A Monthly Bulletin for the Villages, Gaothans and Koliwadas of Mumbai, Thane, Vasai and Raigad District



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**Uplifting the Village Community** 

VOICE

**GAOTHAN VOICE AUGUST 2022** 

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One Vision!

One Voice!
The East Indian Magazine

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# **SAAT BETH! SAAT MAULI**

Seven Marian devotions in the City of Seven Islands



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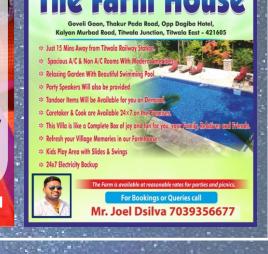
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## **EAST INDIAN PUNCH**

The Mouthpiece of the East Indian Community

# SAAT BETH! SAAT MAULI! Seven Marian devotions in the City of Seven Islands

Gleason Barretto, Old Kurla

other Mary is venerated with the greatest respect across our East Indian Gaothans. A majority of our Holy Crosses also have a statue of our our lady dedicated to various devotions. In this article, we would like to focus on the Mumbai's History as that of 7 islands, which were then merged to be called Mumbai City, Bombay of the \*yesteryear's\* and referred as Mobai by the East Indian Community. As per a legend each of the 7 islands had a Devi(Hindu goddess) who were 7 sisters and once a year they used to visit Mot Mauli around the time of the Bandra Fair. These devis today are venerated by our Hindu brethren from the Koli community. To connect with the 7 islands we have 7 big church feast dedicated to Mount Mary-Bandra, Mount Carmel-Bandra, Our Lady of Good Health-Velankanni, Our Lady of Fatima-Karjat, Our Lady of Immaculate Conception-Borivli, Our Lady of Hope-Thane and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour-Mahim

round this time a majority of the East Indian Community go on a pilgrimage to Velankanni, Chennai. Those who cannot make it to Velankanni visit the Shrines dedicated to Our Lady of Good Health at Bhate Bunder Uttan and Irla. Tens of thousands go to Velankanni to participate in the Procession and holy mass. The East Indian pilgrims have been visiting Velankanni for around 100 years and the numbers keep increasing each passing year. Many Villages also organise novenas at the local Church or at a prominent location in the Gaothan. Bombay Vailankanni Catholic Association has been doing a great job by coordinating for special trains during the annual festival.

Inder the foundation laid by the East Indian Community, the devotion to Mount Mary was born. The East Indians especially Bandraites celebrated the Mount Mary feast with great enthusiasm. All relatives across Mumbai visited their relatives home at Bandra to taste a variety of East Indian food on the buffet table. The fair which has now been commercialized has stalls from various migrant communities, but has no place for the Indigenous East Indian Community. The East Indian Marathi holy mass finds no place and the state language Marathi mass has been allotted only twice, instead of having it everyday. The Founders of the Bandra Fair seem to have been forgotten and ignored.

ove and devotion to Mother Mary is strong across the East Indian Community. Besides Mot Mauli & Velankanni Mauli, we have Barvasa Mauli, Sukur Mauli, Betinichi Mauli, Kosav Mauli & Fatima Mauli. All these 7 devotions are grand with Jatras or Fairs and traditional celebrations. The Mot Mauli Bandra Fair is the most popular and gets the highest visitors. The Velankanni Shrine at Bhate Bunder Uttan organises flag hoisting everyday, while the Irla Velankanni Shrine has a variety of stalls and a grand procession. Kosav Mauli - Borivali, Barvasa Mauli - Ghodbunder, Fatima Mauli - Karjat & Sukur Mauli - Mahim have the Annual Feast celebration with a Fair or a series of stalls that gets a great response. Betinichi Mauli - Bandra has a traditional procession organised by the East Indian Community of the parish and the main celebrant is taken through the Gaothan on a Rekla.

n modern times these traditional celebrations for our devotion to Mother Mary are changing, year after year with the influx of migrant communities. Reviving these celebrations in the East Indian way remains most important, as in some cases the East Indians are either sidelined or ignored. Revival is the need of the hour and MGP will support all like minded locals to ensure that our Traditional celebrations and religious rituals are followed in the ancestral way. It's time we stop those who want to rewrite history and erase the East Indian Community connect to these Marian Devotions. Pope Francis has emphasised on the importance of the Indigenous People across the world and its time we sensitise the hierarchy and the clergy about the same. The Indigenous People have their rights and its time they get what they rightfully deserve.



## **REETIN REEVAZ**

## The East Indian Culture Guide

### SEVEN MARIAN DEVOTIONS OF THE SEVEN ISLANDS OF BOMBAY

The City of 7 islands have a variety of Marian Devotions but the 7 most popular amongst the Indigenous East Indian Community are Our Lady of the Mount, Velankanni, Fatima, Hope, Perpetual Succour, Immaculate Conception and Mount Carmel. Mother Mary has a special place in the lives of the original inhabitants who reside in Gaothans and you will see the statue or picture of Our Lady on the walls of each East Indian home and also at the Goathan Holy Crosses. The 7 devotions have a connect with the festivals of the Indigenous Community celebrated for more than a century.

# MOT MAULI CHA SANN - VANDAR CHA SANN - BANDRA FAIR Our Lady of the Mount - Bandra - 1566

\*It was the zeal of the native Christians(Agris, Kunbis, Bhandaris, Kolis and many more later known as East Indians) that popularized the Bandra (Mot Mauli Cha Sann) Mount Mary Feast.

\*In 1566 the Jesuits built a modest Oratory of mud and thatch and dedicated it to Our Lady of the Nativity

\*In 1739 during Maratha invasion this chapel was destroyed and the statue was allegedly dumped into the sea which was rescued by the local fishermen and kept at St. Andrews Church

\*In 1761 the Chapel was rebuilt and the statue was carried in procession and restored to its original place on the Mount

\*In 1882 a glass enclosed portico was added to the Chapel for extra accommodation as more and more pilgrims came to the shrine to seek mothers blessings

\*In 1904 the new Church was built, an edifice in gothic architectural style was opened to public after 2 years of construction

\*It was the natives East Indians from Bandra and the islands of Salsette and North Konkan homeland that celebrated the feast of Our Lady of the Mount with great zeal and gusto

\*The Thursday preceding the feast was called the "Farm Day" when sweets and cakes were baked in all homes of the East Indian communities.

\*In those days specialty sweets were called Cucumber sweets called "Pan-Mouries" and "Umbers"

\*Pigs were slaughtered on this day and East Indian delicacies like Vindalo and Ser-pe-tair were prepared

\*A home brewed spiced alcoholic concoction popularly called "Khimad" was a "must" and was kept ready for the feast on the coming Sunday

\*The Bandra East Indians invited all their relatives for the Celebration of the Feast in reciprocation, those relatives invited their Bandra counterparts for the Harvest Festival "Agera" which would soon follow

\*Horse Tongas or "garras" plied from Bandra station to the very foot of the hill during the Church festivals

\*Stalls were set up by North Indian and Konkan belt migrants selling black grams and sweets. Also temporary canteens were set up alongside the pathways selling food and special dishes for the pilgrims.

\*It is said that the steps that go up the hill right up to the Church on the Mount was built by a Parsi Gentleman who had made a petition to Mother Mary after his wish was granted, and this childless couple were blessed with a child.

## **SUKUR MAULI CHA SANN - MAHIM CHA SANN Our Lady of Perpetual Succour - Mahim - 1534**

- \*Mahim was one of the seven islands of Bombay situated at the North-Western side and separated by a creek from the Salsette Island
- \*The Original Church of St. Michael is believed to be built in 1534 by Antonio de Porto a Church builder of the Franciscan order
- \*By the river fronting the Mandove (Customs House) stood a large and beautiful Church with a large Verandah before the portal
- \*The East Indian Native Christians bequeathed large estates to the Church where housing societies stand today
- \*The Statue of Mount Mary, Bandra was kept at the Mahim Church when the Bandra Church was destroyed till 1761
- \*The weekly Novena services were started in 1948 when Fr.Edward Placidus Fernandes from Bombay on his visit to Europe notices a similar ritual celebrating Our Lady of Perpetual Succour at Belfast, Northern Ireland
- \*Fr.Edward brought with him a picture touched to the original icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour at Rome
- \*The first Novena was held on 8th September 1948, the birthday of Mother Mary
- \*It was a Wednesday and hence the Novena Services were held every Wednesday
- \*Mahim Church is situated on the Old Portuguese Church Street(now known as Mori Road) and was rebuilt in 1973
- \*The MGP Annual Traditional Procession of Mount Mary in September starts from the Mahim Church to bring back memories of the first procession taken in a Rekla from Mahim Church to Mount Mary's Church

# BARVASA MAULI CHA SANN - GHORMAL CHA SANN Our Lady of Hope - Thane Ghodbunder - 1630

- \*Our Lady of Hope, Ghormal is one of the many churches left in ruins after the war of 1737-39
- \*Situated on a hillock at Nagla Bunder off the Ghodbunder Road from Thane to Ghidbunder, it must have been a private chapel as we do not find mention of this church in the official accounts
- \*In living memory, the church was without a roof, Later an asbestos roof and doors were added to keep the church secure.
- \*Older residents of Thane recall devotees from Kashimira, Bhayandar, Vasai, etc. visiting this church on the Feast day usually the Sunday after Easter
- \*We recall the village women folk who would bring water in earthen pots and the pilgrims would purchase water at four annas
- \*The families devoted to this church were from Charai, K'Villa, Utalsar, Kolbad and Horta
- \*The feast day was a chance for families to picnic under the shade of the trees at the foot of the hill
- \*The devotees of Bhayandar and neighbouring places used to come in bullock carts, horse-Carriages/Tongas. Boats from Vasai and Uttan sailed down the creek and fresh fish placed as offerings at the Offertory service.
- \*A few decades the dedicated parishioners of St. John the Baptist Church, Thane decided to renovate the church as senior citizens and the old devotees to Our Lady of Hope Church could no longer climb the hillock, Steps leading up the hill made the climb easier
- \*The Church was renovated on 31 July 1995 by the late Fr. Rev. Dominic Pereira, and the vigilance cell took the initiative and Services are being held on the first Sunday of every month.

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## **REETIN REEVAZ**

## The East Indian Culture Guide

### KOSAV MAULI CHA SANN - MANPESAR CHA SANN Our Lady of Immaculate Conception-Borivali -1547

\*The Church structure traces its origin back to the fifteenth century, a monument with an historical and national significance.

Besides the present Church building are the Mandapeshwar caves which date back to around the year 750-850AD

\*A Franciscan missionary was the founder of this Church in 1547. By October 1548, a number of locals were baptized and a 'devout hermitage' was started at Mount Poinsur.

\*Around 1630 there were around 1500 parishioners in the Gaothans of Mount Poinsur, Dhainsa (Dahisar), Canary (Kanheri), Simpor and Cassor. Around this time the name of the Church was changed to Our Lady of Immaculate Conception from Our Lady of Piety

\*The Village Festival is celebrated on the Sunday after the Church feast day on 8 December

\*The Local East Indian Community and from all East Indian Gaothans come in large numbers, following a tradition passed down over the centuries that has seen this Church as a centre for pilgrimage.

\*The Village Fair and the Reklas of our community are an added attraction at this Feast like at all other East Indian Village Festivals

## FATIMA MAULI CHA SANN - KARJAT CHA SANN Our Lady of Fatima - Karjat - 1920

- \*As per tradition community members travelled by train or by road to the Church and later settled near a stream or an open space
- \*The Our Lady of Fatima Church, Karjat is the first Church in Asia to be dedicated to this devotion.
- \*In 1920 the statue of our Lady of Fatima was bought from Portugal and placed in a room at the Karjat Railway Station

\*The Pilgrimage started in the year 1935

- \*In 1978-1979 a special train "Fatima Express" brought pilgrims from Bombay to Karjat, but was discontinued by Railways
- \*Some groups now visit nearby resorts and a section of our community members also own farm houses near this Church.

# BETINICHI MAULI CHA SANN Our Lady of Mount Carmel - Bandra - 1894

- \*This feast is celebrated by East Indian parishioners and neighboring Community members on Sunday after 16th July
- \*A Procession is organised wherein the priests are ferried in a tanga (horse chariot) with chatir (large umbrella) thru the Chapel Road till the parish
- \*The procession is accompanied by the Confraternity of the parish
- \*Local women are present at the procession dressed in the Traditional Lugra
- \*East Indian brass band from the locality play hymns during the procession
- \*Holy pictures and Betin (scapulars) are distributed during mass
- \*Refreshments are served after the holy mass
- \*The locals along with the brass band go dancing through the bylanes of Chapel Road as a part of the celebration

\*Traditionally the local residents throw buckets of water on those dancing on the streets as a part of the Celebrations

\*Locals serve refreshments to the band members and those dancing

# VELANKANNI MAULI CHA SANN Our Lady of Good Health - Velankanni - 1570, Irla and Bhate Bunder-Uttan

\*East Indians have been going for Pilgrimage to Velankanni, Chennai for more than 100 years

\*Every year around 1 lakh East Indians visit Velankanni Church at Chennal dedicated to Our Lady of Good Health which is also called the Lourdes of the East

\*Around 50,000 East Indians visit Velankanni during the Annual novenas with flag hoisting, holy mass, visit to Our lady Tank to recite the Rosary and the procession.

\*The Bombay Vailankanni Catholic Association organises a special train from Mumbai to Velankanni and also cultural event during the novena days

\*In Mumbai a Shrine was first dedicated to Our Lady of Velankanni at Irla where lakhs of devotees visit every year.

\*More than a decade ago another Shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Velankanni was built at Bhate Bunder, Uttan.

\*In many East Indian Villages the Novenas are organised in the local parish church or at a prominent Gaothan locations with flag hoisting, holy mass and procession.





## **MGP ESTORY**

A Special write up by MGP Team

## WHY NO BANDRA FAIR FOR TWO YEARS?

## The MGP Story

On 15th September 2015, a front page headline in the Mid-day proclaimed, "Bandra Fair hijacked by outsiders". The devout Catholics were disturbed but little did they understand the reason behind the headline. Have you heard of any international fair where the indigenous community does not have a single stall to promote its cuisine and artefacts? Hundreds of stalls were allotted by Mount Mary Church and the BMC, but no place for a stall to the founders of the fair -- the East Indian community. A couple of weeks before the 2015 Bandra fair, the vice rector called for a meeting with the MGP Team along with an East Indian priest. The vice rector assured since the allotment was done for the year they would surely look at an allotment for the next year.

The vice rector was transferred and a new rector was appointed. The MGP team approached the new rector only to be told that it was not possible for stall allotment with various surprising reasons, but the bottom line seemed to be that they did not want to allot stalls for the East Indian community. The MGP also sent a communication to the local MLA but all we got there again were assurances. The founders of the Bandra fair were truly being treated like outsiders.

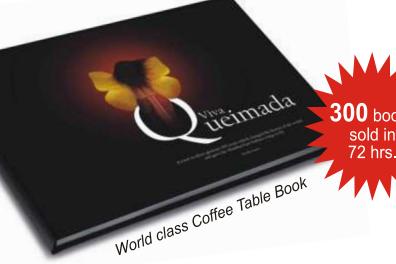
As per our research, the Church as well as BMC had a lobby which only wanted to selectively allot stalls to either regulars or high bidders at auctions. The religious fair was now more commercial with the blessing of the authorities and their special teams. Year after year we reminded the authorities about the need to allot stalls to the indigenous community like done across the world. The first rightful community now had no space to accommodate the promotion of their cuisine and handicrafts.

The next point raised was a need for the native East Indian dialect Holy Mass with preference for the state language Marathi, on all days. A request was also made that the recessional hymn should be in the East Indian dialect. This also was not considered and to add to our woes, preference was given to a migrant language. Why this disheartening treatment to the indigenous community? Infact, after the annual procession the Rector avoided mentioning about the revival of the procession with the historical connection of the group behind it.

In the year 2019, like previous years, we approached the Church rector, BMC authorities and political leaders and got the same negative answers. Their lobbies seem to have grown stronger and the authorities seem to have no qualms with the commercial angle running into lakhs and crores. We decided to go down the Mount Mary steps and identify other alternatives along the way and landed at Mount Carmel Church, famous for its September Garden. When we called the parish priest he was unavailable and did not seem to be interested in allotting a stall to the native community. We then called an East Indian priest only to be told that truly we were being ignored and all we should do is pray and Mount Mary will surely bless us. Truly our prayers seem to be answered as the Bandra fair was not held for the last two years which has never happened in the fair's history. In spite of the pandemic, the MGP continued with its Mot Mauli Yatra and the Purcessao on the traditional rekla.

Mount Mary has truly given us a strong message that the indigenous people of Bombay, the East Indians, have a special place in the history of the festival. So what if we were sidelined and ignored, Mount Mary stood by the community which religiously visited the fair year after year since inception. There could have been no Mount Mary Church or Bandra fair without the East Indians and it is high time the authorities realise it. We will continue to pray and we are confident that Mount Mary will bless us with what we rightfully deserve.





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## **AN APPEAL**

Mobai Gaothan Panchayat (MGP) is happy to announce its initiative in building the first religious structure in the Diocese of Mumbai dedicated to our East Indian Native and Patron Saint..

## ST. GONSALO GARCIA CHAPEL Aaplaa GAAV! Aapla Devool!

Proposed site Mumbai City, Mumbai Suburb, Dharavi Beth, Thane & Raigad.

## **Highlights**

- \*The First Religious structure in Bombay Archdiocese to be dedicated to our Native Saint.
- \*The Chapel is likely to be inaugurated in the year 2023.
- \*We look forward for Support from Experts (Designers, architects, Sculptors, fabricators, etc) in building this Chapel.
- \*Contributions by Cheque or in kind are welcome.
- \*We plan to get relics from Japan and promote pilgrimage to Nagasaki.
- \*Well known Altar designers to be a part of the project interiors.
- \*The boat on which the Chapel will be built will be made by a well-known boat maker.

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