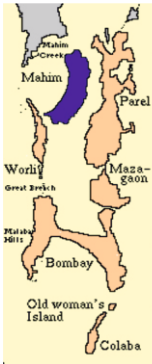


THE VOICE OF MALABAR HILLS

Altamont Road Carmichael Road Peddar Road Kemp's Corner Breach Candy Nepean Sea Road Walkeshwar Mahalaxmi Temple Ridge Road Little Gibbs Road Chowpatty Gamdevi

Mahim - the first island to be developed



Left: Map of islands of Mumbai, Mahim marked in blue.
Right: Raja Bhimdev

In 1290 CE, Bimba Shah, of the Chaulukya (Solanki) dynasty who ruled Anahilavada, Devagiri, in modern day Gujarat fled southwards to the Konkan coast after his father was defeated by Allauddin Khalji. He was accompanied by several others who settled in towns like Parnera, Sanjan and Shirgaon, but he was 'enamoured by this beautiful island' and decided to settle in 'Mahim'. He developed the island. Built himself a palace and a court of justice. Both are lost in time without leaving any ruins, but are mentioned by various Persian historians. He is popularly known as 'Raja Bhimdev'.

The word 'Mahim' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Mahikawati' meaning miraculous. Like all migrations around the world, men build shrines of their Gods wherever they go. Raja Bhimadev was a Shaivite and he thus built the original temple of Babulnath'. The Linga was shaped from the root of a Babool tree, lending its name to the temple. Where exactly this was located is also lost in time. The idols were buried and five were discovered only 500 years later and the temple we know today near Chowpatty was built by a Gujarati merchant.



Prabhadevi Temple

The other temple he built was to his Goddess 'Prabhavati Devi'. The temple

that exists today was rebuilt only 300 years ago. The original idols had been shifted to Karnataka and were brought back to the present site of the temple. The temple lends its name to the whole area.

Castes who migrated with Bhimdev were the Pathare Prabhus (believed to be descendents of Ashwapati of Nepal), Agris (agriculturists), and the Bhandaris (who climbed the palms for todi), The Pathare Prabhus are Kshatriyas.



Mahim Dargah

In 1343, Mahim was possessed by the Sultan-ate of Gujarat. This brought Islam to the island and the Mahim Mosque and the Dargah of Makhdoom Ali Mahimi Shafi. He was a saint and scholar of international repute. He was the first Indian scholar to write an exegesis on the Quran, and authored over 100 books. He was held in high esteem by Hindus and Muslims and when he died in 1431, he was buried in Mahim and the Mausoleum draws crowds to the annual 'Urs' festival in December.

In 1534 the Portuguese captured the islands of Mumbai and built churches for their God. St. Michael's Church is the



Top: Church & River at Mahim. Above: Old and new Church

oldest Portuguese Franciscan Church in Mumbai and is believed to have been built by Antonio do Porto, a builder of the Franciscan Order. When the Marathas conquered Salsette in 1739, the holy image of the 'Blessed Virgin Mary', normally housed in the 'Lady of the Mount' Chapel in Bandra was hidden in this Church till 1761, the image was moved back to Mount Mary Church. The Church was rebuilt a number of times and what we popularly call as the Mahim Church was built in 1973. Prayers are held throughout the day and people from different faiths attend these 'Novenas'. The devotees believe that attending these prayers on nine consecutive Wednesdays will grant their wishes. These services were started in 1948 – on the Birthday of Mary, concurrent with a Wednesday in that year.



Mahim Fort

Mahim Fort is the most ancient on the islands. Its origin is mired in history, but it is believed to have been built in 1140 and then strengthened by Raja Bhimdev. It is positioned at a very strategic site, at the mouth of the Mahim Creek, overlooking the Mahim Bay. It could thus direct trade routes in the 12th century. In 1516, the Portuguese commander Dom Joao de Monoy took control of the Fort and it was held by the Portuguese till the islands were given as dowry on the marriage of the Infanta Catherine of Braganza to King Charles II of England in 1661. The British East India Company strengthened it to defend the islands from attacks from the Moghuls, Portuguese, who held territories in south Gujarat and the Marathas. It is sad that we can see only some of the broken walls and think of what it must have been once. It is dirty, unkempt and occupied by encroachments and miscreants. Supposed to be under protection of the Archaeological Survey of India as a Grade-I Heritage structure.

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Good educational institutions were also established on this island. St. Michael's Church built a school for education of children of their Order. Later, in 1850 it extended education to boys and girls of all religions and communities.

A other school was founded in 1847 by a small group of Scottish missionaries as the Scottish Female Orphanage. It was meant to educate the daughters of Scottish Presbyterian soldiers and Indian Navy seamen. It later merged and in 1863 the name was changed to the Bombay Scottish Orphanage High School. It was originally meant only for Scottish children, but over the years it opened its doors to children of all communities and the name was changed again to what it is today, The Bombay Scottish School, a premiere institution in the city.



Above Photo courtesy of Dinodia Photos (www.dinodia.com)



The seven islands of Mumbai were negotiated as dowry explicitly to develop a port for trading activities of the English East India Company. They already had the port and invited this small community to assist them 'realise Gerald Aungier's dream of the greatest port in East'. The community was given large parcels of land to continue with their distinct religious practices. They built fire temples and homes on different islands. The largest one in Mahim is the Seth Edulji Rustomji Soonawala Agiary.

Mahim was, and still is a multicultural area of Mumbai. All faiths live in harmony together, There have never been the beginnings of any unrest. This was the true spirit of the city we oldies grew up in and loved.



Dr. Anita Garware
Chairperson
Indian Heritage Society, Mumbai

Pictures: Top: Old and new, St Michaels School, Mahim. Above: Old and new, Bombay Scottish School, Mahim. Left: Seth Edulji Rustomji Soonawala Agiary, Mahim and the Sitladevi Temple. Below: Mahim Fair.



A multi-cultural spirit of Mahim