in Mumbai
Dalit-Neo Buddhist, Koli, Sikh



Babar's Will-

Son, this Nation Hindusthan has different Religions. Thank Allah for giving us this Kingdom. We should remove all the differences from our heart and do justice to each community according to its customs. Avoid cow-slaughter to win over the hearts of the people of this land and to incorporate the people in the matters of administration. Don't damage the places of worship and temples, which fall in the boundaries of our rule. Keep the people following different customs integrated into a single whole so that no part of the body of this Kingdom becomes diseased.

(Translated from the original - National Museum)

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Film Festival: Inaugurated by: Mahesh Bhatt, Pooja Bhatt; Introduced by: Amrit Gangar, Films: Great Dictator, Zakhm, I Live in Behrampada, Fahrenheit 451, The Boy in the Branch, Night and Fog, Mammo Public Lectures by: Renowned writer, Mahashweta Devi and Kapil Sibal, Senior Counsel, Supreme Court

While Photographing Mr. Elias Koder

Ketaki Sheth

The photograph I have chosen is of Elias Koder in his drawing room in Jewtown, Cochin, with portraits of his ancestors and his pet dog. It was taken in 1987. Elias belongs to the most well known of Cochin Jewish families, his brother was then the head of the community.

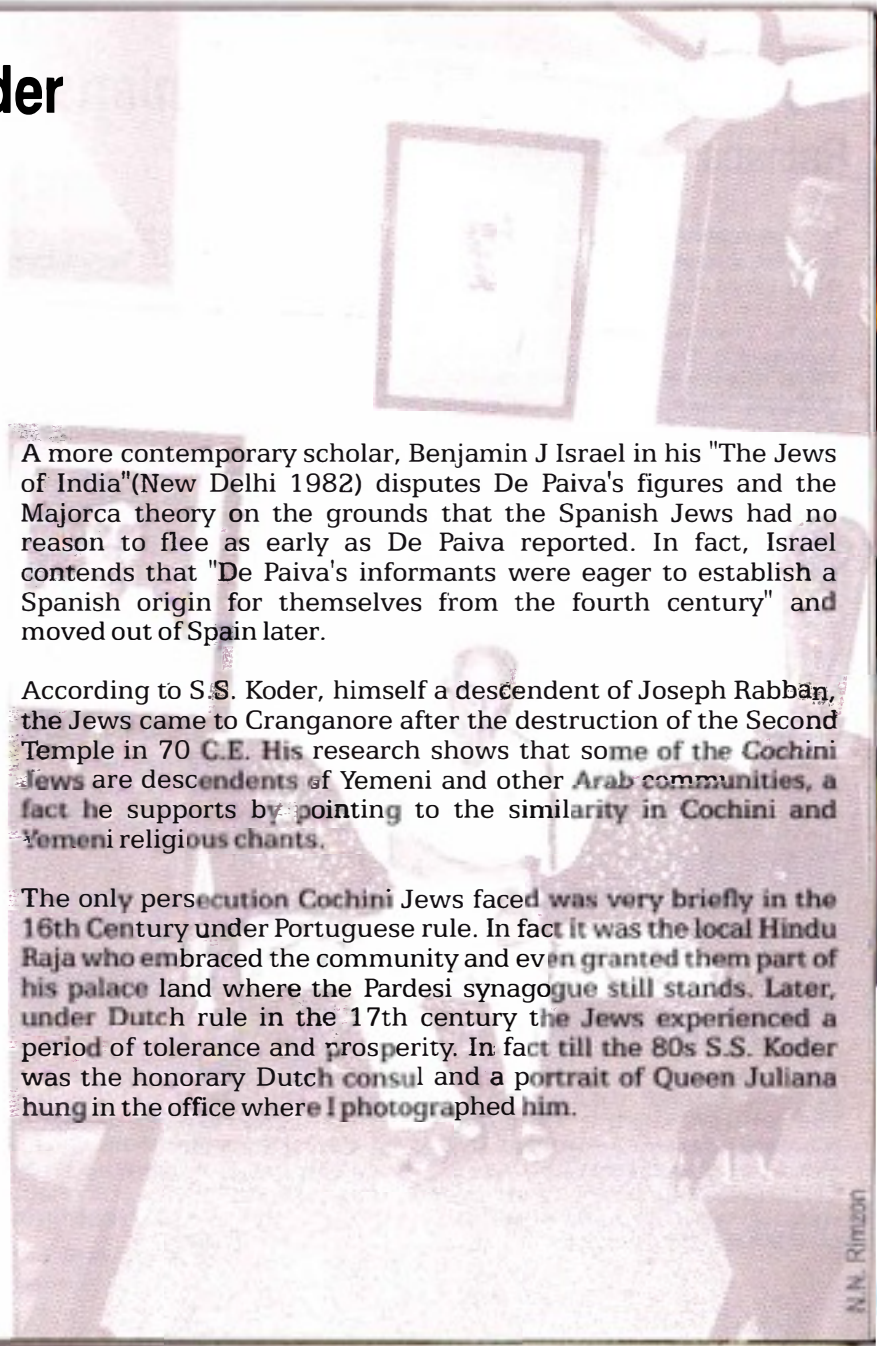
Once there were thousands of what was a thriving, prosperous, highly educated community. Today they are just a handful. In 1968 when the Cochin Jews celebrated the 400th anniversary of their synagogue there were hundred of them. By 1987 when I spoke to S.S.Koder, then head of the dwindling community, there were only 33 left. The last 'community' marriage, according to him, had taken place in the late '70s. In the days I was there I never saw a young person except for a young boy from Ernakulam who had come with his grandmother to fulfil 'minyan' requirements (a minimum number of males for prayer services). Dietary practices were also affected as there were no kosher butchers left. The local graveyard looked like a barren wasteland.

Many scholars have studied the origin of Cochin Jews but different versions exist. A study by Moses Pereira De Paiva commissioned by Amsterdam's Jewish community in 1685 reported that between 70,000-80,000 Jews came in two periods, 370C.E. and 499C.E.(Common Era or Christian Era) from Spanish Majorca to India's Malabar Coast. These settlers, De Paiva wrote, had "found favour in the eyes of King Cheran Perumal" who granted one Joseph Rabban the city of Cranganore, some 16 miles from Cochin and even appointed him prince of his domain. The decree is inscribed on copper plates in the exquisite Pardesi synagogue near the clock tower and can be seen by all even today.

A more contemporary scholar, Benjamin J Israel in his "The Jews of India"(New Delhi 1982) disputes De Paiva's figures and the Majorca theory on the grounds that the Spanish Jews had no reason to flee as early as De Paiva reported. In fact, Israel contends that "De Paiva's informants were eager to establish a Spanish origin for themselves from the fourth century" and moved out of Spain later.

According to S.S. Koder, himself a descendent of Joseph Rabban, the Jews came to Cranganore after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. His research shows that some of the Cochini Jews are descendents of Yemeni and other Arab communities, a fact he supports by pointing to the similarity in Cochini and Yemeni religious chants.

The only persecution Cochini Jews faced was very briefly in the 16th Century under Portuguese rule. In fact it was the local Hindu Raja who embraced the community and even granted them part of his palace land where the Pardesi synagogue still stands. Later, under Dutch rule in the 17th century the Jews experienced a period of tolerance and prosperity. In fact till the 80s S.S. Koder was the honorary Dutch consul and a portrait of Queen Juliana hung in the office where I photographed him.



Down Memory Lane: Armenians In Bengal

Ratnabali Chatterjee

My acquaintance with the Armenians began on a sunny winter morning. It was 4th January 1954. Just thirteen then, I stood hesitantly before the huge gates of the Armenian College since my friend Fanny Palladian was nowhere to be seen and the moustachioed gatekeeper appeared very stern. Then suddenly, my eyes caught the nameplate on a pillar 'William Makepeace Thackeray was born in this house in 1811'. I was amazed. What was the connection between the famous author and the Armenian College? While I was pondering Fanny arrived and ushered me in. Her father was the Principal.

Once inside, I relaxed. Her parents told me how the Armenians, who came to India as merchants considered themselves to be an integral part of the state's educational system. It was in Calcutta that Johanne Khalandahar Margaran, officer in Nawab Mir Kasim's army, under General Gurgan Khan (who too was an Armenian) first set up a school for Armenian boys and girls in his home. In 1797 Aswatoor Murad Khan willed Rs.8000 for the establishment of a school in Calcutta.

The Armenian Philanthropic Academy founded in 1821, was later moved to the Armenian College premises in 39 Free School Street, which had belonged to the Thackerays. When I expressed my surprise, Mr. Paladin, Fanny's father, informed me that a large part of Park Street, Dalhousie, even the Grand Hotel had belonged to the Armenians. By the nineteenth century many Armenians had become real-estate barons. The biggest success story was that of the Apcars. In1830, Aratoon Apcar transferred his business from Bombay to Calcutta. His son, Sir A.A. Apcar was President at the Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

J.C.Galstaeen, a compulsive builder, was considered to be one of Calcutta's richest men. Part of his wealth was spent in acquiring houses, no less than 350 in number. Some of them, like the Queen's Mansions at Galston Park, the Harrington Mansion along with his own palatial building which became the residence of the Nizam of Hyderabad, known to date as the Nizam's Palace, testify to his memory.

Adjacent to the Galston Mansions stands Stephen Court built by Aratoon Stephen, hotelier and a collector of porcelain. The fame of his collection had brought Kitchner of Khartoum to his Camac Street residence. Stephen House in B.B.D. Bag along with the main edifice of the Grand Hotel was also Aratoon's creation. The Oberois took over the hotel from his heirs in 1938. Though the opulence has gone, Armenians still retain some of the smaller hotels, evolved from the boarding houses, once built by them for their own kin.

I did not acquire all this knowledge in that one visit. I became a frequent visitor. Like many of my school friends, I found the house fascinating, reminiscent of by gone days. It aroused my curiosity and the memories of Fanny's family albums led me to look at Armenian relics which were strewn all over West Bengal. Years later when, as a student of History, I visited Murshidabad, I discovered the Armenian church and graveyard at Baharampur. The church at Chinsurah built by Joseph Marger in 1697 is the second oldest church in Bengal and the third in India. These monuments stood out with their distinctive style.

Only 200 Armenians now live in Calcutta. Once there were thousands. From eleventh century, merchants from Armenia travelled by the Caravan route though Persia, Bactria and Tibet and established themselves in all-important trading centers of the sub continent and played an important role in local politics. One of Akbar's favourite Begums was an Armenian, Mariam Zamani. Armenians were the chief mediators between the British and the Mughals, helping the former to gain important trade concessions. Later, they were educated in English schools and worked under British masters.

For the generation who lived in the late nineteenth century, law and medicine became professions of choice. Gregory Charles Paul (1831-1900) was knighted and became Advocate General of Bengal. Stephen Owen Jones founded St. John's Ambulance courses in first aid and home nursing. Today, like many other non-resident Indians, my friend Fanny works in the U.S.A. Her cousins, friends, and relatives have migrated to U.K. Australia and New Zealand. They still regard India as their home. Those who live here share with us memories of ancestors who had been some of our earliest national philanthropists.

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इसे किया है हमसबने आबाद।

Together we have made it a Home...

Children of the soil. But who are they? The ones born upon the soil ... the ones who serve the land ... who participate in making a nation out of a land ... those who bring trade and business to it ... who bring glory to it. Who do not know of any other land than this ... the diasporic tribe ... the ones who live abroad and long for the land in an imaginary state ... the ones who speak the language that majority of the people speak ...

Which language does the majority speak? ... In which land? Doesn't the spoken language in our country change every few kilometers? Does soil and its identity depend upon some lines drawn on some official looking papers? Which line is most sacrosanct - the housing society boundary ... the municipality ward limit ... the city border ... the state border ... the country ... the continent?

Dr. Chang, the dentist in Saat Bangla rides on his two-wheeler to the local fish market. He wants Bombil for his dinner tonight. The man with distinct Chinese features bargains in chaste Marathi with Bombay's revered Koli women. No way they can fool him in this popular game of fish buying. The Koli women will vouch that nobody is more of a Bombaiyya than Dr. Chang, whose family is residing here since the end of the previous century.

East Indian, a generic name full of ironies - the community who have been living here since this famous 'soil' was only water and marsh land. Speaking in English, Bombaiyya mixture of Hindi, Marathi and Konkani, visiting churches and also observing many local rituals which are not part of any classical religion, they are neither Marathi, nor Christian, nor cosmopolitan. They are Bombaiyya.

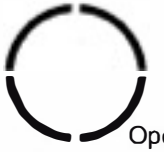
The landscape of Bombay is dotted with Irani and Udupi restaurants from time immemorial. They are the 'time pass' places, they are the landmarks, also the 'paisa vasool' food joints. The Tulu speaking Shettys whose traditional hometown is Mangalore runs one. The other, by the Dari speaking community whose forefathers came from Iran centuries ago. One is a vegetarian joint and the other is non-veg, both distinct in their cuisine but equally pedestrian. A distinct feature of Bombay's social life, these restaurants have a space in the memory of anyone who visits Bombay even for a short period.

So many people, so many stories, so many identities, a rich tapestry which colours the journey of the seven islands to the metropolis Bombay. Bombay/Mumbai is the name of that culture which nurtures the very concept that is India.

Within the identity politics, for too long the debate has centered around the Hindu-Muslim-Christian axis, forgetting smaller groups who are also an integral part of the plurality of the Indian ethos. The most prominent of these may be the Parsis - entrepreneurs, philanthropists, industrialists whose tall claim under the British 'we built Bombay' is indulgently smiled at even today - but there are other less visible communities whose contribution to the multi-culturalism that is India is equally vibrant.

What does the future hold for these groups, some of whom may fall within the wide umbrella of Hinduism but whose beliefs and practices are diametrically opposed to the tenets of the Sangh Parivar? How long before one or the other gets targetted because it suits the political convenience of the rulers - if only to divert attention from economic, political and administrative failures?

In this brochure, even as we re-live the anguish of 1992-93 and cope with the increasing intolerance for the other, the outsider, we visit some of these invisible minorities to recapture the multiculturalism of our pluralist nation, lest we forget.



Open Circle Arts Trust (OC) is an artist's initiative formed in 1999, to create a platform for a meaningful dialogue on an intercultural level, on the issues most pertinent to the present day cultural and political environment.

OC 's concern has been amongst others the global and local manifestations of the questions of acknowledgement of cultural plurality as opposed to cultural homogenisation and the silencing of the 'other'.

The year 2000 program of OC explored two conditions brought about by the phenomenon of globalisation: questions of identity and the position of artists involved in some displacement, either chronic or momentary; and the negotiation of (yet another) displacement through the experience of the megalopolis of Mumbai. Through a workshop involving 8 Indian artists, 8 foreign artists and one theorist. This was followed by an exhibition in four leading galleries of Mumbai, site-specific installations at the venue of the workshop and an international seminar.

The study circles conducted in 2001 dealt with local issues and ramifications of the globalising conditions and their impact on the working classes.

In the year 2002, OC organised a weeklong event called 'Reclaim Our Freedom' in response to the carnage in Gujarat. The week comprised of a line up of simultaneous performances on the hour at public places, exhibits by artists in cafes, galleries, billboards, in the Kala Ghoda area, film shows, talks, dance and music concerts, all in protest against the violence being propagated by the right wing forces.

INDIA SABKA asserts the domicile and affirms the share of all the minority communities in making of the idea of India.

Open Circle, is also a partner of the RAIN international network set up with the prime intention of facilitating a transaction of knowledge, ideas and exchange- programs for artists along south south as well as south north axes.
For details and images, please log on to www.opencirclearts.org.

Prizes sponsored by: Art India Publishing Company, Crossword, Fire Flys Post Sound, Gallerie Publishers, Indian Express, Kali For Women, Katha, Loksatta, Mahanagar, Marg Publication, Media Marketing Services, Natarang Prathishthan, National School of Drama, Orient Longman, Oxford University Press, People's Publishing House, Popular Prakashan, Seagull Books, Stree Publication, The Little Magazine, Tulika Publishers, Urvashi Butalia, Vinod Momaya, Western Railways

मजलिस Means people's forum. The word is commonly used with subtle different connotations in Hindustani, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and various central Asian languages.

Started in 1990, our Majlis, is a forum for various disparate activities: multi-cultural initiatives, film and theatre productions, cultural literacy programmes, legal interventions on behalf of women and minority communities, research and publications on rights discourses, public campaigns, interventional research on urban studies and the rest as the times and people decide and demand.

Campaign for India Sabka stems from this multi-faceted identity of Majlis.

No, we do not have any website yet, but soon we shall. Till then it is only majlis@vsnl.com

FILMS

I live in Behrampada: 46 Minutes
On a Muslim ghetto in Bombay in the context of riots in 1992-93

Memories of fear: 55minutes
On growing up and adult violence

Kya apko pata hai: 12 minutes
Spots on legal rights of women

Skin deep: 90 minutes
On beauty myth and femininity

Sundari: An actor prepares: 30 minutes
Based on a play by Anuradha Kapur on performance and impersonation

Scribbles on Akka: 60 minutes
On identity, rebellion and bhakti

Colours black: 30 minutes
On childhood, quiet as it is kept

Made in India: 30 minutes
On visual cultures of contemporary India

PUBLICATIONS

My Story Our Story... of Rebuilding Broken Lives
In English, Marathi and Gujarati, an autobiographical narrative of domestic violence

Journey to Justice: Procedures to be followed in a Rape case
In English and Marathi

Give us this day our daily bread; Procedures and Case Law on Maintenance

Law, Gender and the Rhetoric of Law Reform
Published by SNDT Women's University

The Nation, the state and Indian Identity
Collection of essays, Published by Samya publication, Calcutta

Of wayward girls & wicked women
A monograph on the actresses of silent era cinema

Law and gender inequality
Published by Oxford University Press

Church State And Women: Christian marriage bill 2000

Judgement call
On the debate on Muslim personal law

Voices over 100 years: Testimonies from Mumbai's textile district, to be published by Seagull books

Volunteers: Annanya Parikh, Bhavna Bhargava, Jeniza Debara, Jyotsana Mascarehnas, Priya Krishnamoorthy, Naina Hegde, Nikhil Gogate, Sanjay Bhangar, Sarita More, Srividya Vutta, Sumangala Biradar, Sunil Palekar, Tarshia Dutta, Uma Oza, Vaishali Gadekar, and others Special thanks to: Navin Kishore, Mandira Sen, R. Sriram, Radhika Sabavala, Ramdas Bhatkal

Seminar on

Constitution and Minority Identity: A Post Gujarat Perspective

Today, it has become imperative to examine whether there are some basic and inviolate principles in our Constitution which are secured, irrespective of who heads the nation, which political party is in power, the political leanings of a particular judge or which particular government functionary is at the helm of affairs at a crucial historical juncture.

Recent events have rendered it necessary to ponder over the commitment of the nation to secularism and multi-culturalism beyond individual variants within the Constitutional scheme of checks and balances. The seminar will probe into some of these questions and its impact on the altering alliances within identity politics.

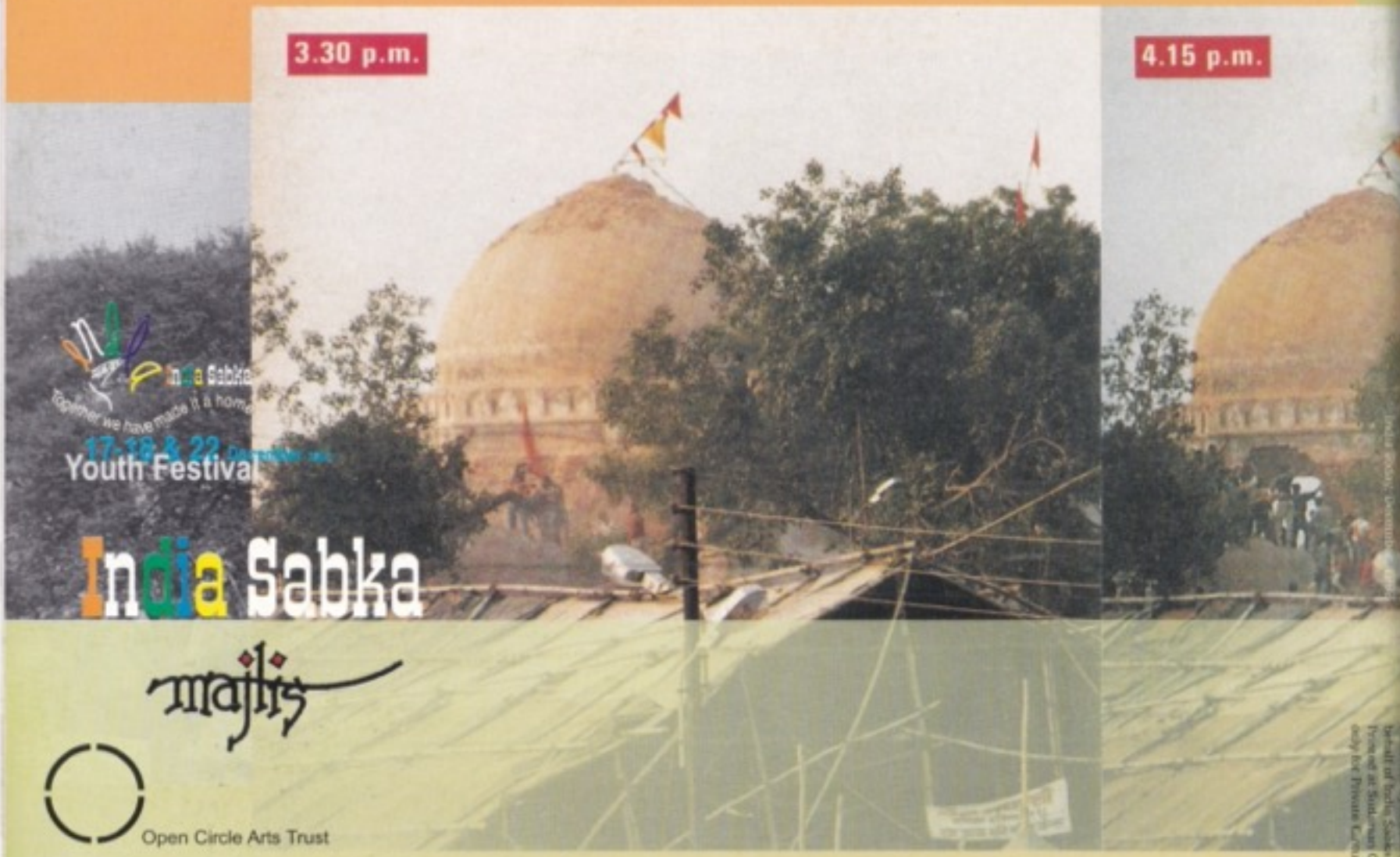
Keynote Address: Prof. Upendra Baxi
Speakers: Dr. Hanif Lakhdawala, Ms. Seema Moustafa, Ms. Sophia Khan, Ms. Teesta Setalvad, Ms. Flavia Agnes, Mr. Ganesh Devy and Mr. Biju Mathews

22nd December, 2002 10 am
YMCA, Bombay Central.

Acknowledgements: Adlle Victor Ferreira, Arjun Sen, Anjali Sen, Anshika, Amit Kumar, Sr. Div. Commercial Manager W. Rlys, Aruna Pendse, B.R. Tata, Consortium for the Promotion of Khadi and Village Industries, Comet Media Foundation, Dr. Chang, Damu Kenkre, Dilip Chitre, Dolly Thakore, Gajanan Kale (Chhatra Bharati), Gangadhar (CED), Ishaat Hussain, Mrs. Jose, Kaiwan Mehta, Man Mohan Singh Obhan, Meenal Patel, Manijit Singh, P.M. Satheesh, Sec. To G.M., W. Rlys, Montu Sound and Service, Mumbai Police, N.A. Kazi, Nasreen Fazhalbhoy, Nikhil Waghle, Nina Martyris, Prakash Vishwarao, Pravin Shrivastava, Media Marketing Services, R.Y.Joshi, Asst. Commercial Manager W. Rlys, Radio Mirchi, Ram Punyani, Ramla Buxamusa, Resul P, Rohan Shivkumar, Rahul Khedekar (NSUI), Roni Mirinda, Rubaica Jaliwala, Sadaf Aboli (NSUI), Sameer Khedekar, Sandhya Krishnan, Sangeeta Jindal, Setu Films, Shankar Adivarekar, Shankar Raman, Shireen Gandhi, Gallery Chemould, Social Service League of the St. Xavier's College, Urmi Juvekar, Vidhya Mani, Vijay Desai, Vijaya Chauhan, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Vishnu Laxman Tamare, Y.B. Chavan Pratisthan.

Homes in Mumbai

Konkani Muslim Bohra Muslim Syrian Christian



In collaboration with Yashwantrao Chavan Pratisthan