

**DOI: [doiglobal.org/10.2021/NAIRJCSSH.030](https://doi.global.org/10.2021/NAIRJCSSH.030)**

THE COSMOPOLITAN NATURE OF EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOMBAY

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Bombay, now known as Mumbai, is one of the most populous cities in twenty-first-century India. The term cosmopolitan refers to a place composed of people from many different countries, cultures, and communities. Bombay is not only the financial capital of India but also presents a unique cultural canvas shaped by heterogeneous ideas and interactions among diverse communities. This diversity gives the city its distinctive cosmopolitan character.

Bombay replaced Surat as an important trading port during the nineteenth century. Owing to the abundant economic opportunities available in this colonial port city, artisans, merchants, craftspeople, and traders from different communities migrated to Bombay and settled there. In his farewell speech, Lord Curzon observed, There seems to be here an excellent feeling between the very different races and creeds.□¹ By 1900, Bombay's capitalist class comprised modern industrial, commercial, and financial groups, along with professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and senior government officials. In the mid-nineteenth century, the city's small Parsi community produced a prominent group of industrialists. They were later joined by members of Muslim trading communities, including the Khojas, Memons, and Bohras, as well as members of Hindu commercial communities such as the Banias, Bhatias, Jains, and Marwaris.Â²

At the first major all-India census in 1872, Bombay had a population of 644,405. It proclaimed itself Urbs Prima in Indis"the foremost city of India and became the largest city on the Indian subcontinent and the second-largest city in the British Empire after London. The island of Bombay was transferred to the British Crown as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza when she married King Charles II. The English Crown subsequently leased the seven islands of Bombay to the East India Company for an annual rent of ten pounds sterling. Initially, Bombay attracted limited attention for two principal reasons: it was separated from the mainland by the Western Ghats, and it faced persistent threats of attack from the Siddis and the Marathas.

The East India Company took possession of Bombay in 1668 and placed it under the Surat Presidency, with Gerald Aungier serving as Deputy Governor. As the first Indian territory held by the Company in full sovereignty, Bombay could be developed by the English as their principal centre of trade. In his first administrative report to the East India Company, Aungier outlined a plan for Bombay's commercial and social development and envisioned it as a gateway for British trade with India and the wider world. Owing to his forward-looking policies, many artisans, traders, craftspeople, and merchants migrated to Bombay during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Parsis received special encouragement because of their role in developing shipbuilding and supplying textiles to English merchants during the early years of East India Company rule. Silk weavers from nearby areas such as Thana and Chaul were also encouraged to migrate to the island. To attract merchants to Bombay, an exemption from import and export duties was granted for five years, from 1670 to 1675. In 1672, the Company sent Banias to the Deccan to invite merchants to trade and settle in Bombay. Gerald Aungier, Governor of Bombay from 1669 to 1677, proposed granting Bombay's inhabitants the special privilege of trading throughout India. Religious and commercial concessions were also offered to encourage people from other regions to settle permanently in Bombay. These policies laid the foundations of cosmopolitan Bombay.

During the nineteenth century, some of India's most experienced business communities including Parsis, Gujarati Banias, and Gujarati Muslims congregated in Bombay. Surat had initially been the centre of indigenous commercial activity in western India, but Bombay gradually assumed that position. Many Parsis who migrated from Surat to Bombay were originally carpenters. In partnership with the East India Company, they became involved in ship repair and shipbuilding, secured an important position in the coastal trade in Malabar teak, entered coastal shipping, and eventually participated in the Indo-Chinese trade in Malwa opium.

During the eighteenth century, the Wadia family became prominent in shipbuilding. In the nineteenth century, families such as the Readymoneys, Modis, and Banajis established a pattern of enterprise that became characteristic of the Parsi business community. In western India, Parsi merchants ranked second only to their European counterparts in the cotton and opium trades. The master shipbuilder Lowji Wadia came to Bombay from Surat in 1735 and helped establish a shipbuilding centre and dockyard of international standing. Parsis also established some of Bombay's earliest textile mills and invested extensively in the cotton-mill industry, which came to epitomise the city's commercial identity. By 1914, Parsi merchants occupied a significant position in Bombay's textile industry.

Bombay also benefited greatly from the philanthropic activities of the Parsi community. Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy funded several public institutions, including the hospital that bears his name and is associated with Grant Medical College, one of the earliest institutions of Western medical education in western India. The Sir Dorabji Tata Trust continues to support important educational causes. Ardeshir B. Godrej co-founded Godrej & Boyce Manufacturing Company in 1897, after beginning the manufacture of high-security locks. He was a pioneering industrialist and philanthropist who made notable contributions to Indian industry and society.

Parsis contributed immensely to Bombay's social and cultural development. Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata conceived the idea of the Indian Institute of Science; Dr Homi J. Bhabha established the Tata Institute of Fundamental

Research; and the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust helped establish the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 1936. Institutions such as the Jehangir Art Gallery, Sir J. J. School of Art, and Taraporevala Aquarium also benefited from Parsi patronage. The distinctive design of Parsi colonies added vibrancy to Bombay's architectural heritage, while the city's culinary history would be incomplete without its celebrated Parsi bakeries.

The Marwaris likewise played an important role in Bombay and the interior of Maharashtra, particularly as bankers and moneylenders. After 1823, they became instrumental in procuring opium from Malwa and Rajasthan. In collaboration with Parsis and other Bombay traders, Marwari merchants accumulated considerable wealth through the opium trade. Marwari migration to Bombay had begun in the eighteenth century. The *Smriti Granth* of the Marwari Sammelan suggests that Marwaris were among the earliest trading communities to settle in the island city. The concentration of Marwari businesses and residences in Kalbadevi, one of Bombay's oldest settlement areas, supports this view.

Swarupchand Hukumchand, Hardutrai Chamarla, Nirmal Lohia, and members of the Birla family made substantial fortunes through opium speculation. A growing number of Marwaris gradually established commercial relationships with Bombay's opium firms. In the cotton-textile sector, the Podars, Somanis, and Birlas were among the leading Marwari trading families. Early and prominent Marwari firms included Khetsidas Harmukhrai of the Ruia family, established in the 1850s, and Cheniram Jesraj Nathuram Podar, established in 1855. These firms began in the opium trade and later developed major interests in cotton. Members of the Piramal family, Bhagvandas Lohia, Jamnalal Bajaj, Bhagwandas Daga, Bisambharlal Maheshwari, and Anandilal Podar were also active in Bombay's cotton trade. Marwari families such as the Ruias and Podars contributed to the city's social development by establishing colleges and promoting education.

The Bhatias were another prominent immigrant mercantile community that shaped Bombay's entrepreneurial character. Jivraj Baloo was among the earliest Bhatia merchants to migrate from Kutch to Bombay in the 1770s. Moolji Jaitha's cotton-trading enterprise was one of the largest in Bombay during the 1830s. He earned substantial profits during the cotton boom of 1862-65 by exporting raw cotton to Britain and Europe. At the initiative of Bhatia merchants, the trade in cotton piece goods became concentrated in three markets: Moolji Jaitha Market, Laxmidas Khimji Market, and Morarji Gokuldas Market. Moolji Jaitha Market, one of the largest markets of its kind in Asia, was developed through the collaboration of Moolji Jaitha, Thackersey Moolji, and Jairam Morarji.

Inspired by the Swadeshi movement, mill owner Vithaldas Thackersey helped establish the Indian Specie Bank in 1906. He also served as chairman of the Bank of Baroda, which was established in July 1908 to advance commerce and industry. His family made a significant contribution to women's education through its support of Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, India's first women's university.

David Sassoon, a Baghdadi Jewish merchant who migrated to Bombay in 1832, occupies an important place in the city's commercial and architectural history. His business interests included the E. D. Sassoon textile mills. Like many other prosperous merchants, he donated generously to public causes in his adopted city. The David Sassoon Library and Reading Room is an enduring example of his family's civic contribution. His son, Albert Sassoon, was responsible for constructing Sassoon Dock.

Gujarati mercantile communities had been present in Bombay since the early years of East India Company rule. They included Hindu and Jain Banias, Muslim Bohras and Khojas, and Parsis, who arrived in groups over a period of more than a century. Their predominance in Bombay's commercial life, together with the use of Gujarati as the city's principal mercantile language, was established at an early stage.¹

Konkani Muslims were among the earliest Muslim mercantile communities to settle in Bombay, arriving during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Many were of Arab origin and worked as seafarers and shipbuilders. Leading merchants from this community, including the Roghays, Ghattays, and Kurs, contributed to Bombay's trade during the eighteenth century. The Portuguese had also been present on the islands since the sixteenth century.

Bombay originally consisted of seven separate islands. In addition to the indigenous Koli inhabitants, certain Muslim communities were present because of the islands' proximity to Mughal territory and the influence of the Siddis, whose strongholds included the forts of Khanderi and Underi. After the English occupation, extensive efforts were made to connect the seven islands, eventually creating the modern city of Mumbai.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, expanding economic opportunities attracted people from diverse regions and communities. Continuous interaction between established inhabitants and migrant groups created a dynamic social and cultural environment. The coexistence of Parsis, Marwaris, Bhatias, Gujaratis, Muslims, Jews, Portuguese, Kolis, Europeans, and numerous other groups shaped Bombay's commercial institutions, philanthropic traditions, architecture, cuisine, language, and public life. It was this sustained interaction among diverse communities that gave eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bombay its cosmopolitan character.

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