

How the Cotton Trade Shaped Mumbai

Image no: 1

Caption: *Timelapse view of traffic in front of historic landmarks BMC Building and Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus*, Video: RM Nunes, Adobe Stock.

Link:

<https://stock.adobe.com/in/video/timelapse-view-of-traffic-in-front-of-historic-landmarks-bmc-building-and-chhatrapati-shivaji-terminus-aka-victoria-station-in-south-mumbai-maharashtra-in-dia-zoom-out/614824942>

Image no: 2

Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay, Byculla Hotel*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214672/bombay--byculla-hotel-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 3

Caption: Bourne & Shepherd, *Colin Murray, Panorama of Bombay*, c. 1880, Albumen silver print, 17.8 x 30.7 cm, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/108V7P#full-artwork-details>

Image no: 4

Caption: William Johnson, *William Henderson, Town Hall Bombay & Cotton Green before the Elphinstone Circle was built*, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/ea/id/1199>

Image no: 5

Caption: William Johnson, *Shoreline, Bombay*, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/ea/id/1170>

Image no: 6

Caption: *Public buildings, Bombay*, c. 1880, Albumen silver print, 17.8 x 31.6 cm, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/108V7N#full-artwork-details>

Image no: 7

Caption: *Bourne & Shepherd, Colin Murray, Esplanade Road*, c. 1890, 21 x 29 cm, Published in Aarefa Johari, “Rare images: How 19th century Bombay nurtured a flourishing photography scene”, Scroll, March 20, 2015.

Link: <https://scroll.in/article/714854/rare-images-how-19th-century-bombay-nurtured-a-flourishing-photography-scene>

Image no: 8

Caption: *Victoria Terminus Building*, Mumbai, 1860s–1870s, Albumen silver print from glass negative, 18.3 x 23.6 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/264519>

Image no: 9

IMAGE CREDITS

Caption: *Francis Frith, The Harbour, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214666/the-harbour--bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 10

Caption: William Johnson, William Henderson, *Panorama — from the Cathedral, Bombay, the Native Town, towards Mazagon*, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/eea/id/1083>

Image no: 11

Caption: Francis Frith, *The Telegraph Office, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214683/the-telegraph-office--bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 12

Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay, Watson's Hotel*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214689/bombay--watsons-hotel-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 13

Caption: *View of the Harbour (from Apollo Bunder)*, c. 1880s, Albumen silver print, 18.3 x 23.5 cm,

Published in Aarefa Johari, “Rare images: How 19th century Bombay nurtured a flourishing photography scene”, Scroll, March 20, 2015.

Link:

<https://scroll.in/article/714854/rare-images-how-19th-century-bombay-nurtured-a-flourishing-photography-scene>

Image no: 14

Caption: *Clifton & Co, Bombay in India*, c. 1905, Leiden University Libraries, Leiden.

Link:

https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/925861?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=c81fd8623a13bab0901b&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0

Image no: 15

Caption: Francis Frith, *Elphinstone Circle, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214669/elphinstone-circle--bombay-photograph-francis-frith>
△

Image no: 16

Caption: Bourne & Shepherd, *Borat Bazaar, Bombay*, c. 1870, Albumen silver print, 18.3 x 31.3 cm, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/1090WR#full-artwork-details>

Image no: 17

Caption: William Johnson, *Train on bridge*, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm,

DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/eea/id/693>

Image no: 18

Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay from Watson's Hotel*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214678/bombay-from-watsons-hotel-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 19

Caption: *Francis Frith, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214663/bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 20

Caption: *Cotton waiting to be ginned for export*, 1930, 39.7 x 29.2 cm, Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai and Google Arts & Culture.

Link:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/cotton-waiting-to-be-ginned-for-export/qAFBkSP17UvEKg?hl=en>

Image no: 21

Caption: *Watering of cotton at Amraoti*, Published in AS Pearse, “Indian Cotton”, *International Federation of Master Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Association*, 1915, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_cotton_\(1915\)_ \(14768931222\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_cotton_(1915)_ (14768931222).jpg)

Image no: 22

Caption: *Slaves picking cotton while watched by a white overseer on horseback*, c. 1850, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cotton_pickers_and_overseer_around_1850.jpg

Image no: 23

Caption: *William Johnson, Train on bridge*, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/ea/id/693>

Image no: 24

Caption: Samuel Bourne, *Reversing Station, Ghore Ghat Railway Incline, Bombay*, 19th century, 19.5 x 30.5 cm, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Link: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/10931>

Image no: 25

Caption: Francis Frith, *The Harbour, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214666/the-harbour--bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 26

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Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay from Watson's Hotel*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214678/bombay-from-watsons-hotel-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 27

Caption: *The Island and Town of Bombay*, Published in WG Blackie ed., “The Imperial Gazetteer”, Blackie and Son, 1855.

Link: <https://archive.org/details/imperialgazette01blacrich/page/n11/mode/2up?q=island>

Image no: 28

Caption: *Bombay Cotton Green*, 1869, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bombay_Cotton_Green.jpg

Image no: 29

Caption: *Bombay brokers and traders in cotton fabric*, 1870, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bombay_Brokers_and_traders_in_cotton_fabric.jpg

Image no: 30

Caption: John Edward Saché, *Cotton brokers, Bombay*, c. 1869, Albumen silver print, 23.5 x 29 cm, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/1091C1#full-artwork-details>

Image no: 31

Caption: *Bombay*, 1870s–1880s, Albumen silver print, 18.8 x 23.6 cm, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/108WGA#full-artwork-details>

Image no: 32

Caption: Jan Van Rhyne, *Bombay, on the Malabar coast, belonging to the East India Company of England*, 1754, Coloured line engraving, 26.5 x 40.5 cm, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.

Link:

<https://csmvs.in/collections/bombay-on-the-malabar-coast-belonging-to-the-east-india-company-of-england/>

Image no: 33

Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay, Byculla Hotel*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214672/bombay--byculla-hotel-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 34

Caption: Samuel Bourne, *Bombay, The Shaik-Memon Street*, late 1860s, Albumen silver print, 18.1 x 23.1 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://collections.lacma.org/node/196624>

Image no: 35

Caption: Francis Frith, *Elphinstone Circle Gardens, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214681/elphinstone-circle-gardens--bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 36

Caption: Francis Frith, *Memorial Church, Colaba, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214704/memorial-church--colaba--photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 37

Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay, Watson's Hotel*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214689/bombay--watsons-hotel-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 38

Caption: Francis Frith, *Bombay, Crawford Market*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214694/bombay--crawford-market-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 39

IMAGE CREDITS

Caption: Francis Frith, *View from Watson's Hotel Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214679/view-from-watsons-hotel-bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 40

Caption: Francis Frith, *The Telegraph Office, Bombay*, 1850s–1870s, Whole-plate albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 16.5 x 20.3 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O214683/the-telegraph-office--bombay-photograph-francis-frith/>

Image no: 41

Caption: *Bombay public buildings, viewed from the Band Stand*, c. 1875, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%22Bombay Public Buildings, viewed from the Band Stand,%22_c.1875.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%22Bombay_Public_Buildings,_viewed_from_the_Band_Stand,%22_c.1875.jpg)

Image no: 42

Caption: William Johnson, William Henderson, *Panorama — from the Cathedral, Bombay, the Native Town, towards Mazagon*, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/ea/id/1083>

Image no: 43

Caption: *Busy street scenes in Bombay [bottom image], c. 1880s, Old Indian Photos.*

Link: <https://www.oldindianphotos.in/2012/11/busy-street-scene-in-bombay-mumbai.html>

Image no: 44

Caption: Shivshanker Narayen, *Image no. 16: The house and shop on the left hand side of the street have been declared by the Plague Committee unfit for human habitation and marked U. H. H., Part of "Scenes of the Plague in Bombay, 1896–97, and the Indian Famine, 1899–1900", 1896–1900, Albumen silver prints from glass negatives and gelatin silver prints, 27.7 x 36.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/287308>

Image no: 45

Caption: Captain C Moss, *Search parties at work, Part of "Plague Visitation, Bombay, 1896–97", c. 1897, Wellcome Collection, London.*

Link: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/es6xrywv/items?canvas=24>

Image no: 46

Caption: Edward Stanford, *The "Times of India" Map of Bombay, c. 1895, 93.9 x 66 cm, Geographicus Rare Antique Maps and Wikimedia Commons.*

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1895_Times_of_India_Map_of_Bombay_India_-_Geographicus_-_Bombay-times-1895.jpg

Image no: 47

Caption: Shivshanker Narayen, *Image no. 3a: Cleaning house and gullies and disinfecting in Mandvie Bunder Street — Bombay, October 1896, Part of "Scenes of the Plague in Bombay, 1896–97, and the*

Indian Famine, 1899–1900, 1896–1900, Albumen silver prints from glass negatives and gelatin silver prints, 27.7 x 36.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/287308>

Image no: 48

Caption: Shivshanker Narayen, *Image no. 16: The house and shop on the left hand side of the street have been declared by the Plague Committee unfit for human habitation and marked U. H. H., Part of “Scenes of the Plague in Bombay, 1896–97, and the Indian Famine, 1899–1900”*, 1896–1900, Albumen silver prints from glass negatives and gelatin silver prints, 27.7 x 36.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/287308>

Image no: 49

Caption: *Lantern slide of plague epidemiology, a house at Parel which gave way to a very large number of rats*, Wellcome Collection, London and Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lister_Institute;_Plague_epidemiology_Wellcome_L00233_58.jpg

Image no: 50

Caption: *Lantern slide of plague epidemiology, Old Bengalpura Street, c. 1900*, Wellcome Collection, London and Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lister_Institute;_Plague_epidemiology_Wellcome_L00233_53.jpg

Image no: 51

IMAGE CREDITS

Caption: *Lantern slide of plague epidemiology, Bombay, 2nd Koliwada Street; types of native quarters, goats and other animals tied in front of the house, 19th century, Wellcome Collection, London and Wikimedia Commons.*

Link:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lister_Institute;_Plague_epidemiology_Wellcome_L00233_56.jpg

Image no: 52

Caption: *Bombay-Poona Mail, 1907, Wikimedia Commons.*

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bombay-Poona_Mail.jpg

Image no: 53

Caption: *Margaret Bourke-White, Bombay Stock and Cotton Exchange, 1946, LIFE Magazine and Google Arts & Culture.*

Link:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/bombay-stock-and-cotton-exchange/tAHlQU18nyUITA?ms=%7B%22x%22%3A0.4740372670807453%2C%22y%22%3A0.4740372670807453%2C%22z%22%3A10%2C%22size%22%3A%7B%22width%22%3A1.8066666666666666%2C%22height%22%3A1.1850931677018635%7D%7D>

Image no: 54

Caption: *William Johnson, William Henderson, Town Hall Bombay & Cotton Green before the Elphinstone Circle was built, c. 1855–1862, Albumen photographic print, 20 x 26 cm, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.*

Link: <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/ea/id/1199>

IMAGE CREDITS

Image no: 55

Caption: Bourne & Shepherd, *Bhendy Bazaar Road, Bombay*, 1870s, Albumen silver print, 23.3 x 28.7 cm, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/108V7R#full-artwork-details>

Image no: 56

Caption: *Constructing the Gateway Of India, Bombay*, c. 1922, Past India.

Link: <https://www.past-india.com/photos-items/constructing-gateway-of-india-bombay-1922-photo/>

Image no: 57

Caption: Mustansir Dalvi, *Art Deco buildings lining the seafront along Marine Drive, Mumbai*, Published in “Alt/ Urban: When Mumbai buildings spoke of the sea”, *National Herald*, April 14, 2024.

Link: <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/art-and-culture/alt-urban-when-mumbai-buildings-spoke-of-the-sea>

Image no: 58

Caption: Margaret Bourke-White, *Bombay Stock & Cotton, Bullion Exchanges*, 1946, LIFE Magazine and Google Arts & Culture.

Link: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/bombay-stock-cotton-bullion-exchanges/LwGdl4vnTySqc>

Image no: 59

IMAGE CREDITS

Caption: *Bombay/Old Mumbai, chawl during 2020 lockdown in India*, Video: Manvendra, Adobe Stock.

Link:

https://stock.adobe.com/in/video/bombay-old-mumbai-chawl-during-2020-lockdown-in-india/355254534?prev_url=detail

Bombay's evolution from a bustling port to a thriving metropolis isn't just a story of ambition, but one that involves capital, class, and importantly — cotton.

The mid-19th century was a time of rapid and radical transformation in colonial-era Bombay, which forever changed the town's contours and composition. This period of churning saw Bombay's rise as a cosmopolitan industrial hub, where social differences were blatantly visible in the urban landscape. The rather humble commodity that accelerated this evolution was cotton, whose trade boomed in the crucial decade of the 1860s.

How Cotton Became Bombay's 'White Gold'

A series of developments brought about the shift. In 1861, the American Civil War cut off the supply of cotton to Great Britain from southern USA, where plantations relied on slave labour. To compensate, raw cotton was sourced from India, where labour was cheap, and the fertile soil and climate suited cotton cultivation. Back in Bombay, the rail, road, maritime and civic infrastructure had seen an improvement, making the time ripe for large-scale industrialisation.

Cotton mills were set up in areas like Mahalaxmi, Parel and Worli, and more than 81 million pounds sterling streamed into Bombay in the span of a few years. Even after the Civil War ended in 1865, the growth kept momentum as Indian entrepreneurs reinvested their profits into the sector. This progress was helped by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which created new sea routes that made trade more efficient.

A City of Contrasts Takes Form

Pre-industrialisation, Bombay was a poorly connected cluster of seven islands, and functioned primarily as a trading outpost. The influx of wealth from the cotton boom contributed to major land reclamation and the opening up of space in what was essentially a racially segregated, fortified port town. Once that happened, two very different enclaves started to take shape.

A sprawling town with planned layouts was developed at the southernmost tip of Bombay, where the colonial settlement had been. In areas like Colaba, Fort and the Esplanade, grand, imperial buildings — commercial, administrative and residential — came up, along with public spaces and well-ventilated streets. This town itself was segregated: the Europeans lived towards the south and prosperous Indians resided along the northern periphery.

Even further up north was the ‘Native Town’ where the Indian population lived, and where development was unplanned. As the biggest employers in Bombay, the textile mills attracted migrants in large numbers, mainly from impoverished areas in the neighbouring Konkan and Deccan regions. Many of them eventually settled in densely-packed single-room tenements called chawls, which were two- or three-storeyed residential blocks meant for the working classes.

The area where these new entrants lived and worked, located largely in present-day central Mumbai, came to be called Girangaon or the ‘village of mills’. While this was a fairly vast area, it’s not well-documented. We see the state of some chawls in images from the late 1890s, when a devastating plague ravaged Bombay. Evidently, the communal housing solution could not keep pace with the growing migrant population — the chawls ultimately proved overcrowded and unsanitary.

Conclusion

Large-scale industrialisation arising from the lucrative trade of cotton had created a polarised landscape, in a pattern typical of colonial cities. As Bombay developed further, this deeply entrenched duality would continue to pose a challenge to city-planning and spatial distribution. It would also exacerbate social differentiation. The beginnings of Mumbai’s capitalist economy, powered in large part by its now-defunct cotton mills, had set the stage for startling contrasts to coexist within the dense urban fabric of India’s maximum city.

Postscript

Bombay's textile sector continued to grow beyond the boom decade of the 1860s, but the labouring class still lived and worked in poor conditions. In 1982, textile-mill workers began a strike, primarily to settle payment disputes. The strike lasted around 18 months, leading to the closure of several mills. Many workers, in turn, vacated the chawls and returned to their villages. Today, the mill lands and the dilapidated chawls — many of the latter now house families — are located in areas considered prime real-estate. Their redevelopment, which was long-contested and is still ongoing, has brought with it a considerable degree of gentrification.

As mentioned in the video, 19th-century images of the mills and chawls of Girangaon are difficult to come by. The images of communal housing shown in this video are purely illustrative, and may not represent the tenements mill workers would actually have lived in.

In 1995, the city's name was officially changed from Bombay to Mumbai, as it is known today. Since this video discusses a time period before the official name change, we refer to the city as Bombay here.

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