2. A Walk Through Mumbai's Coastal Heritage: An Insight into the *Koliwadas* of Worli, Mahim and Colaba

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Abstract

Mumbai's rich heritage is inseparable from the contributions of the Koli community, who are known to be one of the earliest inhabitants of the coastal city Mumbai in Maharashtra, India. The traditional settlements of this community known as the *Koliwadas*, stand as living testimonies to the city's maritime past. This paper explores the *Koliwadas* of Worli, Mahim, and Colaba, examining their socio-cultural fabric and the challenges they face in the wake of rapid urbanisation. It highlights the enduring culture of the *Kolis*, delving into their intangible heritage, festivals, and traditions that contribute to the city's diverse cultural mosaic. This study also seeks to examine how modernisation, gentrification, and climate change pose existential threats to these settlements, leading to loss of livelihood and displacement of people. Monumental infrastructural projects such as coastal roads and sea links jeopardise the livelihood of the fishing community. Moreover, this indigenous community faces the threat of losing their esteemed identity due to increasing marginalisation. The paper discusses the sustainable urban development that respects the indigenous history and identity of the *Koli* community and their *Koliwadas*.

Key words

- Koli
- Koliwadas
- Urbanization,
- Heritage

Introduction

Mumbai was once described as 'the desolate islet of the Mumbai Koli fishermen' by Dr. Gerson da Cunha in his book 'The Origin of Bombay'[1]. Known as the earliest recorded inhabitants of the city, various records reveal that the Kolis, an indigenous fishing community, occupied the land in 1138 AD [2]. Originally, the Kolis were chieftains in the Gujarat regions and they migrated south towards Maharashtra to establish fishing settlements along Mumbai's coast [3]. The Kolis served as traders for ages, and eventually started fishing for trade. Thus established settlements known as 'Koliwadas' emerged.

Koliwadas or traditional *Koli* fishing villages are important to Mumbai's culture and landscape. From the authentic cuisine to the popular folk art forms like the *Koli* dance, the cultural traditions of the *Kolis* are central to the city's rich heritage. These settlements are located along the coastline, characterized by their narrow lanes, brightly coloured houses and bustling fish markets. Some of the most well-known *Koliwadas* in Mumbai include Mahim *Koliwada*, Colaba *Koliwada*, Versova *Koliwada*, Worli *Koliwada* and Mazgaon *Koliwada* amongst others.

There are several endogamous divisions of the *Kolis* such as *Malhar Kolis, Mangela Kolis, Son Kolis, Mahadeo Kolis, Dhor Kolis* and many more [4]. Although the term 'Koli' often refers to fishermen and women, there are many groups within the Kolis that also practice agriculture and have a diverse range of occupations as well. Especially with the advent of large-scale urbanization, many *Kolis* are stepping away from their fishing occupation and delving into other professions.

The *Kolis* have thrived on the land of Mumbai for the longest time, carrying a plethora of rich and long-standing culture and traditions connecting us to the city's roots. Yet, their significance has faded away over time, overshadowed by the wave of modernity. Very little is known about the *Kolis*, their culture, livelihood and the unique set of challenges they face. Highlighting the different facets of their lives is very essential to honour their legacy and to hold on to our past.

This paper, therefore, aims to explore the community's practices and problems in three particular areas: *Kolis* deities and rituals, festivals and cultural traditions, and urbanization and gentrification. The study is carried out by conducting a qualitative and comparative analysis of Mahim, Worli, and Colaba *Koliwada* through real-life interactions with the locals during the two visits the group paid to each of these *Koliwadas*, supported heavily by existing literature.

Net of Beliefs: Deities and Rituals

Humans have always battled hardships, disasters, and various challenges brought about by natural forces and an evolving lifestyle. To cope with such threats, they attributed them to divine wrath and began worshipping nature. As human customs evolved, people began worshipping ancestral relics [5]. Over time, ancestors transformed into deities, and stories about gods, goddesses, and divine incarnations emerged. Human existence, environment, and culture are deeply interconnected and play an immense role in shaping the faith and belief systems of different communities. The *Koli* community, known for its maritime heritage, also has immense faith in their cultural practices. Since the *Koli* community is extremely diverse, many regional deities are worshipped, each holding different significance in different localities.

In Worli *Koliwada*, temples and shrines dedicated to local deities are scattered

throughout the village. One of the main attractions and an integral part of the Worli *Koliwada* is the *Golfa Devi Mandir*. For the people in the community, *Golfa Devi* and her temple hold prime importance. It is a beautiful white marble structure that stands out in contrast to the colourful huts around it. Inside, on a raised platform sits *Golfa Devi* in the form of a black stone idol adorned with a heavily embroidered cloth [6]. She is accompanied by two goddesses on either side of her; *Sakba Devi* (symbolises the moon) and *Harba Devi* (symbolises the sun), both adorned with jewellery and sarees as it is common practice to dress deities in sacred attire. *Golfa Devi* is popularly known as the 'talking goddess' of Worli. A ritual called kaul lavane enables the goddess to communicate with her devotees [7]. According to historical evidence and conversations with the local residents, the temple has been established for at least 700 years.

Figure 1: The Three Goddesses in the Golfa Devi Temple

Another site of worship is the *Mahadev Mandir*, which houses multiple deities. On the main marble platform in the sanctum of the mandir are the statues of Ganpati, Shiva-Parvati, and Sai Baba. It is not very common to see Sai Baba's statue near the traditional Hindu idols and reaffirms the *Kolis'* strong belief in him [8]. The temple also has a *Shivalinga* present inside and is one of the only religious structures in Worli *Koliwada* that is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Outside the temple there are two more marble shrines dedicated to Hanuman and a triad of Vishnu-Brahma-Shiva, respectively. The temple continues to serve as an important point for various religious ceremonies. During Mahashivratri a *Palkhi* (palanquin) procession comes to the mandir and many locals have strong sentiments attached to this temple.

Figure 2: Idols of Ganapati, Shiva-Parvati, and Sai Baba (Left-Right)

Figure 3: Palki after Maha Shivratri festivities

The *Koli* community places immense faith in various Goddesses. *Mumbadevi* is said to be the patron Goddess of the city of Mumbai and according to local traditions she is a *Koli* Goddess, worshipped by the Koli community for centuries. *Ekvira*, a form of the Goddess *Renuka*, is the *Kuladevi* (family deity) of the *Kolis* with a temple dedicated to her near the Karla Caves, a significant pilgrimage site. Another revered form of Ekvira *Devi* is *Mauli Devi* who holds a sacred place in the community.

As one moves further through Worli *Koliwada*, they can see the *Santoshi Maa* Temple dedicated to Goddess *Santoshi Maa* who is said to be another form of Goddess Durga. She is considered to be a relatively new addition to the *Koli* pantheon of mother goddesses [9]. Near the Worli fort, there is a shrine dedicated to *Hanuman*, being one of the only main structures solely dedicated to him.

In contrast, Colaba *Koliwada* features many major temples and structures dedicated to Hanuman. There is a huge *Hanuman* Mandir, and multiple shrines dedicated to the God. According to a local residing in Colaba *Koliwada*, many people have devout faith in this temple, thus attracting devotees from across the nation. The renovation of the mandir was done by a staunch devotee who had made a '*mannat*' (wish) or sacred vow. Upon the fulfilment of that mannat , he funded the renovation of the temple completely on his own . Therefore it is no surprise that *Hanuman Jayanti* is celebrated extremely enthusiastically in this area as compared to Worli or Mahim.

Figure 4: Jai Hanuman Mandir, Colaba

In Mahim *Koliwada* there is a big temple dedicated to Lord Rama with the following lines "राम काज कीन्हें बिनु, मोहि कहां विश्राम'' (Every hand is with Ram) printed on a poster outside. The temple houses the idols of *Hanuman*, *Shiva-Parvati*, and *Ganesh*. This temple also had a *Shivalinga*, however, it was much smaller as compared to the one in Worli. There was also a frame of *Sai Baba* at the corner. It was observed that in almost every mandir in the Koliwadas, there is an idol, frame or picture of *Sai Baba*, signifying the *Kolis* faith in him.

Fig 5: Shivalinga in Mahim Temple

Sai Baba, is an ascetic saint and he is extremely revered in the *Koli* community. This can be seen from the sheer number of temples and shrines dedicated to him. It is said that he is a contemporary manifestation of *Ekvira Devi*, the *Koli* clan goddess. While Mahim *Koliwada* has fewer religious structures as compared to Colaba and Worli, it contains one big *Sai Baba* Mandir as well. Worli has the most structures dedicated to him (around 10-12) and on *Gudi Padwa* (*Chaitra*, Hindu calendar New Year) a *Palkhi* (palanquin) procession carrying his idol travels on foot from Worli to Shirdi. It is not clear how and why exactly the bond between *Sai Baba* and the Koli community originated, however, it is evident that he is considered to be an important and sacred figure. As said by Mrs Chhaya, a resident of Mahim *Koliwada*, each individual has their own belief and personal connection to a deity [10]. Compared to Worli, Mahim and Colaba *Koliwadas* have fewer religious structures, which are often less visible and situated deeper in the communities.

Figure 6: Sai Baba Mandir, Mahim

The *Koli* community have a very firm belief in their rituals and religiously practice them. For example, the *Kaul Lavane* ritual is performed to bless important infrastructure projects and the *Kolis* seek permission from Goddess *Golphadevi* before embarking on any personal or communal endeavours. They consider this to be an extremely auspicious activity. Before the Worli Sea Link Bridge was built, a major ceremony was performed before the Goddess in order to ensure the success of the project by obtaining her permission. Worli Koliwada was the appropriate site because the Sea Link Bridge sits directly opposite the village. The ceremony brought together the village residents with the Mumbai Municipal Corporation members, Maharashtra State Road Development Corp. Ltd and building contractors. In contrast, the failure to perform the ritual to bless the new Coastal Road Project was seen by local Kolis as a bad omen. Such rituals provide important insights into how the *Kolis* have created an alternative explanation for the growth and development of Bombay city. Rather than praising the technologies used to construct Mumbai, *Koli* legends assert the power of the water spirits and goddesses without whose agreement, economic development would not have been possible. Such legends empower *Kolis* to believe in their own agency. They provide the courage to stand up to the various challenges that threaten *Koli* values and lifestyles in modern Mumbai [11].

Expressions of Heritage: Festivals and Cultural Traditions

Festivals

Festivals, their celebratory traditions and associated rituals serve as gateways to understanding the distinctive heritage of a community. The *Koli* community celebrates their festivals with great enthusiasm. While a lot of festive practices closely resemble that of Hindus, certain features make them unique to the *Koli* community. Through field visits, we could deduce that the main festivals celebrated in the *Koliwadas* include: *Holi*, *Narali Purnima*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Mahashivratri*, *Gudi Padwa* and *Hanuman Jayanti*.

Holi: Through multiple interactions with the locals in the *Koliwadas*, we could infer that Holi is one of the most significant festivals for the *Kolis* [12]. It is celebrated in the month of *Phalgun*, that is, March. On Holi *Purnima* (Full moon night), firewood is burnt at night and women often carry the '*mangal kalash*'(auspicious pot), which is a pot made out of mud and contains a coconut. This is later offered to the sacred Holi tree. As in popular Hindu culture, the Holi tree is lit on fire and is believed to take away all bad luck with it. "The sacred tree is symbolized and worshipped as a goddess, believing a *Holika/ Havlubai* will prosper in their business," said Nalini Tamore from Mahim *Koliwada* [13].

Vitwaa Kolis, a sect of *Kolis* have a unique tradition of engaging in night-long celebrations on *Holi Purnima* [14]. While interacting with the young children on the streets of Worli *Koliwada*, the kids excitedly declared that *Holi* was their favourite festival [15]. After the *Holi Purnima*, on the next day, children and adults play with colors to celebrate this vibrant festival.

Narali Purnima: This festival is unique to the fishermen community and holds profound significance. *Narali Purnima* is marked by offering a coconut to the sea and the commencement of a new fishing season. *Narali Purnima* is celebrated with great splendor and with a spectacular showcase of dance and music. It is on this festival where the famous *Koli* dance is popularly performed and there are also special songs for this occasion such as '*sana ailay go naralipunvecha*'(Coconut full moon festival is here) [16].

Mr. Vesavkar from Worli *Koliwada* remarked, "The coconut is offered to the sea to calm the tides, so the *Kolis* can embark on fishing again". Talking about this festival, he informed us that they pray to *Mauli Devi* and *Ekvira Devi* before offering the coconut to the sea. He also mentioned that before *Narali Purnima*, during the monsoon season, fishing is at a halt for up to 4 months. This allows the fish to reproduce and also the fishermen to upgrade and repair their equipment. However, on conversing with a few women at Colaba *Koliwada*, it was noted that they put a pause on fishing activities for only 2 months before *Narali Purnima*. These *Koli* women also mentioned that the coconut that is offered to the sea is covered with a gold leaf by those who can afford it. It is important to note that *Narali Purnima* is celebrated on the same day as another Hindu festival 'Raksha Bandhan'[17] and the fishermen get *rakhis* tied on their wrists by their sisters first, then continue with the rest of the rituals of the festival.

Ganesh Chaturthi (Ganapati festival): This festival is celebrated whole-heartedly across Maharashtra and the Koliwadas are no exception to it. Most of the rites are similar to that of Hindu groups, however, the *Kolis* often celebrate the *Gauri* festival along with *Ganesh Chaturthi* and this is called '*Gauri Ganapati*'. A *Koli* woman residing in *Macchimar Nagar* (Fishing village), in the Colaba region of the *Koliwadas*, noted that the festival is celebrated for 11 days. During this time prayers and offerings are made solely to Lord *Ganesha* for 5 days, after which Goddess *Gauri* is also revered for the next 5 days. The people bring in large idols of Lord *Ganesha* and Goddess *Gauri* to their homes/colonies and decorate their mandaps with flowers and lights. A stark difference from popular Hindu rituals is seen in the offerings made by the *Kolis* to God which include fish, crab and curry, symbolizing their connection to their means of livelihood.

Others: The *Koli* community celebrates a wide array of festivals in addition to these main festivals elaborated above. Mahashivratri is a festival that is also celebrated

amongst the Kolis. On a visit to Worli Koliwada just a day after this festival, we were able to find out that on this festival they had arranged a '*bhandara*'(community's religious food offering to the public) or a free feast for all at their '*Shankara Mandir*', along with prayers offered to Lord *Shiva*. *Gudi Padwa* is an important festival in Maharashtra, marking the beginning of a 'new year'. Speaking about Gudi Padwa, locals living across Mahim, Colaba and Worli *Koliwadas* remarked on the departure of a palanquin from their temples all the way to *Shirdi*, on foot, to pay homage to *Sai Baba*. *Hanuman Jayanti* is a festival celebrated with great enthusiasm in Colaba Koliwada, this was a distinctive feature because this festival was not as well noted in Mahim or Worli *Koliwadas*. The *Koli* women in Colaba expressed their excitement for the forthcoming festival of *Hanuman Jayanti*, which is celebrated in the month of April for 4-5 days. They celebrate this festival by offering prayers to *Hanuman* in their Hanuman temple, and they lit up their streets with lights, food stalls and game stalls, like that of a '*mela*'(fair).
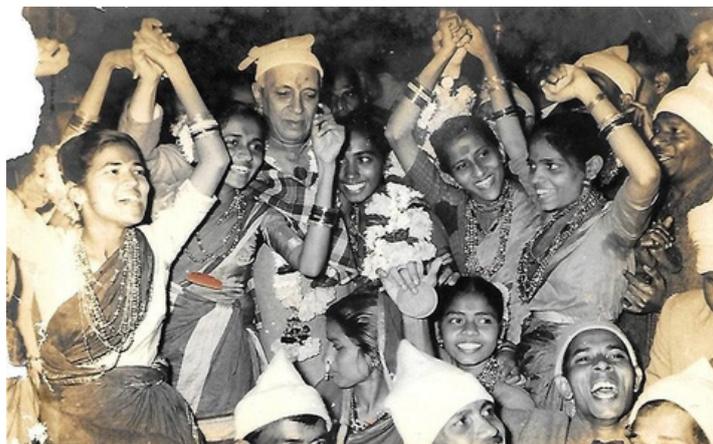
Dance and Music

Figure 7: India's first Prime Minister, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru wearing a Koli cap and enjoying Koli dance during the republic day parade on 26 January, 1950. (Fernandes, *"When Bandra's Kolis danced in the Republic Day parade and what that has to do with a Bollywood hit"*)

Koli dance is a popular folk dance of Maharashtra. It is practiced by both men and women and it reflects their deep connection with the sea and their occupation i.e, fishing. The movements incorporate elements like rows and nets that are used in their occupation. The dancers move in unison, portraying the movement of waves. Traditional instruments such as the *dhol*, *tasha* and *lezim* are used to create rhythmic beats and the singers usually narrate tales of the sea and fishing adventures. The *Koli* dance is performed in weddings, celebrations and festivals. It is an integral part of *Narali Purnima* as highlighted by the Kolis encountered at Colaba, Worli and Mahim *Koliwadas*. The *Koli* dance has been adapted in various modern dance performances and has also been seen in various Bollywood movies like 'Amar Akbar Anthony'. Events like the 'Kala Ghoda Arts Festival' have showcased *Koli* performances and exposed this deep-rooted cultural phenomenon on a global stage)[18].

However, the authentic essence of the art form is at a risk of fading away as this dance form is being increasingly commercialized and there is a loss of traditional knowledge. It has been noted on several occasions that this dance form is performed on Bollywood songs or without any knowledge about the roots of the dance style.

Nonetheless, the *Koli* community enjoys performing this energetic dance form and it is an essential part of their cultural heritage. Songs are also an important part of *Koli* culture and almost every festival has a special song dedicated to specific deities. There are a few songs which are well-known all over the country like: '*Me hai Koli*'(I am a *Koli*) and '*Valav re nakwa*' (sail the boat).

Between Tides and Towers: Urbanisation and Gentrification

The process of urbanization involves a wide range of activities and phenomena, some of them having a comparatively larger consequence than others.

The *Kolis*, one of the earliest inhabitants of Mumbai have been dwelling on the coastline since the city was an archipelago of seven islands. However, while talking about urbanization, *Koliwadas* are not only being left aside but are also indirectly forced to abandon their profession and land. The *Koliwadas* are being categorized as 'slums', while the *Kolis* try their best to hold on to their livelihood, heritage and traditions [19].

Settlements and Amenities

The houses in the *Koliwadas* were pretty clustered with the majority ranging from 200-500 sq.ft [20]. As observed, the houses in Mahim *Koliwada* seemed comparatively more urbanized with more *Pakka* (concrete) houses and multiple local and national level fishermen associations like National Association of Fishermen whereas Colaba and Worli had a mix of *Kuccha* (clay) and *Pakka* (concrete) houses. The houses in Mahim, however, are more vulnerable to high tides and floods and sometimes have to be vacated during monsoons due to the same [21].

Though all of them had basic general stores and shops for daily use products, Colaba seemed to have a more inclusive settlement, including eateries, laundry, clinics, salons, and also a fish market within the settlement itself. Colaba also seemed to have a stronger community identification, one of the proofs being the fish and boat decorations at the entrance of the settlement. Worli, however, had more sea-themed murals and basic amenities like clinics and pharmacies, and educational institutions like tuitions and coachings in the Worli Village itself. Worli also had sign boards all over the area, put by RPG Foundation under The Heritage Project to help visitors

navigate the routes to some important places of attraction like Worli Fort and Battery Jetty. While these settlements do not face much water and electricity problems, they do lack proper washrooms or toilet facilities.

Figure 8.1: Mahim: Fishermen's associations

Figure. 8.2: Colaba, Decorations at the entrance; Salon; Fish market; Doctor's clinic; Traditional food from an eatery (Anti-clockwise starting from left)

Fig. 8.3: Worli, Murals; Coaching classes; Doctor's clinic; Sign boards (Anti-clockwise starting from left)

Creation of New Coastal Infrastructure

Building of new coastal infrastructure in the sea has led to a huge reduction of fish in the sea, especially near the sea coast. The new coastal road stretching from Marine drive to Bandra-Worli sea link is one of the major examples of the coastal infrastructure negatively impacting the fish and fishing patterns. The noise and vibrations from the road and the construction process scare the fishes far away.

According to Mr. Nitesh Patil, the secretary of Worli *Koliwada Nakhwa* (male *koli*) society, landfilling for the coastal road has destroyed some very important natural breeding grounds for various fishes, resulting in huge decline in the quantity of those species. The rising water levels due to construction activities has resulted in the rocky sea shore that used to serve as breeding ground for sea creatures and fishing ground by the fishermen, being encroached by the sea. The construction of the coastal road is also very near to the most important zone for Worli fishermen for good quality prawns, which restricted their access to the region, majorly decreasing the supply of prawns [22]. The locals also confirmed the same during our onsite visits. Mr. Sanjay, a fisherman from Worli *Koliwada*, added, "the fishermen earlier did not have to venture too far into the sea to catch fish until a few years ago since the start of the coastal road project." This also indicates the risk to their lives.

The government did not consider any provisions for the fishermen while designing the

project. Initially even the pillars of the road were planned to be distanced at just 60 meters from each other, compromising the safety of passing fishing boats and were only changed to 120 meters after years of protest.

Colaba, a breeding ground for one of the major populations of *Bombil* (Bombay Duck), has also noticed a huge decline in the number of fish and an even larger decline in the other fishes.

Gentrification

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term 'gentrification' can be defined as a process where a poor area of a city experiences influx of richer population renovating and rebuilding homes and businesses, often leading to increased property values and displacement of pre-residing poorer residents [23].

The *Koliwadas* are being considered as slums while the profession is often disrespected. The fishing grounds are being used for dumping while the area itself is considered dirty because of the fishy smell that comes from one of the most favourite delicacies of the city – Fish [24]. This and the constant decline in fishes in the sea makes future generations unwilling to continue this profession as a full-time employment for better standards of living, also leading to numerous families from the community move out to better localities. Worli *Koliwada* is a prominent example for this situation as multiple different communities reside in Worli Gaon now since many *Koli* people left their houses for better jobs and opportunities. Colaba *Koliwada*, however, still manages to keep its area a little less diverse, mostly occupied by only Hindu *Kolis*, though the majority is venturing into different professions. Mahim *Koliwada* also dwells mostly Hindu Kolis with a minority of Christian *Kolis* and even they discourage their children to take up fishery as their profession.

Now as the definition goes, gentrification should also be looked into with the perspective of how the government or big private companies want to acquire the land in these areas with the intention of turning them into huge sea-facing building projects with sky-high prices and rents. All three areas that we are looking into under the purview of our study are considered one of the posh areas of the city and the land covered by *Koliwadas* can be very profitable for real estate businesses.

While commenting on the area development, a *Koli* woman, owner of an eatery shop outside the Colaba *Koliwada*, mentioned, "there have been multiple visits made by private developers for area measurements and ground visits while the residents have been informally requested to sell their land in exchange for values of their choice."

Besides, development projects have also been carried out in few *Koliwadas* like Sion, Mahul and Masjid Bandar under Slum Rehabilitation Schemes (SRA) which are being

planned for other *Koliwadas* as well. However, according to Ar. Sanman *Koli*, the *Koliwada* communities do not favour the SRA as it has a history of doing great damage to the *Kolis*, for eg; the *Mahul Koliwada* and the *Masjid Bandar Koliwada* as these settlements were relocated under SRA scheme to the city core in *chawls* (slums) and SRA buildings, far away from sea edge, which led to occupational loss for the entire community [25].

Socio-economy of Fishing Households of the Koliwadas

The major role that men play is going on boats and catching fish while the women sell that fish in the market. Additionally, the men who are also involved in net-making, since that and fish shed collection are two major fishery-allied economic activities that take place in these households. Since the past few years, numerous families solely dependent on fishery have noticed their income levels declining due to reasons like lack of fishes in the sea and the changing demographic composition of these settlements with more people outside the community taking up fishery which majorly contributes to increased competition for *Koli* women in markets.

Mr. Sanjay, from Worli *Koliwada*, while talking, also mentioned, "earlier the fishermen would not mind even giving some of their fishes for free but now even though fish is costlier, the income is not enough for them to have a comfortable lifestyle."

There are also middlemen now, exploiting the fishermen in exchange for easy loans and becoming the reason for women losing out on their work of selling fish, taking the catch for export purposes and barely leaving any for the women to sell in the local market. Availability of basic household amenities like houses and physical assets including boats, types of boats, and types of nets also define the status of these fishermen. People in Mahim tend to use and own more mechanized boats while people in Worli majorly use motorized boats [26].

Pollution and Health Issues

Rapid industrialisation also leads to a huge amount of dumping of pollutants into the sea. The *Koliwadas* being situated right on the coastline, are the most vulnerable to these pollutants and the health issues caused by them [27]. Also, pollution is one of the major causes for reduction of fish near the coastline, forcing the fishermen every day to go farther in the sea. This, as mentioned earlier, poses a great threat to their lives.

Figure 9 : Pollution near the sea shore in Colaba

Heritage Conservation

Koliwadas are the epitome of our city's rich heritage. Today, they are facing a major threat of losing their identity, homes and livelihood. Despite being the oldest indigenous community of Maharashtra, there has been no mention of the *Kolis* in the Coastal Zone Management Plans of Maharashtra [28]. The people allege this is a plot to destroy these original settlements under the garb of planned development. This can further marginalize the *Koli* community.

The voices of the *Kolis* often go unheard. For example, the fishing community is never consulted before initiating projects impacting their livelihoods. Fishermen claim that they failed to get proper details even after approaching the courts [29]. This is a simple issue of governance and efforts must be taken by the city to develop an active relationship with the sea and the fishermen."

There are various organisations trying their best to protect the rights and heritage of the *Kolis*. One such organisation, the RPG Foundation has undertaken The Heritage Project in Worli *Koliwada*. This project works with Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for the urban planning and social development of this 800-year old settlement [30].

Mahim *Koliwada*, alternatively, has taken efforts to preserve their heritage through their mouth-watering *Koli* cuisine with the help of the BMC by setting up a seafood plaza at the Mahim Beach with the stalls completely run by the *Koli* community.

Another measure in the conservation of the *Koliwadas* is the formulation of a special set of Development Control Regulations (DCR) by the Maharashtra Government. The government gives assurance that approximately 32 *Koliwadas*, which have been demarcated, will not undergo redevelopment as Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) projects but will have development guidelines of their own.

Apart from these large-scale projects, there are also small-scale initiatives taken at community level to conserve the legacy of the *Koliwadas* through social media. For example, youtube channels like '*Worli cha Koli*' and Instagram pages like *@shree_Koli_vlogs* run by the people from these communities were mentioned by locals while conversing.

Conclusion

Amidst rapid urbanization, there is a constant threat to the lives and livelihoods of the *Koli* community. In recent times the number of *Kolis* practicing fishing has drastically decreased. For instance, Mazgaon *Koliwada*, once a booming area , now barely has any *Kolis* living in the area and even fewer who are practicing the fishing profession. Conversations with residents from the *Koliwadas* reveal that the problem of unemployment is pervasive, despite many families educating their children and encouraging them to pursue different career paths.

Moreover, water pollution is one of the major challenges for fishermen since they mostly depend on the sea. The polluted coastal water is affecting them in terms of a decrease in fish availability, an increase in health issues, etc [31]. This endangers their means of sustenance and very few *Kolis* consider fishing to be a full-time occupation and work in other sectors such as boat making, net-weaving and do businesses or work in private sectors.

The earliest inhabitants of Mumbai, the *Koli* community and their rich heritage are at significant risk. Unless there are serious and focused efforts from the authorities to conserve them, their conditions will continue to deteriorate.

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1. Inference made after interactions with the locals at Worli, Mahim and Colaba Koliwadas. Each person remarked that Holi is one of their major festivals after Narali Purnima and it is celebrated with lots of excitement.

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Acknowledgement

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