

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
ORDINARY ORIGINAL CIVIL JURISDICTION
WRIT PETITION NO.904 OF 2005

Ehsanul Haque A. Nadvi

..... Petitioner.

v/s

Union of India & Ors.

..... Respondents.

Mr. Z.A. Jariwalla i/b M/s Thakore Jariwalla & Associates for
Respondent No.9.

Ms. B.L. Mahant for the Union of India.

CORAM: SWATANTER KUMAR, C.J. AND
V.M.KANADE, J.

DATE : 7TH APRIL, 2008.

P.C.:

The learned Counsel appearing for Respondent No.9
places on record letter dated 4th April 2008. In view of this
letter nothing survives in the Petition. Petition is disposed of.

CHIEF JUSTICE

V.M. KANADE, J.

FLATTENED OUT

RISE AND FALL A new book on the hills of Mumbai, being launched this week at the Bhutan literature festival, explores the odd shape of Andheri's Gilbert Hill to uncover a city's lost topography

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Amid the teeming slums and ambitious towers that make up the skyline of Andheri (West), Gilbert Hill seems rather out of place.

Less a hill and more a massive, box-shaped rock capped by a temple, Gilbert Hill as it now stands is celebrated as Mumbai's geological wonder — a rare formation of thousands of hexagonal basalt columns, born of ancient volcanic lava, fused together into a 200-ft-high monolith.

But this rock is only the amputation stump of the original hill. The real Gilbert Hill stretched from what is now Andheri station all the way to Versova.

Now, its disappearance and the tale of Mumbai's lost geography is the subject of a new book by Kalpish Ratna, a pseudonym for the author duo of Kalpana Swaminathan and Ishrat Syed, surgeons by profession.

The book, *Once Upon a Hill*, will be released at the Bhutan literature fes-

tival in Thimphu on May 22.

"Everybody talks of Mumbai's metamorphosis from a fishing hamlet into today's megalopolis," say the authors, who prefer to speak jointly as Kalpish Ratna. "Few realise that this recent flattening of the hills between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea."

About 150 years ago, maps of the island city still displayed a hilly eastern ridge from Sion to Colaba and a western ridge along the coast. All of Mumbai's temple caves, including those in Jogeshwari, Andheri and Borivli, were carved into the volcanic rocks that made up these hills.

Over the past century, however, this topography has been completely erased by relentless quarrying. And the consequences of this can be felt most acutely in changing rainfall patterns and resultant floods.

"The contours of hills determine how

water flows both on and under the ground," says architect and urban planner Pankaj Joshi. "Altering the terrain has led to a change in water courses, wind patterns and natural drain patterns. Thus, every monsoon, areas that were not prone to flooding now experience floods."

Through old maps, interviews with local residents and books by 19th-century geologists and cartographers, *Once Upon a Hill* explores the history of these forgotten hills of Mumbai — from Malabar, Mazagaon and Pali to Dongri, Mahakali and Amboli.

"All the hills we know in today's city are only amputation stamps," say the authors, who have both lived in Andheri and had been looking for an explanation for Gilbert Hill's unusual shape.

The focus of their research is Gilbert

Hill, which was sold by the government to private builders in 1939, quarried persistently for road-building and construction material, then razed to make space for an expanding city, till the basalt colonnades were finally discovered at its heart and declared a protected heritage structure in 2007.

"My father and grandfather helped raze one section of the hill to make space for our homes," says Tajuddin Sheikh, 23, an autorickshaw driver from the slum at the base of the monolith.

Invasions into the rock of Gilbert Hill continue. Three years ago, the trust that runs the temple atop the hill built a new temple structure there, driving steel columns deep into the rock. The slums and high-rises around it too are gradually eating into the base.

"Gilbert Hill is the still point in the flux of opportunism and greed," say the authors. "The hills can only be saved when we become smart about how we want history to remember us — with revision or with pride."

[*Once Upon a Hill* (HarperCollins, Rs 499) will be available at bookstores in mid-June]

LEVELLED & LOST

UNTIL THE MID-1800s, Mumbai was lined by two ridges of hills, one each on the east and west, made up largely of volcanic rock.

WHILE MOST OF THESE HILLS have been pulverised to make way for roads and buildings, some — such as Malabar, Cumballa, Pali, Antop and Mahakali — survive in name, a gentle slope all that is left of the original formation.

AMONG THE HILLS LOST entirely are Mazagaon, Chinchpoogly (now Chinchpokli), Ambivli (now Amboli) and Nowrajee (the area around Dongri, believed to have been quarried for material used to build the docks).

GILBERT HILL is marked in a 1981 map of Salsette Island as Undheree Hill.

READ ALL ABOUT IT



ONCE UPON A HILL
(HarperCollins, ₹499)



Kalpana Swaminathan



Ishrat Syed

COMMENT CORNER

Architecturally, it is possible to construct buildings on hill slopes if one really wants to. In fact, because hills offer great views of the landscape, their real-estate rates tend to be very high in cities.

In Mumbai, however, most of the city's hills were sea-facing and thus became prime real estate and were exploited by builders.

PANKAJ JOSHI, architect and urban planner



■ The basalt monolith that we now call Gilbert Hill is just the amputation stump of a hill that once stretched from Andheri station to Versova.

PHOTO: DATE/14