

# *Tais* of Mumbai: Women Leaders and Inclusive City-making

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Mumbai







# Aajji (Grandma) or Pushpa-tai Wagle







Image: From Author's family



# *Tai*-s of Mumbai

*Tai* = Elder sister





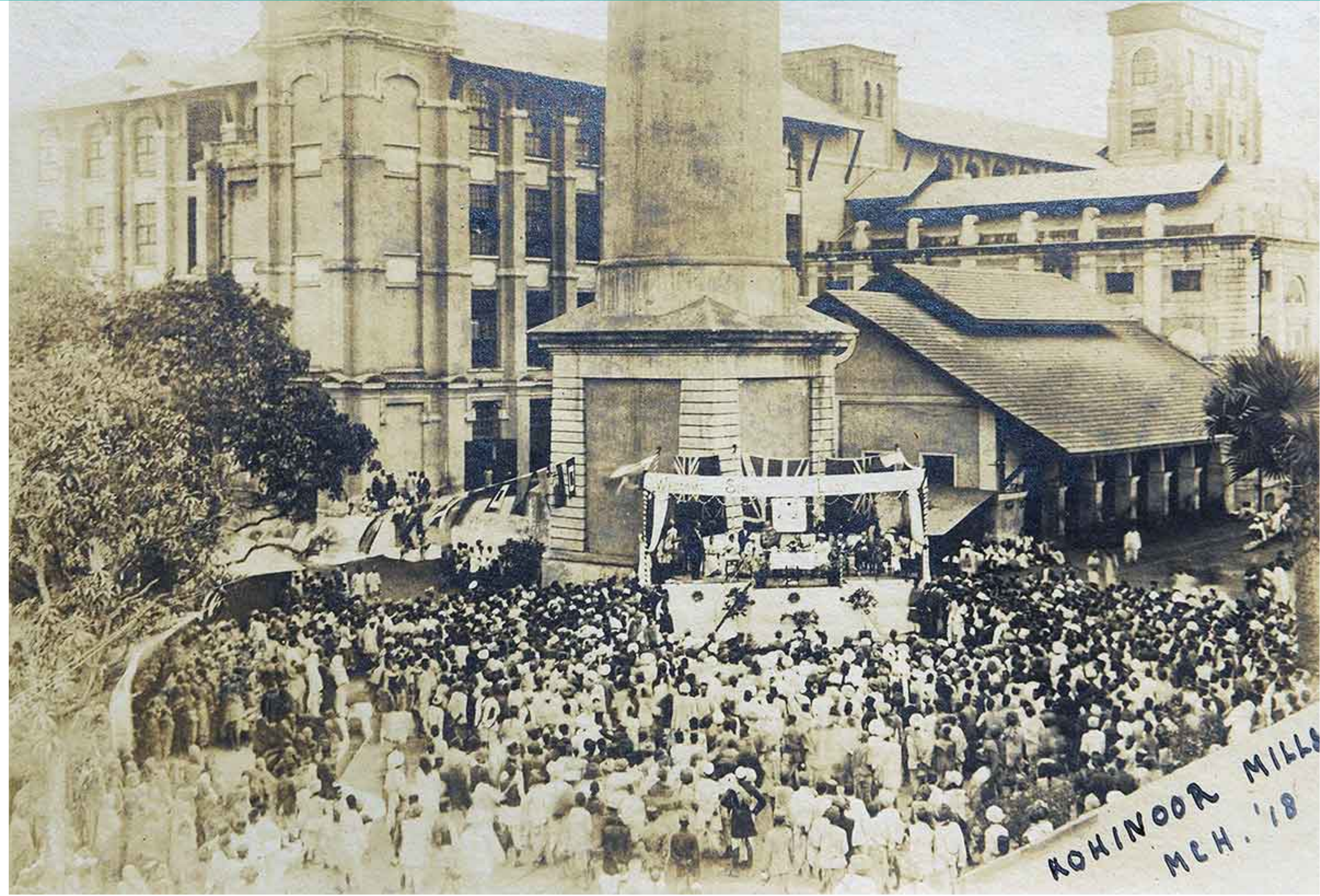
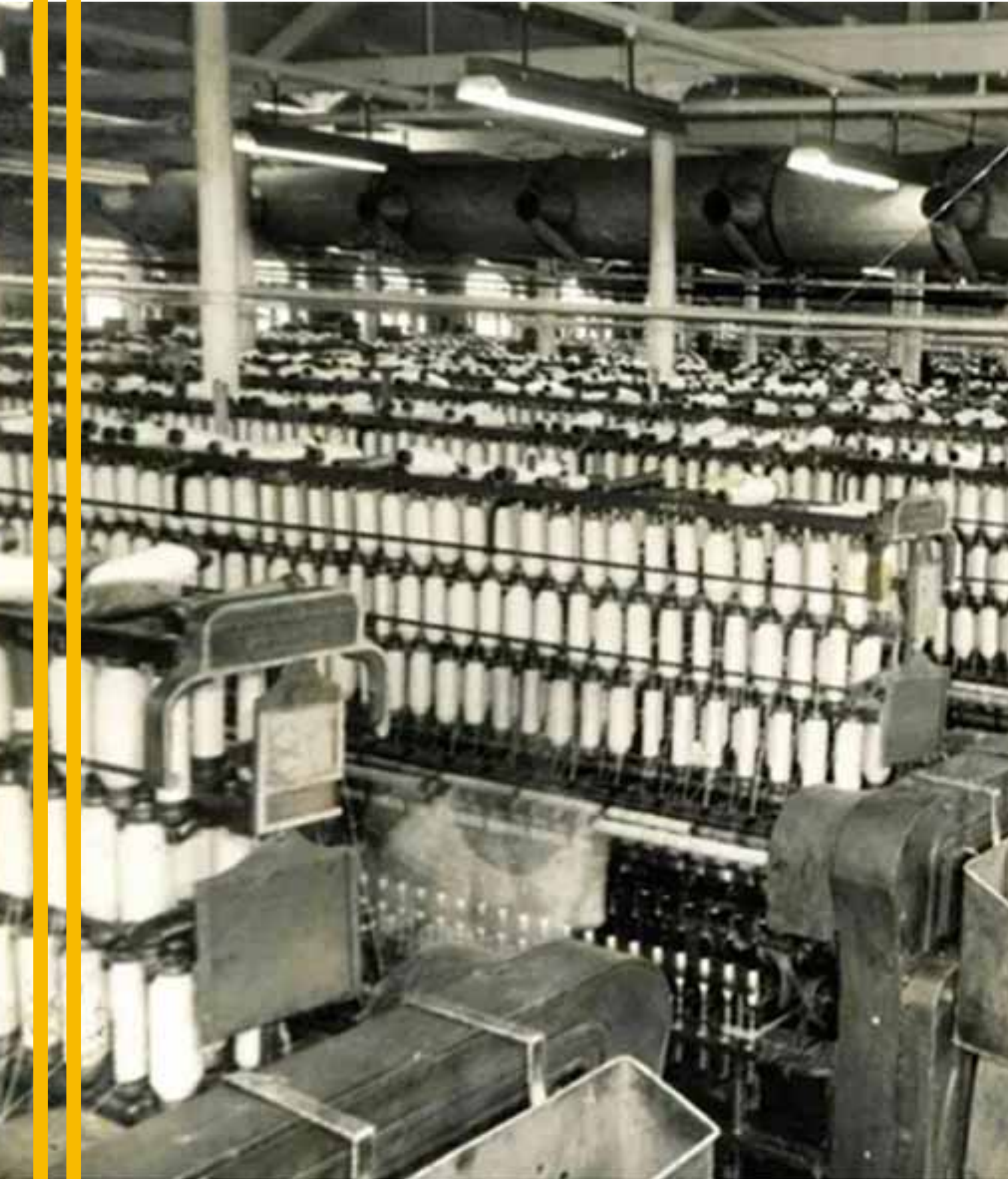
# *Tai*-s of Mumbai

The story of these *Tais* is a story of women as active city-making agents.





# The Mill City





D. 8634



# Women as Work Force



# Ahilya-tai Rangnekar: *Ranaragini* (The Warrior)

- Her focus was on generating awareness among women workers, wives of mill workers, and women from various underserved background around the socio-political situation and workers rights.
- Parel Mahila Sangh (Parel Women's Organization): Through its working-class membership brought forth the pressing issues of maternity benefits, higher wages for women, and safe working environment
- Created a flank of women protestors that also supported other movements. Eg. Naval strike in 1946





# Mrinal-tai Gore: *Paniwali Bai* (The Water Lady)

- Started her career around issues of women's health, women's education, empowerment, and issues of domestic violence and safety
- Relentless pursuit of basic amenities for the residents of Mumbai, especially those in the her constituency of Goregaon.
- Addressed issues related to water supply, housing, sanitation, and mobility.
- Particularly, her dedication to ensuring a stable water supply earned her the title "Paniwali Bai" from her constituents

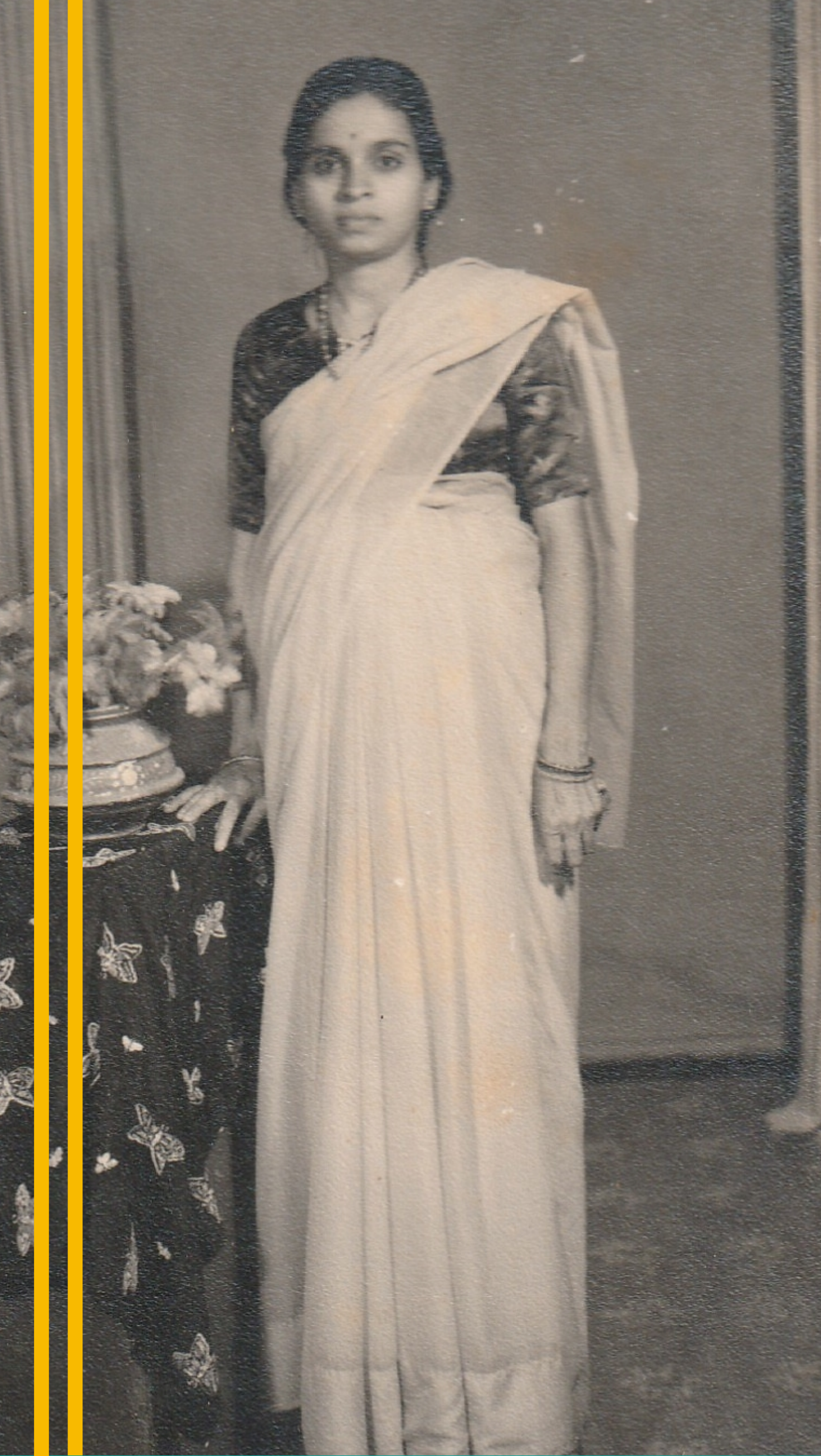




# Mrinal-tai: Expanding the Urban









# Pushpa-tai: Establishing the Urban



*An early photograph of Andheri station (c.1940s)*



# Mahila aani Mahagai : Women and Inflation

- 1960s and 70s were an era of post independence "bhramniras" (disillusionment), marked by the failed promise of rapid development.
- Period marked by economic challenges, including high inflation rates, food shortages, and rising cost of living, limited employment opportunities for women
- Government policies like food rationing systems and subsidies were often insufficient, leading to continued price escalations in the market.
- Men would work and household responsibilities were on the women, so women were particularly affected.

आजकाल रवा ही वस्तू दुर्मिळ झाली आहे. शिधावाटप दुकानात रव्याचा अपुरा पुरवठा असतो. Frist Come First Serve या शिधावाटप व्यवस्थापकांच्या नियमाप्रमाणे दुकानदार त्याचे वाटप करतात. सहाजिकच नोकरी करणाऱ्या महिलांना हा रवा मिळत नाही.

या बाबतीत मला असे सुचवायचे आहे. की, प्रत्येक शिधापत्रिकेवर फक्त अर्धाच कीलो रवा द्यावा किंवा या महिन्यात ज्यांना रवा मिळाला नाही त्यांना पुढील महिन्यात रवा मिळावा. नाहीतर रव्याचा योग्य पुरवठा प्रत्येक दुकानात असलेल्या युनिटसच्या हिशोबात देण्यात यावा.

मी स्वतः कंट्रोल ऑफ रेशनिंग श्री. जोशी यांच्याशी याबाबतीत पत्रव्यवहार केला आहे. त्यात वरील सूचना केल्या आहेत. सूचना विचारात घेतील अशी अपेक्षा आहे. महिलांनी या बाबतीत श्री. जोशी यांना भेटून ही समस्या सोडविण्याचा प्रयत्न करावा.

22/11/63  
अंधेरी 63 आपली,  
सौ. पुष्पा वागळे

*My grandmother wrote in a newspaper column that as the provisions are distributed on 'first come first serve' basis, working women who cannot stand in the long lines outside the ration store, are most affected*

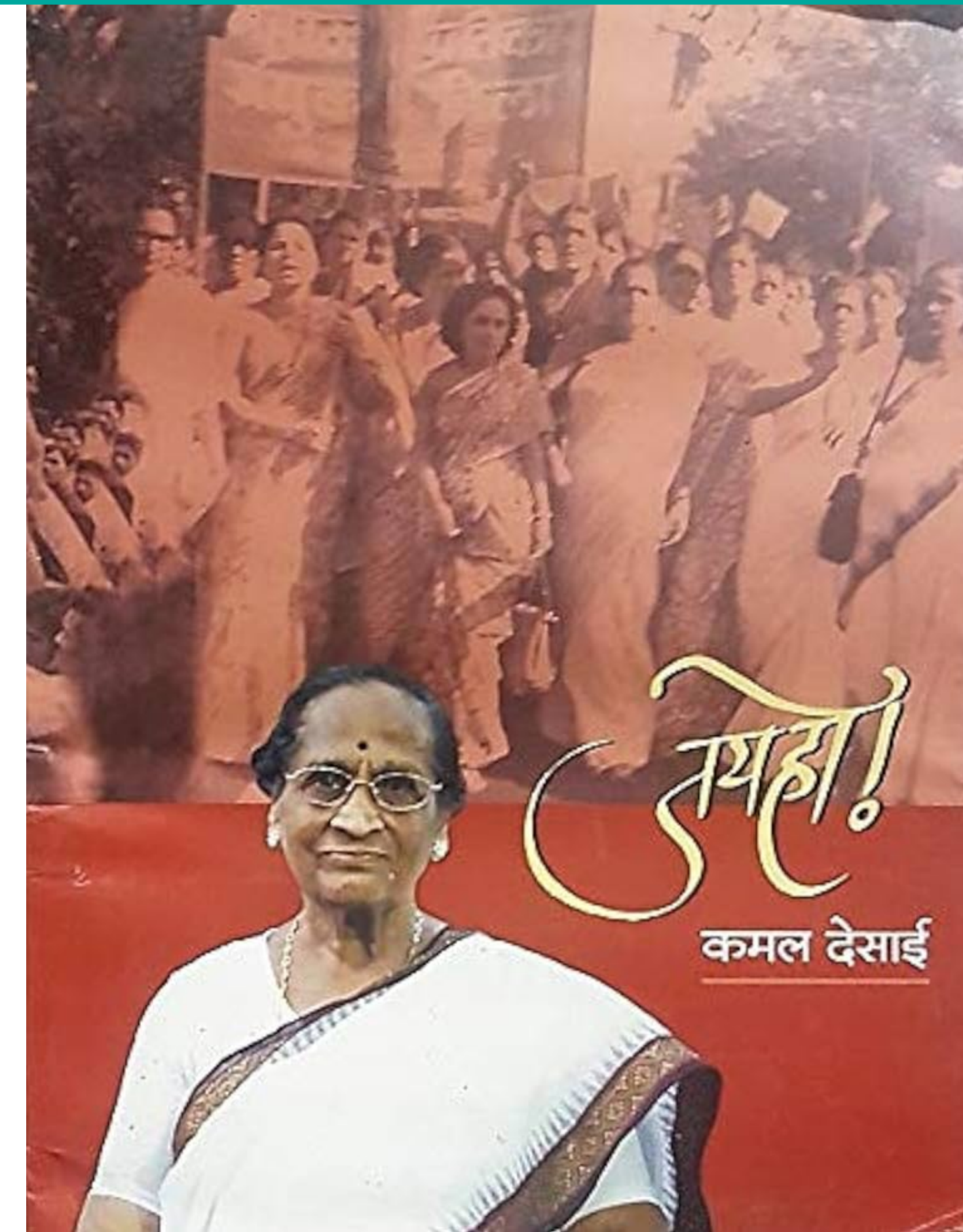






# 1972: Anti-Price Rise Movement

- In August 1972, ten women from various women's organizations across political divides came together to have a signature campaign and present a scheme for controlling inflation to the government
- They gave themselves a name – the *Mahagai Pratikar Samyukta Mahila Samiti* or the Anti Price Joint Women's Committee
- October 1972: The Samiti staged the first protest close to the Legislative Assembly and put forward an eight-point demand charter. Hundreds of women joined.
- Various morchas (protest marches) and gheraos (preventing government officials from leaving work places until demands were met) organized over a year and half with thousands of women participating
- Supported various other movements by joining as a 'women's flank'
- 17 October 1973: 10,000 women marched in the latni or rolling pin morcha



Kamal-tai Desai, the  
'Mobilizing Machine'



# Latnis: Women with the Rolling Pins



## When the Rolling Pins Hit the Streets

Women in the Anti Price Rise Movement in  
Maharashtra

NANDITA GANDHI

*The book by  
Nandita Gandhi that  
brought the stories  
of the Latnis to the  
broader public*















# Women in Politics

- Many of the women leaders during that era were party workers and involved in mainstream politics
- They encouraged other women from various walks of life to enter politics
- Mrinal-tai Gore is considered a shining example. She believed politics is where social work happens, and had a brilliant political career at the city, state, and national level









# 1975: International Women's Year





# Prema-tai Purav: *Loanwali bai* (The loan lady)



- Organised the women that engaged in secondary economic activities like running food messes for the mill workers.
- Focused on economic empowerment and financial literacy of women
- Organized women into self help groups to take advantage of the group loans scheme by the government to invest in their small businesses
- Formed a membership based credit bank to provide individual micro-loans to women in need
- From 1976 to 1982 over 6000 women were helped through group loans and micro-loans that amounted to 10 million rupees.



# Prema-tai Purav: *Annapurna* (Goddess of Nourishment)

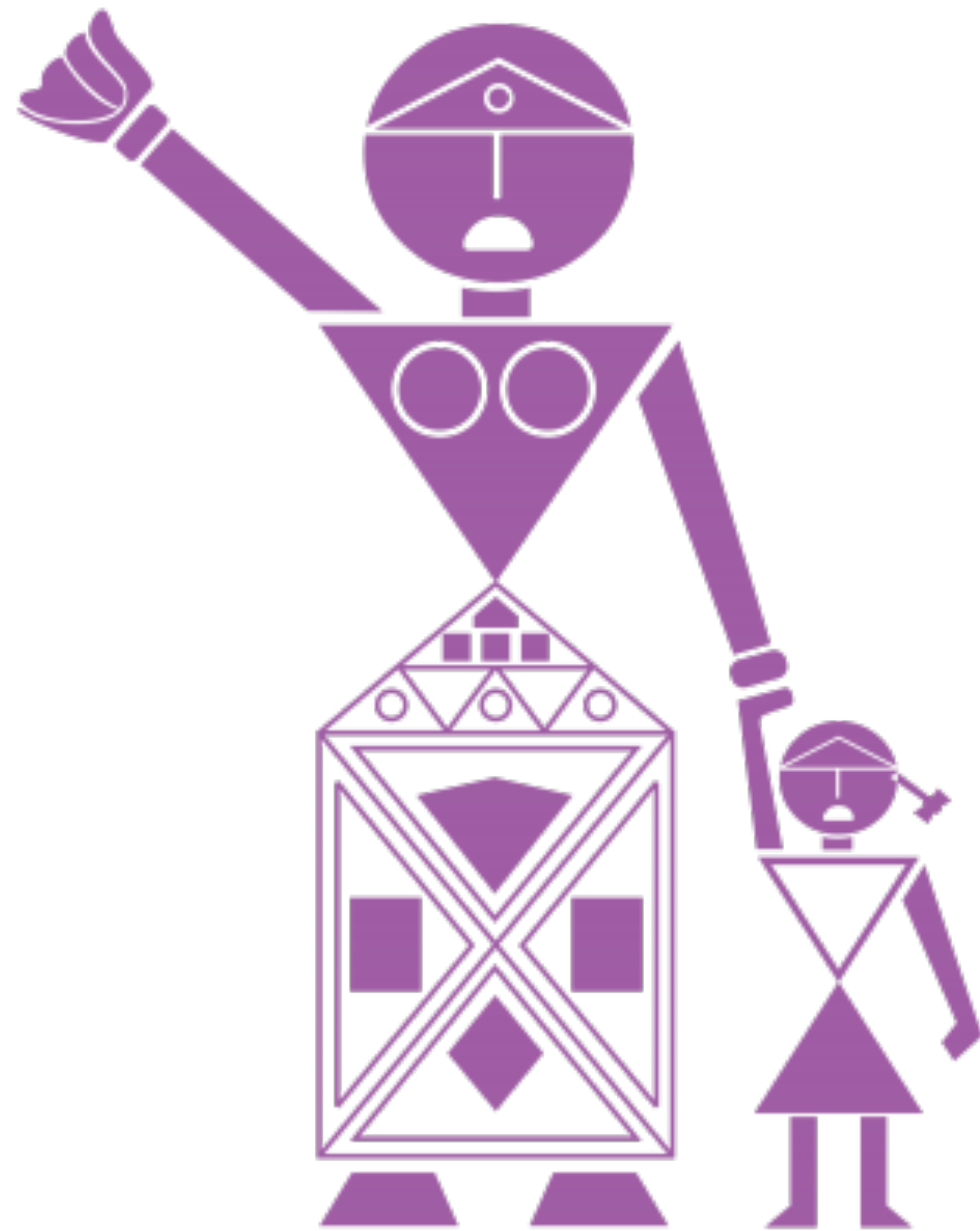
- 1982: A big mill workers strike ended the era of mills in Mumbai which led to many families without any income source
- 1983: She started a community kitchen run by women to feed people in need at low prices
- Over years the community kitchen and its branches employed 200 women to make lunchboxes for over 1000 industrial workers and unorganized workers
- The kitchen also provided snacks, tea, and meals to hospitals, schools, universities, and offices at affordable rates.



Image: Prematai's family



# Stree Mukti Sanghatana: Women's Liberation Organization



- Women's concerns: economic, social, political, cultural and mental
- The struggle has to take place at three levels: an intellectual struggle with oneself, a struggle in individual practice and, collective struggle
- The focus is on organizing women and making them aware of their rights



# Stree Mukti Sanghatana: Women's Liberation Organization

- 1975: Kalapathak (Cultural Troupe) starts raising awareness in the Shahiri tradition of Maharashtra about women's issues, women's struggles and the organization
- 1985: First Family Counseling Centers (FCCs) offered services to the low-income communities
- 1987: Day care centers to support working women
- 1996: 'Jidnyasa' (Curiosity) program for adolescents from lower income groups to raise awareness about women's issues



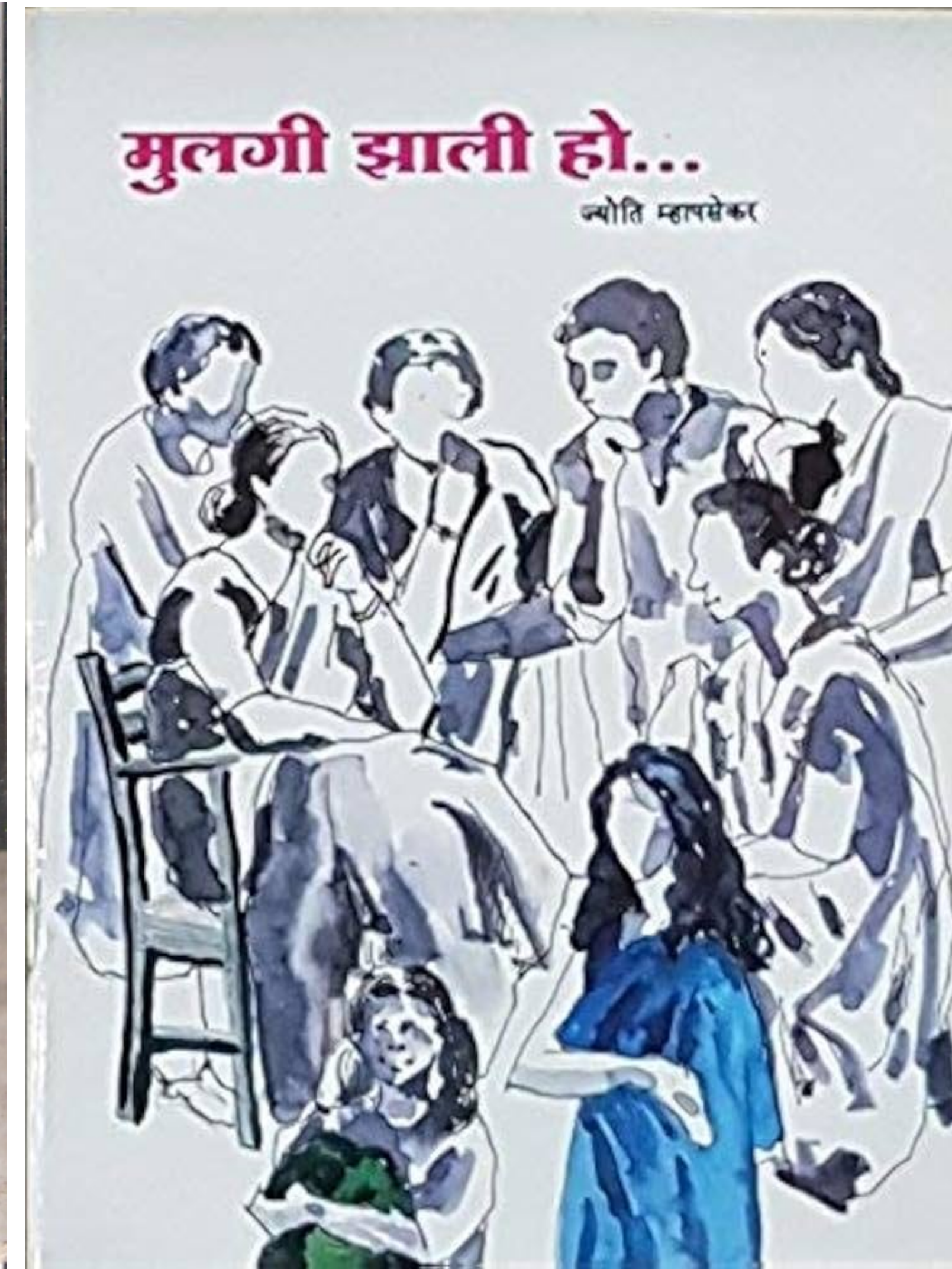


# Kalapathak: Cultural Troupe





# Mulgi Zhali Ho (A Girl is Born)





# Jyoti-tai Mhapsekar: Eco-Warrior Playwright

- President and founding member of the *Stree Mukti Sanghatana* (Women's Liberation Organization)
- Author of the play "*Mulagi Zhali Ho*" (A Girl is Born) and many other plays.
- Organised over 5000 women waste pickers in self help groups in the Parisar Vikas (Neighbourhood development) program
- The program trained 1000+ members in composting and biomethanation and other alternate skills.
- Parisar Vikas has 3 Federations and 10 Cooperatives affiliated with it.





# Parisar: Women, Waste, and Economic Empowerment

- Interventions:
  1. Formal recognition to the women waste pickers
  2. Support for children's education
  3. Formation of self help groups (SHGs)
  4. Health checkups and medical facilities
  5. Skills training like composting, bio-methanation, gardening, and leadership training
  6. Formation of co-operatives to facilitate work opportunity

## PARISAR VIKAS- A PROGRAMME FOR WASTE PICKERS BY STREE MUKTI SANGHATANA



SMS with the cooperation of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai provides waste management services through its member-based cooperatives



# Right to Pee: Women, Sanitation, Mobility

- A campaign conducted in a collaborative manner by thirty-three social movements and civil society organisations
- Core objective is to secure free, clean, and safe sanitation facilities for women in work-places and in public spaces.



— “ —

When a woman is not given access to a bathroom, it is nothing short of political violence.

DEEPA PAWAR

— ” —



# Mumtaj-tai Sheikh: The 'Daughter of Maharashtra'



- Engaged with local communities, government officials, and the media to advocate for better sanitation infrastructure
- Focus on educating the public about the importance of safe toilets and the impact of inadequate access on women's dignity and safety.
- Through sharing her own experiences, she represented the voices of marginalized women and emphasized how systemic inequalities in urban planning affect their daily lives.
- 2015: Successful in getting 96 free female toilets built around the city
- Focused on training a cadre of ground activists.



# Right to Pee is the Right to the City

- The campaign led to increased attention from the government and local authorities towards the need for better sanitation facilities.
- It highlighted the importance of integrating women's needs into urban planning and infrastructure.
- Right to pee underscores the three ideas of 'Right to City': Right to 'be'/ dwell 'well', Right to voice in decision-making, and right to have differences acknowledged
- " Recognize me, celebrate me" - Right to Pee activist



— “ —

If the society and the government can make so many other decisions about my body, then why are they so ashamed of talking about urinals? The personal is political.”

SUPRIYA JAN-SONAR, CORO INDIA

— ” —



# Women's Role in Inclusive City-making

- The *Tais* engaged in city-making processes by opening space for common women to participate in politics, strengthen women's space in work force, navigate public spaces more freely, take advantage of economic spaces.
- Their activities have had a significant impact on how the city functions to date and have changed not only the political and policy landscape of the city but also spatial and environmental aspects of urban planning in Mumbai.







line of duty... women constables in action

2910019003  
Mid-day.





Images: From Author's family



# Tais of Mumbai: A Book Project



- Tracking the work of various *Tais* against a backdrop of the history of Mumbai gives us deeper insight into how women leaders shaped the city and made it more inclusive.
- The story of the *Tais* provides an opportunity to learn from their struggles, experiences, politics, and modus operandi.
- This is a way for me to 'bear witness' to, and document, the contributions of the *Tais*...and my grandmother.





Thank you!