



Bread, Migration, and Identity: The History of Goan Bakers in Bombay

Dr. Mayur M. Arolkar¹

Abstract:

The migration of Goan bakers to Bombay represents a significant yet understudied chapter in the social and economic history of both regions. This paper examines the historical trajectory, cultural identity, and occupational transformation of Goan bakers who relocated to Bombay from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Drawing on archival records, oral testimonies, and existing scholarship, this study examines how Goan migrants established themselves in Bombay's highly competitive urban economy through the bakery and confectionery trade. Many migrants from Goa entered this sector and gradually built a recognizable niche within the city's food market. The research explores the socio-economic circumstances that encouraged migration from Goa, including the limited employment opportunities in the region, the culinary influences shaped during Portuguese rule, and the increasing demand for inexpensive baked goods in a rapidly expanding metropolitan centre such as Bombay.

The study also considers how Goan bakers adjusted their traditional skills to suit the tastes and needs of Bombay's diverse population. In doing so, they became part of the evolving food culture of the city. Their bakeries, which were often small family-run establishments, served not only as places of business but also as spaces where community ties were strengthened. These establishments frequently provided employment to other migrants from Goa, thereby creating support networks that helped newcomers adapt to life in a large and unfamiliar urban environment. By situating the experiences of Goan bakers within broader discussions of migration, labour, and identity, this research highlights the entrepreneurial role played by the Goan community in the shaping of Bombay's informal urban economy. The findings suggest that Goan bakers did more than simply continue a traditional occupation; they contributed to the transformation of Bombay's culinary landscape. Their story offers an important perspective on how migration, livelihood strategies, and cultural traditions intersected in colonial and postcolonial urban India.

Keywords: Goan migration, Bombay, Bakers, Labour history, Urban food culture.

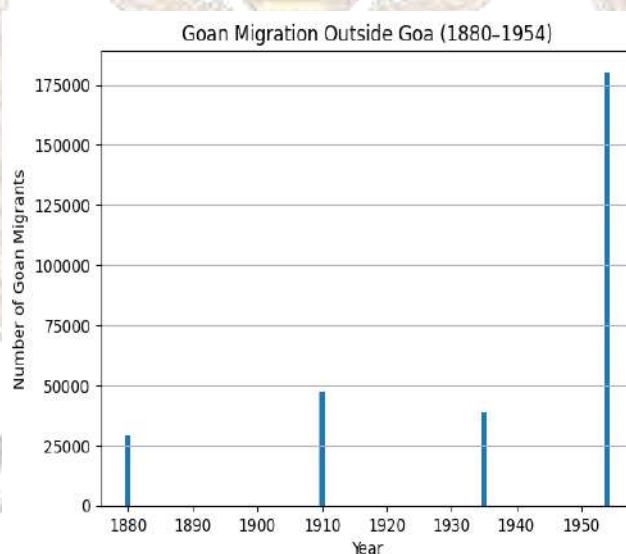
¹ Assistant Professor of History, Dhempe College of Arts and Science, Miramar, Goa.

Introduction

Goa has long been shaped by patterns of migration, both permanent and temporary. As noted by M. N. Pearson, the region historically maintained strong connections with the Arabian Sea and its coastal networks, even before the advent of Portuguese rule. This maritime orientation encouraged mobility and facilitated interactions with regions beyond Goa, laying the foundation for later migration trends.ⁱ

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, migration from Goa increased significantly, with Goans moving in large numbers towards British India as well as to parts of Africa. Within India, cities such as Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta, and Pune emerged as important centres of settlement. Statistical records reflect this growing movement: in 1880, around 29,216 Goans—primarily from the Old Conquests—were recorded as having left the region. By 1910, this number had risen to 47,334, and by 1935, approximately 38,788 Goan Catholics were noted as absent from their homes. A later estimate from 1954 suggested that nearly 180,000 Goans were living outside Goa, indicating the scale and continuity of this migratory pattern.

Graph 1.1: Goan Migration Outside Goa (1880-1954)



Source: Teresa Albuquerque, *Goan Pioneers in Bombay* (Panjim: Goa 1556, Broadway Publishing House, 2012), 11.

The relationship between Goa and Bombay, in particular, developed through these movements of people, goods, and ideas. Both regions shared early connections under Portuguese influence, yet their historical trajectories diverged from the seventeenth century onward. Despite these differences, migration sustained



close links between the two, fostering ongoing cultural exchange and economic interdependence. This interconnected history highlights the importance of mobility in shaping Goan society and its engagement with wider urban and maritime worlds.ⁱⁱ

Bombay—then known as *Ilha da Boa Vida*—was ceded to the British Crown in 1661 as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza upon her marriage to King Charles II of England. While this diplomatic transfer marked a formal political separation between Goa and Bombay, it did not sever the social, cultural, or emotional connections between the two coastal regions.ⁱⁱⁱ

Review of Literature

Existing scholarship on Goan migration to Bombay provides valuable insights into the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of migration. Teresa Albuquerque's *Goan Pioneers in Bombay* (2011) offers a foundational account of Goan life in the city, highlighting occupational mobility and cultural adaptation. Fatima Gracias's works—*Kaleidoscope of Women in Goa* (1994) and *The Many Faces of Sundorem* (2007)—provide crucial perspectives on gendered migration and women's labour mobility.

Karin Larsen's *Faces of Goa* (1998) places migration within a wider understanding of Goan society, highlighting how movement across regions has shaped social structures, identities, and cultural practices. In addition to such scholarly works, periodicals and newspaper archives preserved in Panjim provide valuable insights into the everyday realities of migration, capturing voices, experiences, and concerns that are often absent in formal records.

Further perspectives emerge from online writings on *kudds*, Goan clubs, which emphasise the importance of these community institutions in maintaining connections among migrants. These spaces not only offered support and solidarity but also played a crucial role in preserving a shared sense of identity in unfamiliar environments.

Despite the availability of such diverse sources, there remains a noticeable lack of focused research on Goan bakers as both cultural contributors and economic actors. This study attempts to address that gap by bringing their experiences into sharper historical focus, thereby adding a new dimension to the understanding of Goan migration and urban life.



Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach that brings together archival research, oral history, and ethnographic observation to build a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Archival materials—such as newspapers, magazines, and historical records—serve as an important foundation, offering insights into patterns of migration as well as the occupational lives of Goan communities over time.

Alongside this, oral history interviews conducted with descendants of Goan bakers and community elders provide valuable personal narratives. These accounts help capture lived experiences of migration, work, and identity, adding depth and nuance that written records alone cannot fully convey.

In addition, ethnographic observations carried out in neighbourhoods historically associated with Goan settlement offer a window into present-day practices and the ways in which collective memory continues to be shaped and preserved. By combining these approaches, the study seeks to bridge the gap between past and present, and between documented history and lived experience.

Research Problem and Hypothesis

The study addresses the socio-economic motivations behind Goan migration, the role of bakers in shaping Bombay's cultural landscape, and the community networks that sustained migrant life. It hypothesises that Goan bakers were not passive migrants but active agents who shaped Bombay's culinary culture while negotiating identity, mobility, and belonging.

Goan Migration and Urban Settlement in Bombay

From the nineteenth century onwards, successive waves of Goan migrants transformed Bombay into one of the most important centres of Goan diasporic settlement in western India. Drawn by economic opportunity, religious freedom, and access to education, Goans increasingly perceived Bombay as a city of aspiration, especially when contrasted with the political uncertainty and social constraints of Portuguese-ruled Goa.

As Teresa Albuquerque observes, "*Bombay opened up a new world to the Goan, both Christian and Hindu.*" Goans demonstrated remarkable adaptability, willingly engaging in diverse forms of labour and not shying away from menial service if it promised social mobility. Over time, such labour translated into institutional presence through the establishment of schools, presses, clubs, and reform movements that aimed at educational and social uplift.



Throughout the twentieth century, large numbers of Goans made their homes in different parts of Bombay, especially in neighbourhoods such as Bandra, Mahim, Santa Cruz, Colaba, Byculla, Dadar, and Worli. As migration increased, Goan village clubs, commonly known as *kudds*, became significant institutions within the city. These spaces offered not only accommodation for new arrivals but also a sense of discipline, familiarity, and community in an otherwise unfamiliar urban environment.

Migration, in many cases, was not a random decision but a carefully considered family strategy. As historian Fatima Gracias observes, some upper-class Goan Catholic families distributed their aspirations among their children—one entering the church, another pursuing a professional career such as medicine, and a third migrating to Bombay. In this way, migration functioned as an investment in economic stability and upward mobility. Over time, distinct Goan neighbourhoods took shape, marked by shared cultural practices such as festivals, music, dance, and community gatherings, all of which helped sustain a strong diasporic identity.

A.K. Priolkar, in *Goan Rediscovered*, offers a useful framework for understanding the diversity within the Goan population in Bombay. He identifies three broad groups: those born in Goa but settled in Bombay; those born in Bombay to Goan parents; and individuals from the wider Konkan region whose ancestors had migrated earlier, often to escape Portuguese rule. These categories point to the layered and evolving identities that characterised the Goan diaspora. At the same time, Goa's distinctive historical experiences, linguistic traditions, and cultural practices continued to shape the identity of migrants across generations.

Although Catholic Goans were among the most visible migrant communities, other groups—including Goan Hindus, Devadasis, artists, and Gowda Saraswat Brahmins—also became part of Bombay's social and economic life. For many from economically marginal backgrounds, the city offered opportunities to move beyond the rigid social hierarchies that structured life in Goa. Women, in particular, played a crucial role in this process. Widows and young girls entered urban labour markets as domestic workers, nurses, cooks, and service providers, contributing significantly to family incomes and the broader migrant economy.^{iv}

As Teresa Albuquerque notes, the first impressions of Bombay for many Goans were often misleading. The city's coastal landscape, greenery, and climate evoked a sense of familiarity with Goa. However, this feeling quickly gave way to the realities of urban life—unfamiliar languages, diverse populations, and crowded, complex streets. Early migrants, often referred to as Indo-Portuguese, initially settled in areas such as Cavel and Girgaum, near Bombay Fort. Many of them came from Salcete, bringing with them their religious

practices, language, and culinary traditions, which gradually became part of the city's evolving cultural fabric.^v

Role of Goan Clubs (Kudds) and Associations

The kudd system, a distinctive socio-housing institution developed by Goans, especially migrant males, represents a significant cultural adaptation to urban living in Bombay. According to the *Gomantak Times* article, “*Kudd* system: A unique housing concept that benefitted Goans down the ages”, it functioned not merely as dormitories but as surrogate homes for Goans in cities like Bombay. They provided migrants with a sense of identity, mutual support, and cultural continuity. *Kudds* were organized along village or parish lines, and followed strict rules regarding conduct, cleanliness, and religious practices, often centered around a patron saint.^{vi}

Expanding on this theme, the *Hindustan Times* article, “Goan? Join the Club”, delves into the continued significance of these institutions as social and cultural hubs. It highlights how *kudds*, originally formed by Goan men seeking employment in cities, evolved into places that nurtured music, and *tiatr* (Goan theatre).^{vii}

Fig 1.1: Jer Mahal (a Goan cultural hub).



Source: Photographed by Dr. Mayur Arolkar, Mumbai, May 27, 2025.

Table 1.1: Select Goan and Migrant Clubs (Kudds) in Bombay: Origins, Membership, and Characteristics

Sr. no.	Name of the Club	Location (Bombay)	Membership Composition
01	St. John's Club, Benaolim	Dhobi Talao	Around 40 men; temporary job seekers, Gulf-bound aspirants, and long-term residents
02	St. Anne's Club, Ponda	Not specified	Male members from Ponda village
03	Rivona Club	Not specified	Male members from Rivona
04	Clubs at Dincha and Jar Mahals	Dincha and Jar Mahals	Members from Bastora, Majorda, Assorna, and other Goan villages
05	St. Anthony's Club, Vagator	Not specified	Male members from Vagator

Source: Karin, Larsen, Faces of Goa, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), 234.

Goan Bakers and Occupational Identity

One of the most recognisable contributions of Goan migrants to Bombay's culinary landscape is bread, locally known as *pão*. This staple, deeply associated with Goan identity today, was originally introduced during Portuguese colonial rule. Both historical records and oral traditions suggest that bread did not form part of the local diet in Goa prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, making it a significant example of cultural and culinary exchange.

The very terminology associated with baking reflects this influence. The Konkani word for baker, *poder*, is derived from the Portuguese term *padeiro*, pointing to the close connection between language and occupation during the colonial period. It is widely believed that Jesuit missionaries were instrumental in introducing bread-making techniques to local communities, particularly in the Salcete region, which formed part of the so-called "Old Conquests." These skills were largely imparted to Catholic Goans, especially among the *Chardo* caste, in villages such as Majorda, Utorda, Nuvem, Colva, and Varca. The availability of key natural ingredients, such as *sur* (toddy), further supported the development of this craft in these areas.

Over time, as Goan bakers honed their skills, many began to move beyond their native villages, spreading across different parts of Goa and eventually to urban centres in India. With migration, this culinary tradition travelled as well, finding a new space in cities like Bombay. There, bread-making became more than just

an occupation—it served as a means of livelihood while also preserving a sense of cultural continuity and memory for migrant communities.^{viii}

Fig. 1.2 Tracing how Goan pão, perfected by Salcette’s bakers, spread across Goa and later reached Bombay through migration.



Source: Gomes and Deshmukh, The Goan Pao, Culture for All Conference, Sahapedia, 2021.

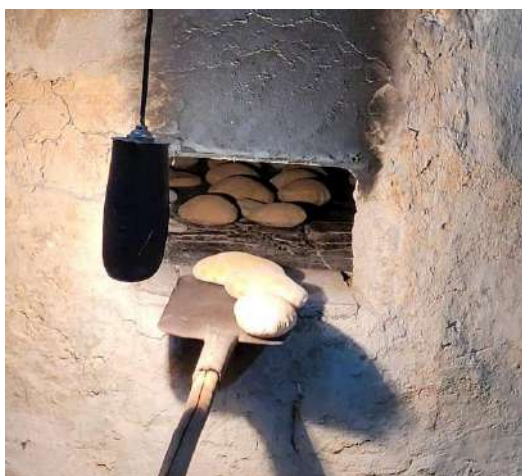
Fig. 1.3 Traditional toddy-fermented Goan breads at Mr. Godino’s Majorda, Bakery.



Traditional baker’s oven (forn)



Baker’s baking a type of bread (Poi)



Breads baked in a traditional form (oven)



Poi- a type of traditional Goan bread

Source: Photographed by Dr. Mayur Arolkar, Mumbai, May 27, 2025.

Faced with difficulties in using imported yeast—largely due to differences in local wheat quality—Goan bakers adapted their techniques by turning to toddy, a naturally fermented palm sap, as a leavening agent. This shift was both practical and innovative. Not only did it address the technical challenges of baking in a new environment, but it also imparted a distinctive flavour and texture to the bread, setting Goan *pão* apart from other varieties found in India.

This method of fermentation, relying on toddy rather than commercial yeast, remained largely specific to Goan bakers and was not widely practised elsewhere in India, except in places like Bombay where Goan migrants had settled. The ready availability of toddy in coastal regions further supported its continued use. Oral testimonies and scholarly interpretations suggest that this practice gave *pão* a unique character—rooted both in local innovation and colonial influence—making it a hybrid culinary product.

However, this traditional method did not remain unchanged. Over time, with the expansion of urban markets and increasing demand for bread, more efficient baking techniques began to replace older practices. The introduction of wet yeast allowed for quicker fermentation and greater consistency in production. As a result, many bakers gradually moved away from toddy-based leavening, especially in fast-paced urban centres like Bombay, where the pressures of scale and speed reshaped traditional methods of production.

Baking, introduced under Portuguese colonial rule, became a hereditary skill transmitted through family and community networks. Within Bombay's competitive urban economy, Goan bakers carved out a distinct space by establishing small bakeries that catered to both European and Indian clientele. In doing so, they



displayed a remarkable ability to adapt their techniques and products to suit local tastes, balancing inherited culinary practices with the demands of a diverse and evolving market.

These bakeries, however, were not merely sites of economic activity. They also functioned as important social spaces, where everyday interactions, shared routines, and cultural familiarity created a sense of belonging. The smell of freshly baked *pão*, the early-morning activity around ovens, and the regular presence of customers contributed to embedding Goan identity into the daily rhythms of the city. In this sense, bread became more than food—it emerged as a form of material culture through which migrants expressed continuity, identity, and social respectability.

The sustainability of this occupation was closely tied to generational continuity. Baking skills were often transmitted within families, ensuring both livelihood and the preservation of specialised knowledge. For many Goans, owning a bakery came to symbolise economic advancement and a degree of permanence in the urban landscape, marking a shift from migrant labour to established entrepreneurship.

At the same time, certain traditional practices retained their symbolic importance. The use of toddy in bread-making, for instance, continued to represent a distinctive aspect of Goan culinary innovation. It reflected the blending of external influences with local knowledge systems, producing a technique and flavour unique to the community. In migrating to Bombay, Goan bakers carried with them not only recipes, but also deeply rooted skills and sensibilities, contributing in lasting ways to the city's changing food culture.

According to Dr. Teresa Albuquerque, Vitorino Mudot, a native of Assagao in Bardez, Goa, is regarded as the pioneer of Goan bakers in Bombay. In 1819, he established the first Goan bakery oven in the city's Goan enclave. Mudot was a trailblazer in many respects. He was reportedly the first to commemorate the feast of St. Caetano—the patron saint of his home village—while living in Bombay. Mudot also played a significant social role by opening his home to young Goans who had migrated to Bombay in search of education or employment, offering them accommodation and meals at a nominal fee of Rs. 4 per month.^{ix}

His generosity set an example for other Goan bakery owners, many of whom began supporting young members of the community in similar ways. Such acts contributed significantly to the educational advancement and social mobility of Goans in Bombay. His household itself reflected a close-knit migrant world: bakery workers from Goa lived and worked together, gathering each evening at sunset to pray the rosary at a nearby cross decorated with marigolds, and coming together weekly to sing the litany. These practices reveal how religious traditions continued to shape everyday life even in an urban setting.

Known for his refined lifestyle, Mudot cultivated the image of a *fidalgo*, dressing in knickerbockers and a long black coat, and travelling by palanquin. Despite his success in Bombay, he maintained strong ties to his native village, contributing generously to the church in Assagao. Over time, as his wealth grew, he entrusted the management of his bakery to junior assistants. However, in 1843, three of them conspired against him and took control of the enterprise. Among them was Salvador Patricio de Souza, also from Assagao, who eventually emerged as the sole proprietor.

Through determination and business acumen, Salvador Patricio established himself as a prominent figure in Bombay's bakery trade. He is said to have prospered particularly during the Abyssinian War, earning the title *O Podeiro Poderoso de Bombaim*—the Powerful Baker of Bombay. Seeking to expand and streamline operations, he employed local Marathi women in the bakery and steadily grew the business. His name appeared in the *Bombay Almanac and General Directory* of 1865 under the Bakers and Confectioners section, marking his recognised presence in an increasingly competitive field that also included emerging Parsi entrepreneurs.

Salvador Patricio's activities extended beyond baking. Like many Goans of the period who were wary of formal banking systems, he engaged in informal financial practices. Known for his reliability, he safeguarded the savings of fellow Goans—particularly seamen—and facilitated the transfer of money to their families in Goa, thereby strengthening community trust and economic networks.

The bakery itself, known as *Padaria de Cavel*, was a vibrant and dynamic space. At its entrance, the proprietor was often seen seated quietly, dressed in a simple striped cotton suit, his glasses lightly dusted with flour—a figure both dignified and deeply connected to his trade. Inside, the bakery was constantly in motion, with workers moving through crowded interiors carrying flour and kneading dough. The sounds of conversation blended with the rhythmic grinding of stones, often operated by singing Maharashtrian women, and the steady pounding of dough on long wooden tables.

Near the ovens—glowing intensely like open furnaces—men laboured tirelessly, tending the fires and baking trays, their bodies marked by the heat and effort of their work. The entire space was filled with the rich aroma of freshly baked bread. Functioning as a major distribution centre, the bakery supplied thousands of loaves daily to households across Bombay—serving Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi communities alike—as well as to ships anchored in the harbour. In this way, it stood not only as a site of production but also as a crucial node in the city's economic and cultural life.

Fig 1.4 Goan bakers in Bombay



Source: Teresa Albuquerque, *Goan Pioneers in Bombay* (Goa: Broadway Publishing House, 2012), 35.

The Decline of Goan Bakers in Bombay

After Salvador's death in September 1870, his bakery—once a symbol of Goan entrepreneurial success in Bombay—continued to operate under his name until the year 1900. This longevity is confirmed by references in *The Times of India Almanac and Directory*, which recognized the lasting reputation of his establishment.

Salvador Patricio's success reflected a broader pattern in which Goan bakers came to dominate Bombay's bread trade for much of the nineteenth century. Known for their distinctive techniques and high-quality products such as *pão*, *undo*, and *katre pão*, they established a strong reputation and a near-monopoly in this sector of the urban economy.

However, by the late nineteenth century, this dominance began to weaken. One of the key reasons for this shift was the entry of Irani bakers into the market. They introduced new styles of baked goods, different modes of business organisation, and highly competitive practices. At times, these included the circulation of rumours about wheat shortages, which unsettled customers and disrupted the relatively stable networks on which Goan bakers depended. Such developments gradually eroded the position of Goan-run bakeries in the city.

In response to mounting competition, many Goan bakers entered into partnerships, often with non-Goan associates, in an effort to sustain their enterprises. While these arrangements provided short-term relief, they frequently led to a loss of control and reduced profits. Over time, the autonomy that had once characterised Goan bakeries began to diminish, contributing to a gradual decline in their influence.

Simultaneously, changes within the Goan community itself further accelerated this transformation. With increased access to education and exposure to new opportunities under colonial rule, younger generations began to seek employment in white-collar professions such as administration, education, and clerical services. Baking, once a respected and viable occupation, came to be viewed as a form of manual labour that offered limited social mobility. As a result, fewer young Goans chose to continue the family tradition.

By the close of the nineteenth century, these combined pressures—external competition and internal social change—led to the steady decline of Goan prominence in Bombay’s bakery industry. What had once been a vibrant and visible aspect of the city’s economic and cultural life gradually receded. Today, this history survives largely in fragments: in oral narratives, scattered archival references, and the continued presence of *pão* in the city’s cuisine.

Although Goans no longer dominate the bakery trade in Bombay—now largely shaped by Irani and later Muslim entrepreneurs—their legacy remains significant. Many Goan bakers eventually sold their establishments and migrated abroad, while others moved into fields such as cuisine, music, and theatre, where their cultural skills found new expression.

Field observations in areas such as Bandra, Byculla, Girgaum, and Cavel reveal that this legacy still lives on in memory. Elderly residents of Goan origin recall their familial ties to Goa and the centrality of bread in their everyday lives. Oral histories highlight the care and skill with which earlier generations produced traditional bakery items. At the same time, younger generations, particularly descendants of these early bakers, are often reluctant to pursue the profession, shaped by changing economic realities and aspirations.

In contemporary Mumbai, the bakery trade is largely associated with Parsi and Muslim communities. Yet the imprint of Goan bakers endures in the city’s food culture. Many of Mumbai’s most iconic street foods—such as *vada pav*, *pav bhaji*, *misal pav*, and *maska pav*—depend on bread that traces its origins to Goan baking traditions. It is therefore difficult to imagine the city without this culinary element, which, introduced by Goan migrants, continues to form an integral part of Mumbai’s everyday life and identity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the history of Goan bakers in Bombay extends beyond a simple account of occupational migration. It reveals a more complex process involving cultural adaptation, identity formation, and the transformation of urban life. Motivated by economic necessity, Goan migrants entered Bombay’s demanding socio-economic environment and gradually created spaces of stability and opportunity through

their engagement with the bakery trade. In this context, bread—once associated in Goa with colonial influence and religious change—acquired a new meaning in Bombay, becoming an everyday food shared across communities and deeply embedded in the city’s culinary landscape.

Although Goan bakers initially experienced upward mobility and a measure of social prestige, shifting market conditions and increasing competition led to a gradual decline in their dominance. Despite this, their contribution has had a lasting impact. Through their labour, skills, and entrepreneurial efforts, Goan bakers played a key role in shaping the food culture of the city, demonstrating how migration could foster both economic survival and cultural transformation.

By tracing this trajectory, the paper highlights how bread functioned as more than a commodity; it became a medium through which Goan migrants negotiated identity, belonging, and continuity in a new urban setting. Their story underscores the broader significance of migration in shaping Bombay’s cosmopolitan character and offers an important perspective on the intersections of work, culture, and urban history.

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