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A COMPREHENSIVE LISTING OF HERITAGE VALUES IN THANE

MMR-HERITAGE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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A COMPREHENSIVE LISTING OF HERITAGE VALUES IN THANE - A CRITICAL NOTE

Most Indian towns have an original, historic part which still exists in some semblance to its past structure and form. Some have existed for over a thousand years and each has a particular story to tell which would contribute immeasurably to the understanding of our culture, both in whole and in part.

However in the pursuit of modernizing our environment, we often tend to overlook this tremendous legacy. Change is taking place in any case, and nobody believes that transformation cannot or should not take place in our society. In this process, however, valuable knowledge of our past is getting lost and it is imperative that we document the heritage as it was or is, before it is too late.

Thane, as history states, was once upon a time a very prosperous city abundant with temples, churches and lakes with numerous little settlements dotted over the entire area on the map of the city. The magnificent temples and churches depicted their own style and grandeur whereas the settlements showed various, yet, individual characteristics portrayed through their built form and the interwoven fabric of the place. The city also boasted of a fort, which still exists and functions as a central jail. As many as Portuguese, typical vernacular, Art Deco, colonial and many other such influences can be seen from the architecture still present in the city.

A special mention in the gazetteer, as Thane once being one of the important ports along with Kalyan, Chaul, Sopara and Sanjan, goes on to show that this is indeed a historical city which was in the peak of its glory when trade activities were carried out with far off countries via the sea route. In spite of innumerable invasions, the city has survived the test of time.

But today, Thane City presents a very different picture of itself. It happens to be a substantially large urban agglomeration located next to the metropolis of Mumbai. On account of its location, Thane has carved out an image of itself. A glance into history, once again, shows that, as the City of Mumbai grew, the residents in course of time became more and more aware of the intensifying urban and economic pressures. They started feeling the pinch of constraint of space due to growing families and started looking for greener pastures. Thane proved an ideal choice for hem at this juncture. A certain class of people, mostly the middle and the lower classes who earlier resided in areas like Girgaon in south Mumbai, started shifting to Thane. Being centrally located and well connected to places like Navi Mumbai, Kalyan, Bhiwandi and Mumbai by road and rail, people opted to reside and commute to their work places from Thane. Incidentally, low land prices also initiated people to buy ownership houses and settle here for a longer time.

The consequence of such a large influx of people into the city was observed in the form of land development. The immediate need of that time was to provide houses for all the people desirous of residing in the city of Thane. An unplanned and haphazard growth without the commensurate infrastructure started the process of decline of the city. The surrounding villages were being encompassed within the purview of the new building activity. As a result the character of the existing settlements, however small, was being wiped out. The place that was once referred to as 'The City of Lakes' by Sir Patrick Geddes, started crumbling down in the frenzy of urban development.

The fact that the existence of a Municipal Council earlier, which monitored the administrative affairs of the area of

Thane was later replaced by a Municipal Corporation to meet the increasing demands itself shows the tremendous development taking place within the city.

Quiet and confined settlements like Charai, Chendani Koliwada, Rabodi inhabited by different religious communities had their own character, which was reflected through the architecture prevalent there.

E.g. Bungalow type houses with Portuguese influence in Charai, tiny vernacular houses in Chendani Koliwada, etc. These sensitive, yet architecturally important areas are losing their battle against unbridled urban development. Their very existence is at stake. Unless an effort is taken to study and document these areas today, whatever that is still existing will be lost.

This study has been initiated for the sole cause of protecting such areas, which could tell us a lot about its architecture and also the history behind it.

METHODOLOGY :

PROJECT WORK PLAN :

The historic city of Thane does not have any conservation guidelines or legislation presently. Precincts, within the city with rich architectural character and an established heritage value need to be conserved through appropriately designed guidelines backed by a true legislation.

The first step towards providing the above mentioned guidelines is to identify the zones within the Municipal limit, next step would involve identification of the collective value of the features of that zone-physical, natural and other within the context of and in relation to the other zones. Further an inventory of the items with historic and other references will be prepared as an up-to-date database in the right format and finally a "List" will be prepared.

IDENTIFICATION :

The areas and buildings which probably would figure in heritage and conservation list were identified on the basis of the knowledge of the city. To add to this, initially, the entire city was divided in terms of areas on the basis of names and an insight of any important building or landmark in each of these areas was made. Certain areas were identified by the age-old names derived from the customs and trade practiced there. An entire list of all such areas was made so that surveys could be conducted in each of these areas. Another list of individual structures, which deserved attention, was made to highlight the same. At the same time, available plans were also studied to facilitate the surveys. The ward-wise distribution of the city was accounted and correct boundaries of areas were identified accordingly. Another reference for this process was to scan through various local newspapers that regularly carry features on historically and culturally significant buildings and areas. This proved to be quite beneficial in the early stages of the study. After finalizing the specific areas, surveys were carried out on foot so as not to miss any structure. The surveys were intensive and covered visual analysis in terms of architectural style, age of the building, interesting details and features meriting conservation, and photo-documentation of the same. The history of the place was also looked into by talking to the residents and reference to any literature if available.

CLASSIFICATION :

The classification is based on the surveys conducted. Broadly, areas that comprise of many structures bearing similar architectural features have been clubbed to form a precinct. The other individual entities which exhibit their own styles and bear no relation whatsoever to any structure around have been classified as singular structures. The classification will enable forming separate guidelines for precincts and individual structures so as to facilitate the implementation of the same at a later stage.

The natural heritage, such as lakes, hills, etc. have been put up separately, since the guidelines for these will be different than those for the built environment.

EVALUATION :

The process of evaluating the structures has been made after considering various different headings under which each of the structures may or may not classify. Besides, all structures have been studied for their various inherent features and detail which merit conservation. A study of whether they fall under any particular architectural style has also been made. The broad classification categories under which each structure or area has been checked are as under :

- National importance.
- Historical importance.
- Architectural style.

- Design and planning.
- Technology and material usage.
- Historical event.
- Personality.
- Movement.
- Institution.
- Regional or local importance.
- Special architectural or aesthetic treatment.
- Cultural or historic value.
- Local landmark due to image and identity of the city.
- Work of master craftsmen.
- Model of ornamentation or proportion
- Designed to suit particular climate.
- Precincts of importance to a townscape.
- Evoke architectural, aesthetic and sociological interest.
- Contribute to determine character of a locality.
- Representative of lifestyle of a particular community or religion.
- Distinguished by setting on a street line.
- Special character of facade and uniformity of height, width and scale.

Many villages, which fall under the municipal limits of Thane Municipal Corporation, have been studied for their characteristic vernacular architecture.

INTRODUCTION:

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

LOCATION :   Thane is the northernmost district of the Konkan region, which lies along the Arabian Sea in the northwest of Maharashtra State. It extends between 18°42' N and 20°20' N latitude and 70°25' E and 73°44 E longitude. It is located next to Mumbai City and can be called its first suburb.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT:

TOPOGRAPHY :   The city of Thane lies on almost flat land encompassed between the Yeour hills on the West, and the Parsik hills on the Southeast. The main city lies on the western shore of the Thane Creek. The high hills on one side and submersible marsh along the Thane Creek and Ulhas River bank have peculiarly divided the terrain. The plain terrain actually forms a wide belt along the foothills and away from creek waters and Ulhas riverbanks.

HYDROLOGY :   There are more than 40 lakes present within the municipal limits of Thane City. The presence of many large lakes in the entire Thane district solves the problem of drinking water throughout the year.

FLORA AND FAUNA: The vegetation in Thane consists of mainly uncultivated trees such as Neem, Peepal and Banyan. There are also a few plantations of coconut palms. To the west of Thane is the reserved forest area of Sanjay Gandhi National Park behind the hills. The creek fringes eastern parts of Thane with mangroves on its banks.

CLIMATE :   The Thane climate is typically coastal and sultry but not very hot. The area receives an average rainfall of 2500 to 3000 mm. Weather is warm. It is observed that the mean maximum temperature varies from 32.37°C to 34.57°C during the whole year. In the months of summer it is maximum and in winter ranges from 17.6°C to 20.55°C. The range of humidity is from 45% to 87%.

HISTORY - CHRONOLOGY

636 AD.: Subhedar Khalif Omar of Bahrain and Oman dispatched his army from Iran to loot Thane.

660 AD.: The Arabs invaded and destroyed villages around Thane.

913 AD.: Arab historian Al Masudi referred to Thana as *Tanha* or *Tabah.*

917 AD.: Abu Rehan Albiruni, a great historian has stated that Thana which is forty miles south of Sopara as the Capital of Konkan.

1318 AD.: Emperor of Delhi, Mubarak Khilji captured Thane and placed a Muslim as head of the state.

1533 AD.: Thane City changed hands from Sultan of Gujrat to the Portuguese.

1538 AD.: At this time there were about sixty temples and sixty lakes in the city of Thane.

Around the seventeenth century, Thane was famous as a port.

1633 AD.: The Portuguese built more than twenty Churches. During the construction of the St. John, The Baptist, it is said that Antonio de Porto destroyed the twelve temples, which surrounded the adjoining Masunda Lake and used these stones to build the Church. The bell of this Church (72' 0" high) is believed to be the largest amongst all the remaining Portuguese Churches in the country.

1666 AD.: Marathas captured Northeast part of Thane.

1710 AD.: The Parsi community built the Tower of Silence near Teen Haat Naka.

1730 AD.: Portuguese captured the Island of Salsette. For purpose of security, they started building a fort in Thana.

1739 AD.: The Peshwas captured Thane and Vasai regions. The Portuguese reign came to end.

1754 AD.: The Old District Court, which has been recently demolished, used to be earlier the residence (wada) of Ramaji Mahadeo Biwalkar, a Subedhar of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao.

1760 AD.: Subhedar Ramaji Mahadeo Biwalkar renovated the Kopineshwar mandir.

1774 AD.: The British captured the fort of Thane.

1778 AD.: During British rule, the Subhedar Wada started functioning as a court.

1780 AD.: Keshavji Sorabji Rustomji Patel built an Agyari (fire temple) in a predominantly Parsi locality. A Parsi Guesthouse is adjacent to the Agyari.

1803 AD. : The first District Court of Thane was set up near the Jambli naka.

1818 AD.: The Maratha rule came to an end.

1824 AD.: The construction of the Collector's office commenced at the far end of the Station Road.

1825 AD.: St. James Church was built near the Castle Tank adjoining the fort.

1833 AD.: A Traveler's bungalow was built on the eastern side of the Collector's office.

1835 AD.: Civil Hospital was built near the Tembhi naka.

1838 AD.: Thane fort was converted into a jail.

1853 AD.: The Great Indian Peninsular Railway started between Bombay and Thane.

1862 AD.: The Hirakot Fort, which is at a distance of a quarter a mile from the station to the east of the road, started being used as Mamlatdar's office. Earlier this also functioned as a town Jail.

1928 AD.: Brahman Co-operative Credit Society was established.

1929 AD.: Khan Bahadur Bapuji Cawasji Diwecha, a Parsi, built the Town Hall opposite the Collector's office.

GENERAL HISTORY

The history of Thana is vast and immense, related to the whole of Thana district, entire Konkan region and the Western coast of Maharashtra. Thane or Sthan, is a settlement also known in the past as Konkan-Thane being the head quarters of Konkan Kingdom of the Shilaharas. This former headquarters of the Salsette subdivision is prettily placed on the west shore of the Salsette creek, in wooded country, between the Yeour range of the Salsette hills in the west and the steep picturesque Parsik peaks on the mainland to the south - east. The fort presently being used as the jail, the Portuguese Cathedral, Hirakot or the Diamond Fort, Custom House, a few carved and engraved stones, and several large reservoirs are some of the signs that go to show that Thane was once a Great City.

The earliest possible date in Thana's history can be claimed as 636 AD when Khalif Omar dispatched his army from Iran to loot Thana. In the tenth century, Thana was stated to be one of the most important ports as said by Al Masudi. In the twelfth century, Al Idrisi, a traveler, included Thana port as one of the important ports along the western coast. Marco Polo has mentioned that during the thirteenth century, leather and cotton used to be exported via the sea route from Thana port.

The glorious years of Thana must have been between the 7th-12th century, the period of the Shilahara Kings. It is said that Thana was the capital city of the whole of the North Konkan area. During this period, many temples and architecturally important structures were built. The remnants in the form of copper plates and disfigured images of various Hindu deities were found from time to

time till date at places like Siddheshwar Talao, Masunda Talao, etc. depicting the glory of that era. The Kopineshwar mandir was being built during this period that was later renovated by Subhedar Ramji Mahadeo Biwalkar in the eighteenth century. During 1800's, the town had mainly grown to the west of the fort with a wide road leading towards Southwest to Mumbai and a road towards north leading to Surat via Ghodbunder. Thereafter it became district headquarters and transformed into an individual town during 1960-70.

Thane has thus witnessed various rules ranging from Muslims, Portuguese, Marathas and British.

MUSLIM RULE : In the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, the Turkish Sultan of Delhi conquered the coast and established a garrison at Thana. This is shown by the accounts of the Franciscan Friers, Jordanus and Odericus, who were in Thana between 1321 and 1324. The Friers state that the Saracens or Mohammedan held the whole country. They had destroyed an infinite number of idols, temples and likewise many churches, of which they made mosques for Mohammed, taking their endowments and property. The people residing during that period were the pagans, Hindus and Parsis.

PORTUGUESE RULE : After the treaty with Bahadurshah of Gujrat in 1534, the Portuguese acquired the region of Vasai and Salsette. During 1538, Salsette was famous for the ruins of the great and beautiful city of Thana and the mighty cave temples of Kanheri. In the hills, was plenty of timber for ships and galleys. Later they formed a separate Thana District comprising of the villages along the coastal region and appointed a General of the Portuguese, and of the Gujrat kings. During 1560, Salsette had two divisions, the isles of Salsette with one subdivision and 99 villages and the town of Thane with 8 wards or *pakhadis*. Thana was a great city with 900 Gold lace looms and 1200 white cloth looms. Silk weaving was carried out in the city in the *Khatriali* or the *Khatarpada* or the Weavers' row which lies to the north of the St. John's church. There were as many as 4000 workers employed in this activity. The cloth would have come to general use were it not they cost from 40-50% that of the French and China silk.

Salsette was never well defended. There were coast forts at Daharavi and Versova, a small watchtower at Bandra, and three small fortresses at Thana. One to the North of the city, it was a square fort with two bastions named Reis Magos. Other two round towers to the south, St. Pedro and St. Jeronimo. In 1728, complaints were made of the defenseless state of the island, and the construction of present fort was begun. Between 1534 and 1552 Antonio do Porto destroyed 200 temples, made over 10,000 converts, built 12 churches, and by founding orphanages and monasteries, secured a supply of Native Priests.

MARATHA RULE : By 1675, Shivaji Maharaj captured all the headquarters, which were earlier under the Muslim rule. He made many fruitless efforts to capture Thana, which was then under the Portuguese rule.

Later on in April 1737, a Maratha force entered Salsette. In 1739, the Peshwas captured Thana and Vasai and put an end to the Portuguese rule. In 1754, Ramji Mahadeo Biwalkar, Subhedar of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao built a Bungalow (the old District Court, Court Naka), and started administration from there.

BRITISH RULE : British rule started in Thane in 1774 when General Gordan marched with a troop and seized the fort. During their rule, the British changed the usage of many important structures in Thane. One such major change was the use of Fort as the Jail from 1838. Subhedar Wada started being used as the court and Hirakot, the Town jail, as the Mamlatdar's office.

The first Great Indian Peninsular Railway in India started during the British rule on 16th April 1853. Other architecturally important areas such as the 'Bara Bangla' area were developed as the Civil Lines.

Except part of Chendani, the fishermen's suburb to the south, which contained a landing place, a Customs house and a railway siding, the town of Thane lied to the north of railway. On the southeast lie the Chendani, and further north the Mahagiri quarters of the town, with a large number of boatmen's and fishermen's houses. Between Chendani and Mahagiri, a salt swamp of some 30 - 35 acres existed, which was reclaimed in 1880 by a dam. The bazaar or the Station road ran half a mile north from the station to an open space or square, where it met the Agra road. To the west stretched the Masunda lake, with its west bank faced with broad stone steps and crowned with Hindu temple, the Kopineshwar Mandir, and on the North bank, the Portuguese cathedral and other picturesque buildings. In the open space, at the meeting with the Agra road stood, on the east side, the Collector's house, a fine double-storied building with a large garden in which were the Collector's office and treasury. To the west were the Byramji Jijibhai high school and the Wadia dispensary, with a public library and a domed building close by. This was intended for an English school, but, since the opening of the high school (1880), it was occupied by public offices. Around were the dwellings of pleaders, traders and other well-to-do natives, double storied with high tiled roofs and gaudily coloured walls. Along the Agra road, towards Bombay, were the Portuguese Cathedral, and, a little beyond, the new Marathi school. To the east, after passing between the Collector's and Judge's houses, the Agra road came out on a wide park like esplanade, crossed by broad tree lined roads, with the fort or jail in the east, the English church in the north, open wooded ground with the civil hospital and the remains of the assistant judge's house to the west, the Judge's and Collector's residences to the south-east. To the south were the better-shaded European houses and the neat police lines formerly used by the Native Infantry Regiments. The esplanade, with the double-bridged creek and the wild Parsik hills to the east, and wooded rice-lands and hillsides to the west, formed a pretty scene which especially during the rains, was in many points more like English than an Indian view.

Beyond at the north extreme of municipal limits on the edge of Ghosala Lake was Colonel Atkin's bunglow. Along the creek between Chendni and Mahagiri, a dam, pitched with stone on its eastern face and provided with two sluice gates, was built in 1880. This dam had been instrumental in reclaiming thirty to thirty-five acres of salt marsh behind the Hirakot, which formerly caused much annoyance and ill-health, as the tide washed up and left on it filth from the latrines on the creek.

There were four landings or bandars, Mandvi near the local fund's bridge (old bridge on Thane Creek), Liberi and Bendi in Mahagiri, and Chendni to the south of the railway line. Want of good drinking water was once a great evil in Thana. Since 1830 repeated attempts were made to provide a proper supply of water. But want of funds and other

difficulties prevented any steps being taken, till in July 1880 the Pokhran scheme was sanctioned. The scheme consisted of a storage reservoir with head works, including outlet and waste-weir, a main to the town, and distribution hydrants. The storage reservoir is at the foot of the eastern slope of the Salsette hills, about two miles northwest of the town.

KOPINESHWAR TEMPLE :

This is a historical landmark, which stands to the east of the Masunda Lake. This temple is about 350 years old. The temple is a magnificent structure that bears an architectural and historical significance. As stated in the Gazette, the temple is conceived after the discovery of an idol of Lord Shiva from the adjoining lake.

GAONDEVI TEMPLE :

This temple was completed in 1916 after enthroning the idol of the goddess with full religious rites and ceremonies. Earlier this temple existed adjacent to platform no. 4 of Thane railway station but later shifted to its present location due to development proposals of the railway station. The idol is carved out against a backdrop of two feet high throne. Adjoining the main idol are five more idols but of a relatively smaller size.

CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, THE BAPTIST :

Earlier known as St. Anthony's, this church was built in 1582. The church bell in this church is one of the largest bells in India. It is said that in order to built this church and Convent of St. Anthony, Antonio do Porto pulled down twelve Pagodas which around the great lake doubtless the Masunda, formerly known as St. Anthony lake and built this church with the stones of these Hindu temples. A cross bears the date 1609, a side doorway at the southern end of the church has 1663 and the main entrance has 1725.

ST. JAME'S CHURCH :

This church also known as the English Church was built in 1825. The church, managed until the dawn of Independence by the Government, is now under the management of the Bombay Diocesan Trust Association. The denominations worshipping in this church are the church of north India, both English and Marathi speaking, Tamil Methodists, Kerala Syrian Marthoma and Syrian Orthodox. This church is located near the jail reservoir. The church celebrated its 150th anniversary in July 1975.
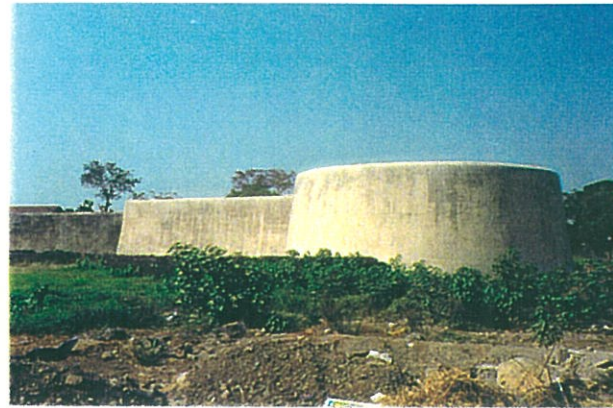
THANE CENTRAL JAIL :

It was during 1730 AD., the Portuguese commenced construction of the fort, but during 1734 AD. lost their strong hold to the Marathas. As a result the construction work was left half way through. Later the British completed this unfinished task in 1774 AD. From 1838 AD., this fort was being used as a prison. Many Freedom Fighters during the Uprising of 1857 were sentenced to this prison.

HIRAKOT (DIAMOND FORT) MAMLATDAR OFFICE :

This is located in the center of the town and was formerly used as the town jail. In 1861 Government abolished it as the town jail and offered the building to the Mauritius government as an emigration depot. Since 1862, it is used as the *Mamlatdar's* office and Collector's record room.

VITTHAL SAYANNA TEMPLE :

This temple was built in 1910 but the idol was placed inside on the auspicious day of 4th September 1912. The area of this temple is about 1200 sq. yards. The temple has been built out of Porbunder stone. The *shikhara* resembles the combination of designs of General Post Office and The Prince of Wales Museum. The entrance of the main yard is flanked by the idols of *Garuda* and *Hanuman* and those of the *dwarpals* i.e. gatekeepers. The temple has a fairly large *sabhamandapa* (audience hall) supported by 26 pillars.
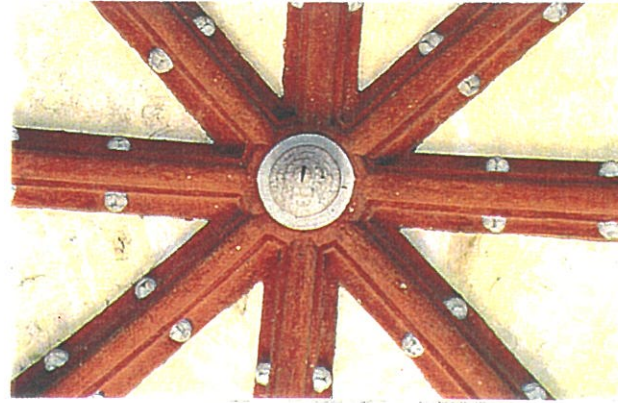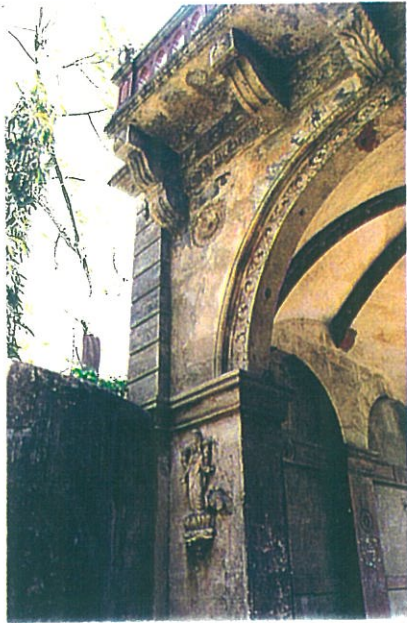
CUSTOM HOUSE :
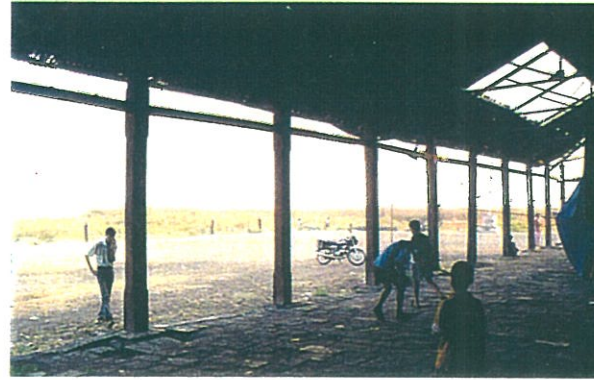
The Custom House is located on the eastern side of Thane. The pillars along the waterfront are inverted cannons that were used as pillars for anchoring the boats in olden days. According to the local public of this area, this port was being used for many years and like the cannons, there are many evidences of historical importance around this place.

TOWN HALL :
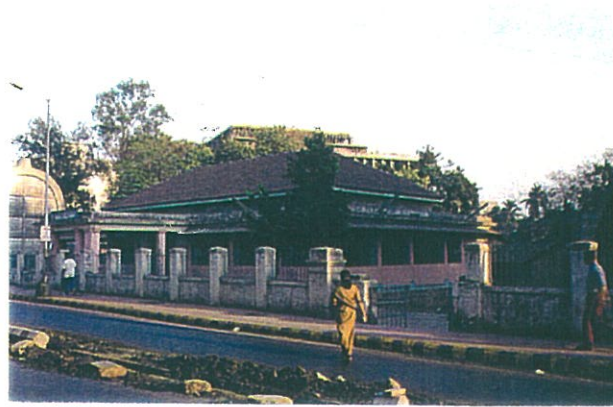
Town hall is one amongst the structures, which have witnessed the independence movement. It was constructed in 1917. This hall is named as 'Khan Bahadur Bapuji Kausaji Divecha's Public Hall' and comes as a gift to the common man from the Parsi community.

A meeting was held in this hall, soon after independence after the realer of the leader Veer Savarkar from central jail. Mahatma Gandhi and Lokmanya Tilak also visited this hall during the pre-independence era.

SYNAGOGUE :

The 118 year old Gate of Haven (*Shaar Hashamaim*) Synagogue in Thane City is a centre of Jewish activities (1879). This structure is located at Tembhi naka.

CHARAI AREA :

Charai, an unseemingly peaceful area, situated very much in the heart of the city is about 100-150 years old owing an allegiance to the Portuguese who ruled over Thana about 300 years ago. The houses in this area bear some resemblance to those in Khotachiwadi and Matharpakhadi in Mumbai. Consisting of not more than two storeys, these houses have mangalore tiled sloping roofs. Characterised by a semi open verandah or porch, an external staircase carved balustrade in timber or cast iron, intricate fascia, eaves board and other details. Every house has a small garden either in front or at the back.

BRAHMAN SOCIETY :

A planned area consisting of a number of houses. It is a relatively peaceful and quiet area, being predominantly residential with houses arranged in a linear manner on both sides of the internal streets.

Almost all the houses have a mangalore tiled sloping roof. The Main house forms are of Ground and Ground + 1 in height. The houses are relatively quite different from each other. Every house is independent having its own plot of land. Some houses have covered verandahs, which form semi open spaces and can be used as sit-outs. Such balconies or verandahs have very intricately carved railings, some being in cast iron while others in timber. At a few places, stain glasswork is also seen. Since roofs of all houses are sloping, the fascia, the eaves boards, etc are finely carved to emphasize the roof form. Some bungalows have fretwork, decorative panels, etc. to highlight the facade.

The locality also boasts of Anand Ashram, one of the oldest co-op housing societies in India.
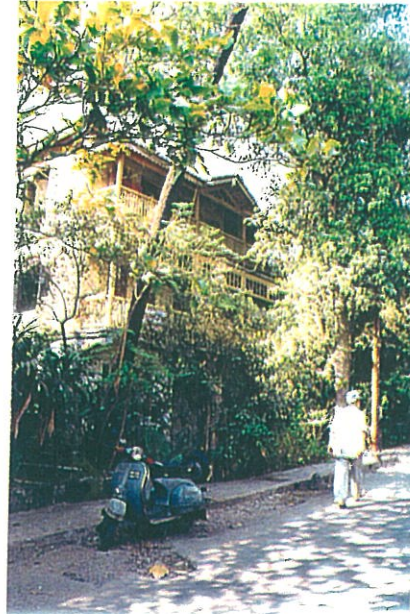
BARA BANGLA :

These bungalows which are thirteen in number were built in the first half of the twentieth century. All bungalows display a distinct colonial character. High pitched sloping roofs, extensively carved railings, timber trusses, spacious porches etc are just some of the few interesting features of these magnificent examples. Each bungalow is more or less two storied and has a huge well-laid garden on all four sides. A separate servant's quarter is provided at the rear side.

A very important feature of the entire area is that it is very well planned. Application of town planning techniques is evident from the layout plan of the area. The area also has a clubhouse for the local residents and it seems that the entire area was planned as a residential area only.

K VILLA :

This area consists of many independent bungalows. A number of the houses belong to Christians who are the original residents, whereas a few houses have recently been taken over by Muslims. The bungalows are spacious with independent gardens. Every house has distinct features such as a porch, balustrades and railings, etc.

RABODI :

This is a predominantly Muslim area. Also known as one of the oldest settlement, there are hardly any original structures present as of today. New construction activity is in full swing and the scene witnessed is that of matchbox type buildings standing beside each other leading to congestion and chaos.

CHENDANI KOLIWADA :

An original settlement of the *Koli* folk, the fishermen community, the area still shows characteristics of the trade practiced. Old boats, drying of fish, etc. can be seen in small open spaces present in the area. A few old houses depict extensive ornamentation work besides an interesting house-form displaying strong characteristics of vernacular architecture.

MAHAGIRI KOLIWADA :

This is another settlement of the fishermen community, but on the western side of the railway station. It is said that, years ago, Mahagiri was famous for its rich silk industry. Silk cloth used to be manufactured over here and exported. Presently no such activity exists. The houses in this area are simple ground storied structures with minimum or no ornamentation.

KHARKAR ALI :

Kharkar Ali is one of the oldest areas of the city. It is nestled within the pocket surrounded by Civil Lines, Mahagiri Koliwada and the wholesale markets of Jambhali Naka. Beautiful bungalows constructed by merchants and lawyers practicing in nearby district court can still be observed in this area.

Social gathering halls like C.K.P. hall, clubs and Gujarati schools were located on main street of Kharkar Ali. Paper, board and stationery wholesale shops are amongst a few wholesale establishments located in this mixed locality of traders and professionals.

The development has now picked up in this area as well and multi-storeyed buildings are mushrooming to cater the demands of trading community. Narrow streets and inadequate parking spaces are causing air and sound pollution in this dense locality.
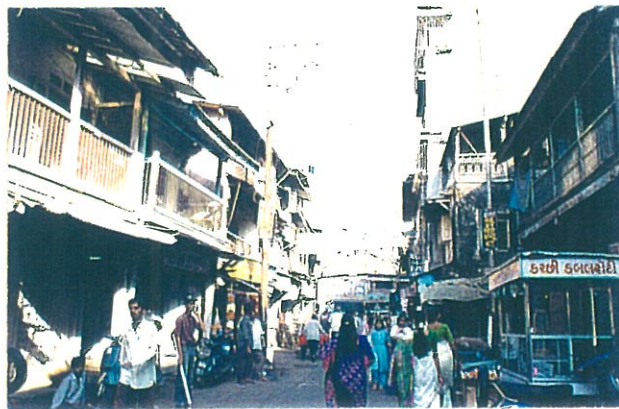
GHANTALI :

The peaceful neighbourhood of Ghantali received its name from the temple of Goddess Ghantali located within it. This locality has been a stronghold of Marathi speaking middle class population living in independent bungalows, chawls and lately in *'Sahniwas'* or co-operative housing societies.

In spite of many multi-storied buildings with shops on ground floor built in 80's and 90's, the area has strongly maintained its residential character.

PANCH PAKHADI :

The area had village like character even though it was a part of erstwhile Thane Municipal Council limits. The terrain was hilly, dotted with lakes and paddy fields. Many bungalows built in traditional manner by the Christian population can be still observed in Chandanwadi section.

The area was easily accessible from both Old Agra Road and Eastern Express Highway prompting the development of many housing societies within it.

The developers operating in this area received a shot in the arms when Thane Municipal Corporation was built on a vacant plot opposite Kacharali Lake. Many posh residential complexes have developed since then. The area also has sports commercial development with health centres, offices and can very well prove an alternative to congested precincts of Gokhale Road and Rammaruti Road.

THANE RAILWAY STATION :

Thane Railway Station enjoys a special mention in history of Indian Railways as first ever train in India traveled between Thane and Mumbai V.T. on 18th April 1853. The railway tracks were soon extended but Thane remained an important station on Great Indian Peninsular Railway (now Central Railway).

The existing station building was rebuilt but some structures still bring back memories of good old days of cast iron and wrought iron construction. For e.g. the roof on platform no. 1 with bent-up trusses, steel water tank with buttressed stone masonary supports, a tiny signal cabin with pitched roof and a few bungalows.

Like any other suburban railway station, Thane Railway Station suffers from problems of encroachments on railway property, hawkers, lack of parking space and traffic snarls. Commuters, especially pedestrians find it very difficult to use the station during peak hours. The plan of modernisation of Thane station is on anvil but the fate of these remnants having significant value in history of Indian Railways is yet undecided.
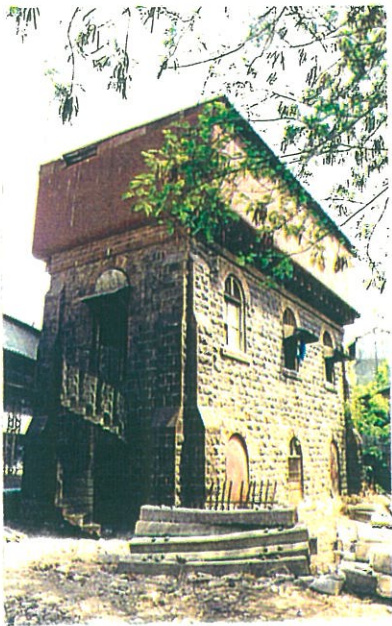
OLD STATION ROAD :

This is one of the oldest thoroughfares between the railway station and the then distant areas of the old city. This road also used to serve as the *Bazaarpeth* - the market place for all the adjoining areas. This street exhibits some kind of a street character that livens up the onlooker's curiosity. The structures abutting the streetfront have interesting features on their facades in terms of ornamentation, carved balustrades and railings, etc. There is a wide range of moulding work in plaster, which is extensively seen along the entire stretch of this road.
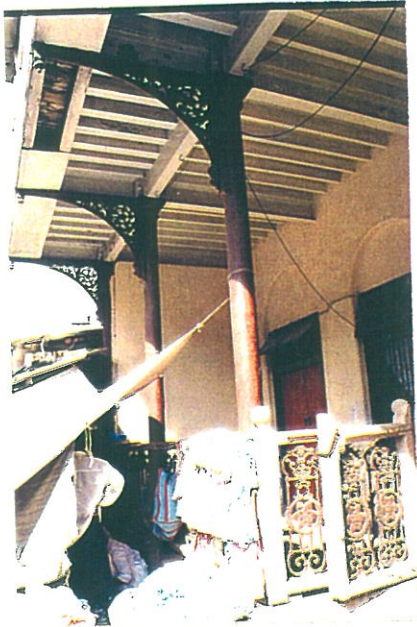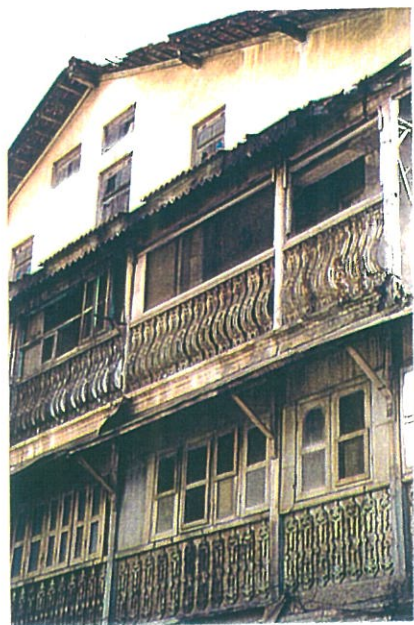
GOKHALE ROAD AND RAMMARUTI ROAD :

Gokhale Road used to be a quiet road linking the railway station with residential neighbourhood of Brahman Society. The road was lined with a few bungalows and shady trees. The streetscape has changed dramatically since then as many residential and commercial establishments were built in last thirty years. Today it is one of the busiest streets in the city also fondly called as 'Fashion Street of Thane' as many cloth shops, boutiques and jewelry shops have sprung up here.

Rammaruti road is an example of another area going through transformation from a quiet residential locality to an upmarket shopping precinct. Many shops selling goods of international brand names like Nike, Reebok, Benetton and Adidas to name a few are located on this street which has been widened recently.

A few old structures depicting the varying architectural styles such as Art Deco, Colonial and Vernacular have survived, in spite of tremendous potential for commercial developments in these prosperous areas.

LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI ROAD (OLD AGRA ROAD) :

Old Agra Road was an important street in Thane as it was serving as a highway before Eastern Express Highway was constructed as a bye-pass. Along with petrol pumps many automobile sales and servicing centres, spare parts shops have come up.

Sawmills and fabrication workshops were also located on this road. Presently many building material and hardware shops can be located on both sides of the street. The road also had its residential development in the form of old chawls with Art Deco features. In modern times high-rise residential structures with penthouses mainly housing the trading community are being built.

Some government and private offices are located on the street towards *Tin Haat Naka*. A beautiful structure with porch, houses the Divisional Forest Office. Road widening has hampered the beauty of structure as the portals are now embedded with the setback compound wall. Vithal Sayanna Mandir, an important temple is located just a few meters before Forest office on opposite side.
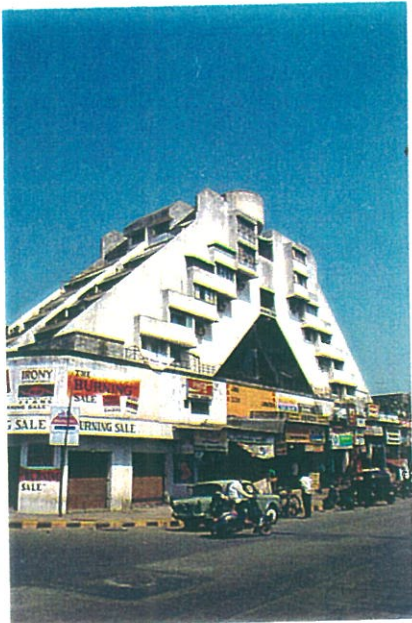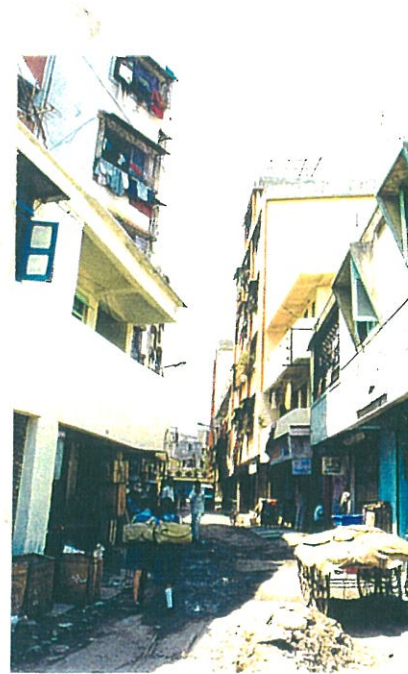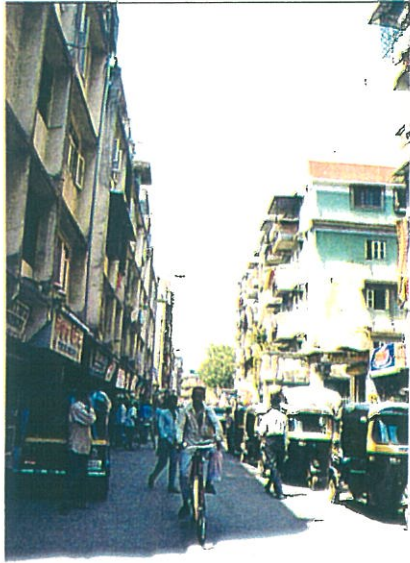
KISAN NAGAR :

Adjoining Wagle Estate Industrial area, a suburb of Kisan Nagar has developed. This area is notorious for unauthorized constructions, which has sprung up almost overnight. A few cases of building collapses are reported every year from Kisan Nagar. Middle class residents still prefer this area in spite of lack of approach roads, inadequate water supply and open spaces mainly on account of its proximity to Mumbai, an easy access to Mulund Railway Station and low property rates. As one enters Kisan Nagar he is confronted with a view of tall buildings almost touching each other, overflowing drains and congested streets. The area has been showing signs of decay due to flouting of byelaws and planning standards.

PADWAL NAGAR :

The area is situated next to Kisan nagar and developing in more or less similar manner. Most of the residents work in adjoining Wagle Estate Industrial area as labourers. The area contains a few Locked-up industrial units and housing societies. The area is shaping up to a more of residential character.
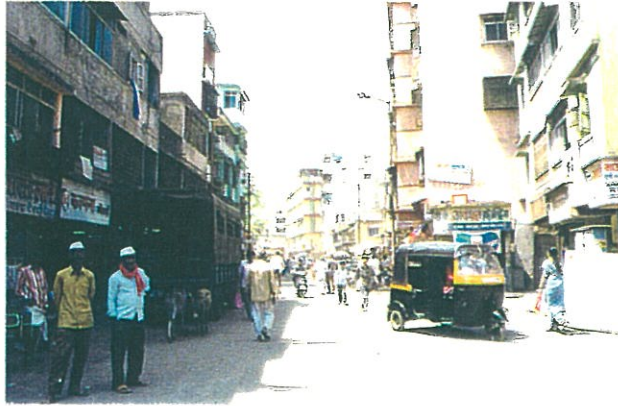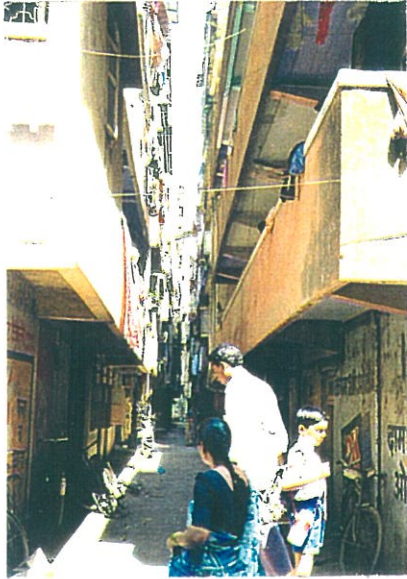
SRINAGAR :

Srinagar is a beautiful locality situated at foothill of Yeour hills. The development in this area has picked up recently. The higher income groups due to its scenic location and serene surrounding preferred Srinagar. The built environment includes bungalows, row houses and multi-storied buildings. The roads are wide showing signs of planned development. Ayyappa temple acts as a landmark within this locality.

The scene changes completely as one enters part of Srinagar close to Kisan Nagar. This area again shows plethora of chawls and building built without any planning norms.

WAGLE ESTATE :

One of the biggest Industrial Estates in India is developed by MIDC at Wagle Estate. The industrial area was prospering just few years back. More than fifty percent Industrial Units are now closed on account of recession. Some units have shifted elsewhere. The effect of carelessness and neglect are observed in the industrial area in form of roads full of potholes, heaps of garbage and choked drainage.
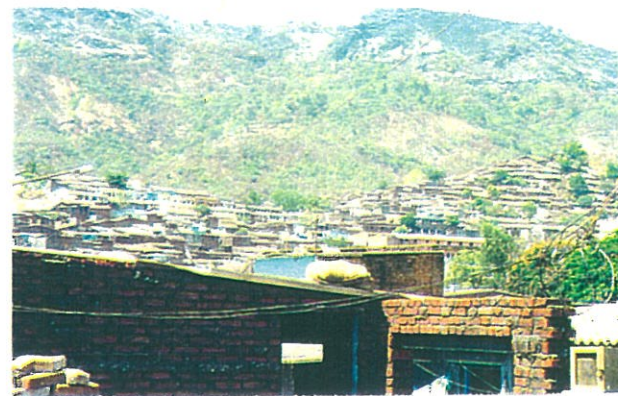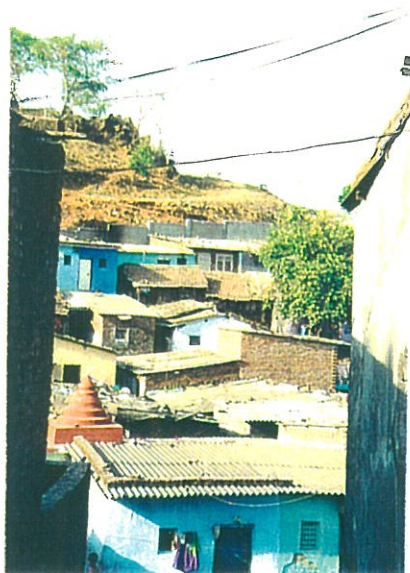
Large patches of slums can now be seen both within and outskirts of Wagle Estate Industrial area on account of apathy shown by the industrialists. Recently the slums at Ram Nagar, located on foothills of Yeour had to be demolished as the land belonged to Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Still the slums are seen proliferating on government and private lands posing major threat to environment and surviving industrial units.

INDIRA NAGAR :

Maximum Encroachments and unauthorized settlements can be observed in this locality besides a few housing units constructed by MHADA for lower income groups. The nature and extent of encroachments is so severe that Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) had to take up special efforts for removing these for road widening purpose.

Recently MHADA has allotted plots for construction of multi-storied buildings to middle income group, which may change the features of this slum-infested locality.

LOKMANYA NAGAR :

The area is very far from Thane Railway station, but is thickly populated since Thane Municipal Transport Corporation buses connect it to different parts of city. The chawls built in 60's and 70's used to dominate the skyline but presently new buildings are taking their place. The area is plagued with unauthorized constructions in spite of large developments undertaken by MHADA and private developers.

VARTAK NAGAR :

Vartak Nagar consists of a large housing colony developed by Konkan Housing Board. The area is situated next to large industrial units such as Kores, Reptacoss Brett, Cadburys and Raymonds. Many people from Vartak Nagar are employed in these factories. Proximity to Eastern Express Highway has been instrumental in speedy development of this locality and in attracting developers to construct high-rise towers.

ADJOINING VILLAGES :

There are many villages that are within the purview of the Thane Municipal Corporation. Although these villages are well connected to the main city, they seem to have been affected by the development activity in different manners. Some villages are humble settlements exhibiting more of a rural character whereas others have been affected by the construction activity. Villages in southeast are very small and almost untouched by evil effects of modernization. Every village consists of roughly 500 - 600 houses with a temple of village god-goddess serving as a community center.
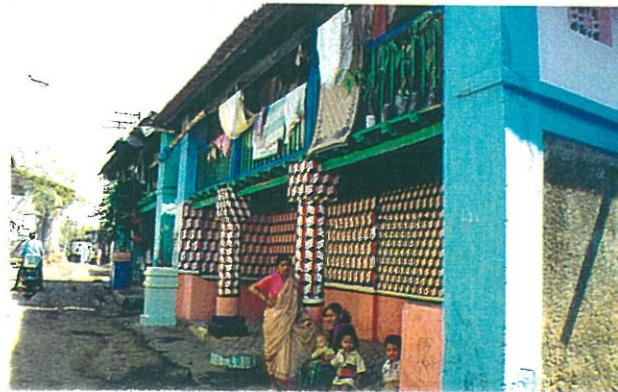
The houses have typical Mangalore tiled sloping roofs with some of them having small verandahs in the front. Some houses have their own adjoining open spaces, which act as gardens. Houses range from single room tenement to multiple room tenements. Use of reeds for walls, cow dung plastering for flooring and walls, thatch for roofing, etc. is extensively visible.

The villages can be categorized mainly into four divisions according to their character.

HIGHLY URBANIZED VILLAGES :

Villages like Kalwa and Mumbra have borne an irreversible impact of urbanization. A major reason for this is the presence of the railway line connecting the main Thane City and these villages. Ample water supply, electricity supply and city bus services made these villages attractive propositions for people to reside here. These villages have mostly residential land use with parallel commercial activities.
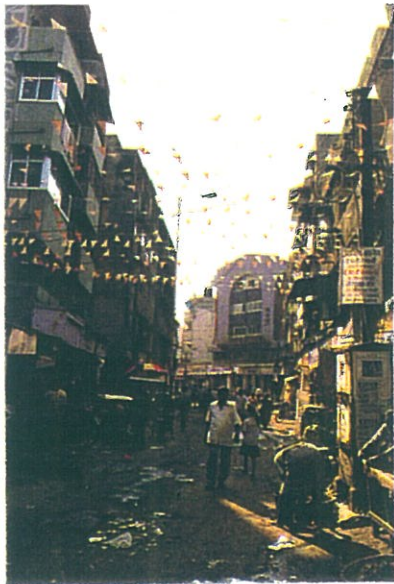
KALWA
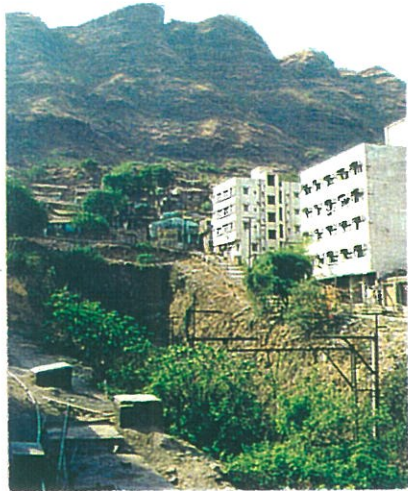
VITAWA
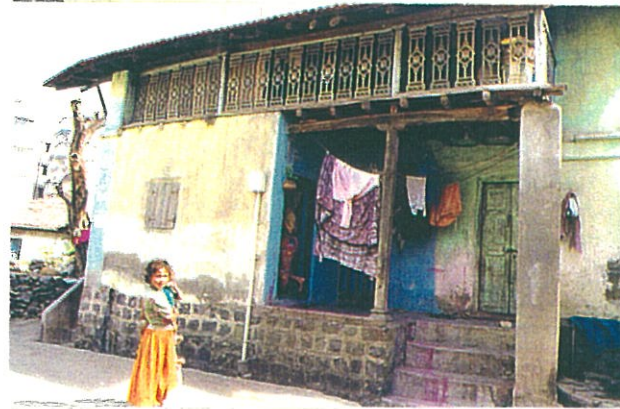
VILLAGES HAVING A COMPLETE RURAL CHARACTER :

The villages which lie to the southeast of Thane city, in the vicinity of Diva station, namely Sabe, Agasan, Dativili, Betavade and Mhatardy etc. are affected to a very little extent by modernization mainly due to lack of proper access roads. One has to enter these villages from Kalyan Dombivali Municipal Corporation Limits by taking a longer route, as direct links are not available. Further another mode of public transport, shared auto rickshaws is needed from the station to reach these villages making them even more inaccessible.

The materials used for building purposes - thatch for roofing, weeds and karvi sticks for walls, cow dung for flooring show that these villages still portray a very rural character baring a few modern constructions.
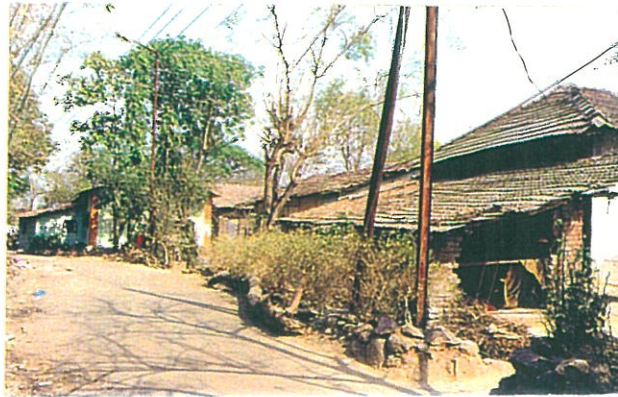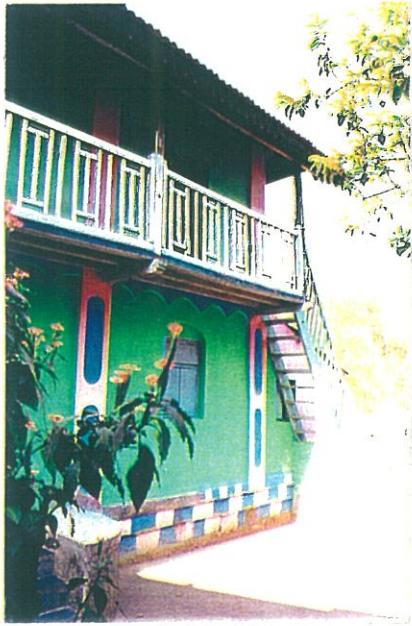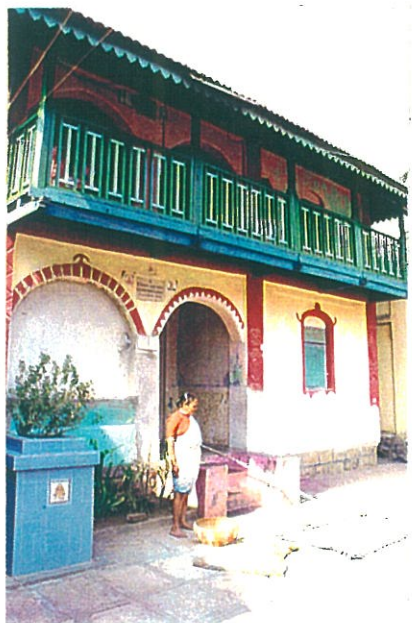
SABE
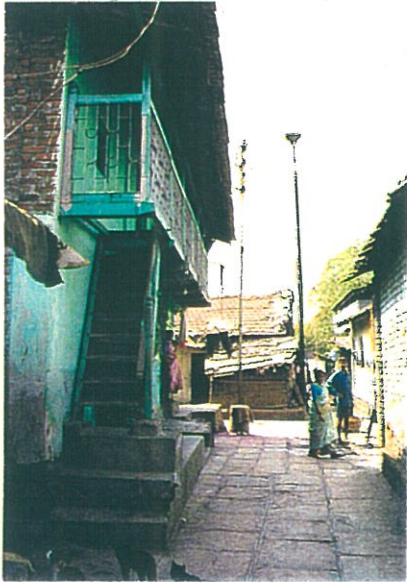
MHATARDI

BETAVADE

AGASAN

YEOUR

VILLAGES AFFECTED DUE TO INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE VICINITY :

Certain villages such as Balkum and Kolshet, which are in the proximity of the industrial area (Chemical Belt), have undergone a sea change due to the strong, inherent land use. Poor workers working in the factories around mostly occupy the villages. Since these people are poor and cannot afford proper houses, slums are the natural outcome of this situation. There is a distinct growth of shanties on the periphery of the industrial zone.
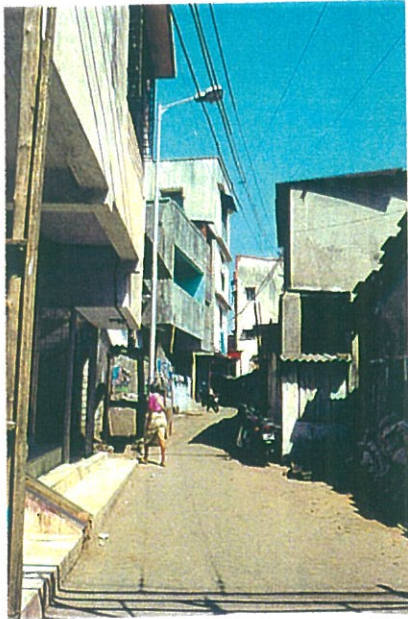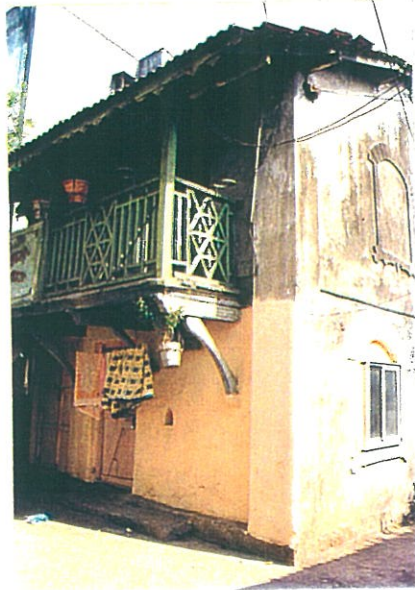
VILLAGES IN THE PROCESS OF URBANISATION :

Villages like Kharigaon, Majiwade, Manpada are presently witnessing a lot of new construction activity. Although located a little away from the nearest railway station these are very well connected by roads. Many of the previous old structures are being pulled down to pave way for the new apartment buildings. Open plots of land are also being developed for residential purposes. Although a few old structures are still observed, the new buildings are also becoming an integral part of the so-called progressing village.

MAJIWADE
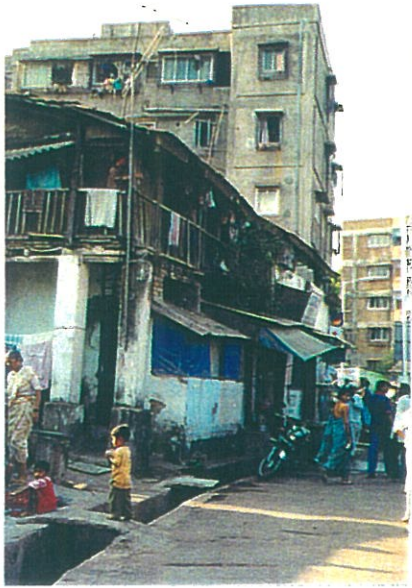
KASAR VADAVLI
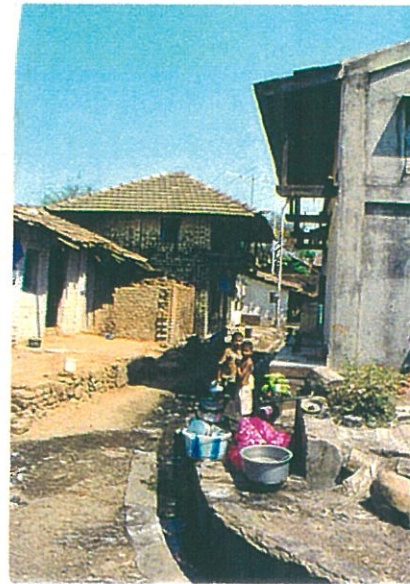
PARTLY URBANIZED VILLAGES :

Some villages like Desai, Davle are located relatively far from the nearest railway station. But they are very much along important roads. As a result, urbanization has already started some time back. These villages presently display more of an urban character than a rural one.

Khidkali village is famous for its old Shiva temple situated on the banks of small lake. The temple and its environs are looked after by a trust who have also constructed a dharmshala. The temple was in ruins but it was partially rebuilt some years ago. The structure appears *Hemadpanti* in its construction from the existing columns.

Twice a year, a fair is held at Khidkaleshwara Temple. Many people visit it every day. Presence of a lake and mango orchards have made this place a picnic-spot for people from nearby villages.

KHIDKALI

NATURAL HERITAGE - LAKES :

These are the most important entities associated with the city of Thane. It is because of these that Patrick Geddes named Thane City as 'The City of Lakes'. These lakes which are big and small are located all over the region, only a few being within the city limits.

In the last century, the city was dotted with sixty lakes. But presently the lakes are facing a grave danger of being extinct on account of encroachments along lakeside. Natural sources recharging lake are drying and they are getting filled with silt and weeds. If proper steps are not taken in time, many of these lakes will disappear from the map of city forever.

Some lakes like Siddheshwara and Brahmala are dotted with archeological findings such as idols and ruins of ancient temples which may throw light on missing links in history of Thane. Presently the disfigured idols are just strewn around lakeside without any regards for safety and security. Urgent steps should be taken to save these precious archeological findings from acts of vandals and slum dwellers.

GHOSALE LAKE

MASUNDA LAKE

UPVAN LAKE

LAKE IN WAGGLE ESTATE

LAKE IN CHENDANI KOLIWADA

KACHRALI LAKE

CASTLE LAKE
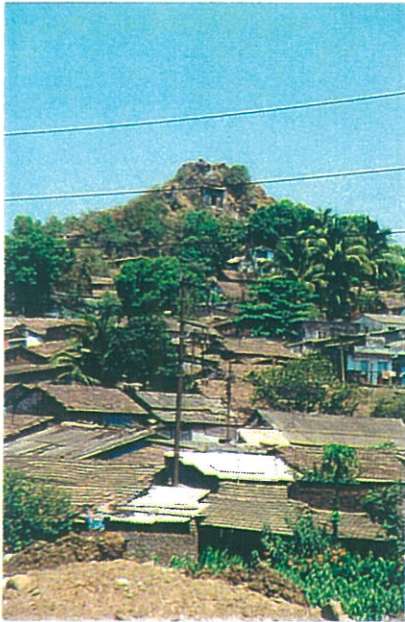
SIDDHESHWAR LAKE


REMANATS FROM SIDDHESHWAR LAKE

REMANATS FROM SIDDHESHWAR LAKE
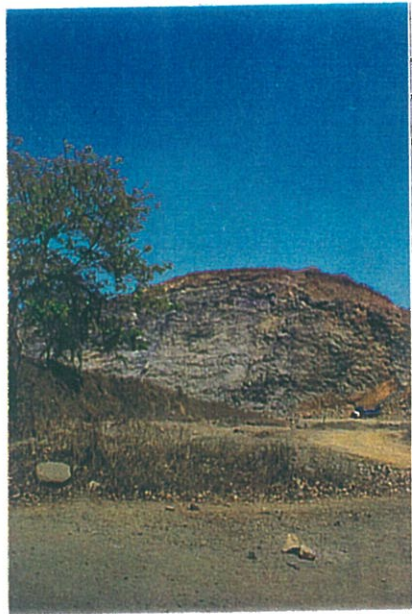
NATURAL HERITAGE - HILLS :

Thane city is surrounded by the Yeour hills on the northwest which form a part of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. These hills form a vital part of the existing eco-system. The present day encroachments and quarrying in these hills is ruining the area and posing a threat to the balance of eco-system. These scenic hills form a sort of a physical boundary to the district of Thane itself.

On the southeast of the city is the range of Parsik hills. Even these hills are facing the problems of encroachment of slums as well as indiscriminate quarries. Summer brings its own problems as the forests are set on fire by criminal elements to clear the land and get coal. Concrete steps should be taken by concerned authorities to save these 'Lungs of Thane City'.
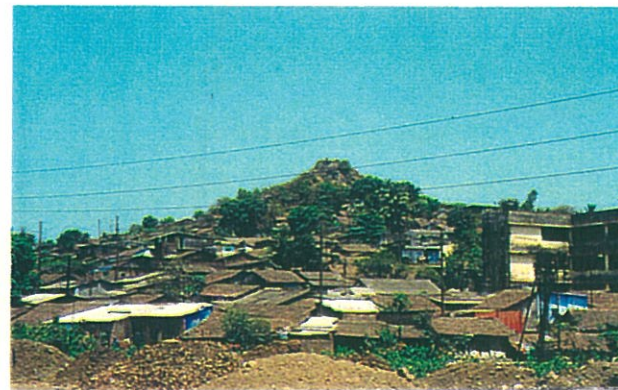
Indiscriminate quarrying is giving rise to sound and air pollution and disturbing the skyline of city. After quarrying is done, the sites are left without any attempt of rehabilitation, inviting the slum dwellers to encroach upon the land for shelter.

NATURAL HERITAGE-MANGROVES:

There is an extensive growth of mangroves in different parts along Thane Creek and Vasai creek within the city of Thane. Due to the presence of the mud flats, the growth of these mangroves is very favorable. These also contribute in a very large way in maintaining a balance in the eco-system and act as breeding grounds for fish and other marine animals. Depositing garbage to make the land available for development is destroying the mangroves. Excessive silting and proliferation of slums are also responsible for declining health of mangroves.
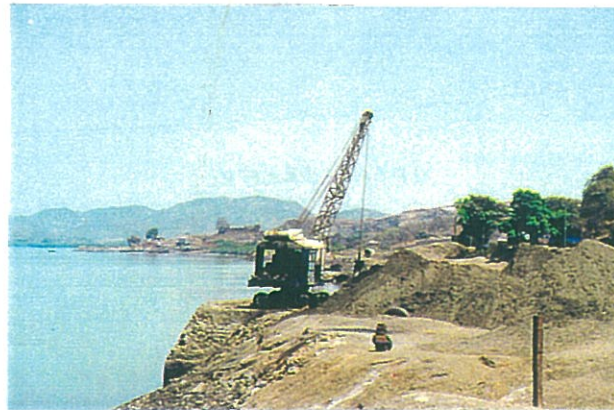
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS :

The City of Thane has always found itself at the crossroads with the love and respect for its glorious past and beaconing future as a modern metropolis. The pressure for development has always been intense in Thane due to its close proximity with Mumbai. The demand for residential and commercial space has always been on the rise and in most cases satisfied by unauthorized development in densely populated areas of old city.

Private developers have been targeting many beautiful residential structures and replacing them with monstrous towers and commercial complexes. Government authorities are also not far behind in this as proved by the neglect and eventual demolition of century-old B.J. High school and buildings in front of Collectorate of Thane. The 18th century *wada* belonging to Subhedar of Thane, appointed by Peshwe was initially converted into Taluka Court, allowed to deteriorate, and later demolished without any second thoughts. Road widening projects undertaken in Thane have also caused considerable damage, especially on street facades in old precincts in Thane.
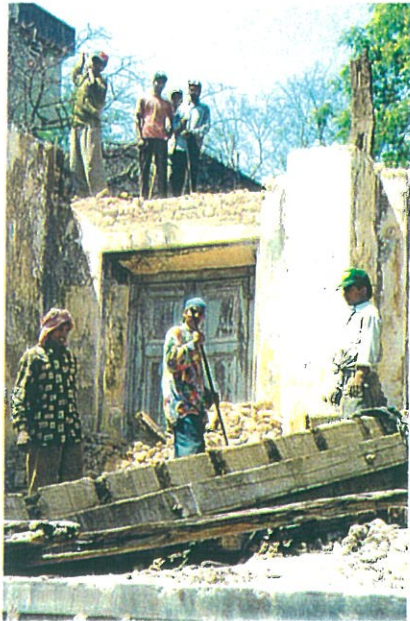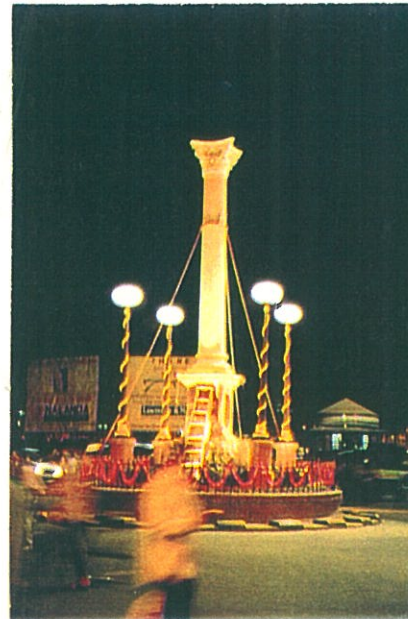
LOOKING FORWARD:

We at Rachana Consultants are extremely pleased to submit the intermediate report of the project ' A comprehensive Listing of heritage Values in Thane' awarded by MMR- Heritage Conservation Society'.

The report describes about the work carried out in Stage I of the above mentioned project i.e. Surveying, photo-documentation and preparation of base maps. The researchers visited each ward in both main Thane City and suburbs including villages, took photographs and discussed with local population and enthusiasts about the same.

It was observed that owing to absence of any guidelines in Development Control Regulations in Thane and intense pressure for development, the heritage monuments and precincts are under threat. Private developers and government departments have carried out their activities of demolishing historical structures and rebuilding in an unchecked manner.

From the preliminary observations and studies, It can be concluded that the areas like Charai, Kvilla, Mahagiri Koliwada, Chendani Koliwada, old station road and Ghantali can be classified as potential area and locations for conservation. Other areas also have settlements and monuments, which need to be studied individually. It was also noted that the surrounding villages contain good examples of vernacular architecture and ancient temples, mosques and churches.

Lakes, hills and mangroves were studied as elements of natural heritage. It was observed that indiscriminate urbanization is causing extensive damages to these them. Lakes in the old city like Bramhala, Masunda and Siddheshwara are surrounded by archeological sites, presently threatened by growth of slums and silting. It may be necessary to undertake separate studies to look into this aspect besides the scope of present study.

During the second stage of work, information collected from primary and secondary sources will be analyzed; interviews of people and government officials will be taken in order to substantiate the findings. The task of delineating the precincts and listing of structures/ monuments can be then undertaken in reference with existing Survey sheets and Development Control Regulations. The information collected and analyzed at the end of stage II will be synthesized during the third and final stage and a Detailed Report will be presented.