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PARKER & SHEAFFER'S
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DEALERS & REPAIRERS OF ALL KINDS OF
FOUNTAIN PENS & LADIES HAND BAGS

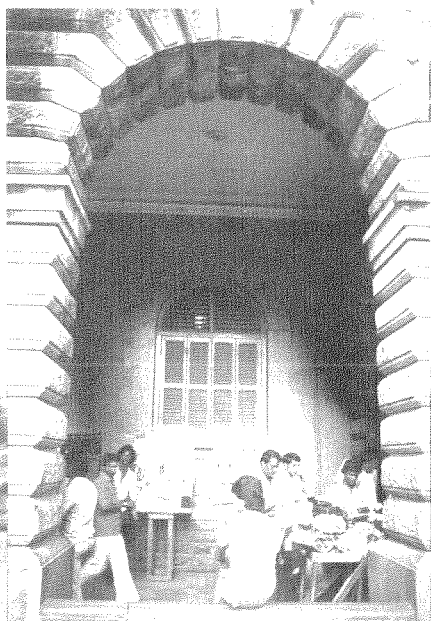
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Bazaars in Victorian Arcades

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bombay's colonial government reshaped the city by means of a series of distinct, planned architectural and urban design projects. The authorities sought not only to make the city's growth cohesive but also to place their imprint on its form by controlling building activity and investment in infrastructure, however sporadic and incremental it may have seemed.

Today, however, Bombay no longer physically manifests itself with the clarity that its colonial planners envisioned. An unprecedented number of people are migrating to the city for economic reasons, bringing with them social values and cultural attitudes that are transforming the structure and form of the city.

The old Fort area of Bombay, the object of much of the colonial government's attention, is symbolic of this transformation. This precinct, which marks the origin of Bombay as a city, is now the commercial and symbolic center of the Bombay metropolitan region. But today the urban fabric of the Fort area is being altered by various activities vying for the same space. And current building laws, which are standardized throughout the city, are unable to safeguard the clarity that designers have envisioned during the past century.

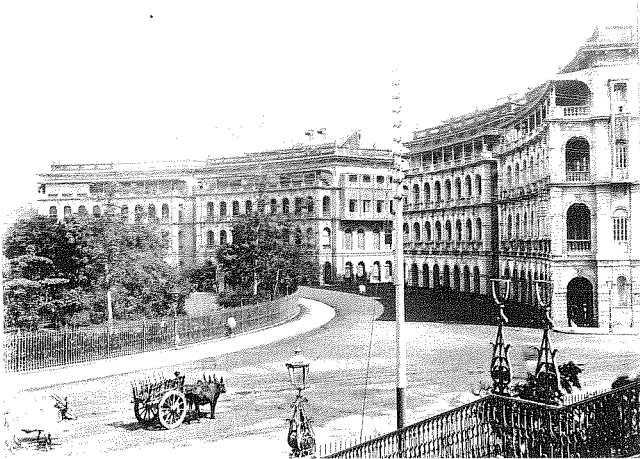
The most emblematic of the conflicts – the spread of traditional Indian bazaars into the formal urban spaces planned by colonial government – suggests new approaches to preservation that take into account the constantly changing nature of the city.

The intermingling of Indian culture and Bombay's colonial architecture is posing unusual preservation problems.

Courtesy Rahul J. Mehrotra.

Horniman Circle, with its combination of a central park enclosed by controlled facades, introduced an urban design approach that had not been used previously in India.

Courtesy Times of India.



Hornby Road, an example of structuring urban form through mandated regulations. Here, the arcade was required in all buildings.

Courtesy Rahul J. Mehrotra.



Structuring the Core

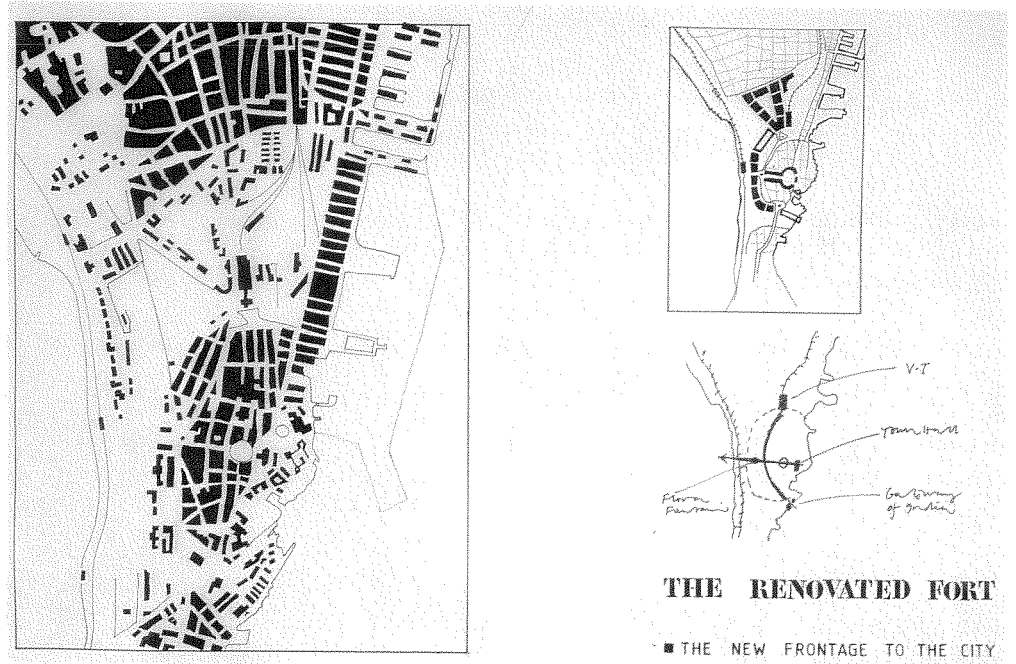
The renewal of the Fort area dates to 1864, when the removal of the fortifications that surrounded the city was finished. The removal of the ramparts symbolized a change of purpose for Bombay, which no longer needed to serve as a land-based defense fort and whose growth as a prosperous trading and manufacturing city was being constrained by the fortifications. It also precipitated a strategic plan to restructure the city center that included the widening and improving of roads, the addition of new open spaces, the construction of new public buildings and the imposition of urban design standards. Consequently, the demolition of the ramparts intensified, clarified and made irreversible Bombay's change of urban function.

These renewal efforts projected a consciously conceived, visible image of Bombay, perhaps the first such urban design gesture in colonial India. At the western edge of the Fort area, along the Back Bay waterfront, several public buildings were put up on land made vacant by the removal of the fortifications. This magnificent ensemble of Gothic buildings (which included the High Court, the University, the Post and Telegraph offices and the Old Secretariat) helped clarify the existing bow-like cross axis, which had implicitly structured the Fort area for more than a century. These buildings transformed Bombay's skyline and visually structured its western edge.

A smaller scale project was the privately-sponsored Horniman Circle (1864), which involved restructuring a green in front of the Town Hall into a formal, circular park enclosed by an assembly of architecturally unified commercial buildings. Although the plots on the Circle were auctioned to commercial firms, the design of the facades was controlled to create a sense of unity. This urban design approach, popular for more than a century in countries like England and France, had not been previously used in India. The arcade also offered protection to pedestrians from both the violent summer sun and the lashing monsoon rain.

These projects created an east-west and a north-south axis through the Fort area. The east-west axis ran from the Town Hall through the public buildings on the western edge, and ended with a vista across the bay. The north-south axis was anchored at one end with the grand Victoria Terminus (1878-1887) and at the other by the Gateway of India (1911-1914), a monument that symbolized the ceremonial entry to the city. The intersection of these two axes was celebrated by the construction of the Flora Fountain (1887).

Courtesy Rahul J. Mehrotra.



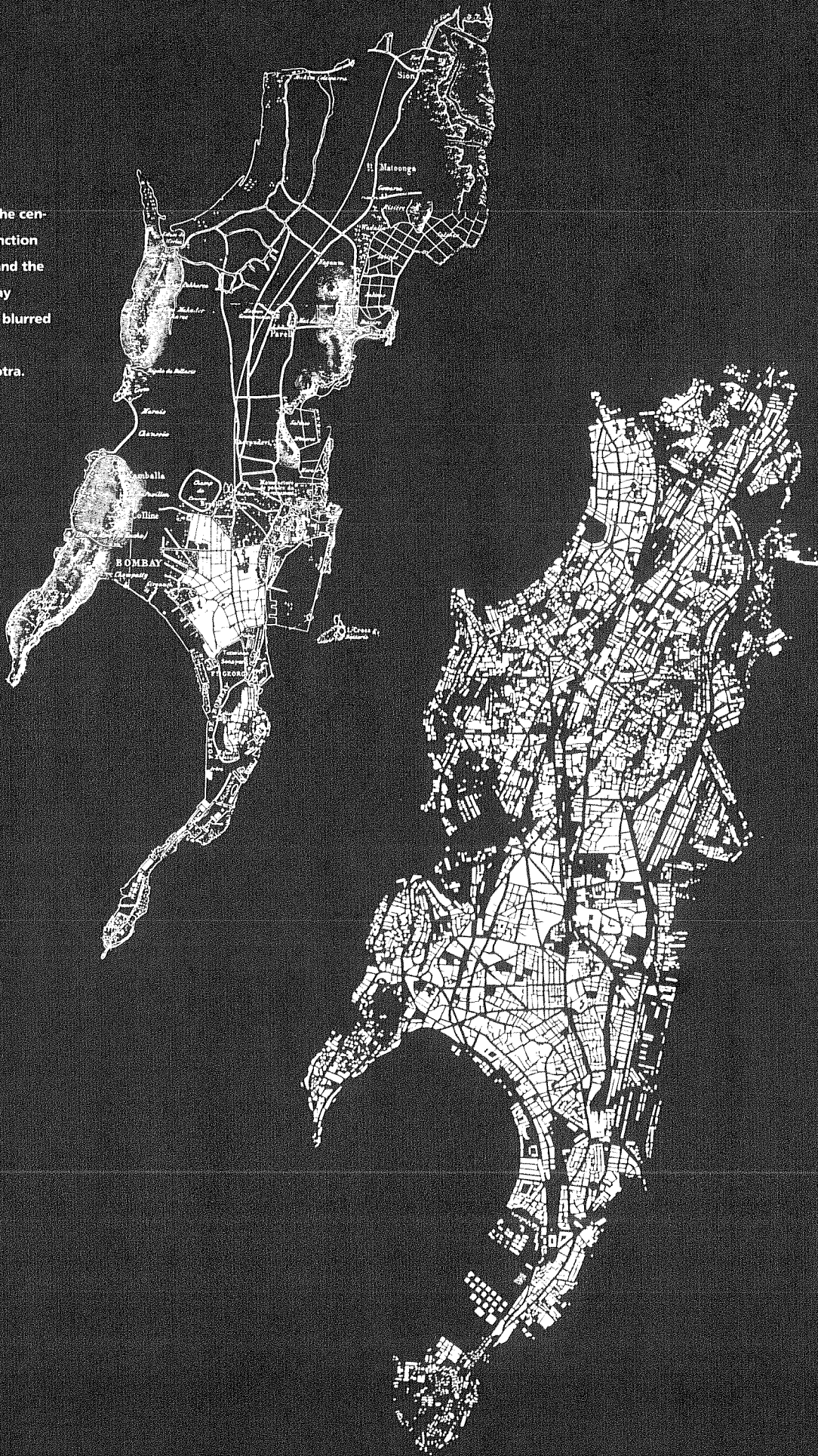
In 1898, the north-south axis was further reinforced by the development of Hornby Road under public design controls. Here, unlike Horniman Circle, there were no restrictions on the design of the facades, which were conceived and built by different architects. But each building was required to have an arcade, which acted as the physical and visual element that tied together the varying architectural styles and enhanced the legibility of Hornby Road as an urban design composition.¹ Development along Hornby Road connected the crescent of public buildings south of Flora Fountain (including, Elphinstone College, Sasson Library, the University and Watson's Hotel), unifying disparate elements in the composition of the newly designed city core.

Definite and consistent principles guided the planning and expansion of the rest of the urban center. It grew out of a process of additive transformations rather than a comprehensive system of land division, although one can recognize instances of a more rigorous division of land blocks on the west side of Hornby Road (land freed for development by the removal of the ramparts). The primary concern, the relationship between buildings and streets, was expressed in a set of agreements in regard to issues of street hierarchy, nodes, building location and frontage.

This decisive re-ordering of central Bombay, which was directed by the colonial government, contrasted with the additive, incremental and impulsive growth that had characterized the Fort area since the inception and settlement of Bombay. In spite of the overwhelming problems of sanitation and overcrowding in other parts of the city, the administration had the liberty, and the power, to focus its attention on a smaller, more tangible area. The government used every opportunity to use buildings and infrastructure to establish a cohesive urban form that responded to the unprecedented increase in commerce and industry, and to give colonial political power a visible expression.

The dual city: A map of Bombay at the turn of the century (left) shows a distinction between the Fort area and the dense Indian town. Today (right) the distinction is blurred beyond recognition.

Courtesy Rahul J. Mehrotra.



The Dual City

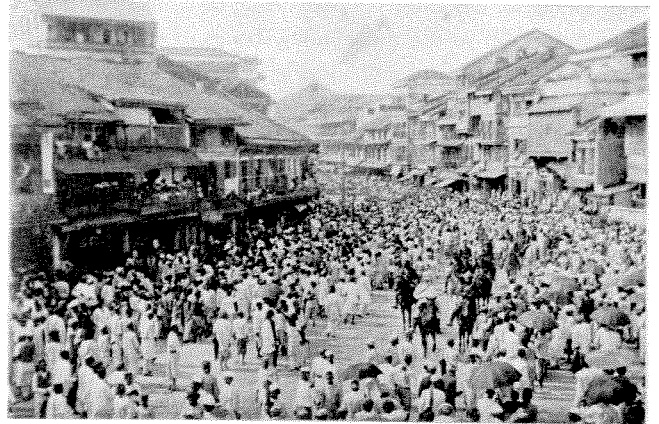
A century ago, Bombay was two separate cities, Western and Indian, with parallel residential, commercial, religious and recreational areas — two separate networks of spaces in which there different worlds existed with minimal conflict. In the Western quarter, all efforts were being made to impose a formal structure upon the city — reinforcing the axes, controlling building edges and styles, instituting traffic regulations and encouraging large corporations to open offices. The Indian city, in contrast, was characterized by chaotic, haphazard growth and overcrowding.

The boom decades of the 1860s and 1870s resulted in fragmented development all over the island. Growth was incremental and organic in the Indian city. Cotton mills, which drew immigrants from surrounding agricultural areas, served as the hearts of districts in the Indian city. Small businesses grew and shops and stalls mushroomed near temples, mosques and main traffic routes. Here, unlike the city center, little control was exercised over the sites being developed for housing or industrial use. Residential, commercial and religious activity patterns were integrated in a tightly knit urban fabric like a traditional Indian bazaar town.

The bazaar — a chaotic market place comprised of shops, stalls and hawkers — can be seen as the symbolic image of and metaphor for the physical state of the Indian city. The chaos and apparent disorder of the bazaar is precisely the quality essential for the survival of vending — physical proximity between seller and buyer. It also is the physical manifestation of incremental and *laissez-faire* growth of the market place. More important, it symbolizes positive energy, optimism and a will to survive outside the official system.

This classical, colonial, dual-city structure survived until the 1960s, when the unprecedented scale of distress migration from rural areas to Bombay (and other urban centers) completely altered the exclusivity of the two domains. The bazaar became an instrument that absorbed migrants, cushioning their entry to the city, and swept across the city — sprawling along transport lines, slopes of hills, underutilized land, undefined pavements and even the arcades in the Victorian core.

The bazaars blurred beyond recognition the physical segregation of the dual cities. They wove the two worlds together with a system of shopping and recreation spaces that infused their own architectural and visual character wherever they spread. The arcades, in particular, provided a condition most



**The dual city: A religious celebration in the bazaar (top) and the Flora Fountain and Esplanade Road in the reconstructed Fort district (bottom).
Courtesy Times of India.**

appropriate for hawking: The supporting columns of the arcade gave definition to the amorphous spaces of the bazaar and defined the territory of individual hawkers.

The spread of the bazaar into the Fort area transformed the intensity and patterns of use there and began to wear down the physical environment with overlays of an alien imagery and building materials that compose the paraphernalia of the bazaar. Today, shrines and stalls abut the splendid Gothic buildings and fill the spaces in their arcades. Overcrowding has altered traffic patterns and made the bow-like cross axis unrecognizable.

The physical degradation was further accelerated by the imposition of the Rent Control Act (1942), which froze rents and gave tenants legal protections. As a result, it became uneconomical for landlords to maintain buildings, which are now subdivided to accommodate the swelling population of the city.

Furthermore, the formulation of building regulations (such as setbacks and floor-area ratios) generalized throughout the entire city (presumably for ease of administration) have resulted in the destruction of the street edge. The Alice Building, on Hornby Road, is a case in point: Its setback has destroyed the continuity of the street edge and arcade, crucial components in the design of Hornby Road. The new block does not comply with either the architectural textures (for example, the masonry bases) or details (such as cornice bands, articulation of arcades) that characterizes the precinct. This has happened in spite of the implicit and explicit rules for building that have been followed in this precinct for the last century.

Conservationist and citizens' groups have emerged to address this immense deterioration and transformation. In the best case, these groups represent a new relationship between citizens and city authorities, a coalescing of private initiative for public good. This is especially important given that city authorities and government (comprising chiefly of politicians elected from rural constituencies with no interest in Bombay apart from its role as the administrative capital for the state government) seem incapable of playing a leadership role and private enterprise seems to lack a moral conscience.

However, these groups' efforts run the danger of being myopic and exemplifying egocentric thinking; they may result in little more than superficial corrections, such as the beautification of traffic islands and the reinstatement of old street names. The groups do not seem to possess a sense of what the city should be;

they lack a constructive, action-oriented agenda for grappling with the city's transformation. Their crusades inevitably devolve into "turf battles" that represent the limited perceptions that a select minority have of the city and its form.

Bazaars in Victorian Arcades

Bombay's century-long history of being a dual city is shifting; its two worlds, and their varied activities, attitudes and physical manifestations are coming together in the same place. The phenomena of bazaars in Victorian arcades in the old Fort area is emblematic of this conflict; it is not only forcing a confrontation of uses and interest groups but also demanding new preservation approaches.

For the average Bombay resident, the hawker provides a wide range of goods at prices considerably lower than those found in local shops. Thus hawking in the arcades that characterizes the Fort area is a thriving business.

For the elites and for conservationists, the Victorian core represents the city center with icons complete. In fact, as the city sprawls out, dissipating the clarity of its form, these images, places and icons have acquired even greater meaning for these groups as crucial symbols of the city's fast deteriorating image. Consequently, hawking is deemed illegal by city authorities, who constantly are pressuring to relocate the bazaars.

Can designers and planners contribute towards conserving and moulding the physical form of the Fort precinct in a way that responds to the massive shifts in demography and use patterns? Can we address, through design, the connection between social issues Bombay faces and the conservation of its physical form? How might we weave into this transforming historic city center the aspirations and use patterns of a world different from that which created it? Can we design with disparate attitudes?

Architects and planners can play a decisive role in initiating new solutions, in creating new contexts by reinterpreting the existing ones. The solution lies not only in creating new districts to take the pressure off the city center, but in simultaneously understanding, restructuring and shaping perceptions of the existing city form. We also must recognize that a city's prime resource, in addition to its urban form, is its concentration of human skills and enterprise, of services and activities. To sustain and accommodate this requires change from within the city. At

times, the urban form must be renewed: Buildings must be recycled or demolished, new streets and infrastructure must be added, and so on.

The challenge in Bombay is to cope with the city's transforming nature, not by inducing or polarizing its dualism, but by attempting to reconcile it, to see opposites as being simultaneously valid. The existence of two worlds in the same space implies that we must accommodate and overlap varying uses, perceptions and physical forms. The arcades in the Fort area are a special urban component that inherently possess a capacity for reinterpretation. As an architectural or urban design solution, they display an incredible resilience: They can accommodate new uses while keeping the illusion of their architecture intact.

The original use of the arcades was twofold. First, they establish a definite position in terms of building–street relationships: The adoption of this architectural/spatial element provided a mediation between building and street. Second, they were a perfect response to Bombay's climate: They served as a zone protecting pedestrians from both the harsh sun and lashing rains.

With today's transformation in use, conserving the Fort area effectively would require identifying those components of the city's urban system that are essential and should be conserved — such as its physical structure or the architectural illusion that it presents through features like principal views, skyline and punctuation — and those that can be transformed to other uses, even if only temporary.

One design solution might be to re-adapt the functioning of the arcades. They could be restructured to allow for easy pedestrian movement and accommodate hawkers at the same time. They could contain the amorphous bazaar encased in the illusion of the disciplined Victorian arcade. With this sort of planning, components of the city would have a greater ability to survive because they could be more adaptable to changing economic and social conditions.

There are no permanent solutions in an urban landscape charged simultaneously with duality as well as rapid transformation. At best, as architects we could constantly evolve and invent solutions for the present using and safeguarding the crucial components of our historically important urban hardware. In fact, “bazaars in Victorian arcades” could potentially become an authentic symbol of this preferred reality — an urban landscape that internalizes the past for the present and perhaps the future.

Note

1. This project was initiated by the City Improvement Trust, a governmental organization whose responsibilities included formulating specific development plans and controls for different parts of the city; it acquired private lands, redeveloped old and congested areas and prepared layouts for underdeveloped portions of the city.