# Greetings from Bombay! Pictures of Colonial Complexity

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*Fig. 17: Mumbai. Bombay Bay around 1900. In the 1920s, the British colonial administration carried out new works to drain the sea and expand the city.*


Say you get a post card.[1] You see a place far away, mostly beautiful, or at least interesting. You know the sender, why otherwise would they know your address or anyway send it to you? You can ask yourself: what's the message? Does the sender want your company? Is he or she lonely

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out there? Or just wants to make you envious? "Hey, I am here, you are not. I know you can't but would like to. Wouldn't you…?" A message from a lucky and free acquaintance from a paradisical Erehwon.[2] Turn the name of this place the other way around, and you read "Nowhere." That's not a place to be. Then you forget that and look at the image side of your newly received postcard. There! That's a place on earth. Greetings from Bombay! Welcome to the historical complexity of colonialism. Postcards give a glimpse of a place by isolating a building, a view, individuals, from the larger context. They want to spark something in you, create something new or revive something old, like nostalgia.

For this essay, I look at a selection of postcards of colonial Bombay from Éléonore Muhidine's collection of Bombay postcards. They are not sent to me. I know the city and will surely go there again when I need to. I look at them in another way. Historically. I explore the palimpsests that make up many of these sites to excavate Bombay's past. One of the definitions for palimpsest is "a manuscript in which a later writing is written over an effaced earlier one."[3] Taking this approach, postcards are released from the confines of their frame to allow for a nuanced and layered understanding of Bombay's architecture in the context of its urban setting.

## The Bombay Fort and its urban design

The Fort was the nucleus of British colonial settlement and the foundation of the town and city of Bombay. The cotton boom of the 1860s encouraged the colonial government, under the leadership of Governor Sir

2 *Erewhon: or, Over the Range* (New York, Modern Library, 1872) is a novel by English writer Samuel Butler, first published anonymously in 1872, is in an invented country discovered and surveyed by the protagonist. At first Erewhon appears to be Utopia. The book is a satire on Victorian society.

3 *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), second edition (1989). See https://www.oed.com/oed2/00169695. (02.02.2023).

Bartle Frere (1862–67), to finally throw down the ramparts surrounding the city in 1864, no longer necessary for military purposes.

This opened the plain, transforming the city by creating a vast new public arena for government offices and public institutions. Urban projects transformed the Fort area leading to the establishment of a north-south and east-west axes. These axes were accentuated in the subsequent decades with the construction of public buildings. The east-west axis started on the east from the Town Hall, went through the garden at Elphinstone Circle to join Church Gate Street that was adjacent to public buildings on the western rim, ending most notably with the B.B. & C.I. Railways Offices Station (1894–96)[4] and Churchgate Station, and terminated with an expansive view across Back Bay. The north-south axis culminated at the northern end with the great Victoria Terminus (1878–1887) and the Gateway of India (1927) at Apollo Bunder. These two axes intersected at what is commonly referred as Flora Fountain.[5] In *Maclean's Guide* of 1889, Rampart Row, which traces of the line of the old fortification between Apollo and Church Gates and the western boundary of South Fort, curves northwards to "the 'Grande Place' formed at this point," where "is the Frere Fountain, a very beautiful work of art."[6] Inaugurated in 1869, the fountain was first named after Bombay Governor Sir Bartle Frere, a central figure in the reshaping of Bombay.

Designed by R. Norman Shaw, the British sculptor James Forsythe worked on imported Portland stone to sculpt the fountain. The sculptures include four mythological figures as well "Flora," the Roman goddess, whose figure crowns the fountain. The fountain is located at or near the site of what was Church Gate, one of the gates into the Fort. Church

4 Now the Western Railway Headquarters.

5 Mehrotra, Rahul, "Bazaars in Victorian Arcades: Conserving Bombay's Historic Core," in: Dandekar C., Hemalata (ed.), *City Space + Globalization: An International Perspective*, Chicago, University of Michigan, 1998; p.46-53.

6 Maclean Mackenzie, James, *Guide to Bombay: Historical, Statistical, and Descriptive* (henceforth, *Guide to Bombay*). Fourteenth Edition, Bombay, Bombay Gazette Steam Press, 1889; p. 217. "Bazaars in Victorian Arcades" puts the date for Flora Fountain as 1887, while newspaper articles date the inauguration of the fountain to 1869. The latter is likely correct.

Gate Street owes its name to St. Thomas Church, now Cathedral since around 1838. Certainly by 1910, the fountain was referred to as the "Floral Fountain" as it is in the postcard. In the image we can see that the fountain was encircled by a grass plot and palm trees. By 1908, these were removed so that "pedestrians and horse-traffic between the tram lines and kerb of the fountain" could be accommodated.

*Fig. 18: Mumbai, Esplanade Road and Floral Fountain.*


In the background to the left, the tree-lined Esplanade Road leads northward. At the junction of Churchgate and Esplanade Roads stands the General Post Office, north of which is the Government Telegraph Office. Beyond these buildings stood the Queen's Statue, which is not visible. The General Post Office (1869–72) was designed by J. Trubshawe and W. Paris, both Architects to Government. W. Paris was also the architect for the Telegraph Office (1871–74), which was later expanded. These buildings have been praised for their use of the "Venetian-Gothic" style-building plans, proportions, the quality of the rich ornamentation on the front façade of the Post Office.[7] The image shows the twin towers, sharply

7 Maclean, *Guide to Bombay*, op.cit.; p.212-14.

sloping roofs, an arcade on the lower floor (the two-storey porch at the entrance is partially veiled by trees).

Although native contributions are mentioned in colonial-era records and guidebooks in passing, they are intrinsic to the construction of these buildings. Muncherjee Cowasjee Murzban, a native engineer from the Parsi community, was the Assistant Engineer in charge of both these buildings. His biography records an incident related to construction of the General Post Office, used since 1914 as an adjunct to the General Telegraph Office. According to this account, the construction of this building was based on designs sent out from England by an English architect. The building was designed in such a way that the entire weight of the two upper floors was to fall on the sub-structure of the ground floor comprised of columns and arches.

## The Post Office building: a colonial landmark

As the building construction commenced, Murzban alerted his superior officer of the inherent weakness of the under-structure. When work on the super-structure of the two upper floors was almost complete and roofing had begun, the inadequacy of the stone columns became clear one had a complete vertical crack. Realizing that a structural collapse would tarnish the reputation of the Public Works Department (PWD), Murzban took matters in his own hands and immediately replaced the cracked column with a new one. Not long after it had been replaced, several other columns were found to be fractured under the excessive weight of the superstructure. People in Bombay began to talk about how the Post Office Building was collapsing, which reached the attention of the governor of Bombay, Sir Seymour Vesey FitzGerald. It was decided that the eight columns beneath the two upper floors should be replaced and Murzban was put in charge. It was a risky enterprise and several Indian and European engineers, the Chief Engineer and the Executive Engineer stopped by to see how this was being handled. Murzban's success-

ful resolution of this structural crisis resulted in his promotion.[8] Even as Murzban portrayed himself as loyal to the colonial government, it appears that the tutelage of the British was no longer necessary, for both native and European engineers learned from his handling of the situation.

*Fig. 19: Mumbai, Crawford Market.*


## From Floral to Flora Fountain

Floral Fountain was not meant for this location but was planned for the centre of Victoria Gardens at Byculla by the Agri-horticultural Society that raised funds for the purpose. After the financial crash of 1865,

8 Murzban, M. M., *Leaves from the Life of Khan Bahadur Muncherji Cowasji Murzban, C. I. E.: with an Introduction containing a life-sketch of Fardunji Murbanji*, Bombay, Furdoonji Byramji Marzban, 1915, p. 47–49. Murzban's son does not give a date for the building nor the name of the English architect. The General Post Office, opened on 1 December 1872, was based on designs by J. Trubshawe and W. Paris, architects to the government. Murzban was appointed as assistant to Trubshawe in 1863. See: Furneaux, J. H., *Glimpses of India: A Grand Photographic History of The Land of Antiquity, the vast Empire of the East*, Bombay, C. B. Burrows, 1895; p. 214.

the Society found itself short of funds. Arthur Crawford, president of the Society and member of the Esplanade Fee Fund Committee, came to a solution for the latter committee to pay the remaining costs and establish the fountain at this site.[9] Opposite the fountain was the newly constructed and "conspicuous Cathedral High School," which had a "medieval feeling" but was constructed in the "Modern Gothic Style" by J. Adams. Erected at the junction of the Esplanade main road and Hornby Row (later, Road), it was carefully designed as a pentagon with two rectangular wings that fronted and were parallel to the roads.[10] Instead of the High School, in the image you see the Oriental Buildings, about which more later.

*Fig. 20: Mumbai, Hornby Road in the 1940s.*


Merging with Rampart Row at Flora fountain, Hornby Row/Road curves northwards towards the right, as the western edge of north Fort, and a reminder of the ramparts. In 1898, design guidelines established that each building here had to have an arcade. At an urban scale, this arcade helped to unify the streetscape and give coherence to individual buildings constructed by different architects, in various architectural styles. Emphasizing the importance of this urban design intervention in

9 Maclean, *op.cit.*; p.217.

10 Ibid.; p.218.

strengthening the north-south axis, architect and conservationist Rahul Mehrotra argued that "This development along Hornby Road connected the crescent of public buildings south of Flora Fountain (including Elphinstone College, Sasson [sic] Library, the University and Watsons [sic] Hotel), unifying disparate elements in the composition of the newly designed city core."[11]

Hornby Road takes us to perhaps the finest Victorian Gothic Revival building in India, the Great Indian Peninsular Railway Victoria Terminus and Administrative Offices (1878–87), commonly known as Victoria Terminus or VT (1878–1887), which is to the right. In England, John Ruskin and others actively supported Gothic architecture, extolling its virtue as an artifact of craftsmanship rather than machine production. Ruskin and other critics of the industrial era romanticized medieval architecture as representing an era that was more honest and truthful than their own. By reviving medieval architecture, they hoped that society might recapture its dignity. Ian Baucom has argued that in the years following the Revolt of 1857–8 in India, Frere and other government officials elected to spend large amounts of money on building projects in Bombay. They believed in Ruskin's view that "the identity of the empire's subjects was to a significant degree a product of the objects and structures which they beheld and inhabited. Ruskin had spent years informing England that there was a direct relationship between the arrangements of space and the contours of the personality."[12] If Indo-Saracenic architecture aimed to remake the British as indigenous rulers, Bombay's Victorian Gothic sought, in a sense, to shape a collective personality so that the *English* might remain English, while Indians could be remade as Englishmen.

11 Mehrotra, Rahul, "Bazaars in Victorian Arcades," *op.cit.*; p.47.

12 Baucom, Ian, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999; p.79.

*Fig. 21: Mumbai, Victoria Terminus (1888), today Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) in the 1970s.*

Buildings in which the Gothic Revival style was combined with Indic details were confusing for the British, as they simultaneously helped project a sense of Englishness while producing a clear degree of hybridity, thus revealing the colonial state's "capacity to collect and exhibit alterity."[13] There are many buildings of this type in British Bombay, such as the Law Courts (1871–9), or the Municipal Buildings (1888–93), but among the most conspicuous is the magnificent Victoria Terminus. It is designed by Frederick Williams Stevens and based on G.G. Scott's Grand Midland Hotel at St Pancras Station in London (1868–77). It contains Indic details that came from the hands of students and craftsmen associated with the Bombay School of Art, under the supervision of John Griffiths. The administrative buildings formed three sides of a square, enclosing a garden, whose entrance gate was guarded by a huge lion and tiger carved in stone. A triumphant figure of Progress crowned the building's impressive dome, a life-size statue of Queen-Empress Victoria stood in front of the main façade. Commenting on the dome, Davies notes that "Unlike St Pancras, VT is symmetrical and is surmounted by a colossal masonry dome, ostensibly 'the first applied to a Gothic building

13 *Ibid.*; p. 85.

on scientific principles,' and this claim is probably true."[14] Glowing in his praise of Victoria Terminus, Davies correctly points out that if there was one critique to be made it would be "in the ratio of its length to its height."

Victorian Gothic architecture is associated with verticality, whereas the large foreground and almost interminable side elevation of the train shed bordering the road emphasize its horizontality, as can be seen in this view.[15] The Victoria Terminus is enmeshed in other popular histories that shape its meaning. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Bombay emerged as a major center for Islam, both in the context of its continental hinterland and as the central hub of a West Indian Ocean world. Nile Green has uncovered stories that reveal the commonly held belief that this industrial city was governed by hidden supernatural forces. One was of the shrine of a Muslim saint, Sayyid Bismillah Shah Baba, that was built into the very structure of the Victoria Terminus. Bismillah Shah was a migrant and, similar to other migrant shrines, his "unknown grave… was 'rediscovered' in miraculous circumstances." The story, according to oral tradition, suggests that when the railway was being laid the tracks in this part of the station would surprisingly disappear or break overnight. Finally, British surveyors and workmen found out that a Muslim holy man lay buried there. The railway company paid for the construction of the domed mausoleum that covers Bismillah Shah's grave, undoubtedly, to ensure that the construction of the Terminus proceeded smoothly. This then became a site of pilgrimage for travelers who made a stop here before embarking on their journey.[16] For some, it is likely that the saint's tomb was more important than Victoria as Queen-Empress, identifying the building with the saint's protection instead.

14 Davies, Philip, *Splendours of The Raj: British Architecture in India 1660-1947*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1985; p.173.

15 *Ibid.*; p.175.

16 Green, Nile, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011; p. 63–64.

Opposite the Victoria Terminus one can see the Municipal Buildings, which stands at the junction of two prominent roads. In an editorial in 1888, the *Builder* noted that there were two opposing theories of how Anglo-Indian, or in other words, architecture as practiced by the English in India should take. One theory advocated "adopting or assimilating native styles" and was illustrated by the prize-winning design by the architect R.F. Chisholm for the proposed Municipal Offices Buildings in Bombay. Even though the design won first place it had been abandoned for reasons unknown. The second theory of Anglo-Indian architecture was to transpose European forms to India, with minor changes and the example given in the *Builder* was of Stevens's recently built Victoria Terminus.[17] Chisholm's Indo-Saracenic design for the Municipal Buildings was never built. Stevens, rather than Chisholm got the commission to design and build the Municipal Buildings (1888–93) whose gable is crowned by a winged figure that confidently symbolizes the city as "Urbs Prima in Indis." In this and increasingly in the Church Gate Terminus (1894–96) designed for the Bombay, Baroda and Central Indian Railway, Stevens tried to marry the Venetian Gothic with the Indo-Saracenic, the latter effect created mainly through the shape of the domes and domelets. However, the plan and design of Churchgate terminus is substantially like the Victoria Terminus. At this time, Stevens also undertook the refashioning of what was the Cathedral School into the Oriental Buildings at Flora Fountain. In common with Church Gate Terminus, it also employs "grey facings with bands of white stone dressings." Of the Oriental Buildings, Davies goes on to say, "It is an evocative affair with a spiky silhouette of spirelets, turrets and gables looking like a setting from some tropical *Gotterdämmerung*... it is an excellent climax in the townscape".[18]

Apart from Sir Bartle Frere's active encouragement of the use of the Gothic Revival style in Bombay in the 1860s, Stamp points to two reasons for its success in Bombay. First, one could find good stone of different colors for construction, allowing for the solid construction desired by

17 "Anglo-Indian Architecture", *Builder*, 1888/55; p.313.

18 Davies, *op.cit.*; p.177.

Gothicists as well as polychromatic detailing by using stones of contrasting colors. Second, Gothic Revival required dynamic architectural sculpture and decoration. This became possible when John Lockwood Kipling was hired as a professor of Architectural Sculpture at the Bombay School of Art in 1865.[19] Under the supervision of Kipling, students at the Bombay School began to make marble, stone, and plaster decorations for many of the public buildings that were coming up in Bombay and Poona. As Mahrukh Tarapor has noted "Their decorations were particularly noteworthy for introducing natural forms into much architectural ornament in India's official edifices, an innovation."[20] John Griffiths (1838–1918), teacher of decorative painting, for example, led a group of students in the decorations of the High Court and Victoria Terminus buildings. Partha Mitter observed that "In the decoration of public buildings in Bombay under Kipling, students enjoyed giving 'play to the grotesque and the fanciful common to Indian and Mediaeval art.'"[21]

*Fig. 22: Mumbai, Taj Mahal Hotel (1903) in the 1920s.*


19 Stamp, Gavin, "British Architecture in India, 1857–1947", *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 1981/129; p. 363.

20 Tarapor, Mahrukh, "John Lockwood Kipling and British Art in India," *Victorian Studies* 24, Indiana University Press, 1980/64; p.53-81.

21 Mitter, Partha, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850–1922*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; p. 61.

Apollo Bunder is located at the southern end of the north-south axis, which is the location of the Indian industrialist Jamsetji N. Tata's (1839–1904) impressive and up-to-date Taj Mahal Hotel ("the Taj"), built in 1903, which became the city's premier hotel. Adjacent to it was the Green's Mansions, constructed in 1890 and purchased by the Tata Group by November 1904 to become the Green's Hotel ("Green's"), whose edge is on the right hand of the image.

## Apollo Bunder, the Gateway to India

The Taj's towering central dome at a height of 240 feet is still used by the Indian Navy "as an official daytime triangulation point" [22] for its ships. Apollo Bunder was the main landing place for passengers until 1895 and a favourite place of resort for Bombay society during the colonial era.[23] It was also the place that one of the city's wealthy *shetias* might make their way to. Here were located the racially exclusive Bombay Yacht Club House (1881) to the east of the Apollo Bunder and the Royal Bombay Yacht Club Chambers (1895–1897) where natives were only welcome as employees. In contrast, the Taj and Green's was open to members of all races. Foregrounding these structures was the final colonial monument built here in 1927, the Gateway of India, designed by George Wittet, to mark the place where king-emperor, George V, and Queen Mary, first stepped ashore in 1911.[24] Tata's biographer stated that the impetus behind this hotel was Tata's "patriotism and love for the city,"[25] but a common Bombay tale is that Tata was denied entry into the dining hall of Watson's Esplanade Hotel and vowed to build a grander hotel where Indians would not face discrimination. This story is not considered to be true, but it has

22 URL: https://www.tajhotels.com/en-in/taj/taj-mahal-palace-mumbai/stories/ (02.02.2023).

23 Maclean, *op.cit.*; p. 205.

24 Morris, Jan; Winchester, Simon, *Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj*, London, Oxford University Press, 1983; p.194-95.

25 Harris, F.R., *Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata: A Chronicle of His Life*, London, Oxford University Press, 1925; p. 77–80.

survived because it seems like a case where the Empire strikes back, even though only the very wealthy could afford to patronize the hotel.

The Taj and Green's interrupted the racially exclusive enclaves of the Yacht Club, to create a middle-ground where the city's English-speaking native elite interacted with colonial officials, Indian politicians, expatriates, exiled artists, and many others. The Taj and Green's were important venues for jazz, and the art scene, including figures associated with the Progressives. Rachel Lee makes the case that "The Taj and Green's were key sites in the public cultural and social life of Bombay's educated English-speaking elites. Both hotels were contact zones that enabled the paths and social lives of travelers, locals, exiles and migrants to intersect."[26]

Seeking inspiration for the design of his own house, the Esplanade House, and the Taj, Tata toured the world for architectural ideas and equipment to make sure that these buildings were modern, stylistically eclectic, and yet personal. For the design of the Taj, Tata had very particular ideas and worked with Raosaheb Sitaram Khanderao Vaidya, who had overseen the construction of the Sailors' Home, and D.N. Mirza. Following Vaidya's demise in 1900, W.A. Chambers, representing the firm Gostling, Chambers & Fritchley, became the architect. Both Vaidya and Chambers had previously worked with Stevens on his Gothic Revival public buildings. While maintaining much of the original design, Chambers altered the shape of the central dome. The hotel's website proudly discusses its eclectic range of influences: "With its Indo-Saracenic arches and distinctive, red-tiled Florentine gothic dome, carved with Victorian Gothic and Romanesque details along with Edwardian touches on the roof, it is truly an architectural jewel."[27] The

26 Lee, Rachel, "Hospitable Environments: The Taj Mahal Hotel and green's Hotel as site of cultural production in Bombay", in: Dogramaci et al. (eds.), *Arrival Cities. Migrating Artists and New Metropolitan Topographies in the 20th Century*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2020. Open access: https://lup.be/products/132128 (01.02.2023). For a definition of "contact zone": see Pratt Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London, Routledge, 1992; p. 6–7.

27 Dwivedi, Sharada; Mehrotra, Rahul, *Fort Walks: Around Bombay's Fort Area*, Mumbai, Eminence, 1999; p.47. Quote from hotel website: https://www.tajhote

building defies any stylistic definition with its large central dome and four onion shaped cupolas at the corners. Its *jharokha* like projecting balconies resemble those from Mughal or Rajput architecture and yet often have tiled roofs, and arch types used vary from the Gothic pointed to semi-circular. It was a Parsi contractor, Sorabji Contractor who constructed the building and conceived of the well-known cantilevered central staircase.

The nationalist spirit animated the policies of the Parsi industrialist Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (1839–1904), who was instrumental in establishing educational scholarships for Indian students to pursue their higher studies abroad and sought to find a Scientific Research Institute.[28] This shows Tata aimed to nurture native expertise. Tata's biographer, D.E. Wacha has described him as "a Swadeshi of Swadeshists long before Swadeshism was boomed in Bengal."[29] Swadeshi refers to something made or manufactured within one's own country. When he planned a new mill in Bombay in 1886, he called it the "Swadeshi Mills." Tata's plan was to compete with Lancashire to spin finer yarn and produce finer cloth to substantially reduce imports, a version of swadeshi.[30] The Swadeshi movement of Bengal of 1905 asked Indians to boycott foreign goods and buy domestic products. One might think of the Taj as a version of swadeshi, where the Tata used Indian and western expertise to construct a hotel which prides itself for coming "with many firsts": the country's "first hotel to have electricity, American fans, German elevators, Turkish baths and English butlers."[31] Confidently naming the hotel after the Taj Mahal, signaled its excellence. If

ls.com/en-in/taj/taj-mahal-palace-mumbai/stories/. The website includes the name of D. N. Mirza but does not mention W. A. Chambers (01.02.2023).

28 Wacha Edulji, Dinshaw, *The Life & Work of J. N. Tata*, Madras, Ganesh & Co., 1915; p.11. For Tata scholarships, see https://www.tatatrusts.org/our-work/individual-grants-programme/education-grants. I am also a former recipient of a J. N. Tata Endowment loan scholarship.

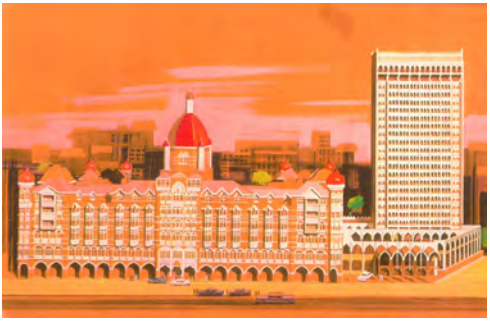
29 *Ibid.*; p. 8.

30 *Ibid.*; p. 8–9.

31 See https://www.tajhotels.com/en-in/taj/taj-mahal-palace-mumbai/stories/ (01.02.2023).

the British picked and chose elements from Indian architecture in the making of Indo-Saracenic architecture, or in the detailing of their buildings, Tata felt free to pick and choose from the world's architecture. The significance of Tata's projects is that they herald a spirit of independence from colonialism. Seeking and incorporating ideas for architecture and technology from India, and abroad in Europe, Tata provincialized the colonial regime by his self-sufficiency, by simply by not requiring their guidance.

*Fig. 23: Mumbai, Taj Mahal Hotel and Taj Mahal Tower, model of the 1970s.*



It was on the steps of the Taj Mahal Hotel and not a government building that Lord Mountbatten made the announcement of India's independence in 1947. Over two decades after India's independence, in 1973, The Taj Mahal Tower, a business hotel, was opened, taking the place of Green's Hotel. Melton Bekker, an American architect, envisioned its L-shaped structure, while Rustam Patell, is credited "as the architect and designer" who brought this vision to fruition. Bekker also borrowed from unrelated Indian architectural traditions, including pillars from Tanjore in the south, "arched balconies from Rajasthan into [sic] the

distinctive tower which is crowned with a jagged diadem."[32] The tower rises from an arcaded podium that echoes the arcade at the ground floor of the Taj. On the Arabian sea-facing façade, the tower's edges on either side form a vertical band that include two arched windows that are setback slightly to frame the tower, while the upper flower with large windows cantilevers out like a crown. As the painted image reveals, the wide-spreading Taj with its central dome still dominates the scene, with the Taj Tower as a vertical accent. Beyond, one is made aware of the rising, less luxurious cityscape.

## Heritage and decolonization

The collection of postcards compels me to return once again to the site of Flora Fountain in the post-independence period. After India's independence in 1947, the multilingual city of Bombay's future was caught up in debates from the late 1940s and 1950s over the establishment of linguistic states within India. In November 1955, there was a proposal to carve three states out of Bombay state with the city of Bombay as one. Protesting the three-state solution, a large procession against this proposal resulted in the killing of protestors by the police near Flora Fountain in 1955. This came to be seen as a pivotal moment in the battle for Samyukta Maharashtra (United Maharashtra). Those who died here and were killed by the police in 1956, came to be seen "as 'martyrs [*hutatma*]' for their homeland." The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (SMS) formed in 1956 were important in representing the interests of Marathi speakers (versus Gujarati speakers) in leading the fight against the three-state solution. Before the division of Bombay state into Maharashtra and Gujarat on 1 May 1960, the SMS led a torchlight procession to Flora Fountain where a memorial pillar had been raised. A foundation stone of the martyr's memorial was laid the next year. Officially, the name of this space was changed to Hutatma Chowk (Martyrs' Square), and government ceremonies ensure its continued importance in sub-national

32 *Ibid.*

nationalism, that is, patriotism towards Maharashtra. A tall pillar holds up a bronze sculpture of a farmer and worker who together hold a torch and slab, which has etched into it, the names of 105 martyrs.[33] This is also a memorial that reminds us of the violence of the police and the state against its citizens in the postcolonial era, where the tensions of nationalism still simmer after independence. The postcards show us Hutatma Chowk with the fountain and memorial bound together in the center of the parking lot, with both identities existing. One image shows us the outlines of the parking spaces, while the other emphasizes the parked cars and the traffic dense traffic here.

*Fig. 24: Mumbai, Flora Fountain in the 1960s.*

As "Floral Fountain" became "Flora Fountain" another history became possible, and scholars have incorrectly shown that the fountain is part of the larger history of the Jews in India.[34] Rather than a Roman goddess, scholars point out that the fountain is named after the renowned Flora

33 Isaka, Riho, "The multilingual city of Bombay and the formation of linguistic states, 1947–60," in: Bates Crispin, Mio Minoru (eds.), *Cities in South Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2015; p. 143–158.

34 See, for example, Joan G., Roland, "The Baghdadi Jews," in: Slapak, Orpa (ed.), *The Jews of India: A Story of Three Communities*, Jerusalem, Israel Museum, 1995;

Sassoon (1859–1936), famous for her good judgement in business, charity, philanthropy, and her piety as a Jew. Widow of Solomon Sassoon (1841–1894), and daughter-in-law of David Sassoon (1793–1864), the legendary founder of this illustrious Baghdadi Jewish family in Bombay of merchants and industrialists. While Solomon is credited with making the family's commercial enterprises global, after his death Flora "truly internationalized the family businesses and she continued its philanthropic endeavours." She also facilitated the family's slow transfer to London, not long after the early twentieth century. Apparently, "Bombayites remember her today, thanks to the dominant Flora Fountain near Victoria Station."[35] The Flora Fountain is part of a Jewish itinerary in Bombay, which could start from the Gateway of India, that was also financed partially by a member of the Sassoon family. In 2017, as Flora Fountain was being restored, conservation architect Vikas Dilawari and the structural engineers working with him first uncovered the fountain's underground water network because they wanted to understand what had stopped the flow of water through the outlets on the mouths of fish on the fountain and restore the system. Apparently, a well, which is now underground is the source of the fountain's water and has been restored. Perhaps, in reference to the well, "Flora Fountain" is also referred to as "Mulji Jetha Pyau," possibly the name of the donor of the well.[36] Flora Fountain, this urban junction, is truly the fountain that keeps giving!

p.37-46; Silliman, Jael, *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames: Women's Narratives from a Diaspora of Hope*, Hanover, Brandeis, 2003.

35 Katz, Nathan, *Who are the Jews of India?*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000; p. 141.

36 Vartak, Priyanka, "Mumbai: Flora Fountain restoration makes architect 'dig' deep into history," *Free Press Journal*, Mumbai.

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