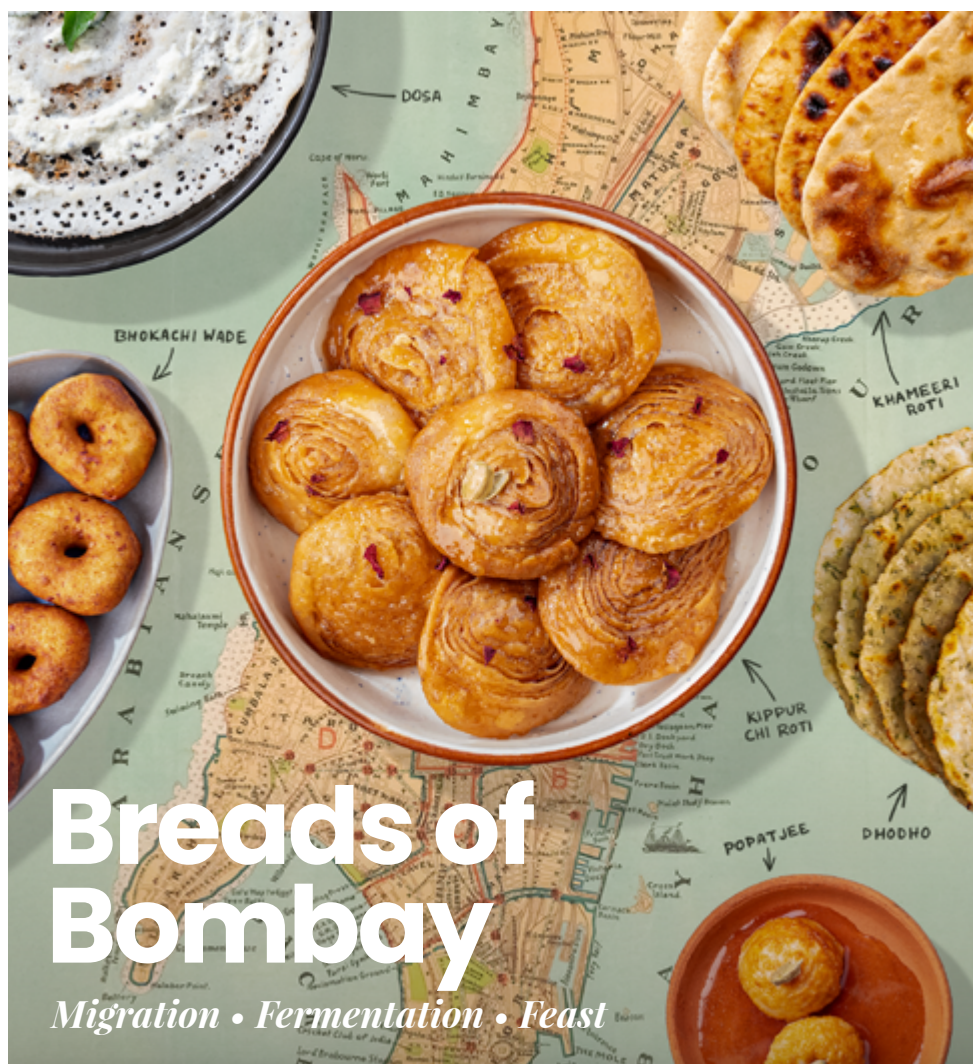


Regional Table

IFB
SPICE
SECRETS

Heritage recipes for modern kitchens

Issue 02



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Bombay city map.

Source: Geographicus Rare Antique Maps (<https://www.geographicus.com>) - 1940.

Introduction

Bombay is often described as a city of opportunities, but it is better understood as a city of overlap. People arrive carrying habits formed elsewhere—ways of cooking, eating, and feeding others—and the city absorbs them without ceremony. What survives are stories ever evolving through practice.

Over time, everyday life begins to borrow. Ingredients cross thresholds. Techniques are adjusted. A meal cooked in one household carries the imprint of another. Food becomes the quickest form of translation. In Bombay, communities do not merely live alongside one another; but routines begin to merge and overlap. .

Bread offers one of the clearest ways to read this city. Long before it was fashionable to talk about fusion, Bombay's kitchens were already negotiating it. Bread appears here in multiple grammars: bokachi wade from East Indian homes, Sindhi dodho shaped by memory and scarcity, khameeri roti rising beside Irani cafés, chawarchi roti paired with sweet accompaniments, popatjee marking Parsi ritual, dosa batter fermenting quietly overnight. Each carries a record of migration, adaptation, and settlement.

Bread is among humanity's oldest foods—born of grain, labour, and surplus. In Bombay, it becomes a marker of how communities arrived and stayed. These breads are not museum pieces; they are living, used, adjusted.

At IFB Spice Secrets, Breads of Bombay traces these everyday histories—placing them not in nostalgia, but in the present kitchen, where tradition continues through use.

To understand Bombay, follow its breads. They map the city more accurately than any archive.

**Happy cooking,
Team Spice Secrets**



Group of Parsi and brahmin girls, Bombay.

Source: Wikimedia Commons - 1880.

Dhodho

The Sindhi bread of resilience

In Bombay's quieter corners—Chembur, Sion Camp, Ulhasnagar—the Sindhi presence lingers in temples, sari shops, and the scent of frying chillies. Long before partition, Sindhis had made this city home—as merchants, students and professionals. They brought little, but carried recipes wrapped in memory.

Dhodho is one of those memories. A humble flatbread made with rice, jowar, or bajra flour, kneaded with green garlic, coriander, onions, and chillies, then pressed and roasted gently in ghee. It is rustic, nourishing, and deeply rooted.

After 1947, displaced Sindhi families stitched their lives back together by selling homemade achar and papad. Their food became a quiet act of resilience. Dhodho was served with *tidali dal* or curd—simple, sustaining fare. On special days, it became *gyarsi dhodho bhaji* or *dhodho chatni*, made without onion or garlic and offered in reverence.

Other breads followed—*koki*, flaky and spiced; *lolo*, sweet and ceremonial. Each speaks of adaptation, memory, and endurance.

To eat dhodho is to share a story of survival. It is history you can taste, folded into every bite.



Group photo of Indian Sindhi traders.

Source: Wikimedia Commons - Place & date unknown.

Chanwaran Dhodho

(Rice flour dhodho)

Ingredients

1 CUP RICE FLOUR
A SPOONFUL OF CHOPPED ONION
CHOPPED GREEN CHILLIES (TO TASTE)
1 TBSP CHOPPED CORIANDER LEAVES
SALT
2 TBSP OIL
WATER

Method

Take rice flour, a mixture of chopped onion, green chillies, coriander leaves, some salt and mix it well. Add water little by little, to knead the mixture until you get a soft dough. Heat a griddle and add some oil. Divide the dough into small portions and using a muslin cloth, flatten each dough ball to the thickness of a paratha. Carefully transfer it on the griddle and cook using a medium flame, flip and cook on the other side. Apply some oil after flipping to make it crisp. Serve it hot with sai bhaji.

Sai Bhaji

Ingredients

1 BUNCH OF SPINACH (300 GM APX.)
HANDFUL OF FENUGREEK LEAVES (OR 1 TSP DRIED KASURI METHI)
FEW SORREL LEAVES (KHATTA PALAK)
2-3 TOMATOES
DILL LEAVES (TO TASTE)
1 SMALL BRINJAL, 30 GM OKRA, 30 GM ARBI
1 SMALL POTATO, 2 ONIONS
½ CUP BENGAL GRAM (SOAKED)
½ INCH GINGER, 2 TO 3 GREEN CHILLIES
1 HEAPED TSP CORIANDER POWDER
½ TSP TURMERIC, SALT

Method

Wash spinach leaves along with khatta, methi, dill and chop well. Peel and dice arbi, onions, and potatoes. Chop brinjal (dice) and okra (into ¼ inch of rounds). Drop the cut veggies in a bowl of water. Heat oil in a pressure cooker, add the mixed vegetables, and sauté them till tender. Add chopped spinach leaves along with khatta, methi, dill, tomatoes, green chillies, ginger, coriander powder, turmeric powder, salt, bengal gram, and mix. Add a little water and close the lid. Cook for 7-8 whistles on a low-medium flame. When the pressure settles down, open the lid and mash the contents well. The consistency should be semi-dry.





Dosa

From temple kitchens to Bombay eateries

In the 1940s, a wave of South Indians—mainly Tamil and Kannada brahmins—made their way to Bombay, settling in neighbourhoods like Matunga, Chembur, and Sion. They brought with them more than language and tradition. They carried an entire ecosystem of South Indian culture. Markets selling fresh curry leaves and coconut, temples fragrant with camphor, and kitchens where batters bubbled quietly through the night.

From these homes, dosas stepped into the city. Udupi eateries began serving the ghee-slicked crepes to hungry office-goers, students, and night-shift workers. By the 1970s, the dosa had moved far beyond Matunga's café tables—onto the menus of the Taj, into Anand Bhavan's bustling dining rooms, and into the hands of Punjabis, Bengalis, and Gujaratis who made it their own.

The dosa's journey stretches far beyond Bombay. Its earliest mentions appear in Tamil temple inscriptions from the 1st century CE and in Sangam literature. Folklore gives it a lighter origin—a Kannada cook's happy accident that gave the dish its name forever. In 1978, French chef Paul Bocuse reimaged it as a seafood-stuffed crepe, proof that even the most rooted recipes can travel and transform.

Today, dosa belongs to Bombay as much as to the South. You'll find it crisp and paper-thin at roadside stalls, soft and spongy in home kitchens, golden and glistening in luxury hotels. But at its heart, it is still what it has always been—a batter of rice and lentils, fermented with time, patience, and the quiet assurance that the first bite will always feel like home.



Cafe Madras, Matunga, Bombay, since 1940.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. © Rashmee Pai Art & Design - 2012.

Dosa

Ingredients

1/2 CUP IDLI RICE (PARBOILED OR REGULAR)
1/2 CUP PONNI RICE
1/4 CUP URAD DAL
1/8 TSP FENUGREEK SEEDS
2 TBSP POHA
1.5 CUPS WATER
1/2 TSP SALT
OIL/GHEE AS REQUIRED

Method

Soak the rice (idli, ponni, flattened), lentils and fenugreek seeds overnight. Grind into a thick paste using a little water. Allow this batter to ferment for around 5-6 hours or overnight. Add salt and mix well.
Heat a cast iron pan. Once hot, spread ¼ to ½ tsp oil all over the pan. Take a ladleful of the batter. Pour and gently spread the batter starting from the center and moving outwards. Cook the dosa on a low to medium heat. When you see the batter on the top has cooked well and the bottom has become crisp and golden, then sprinkle ¼ to ½ tsp oil on the edges and center. Flip the dosa and immediately take it off the pan. Serve these crisp dosas hot with coconut chutney.

Coconut Chutney

Ingredients

GRATED COCONUT (OF HALF A SMALL COCONUT)
3 TBSP ROASTED BENGAL GRAM (PUTANA)
3 TO 5 CLOVES OF GARLIC
2 GREEN CHILLIES
1 TSP MUSTARD SEEDS
1 SPRIG OF CURRY LEAVES
ASAFOETIDA (OPTIONAL)
COCONUT OIL/SESAME OIL
WATER - 1/2 CUP FOR A THICK CHUTNEY (1 TO 1.5 CUPS FOR A THIN OR RUNNY CHUTNEY)

Method

Grind grated coconut, garlic, roasted Bengal gram (putana), green chillies in a mixer jar. After a few seconds of whipping, add 3 to 4 tbsp of water. Blend it. Add salt and another 3 to 4 tbsp of water. Blend well. Check for the thickness you prefer. Add more water and blend if you want it thinner. For the tadka, heat 1-2 tsp of coconut or sesame oil. Add mustard seeds and asafoetida (optional). Wait for the mustard to splutter. Turn the heat off and add in curry leaves. Pour the hot tempered oil over the bowl of chutney.





Popatjee

A Dutch pan, a Persian feast, a Parsi heart

The Parsis, a maritime trading community along India's Western coast, have always been open to what the sea brought in—ideas, spices, tools, and tastes. Between the 1600s and 1800s, in the bustling ports of Surat and Bharuch, they encountered a Dutch kitchen pan with deep, rounded cavities used for making poffertjes. Adapted to local kitchens, it became the Popatjee na Paenno—ancestor to South India's appe pan, though with just three large cups, each ready to cradle a soft, sweet bread.

That bread was popatjee. Made from semolina, eggs, sugar, toddy, rose water or vanilla, and a trace of nutmeg. It is gently fried until golden, its edges crisp and centre tender. Traditionally, the toddy came fresh from Gholvad or Daman, lending a flavour that is hard to replicate today.

Prepared during Muktaḍ, the ten-day observance before Navroz, popatjee carries the weight of both celebration and continuity. Its ingredients speak of Persian roots and coastal abundance; its pan tells the story of Dutch trade; its place on the table reflects centuries of Parsi adaptation and preservation.

In Bombay, a few specialised Parsi cooks—often attached to agiaries—still make popatjee for families from Ahmedabad and Surat who order it in advance, ensuring the sweet, sacred bread survives another year. To taste one is to taste a Parsi kitchen that has absorbed the world and still kept its own soul.



Parsi family from Bombay.

Source: Wikimedia Commons - 1880.

Popatjee

Ingredients

2 CUPS WHEAT FLOUR
1 CUP MAIDA, 1/2 CUP RAVA
2 EGGS,
2 TBSP GHEE + FOR FRYING
A PINCH OF SALT
1/2 KG DAHI, 2 CUPS MILK
ALMONDS, CASHEW NUTS
CARDAMOM, NUTMEG POWDER
APPE/PANIYARAM PAN

Method

Mix eggs and ghee together till fluffy. Add wheat flour, maida, rava, dahi and mix well. The batter must be semi liquid. Adjust the thickness using milk. Add cardamom powder, nutmeg powder, almonds, cashew nuts and a pinch of salt. Mix again and keep aside. Make sugar syrup with 1 and half cups sugar and water. It must reach one string consistency. Heat the appe pan and add ghee to the holes. Add about 1 tbsp batter to each hole and fry till one side is golden brown. Turn and fry the other side. Remove from the pan and immediately dunk into the sugar syrup. It should completely cover the popatjees.



Popatjee na paenno

DID YOU KNOW?

Even in the early 20th century, a popatjee na paenno had only three cavities and today the implement has evolved so much in size and material that we have non-sticks and teflon-coated ones in the name of an appe pan.



Khameeri Roti

Taste of two homelands

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Bombay welcomed a wave of new settlers from Iran—Zoroastrians and Shi'a Muslims—fleeing famine, political instability under the Qajar dynasty, and religious persecution. Two Zoroastrian streams flowed into the city: the long-established Parsis, and the more recent Iranis. The latter arrived through the ports of the Persian Gulf, drawn by Bombay's trade links and the promise of a new beginning.

Some came with little more than family recipes. They opened modest chai houses and bakeries, filling glass jars with khara biscuits, stacking the counters with brun maska, and serving sweet, strong tea. These Irani cafés—like the now-legendary Yazdani, named after a desert town back home—quickly became gathering spots for the city's writers, artists, and thinkers. Saadat Hasan Manto was a regular, lingering over bread and conversation.

Alongside the tea and biscuits came something new to Bombay's streets: the tandoor. While Middle Eastern Jewish families had introduced tandoor-baked breads in the 1850s, it was the Iranis who turned them into café staples. From its smoky heat emerged khameeri roti—soft, leavened, and blistered—served with kheema, akhuri, or slow-cooked beans with meat. It was bread built for sustenance and companionship, meant to be torn and shared.

In the Irani cafés, khameeri roti became more than food—it was part of the city's rhythm. A warm, leavened circle that linked Bombay's cosmopolitan appetite to the deserts of Yazd, the ports of the Gulf, and the ovens of a faraway home.



Yazdani Restaurant & Bakery, Fort, Mumbai. Established in 1950.

Source: Instagram. Photograph by Sagar Sawant - 2011.

Khameeri Roti

Ingredients

2 CUPS OF WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR
1 TSP DRY YEAST
1 TSP SUGAR
SALT AS REQUIRED
2 TSP BUTTER

Method

Dissolve yeast and sugar in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lukewarm water and rest 15 mins. Mix with wheat flour, salt, and about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm water to knead a soft dough. Knead 4-5 mins, cover and rest 2 hrs. Divide into 8 portions, roll out, and place on a hot baking tray. Bake at 250°C for 3-4 mins on the top rack until blisters and brown spots appear. Brush hot rotis with butter and serve with mutton khichda.

Mutton Khichda

Ingredients

3 FINELY SLICED ONIONS
BROKEN WHEAT/KHICHDA WHEAT
1 TSP OIL, $\frac{1}{3}$ CUP RICE
1 CUP DALS (MIX OF URAD, MASOOR, CHANA, TOOR, MOONG, GREEN MOONG)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ KG MUTTON WITH BONE
3 TO 4 TSP CORIANDER POWDER
2 TSP CUMIN POWDER, 2 TSP GARAM MASALA
1 TSP TURMERIC, 1 TSP RED CHILLI POWDER
HALF A BUNCH CORIANDER LEAVES
3 TO 4 TSP GINGER, GARLIC AND GREEN CHILLI PASTE
TOMATO PUREE FROM 3 TOMATOES

Method

Soak wheat in one vessel, rice and pulses in another, overnight. Next day, pressure cook wheat with turmeric, salt and oil (4 whistles). Once cool, mash coarsely. Brown 2 onions (birista) for garnish. Cook rice and pulses with turmeric and salt, mash and keep aside. Cook mutton with ginger-garlic-chilli paste, coriander powder, whole garam masala, salt and red chilli powder until tender. Remove whole spices. In a large vessel, sauté the remaining onion in oil till golden. Add ginger-garlic-chilli paste, tomato puree, coriander and mint leaves. Mix in coriander, turmeric, cumin, garam masala and salt, cooking till oil separates. Add mutton, stock, wheat and pulses. Stir in lemon juice, add water if needed, and cook on low till combined. Garnish with mint, coriander, browned onions, ginger juliennes and lemon wedges.





Bhokachi Wade

A feast-day bread, born of shared hands

On wedding mornings in Bombay's East Indian homes, the air smells faintly of toddy and frying batter. In the courtyard, women in bright cotton sarees stand around large parats, mixing urad dal, rice, and yeast into a silky batter. Hands work in rhythm, chatter rises and falls, and the batter is left to swell and breathe. Later, it will be pinched into rounds, slipped into hot oil, and lifted out—golden, crisp-edged, and ready for the curry pot.

Bhokachi wades are more than bread; they are a collective act. Made in large batches for weddings and feast days, they are always prepared together—family, neighbours, and friends sharing labour and laughter. Served alongside chicken or pork curry, they carry the conviviality of the table into every bite.

The method of fermenting with toddy came centuries ago, under Portuguese influence, when native Catholics in the islands of Bombay began blending colonial techniques with Marathi recipes. This gave the wades their distinctive tang and airy crumb, setting them apart from fugias (made with milk or no leavening at all).

While Goa's poi had long been toddy-fermented, baked breads like pao only reached East Indian kitchens in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—brought by Goan and Mangalorean bakers travelling the Western Railways. But wades, fried and festive, never lost their place at the heart of celebrations.

To make bhokachi wades is to keep a tradition alive: the gathering of hands, the warmth of shared labour, and the joy of tearing into bread that tastes of both tide and history.



East Indian bride Cecilia Coutinho (second from right) on her wedding day, Bombay.

Source: East Indian Memory Co. (eastindianmemoryco.com) - 1963.

Bhokachi Wade

Ingredients

500 GM URAD DAL
500 GM MAIDA
500 GM RICE FLOUR
100 GM SUGAR
2 TSP YEAST / TODDY
1 TSP SALT
1 L COOKING OIL

Method

Soak urad dal overnight and coarsely grind into a paste. Combine the remaining ingredients in a bowl with some warm water. Let the mixture ferment for about 3-4 hours at room temperature. Combine the two batters. Heat oil for deep frying. Take a small amount of batter on your palm with water. Form a ball, then make a hole in the middle with your finger. Drop in hot oil and deep fry until golden brown. Remove the wades with a perforated spoon to remove excess oil. The wades take about 2 minutes to cook on each side. Serve immediately with chicken khudi curry or East Indian style curry.

East Indian Chicken Curry

Ingredients

1 KG CHICKEN
3 POTATOES (DICED)
2 TBSP OIL
2 TBSP EAST INDIAN BOTTLE MASALA/CURRY POWDER
1/2 TBSP FRESH TAMARIND PASTE
SALT, 1/2 TSP BLACK PEPPER

FOR SPICE PASTE:

2 CHOPPED ONIONS, 4 GREEN CHILLIES
2 CUPS OF FRESHLY SCRAPED COCONUT,
2 INCHES OF FRESH GINGER
8 LARGE GARLIC PODS

Method

In a frying pan, dry roast freshly grated coconut until lightly toasted. Remove from the pan and set aside. In the same pan, dry roast onions, chillies, ginger, and garlic. Transfer to a food processor or blender and blend until smooth, using 1/4 to 1/2 cup water if needed. In a skillet over medium-high heat, stir-fry the chicken pieces in oil for two minutes until lightly browned. Add the ground masala paste and sauté for 2 minutes, then add the bottle masala and sauté for a minute more, adding a little water if necessary to prevent burning. Add a cup of water, season with salt and pepper, and add the chopped potatoes, ensuring they are immersed. Cover and cook for 20 minutes until the chicken is cooked and potatoes are tender. Finally, add the vinegar and cook for a minute more. Taste and adjust seasoning.





Kippur Chi Roti

Bread that carries two thousand years in its folds

Nearly two thousand years ago, so the story goes, a shipwreck scattered a small band of Jews along the Konkan coast. They came ashore at Navgaon, wove themselves into the rhythms of Marathi and Konkani life, and became known as Bene Israel—or, locally, the Shanivar Telis. Whether or not the tale can be proven, the community has preserved its identity through oral traditions and the careful observance of holy days, even with limited links to the wider Jewish world.

In their daily lives, the Bene Israel dressed, spoke, and cooked much like their Hindu neighbours. But on Yom Kippur, the break-fast table revealed something distinct: kippur chi roti. Known elsewhere in Maharashtra as chirote, this festive bread takes the form of deep-fried wheat spirals, dipped in sugar syrup and perfumed with cardamom.

The making of kippur chi roti has long been the pride of Bene Israel women—rolled, folded, and fried in home kitchens, the air scented with warm syrup. In Bombay, it was once a communal task: families gathering in the days before the holy fast to prepare enough to share, ensuring no one's table was without it.

Even after the 1940's Aliyah to Israel, the recipe travelled—kept alive in new kitchens far from the Konkan, still tied to the rhythm of Yom Kippur. To eat kippur chi roti is to break the fast not just with sweetness, but with a link to a community's long memory—one shaped by tide, migration, and the will to remember.



Bene Israel teachers in Bombay.

Source: Southern Methodist University and DeGolyer Library, Texas / Central University Libraries, Delhi - 1856.

Kippur Chi Roti

Ingredients

FOR DOUGH:

1 CUP MAIDA
2 TBSP GHEE
1/2 CUP COLD WATER
A PINCH OF SALT
OIL TO DEEP FRY

FOR PASTE:

2 TBSP MAIDA
2 TBSP GHEE

FOR THE SUGAR SYRUP:

3/4 CUP SUGAR
1/3 CUP WATER
1/3 TSP CRUSHED CARDAMOM

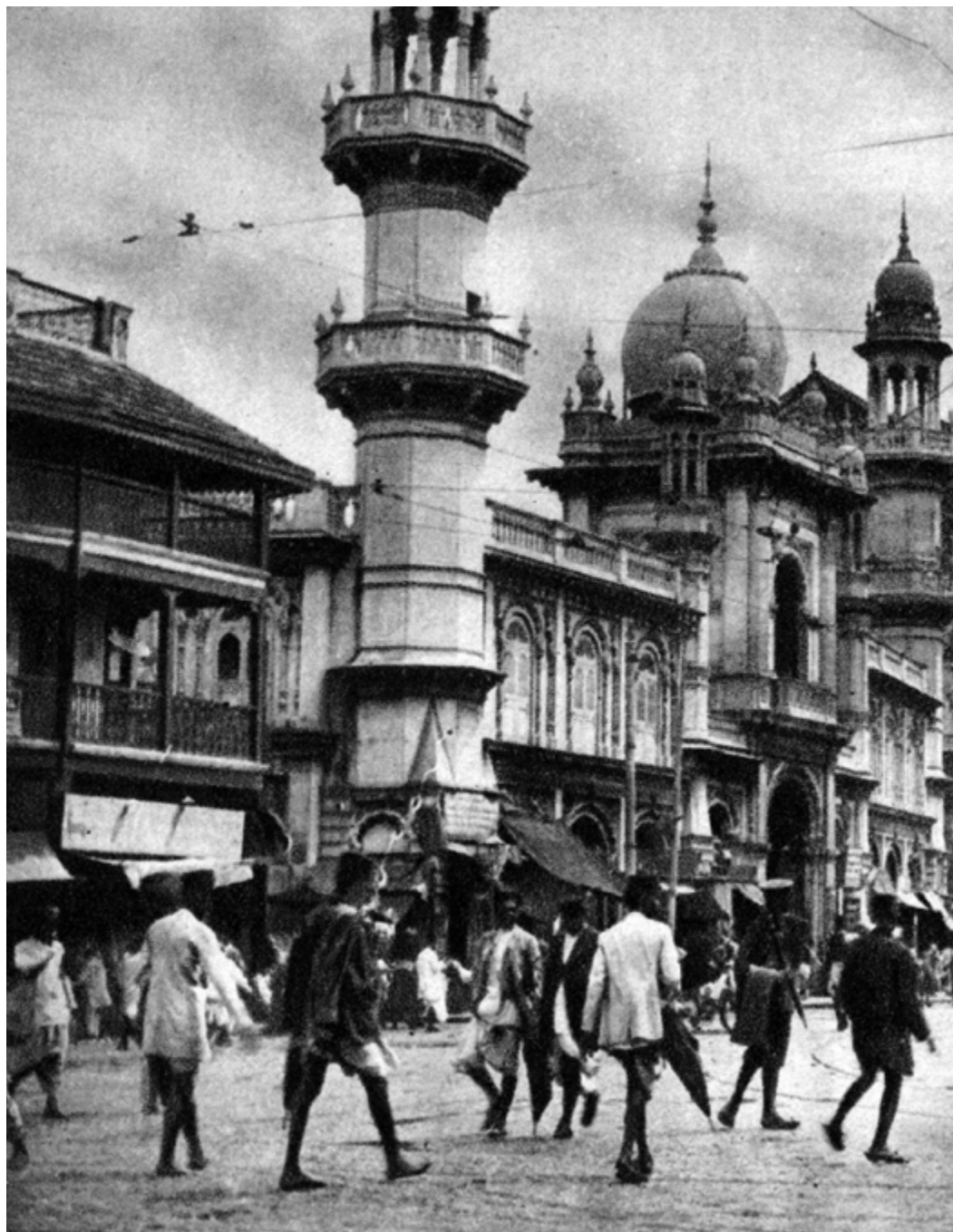
Method

Mix maida, ghee and salt to form a crumbly mixture. Add water little by little to make a soft dough. Let the dough rest for about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, prepare a paste of maida and ghee. Divide the dough into two equal portions. Start rolling the first portion to a circular disc of approximately 8 × 12 inches. Smear the paste of maida and ghee all over this. Roll over the second portion to a circular disc of the same size. Place the second rolled disc over the first and smear the remaining maida and ghee paste. Roll the discs, placed one over the other, into a log, as tightly as possible and refrigerate for 3–4 hours. Cut the log into small discs of 1/2-inch thickness. Press each tiny disc and roll it further with the rolling pin.

Deep fry in moderately hot oil in a wide-mouthed pan. Each batch of five rotis takes roughly 4 minutes to turn golden brown, turning them side to side. After all the rotis are fried, make the sugar syrup. Heat sugar, water, and crushed cardamom together. Let the sugar dissolve and come to a boil. Let it simmer for a minute. Turn the flame off, and add the fried rotis into the sugar syrup. Let them soak for 30 minutes before serving.







Hamidiya Masjid Pydonie, Mumbai. Source: alamy.com. Photograph by Dinodia Photos RM - c. 1900s.





Group of brahmins, Bombay. Source: Wikimedia Commons. British Library - 1860.



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