



# *Dadar Flower Market*

A Visual Ethnography Project





# *Dadar* *Flower Market*

A VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY PROJECT

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## *Approval Sheet*

The Industrial Design Center DRS Project II titled "Visual Ethnography" by Shubhangi Salinkar (136250009) is approved, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Design Degree in Visual Communication at the Industrial Design Centre, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay.

Guide

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nina", followed by a long horizontal line.



## Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misinterpreted or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that the violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

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# First Impression

When I reached, the first day, at 5 am in the morning, everything was pitch dark. There the CST-bound local train by which I was travelling was crowded - for sure, but everywhere I looked, at the people, stations, and the roads by which I had come - bore a hushed air, one of quiet, morning peace.

I stepped out of Dadar station, and the flyover that runs across Dadar Flower market was near-deserted, and a mist hung in the dark air. Little did I expect the burst of light and noise that would greet me the moment I stepped down from the foot-over-bridge.

Carts full of Genda flowers were bathed in 100 Watt bulb light, stark and yellow. There was general cacophony that accompanies any crowded market place, but its presence this early in the day, while the rest of the world slept, was miraculous. Flower vendors calling out prices, wholesale buyers haggling, individual buyers - ladies, college girls, men in shirts - trying to fit their purchases into bags they had brought - the crowd was varied and endless.

The market smelled of Genda too - A pungent, almost-fragrant smell, that characterized the

whole market. Have you ever smelled it? Try and pinch out a bunch of petals from a Genda flower - and you will get it immediately!

The weather was cold outside, a dipping 18 degrees (By Mumbai Standards!), but the market was abuzz with a warm, live energy. It was an unforgettable first sight!



*In the dark of the dawn  
the market shone bright,  
Flowers in bright profusion,  
quite an unforgettable sight!*



# Map of Dadar Flower Market



*Flyover*

*Towards  
Kabutar  
Khana*



*Phool Gully*

*Overbridge*

*Railway Lines*

**Dadar**



# Method

I visited Dadar Flower Market almost daily. Initially, I was a passive observer, and hesitated to intervene in the flurry of activities that were taking place. But I started striking up conversations with the flower sellers bit by bit, and in their free time, they started having conversations with me.

I observed it through various times in the day, noticing closely how the activities took place, like garland making, selling, wholesale supplying, clearing, stocking up, etc. I also observed the connections of the various flowers being sold to the market itself - They are intrinsically associated with the time of the year, festivals, day of the week, type of buyer, etc.

I also observed what was sold in addition to the flowers - leaves, garland-making supplies, and various types of leaves.









## *Through the Day*

The Flower Market starts at 4 am every morning, and does brisk business from 5 am to 7 am. At around 8, the flower sellers start packing up, sell off their remaining stocks to other flower vendors, who sit in the same place throughout the day till evening. The morning lot of wholesalers leave at around 8am, and the phool gully bears a relatively deserted look after that. The second batch of flower sellers do slow business throughout the day, and their rates are not wholesale rates.

# *How is the Market Organized?*

## **Small time sellers**

These are small-scale home-grown flower sellers, who grow their own produce, and bring it to the market to sell. They come from villages around Vasai, Panvel, and Kasara. They sell Genda in smaller quantities, and mostly sell other flowers like Hibiscus, Mogra, Chameli, Aboli, Shewanti.

## **Long term sellers**

These sellers buy stocks from farm-owners, and are essentially middle-men. They are most prominent in the Phool gully, doing competitive business right in the middle of the street. They mostly sell various varieties of Genda and other such flowers.

## **Shop owners**

These too, are like the large scale sellers, but they have permanent shops along the length of the gully, facing the flyover. The flowers are neatly laid out in baskets here, and the shop-owner usually has a digital weighing scale, and a few assistants to help out with the huge loads of sales. The noteworthy difference here is that these shops are legal, and they do official business. The street sellers often flee when the police arrives, because they are categorized as hawkers.

## **Exotic Flower Sellers**

There are 2 exotic flower shops. They import flowers from overseas, and they mostly supply to high-end buyers like big hotels and corporate businesses.

## **Accessory Sellers**

These sellers capitalize on the 'everything in one place' factor, and sell various garland making and bouquet accessories in at wholesale prices.

## **Leaf Sellers**

These sellers are mostly small-time farm owners too, just like the first category. But they don't sell any flowers at all! Instead, they sell leaves with a religious significance, like Tulsi, Durva, Mango, Banana, Terda.

## **Garland Sellers**

There are many of these in Phool Gully, owing to the presence of Siddhivinayak Temple nearby. They make many types of garlands, of varying intricacy, and varying price ranges.







# *Where do the Flowers come from?*

The flowers come from places around Mumbai, like Junnar, Pune, Nasik, Vasai, Virar, Panvel. These places have farms, greenhouses and large scale farmers who grow such flowers. The transportation occurs mostly in tempos, autorickshaw-carriers and local trains. Most flowers vendors travel to Dadar on the 3.25 am local train from Virar. They reach the market at around 4 am.







# *Which are the Flowers?*

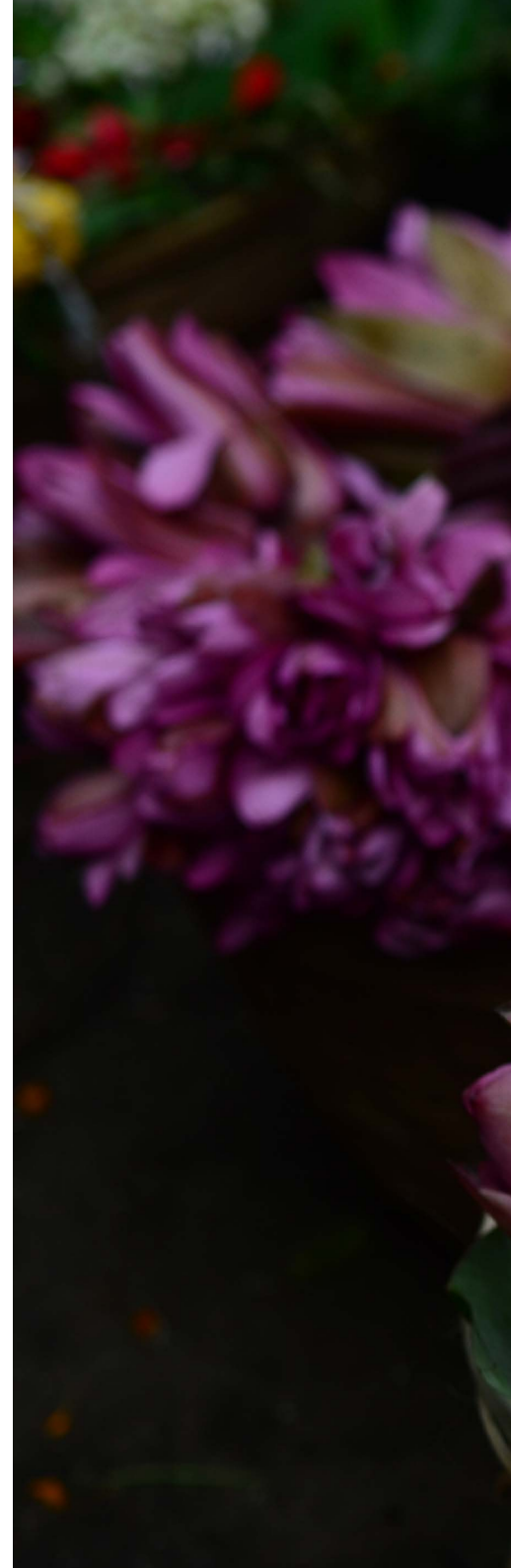
The phool gully boasts of a huge number of flowers. While most of them are grown locally in the nearby regions, yet others are flown in from European countries and South America!

Flowers in the phool gully can be classified as two types:

Ones that are used in traditional ceremonies and for cultural reasons.

Ones that are used for boquets, flower arrangements, and other such reasons.

The rose however - has made the transition. It is used in boquets and garlands alike.









# *The Fragrant Ones*





# *1. Gulchadi*

*The bees love the sweet-smelling Gulchadi- & so must you!*





*2. Chameli and Mogra*





# *Gajra Making*

Gajras are made on-the-spot, with fragrant flowers like gulchadi, mogra, and jasmine. Often families of the seller can be seen sitting at the back, busily making more gajras, as they are being sold.



### *3. Son Chafa and Jaswanda*







#### *4. Lakshmi Kamal*





*5. Aster*

# *Interview*



Prathamesh Patil is an Aster vendor in the morning, at Phool Gully. "Asters are very common", he says. They are offered to all the Gods. These come from Junnar, near Pune.

Asters are sold by the 100. Generally, 100 asters go for 60/- Rs, but on Thursdays, they sell at 100/- . This is because Haldi Kunkus generally happen on Thursdays.





## *5. White Gonda*





*6. Kaafri Gonda*



## 6. Jhendu

The marigolds (or the gendas or jhendus) definitely own the Phool Gully. Locally grown, they form an integral part of all Indian festivals and religious ceremonies. They form beautiful garlands which are strings of blinding colour. Their petals are often removed, and used in bright rangoli-like designs.

They are the very colour of Indian Festivities.

At Phool Gully, they are unloaded by the truckfuls at about 3 am every morning (A sight that I was not able to witness..), and they sit comfortably in huge baskets until wholesalers take them away in sacks.

*Warning: The next four pages contain scenes of blinding warmth and colour:*







# *Orange Ihendu*





# *Yellow Jhendu*





*Laal Jhendu*





# *Scarlet Jhendu*





## 7. *Aboli*







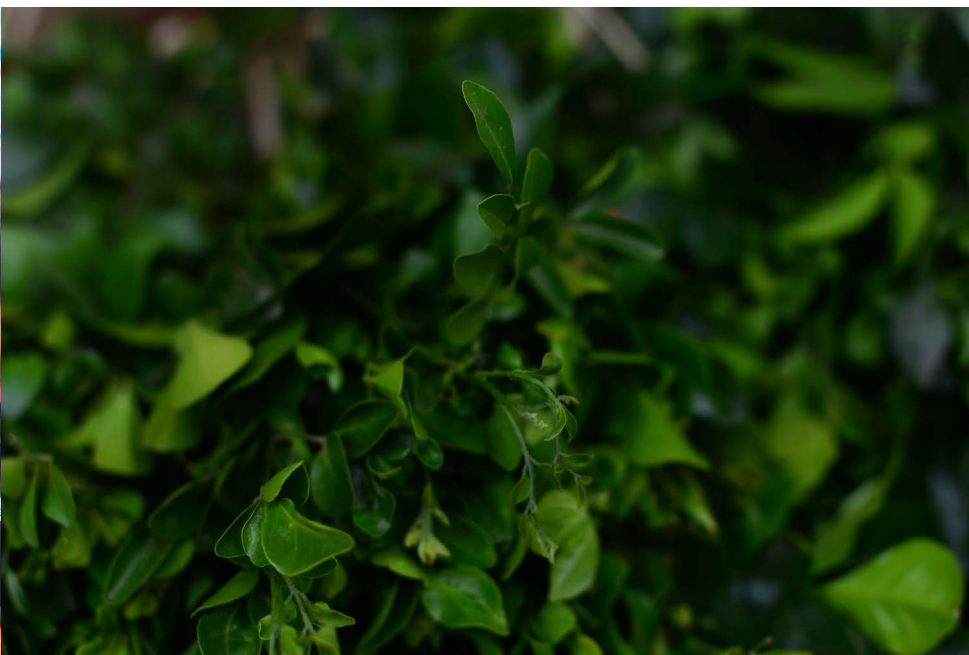
## *8. Roses and Rose Petals*



# Leaves in Phool Gully

There are various non-flower items in the Phool Gully, like Banana leaves and flowers, Kaamini, Aapta, Palas, Tulsi, Mango, Terda. These leaves are used in garlands, phool-pudis, and as offerings to various Gods.











# *Interview with a seller*



Rakesh Lele is a small vendor on the back-gully of the morning flower-market. He has his own farm, in Vasai. He sells Raw bananas, Banana Flowers Hibiscus, Tulsi and Packets of Son-champa.

His family has a huge banana plantation. One tree gets only one flower, he says. Hence banana flowers are expensive.

He works in the fields throughout the day, and sleeps for two hours in the afternoon. He does not get any sleep at night. They harvest in the early evening, package it into packets or for transport, and he leaves the house at 2am in the night. He catches the 3:25 am Virar local and reaches the market before 5am.

He sells his produce till 8am, and then packs up and leaves. What is left over, he sells at low prices to the other vendors, who will sit in the phool gully till evening, after the morning market ends.

He is kind, but too busy to talk, business is his first priority. After talking a while, he tells me apologetically, to come later.







## *Interview with a small-time seller.*



Manoj Shetye sells local germanium flowers, tulsi leaves and hibiscus. He has a farm in Panvel.

He too, reaches the market by 4am and wraps up his selling by 8am. He tells me that he is one of the very few people to be selling the 'german' flowers - They almost look like Jhendu, but have long stalks. "All these flowers with stalks will last a minimum of 5 days if you keep changing their water", he says. (He refers to the flowers with stalks as 'dandi wala maal'). They are used at the end of flower garlands, as hangings. The prices of the terda and Hibiscus go up during Ganpati and Sankashti.

He tells me that students like me have visited his farm, back in Panvel, for a study. He offers me a big bunch of 'Germans', to take home for free, and a handful of hibiscus as well!





# *Interview with a Buyer*



Mariam buys roses, marigolds, and gulchadi from Dadar. She sells them at Mulund Check Naka, at double the price.

She has been doing this for ten years now, and has earned enough to send her daughter to Law college.

She uses large plastic sacks to carry the flowers by local train. She begins her day at check naka at 10am, and wraps up her business by 6pm.







# *Interview with a second- batch seller*



Rama Bai is a vendor of roses, and sets up her shop after the peak morning hours. She buys the roses from the Morning Market, and sells each rose for five rupees, which is almost triple of what she buys it for.

We sit here all day, in the hot sun. Business is slower in the afternoon and the evenings, crowds are less. Most people who pass by in the afternoon are not here to buy flowers. So it is hard work, she says.

Business is good and will continue to be, this week, because it is Valentines Day, she says. "We will sell 1 rose for 10 Rs, on 13th ,14th and 15th February."





# *Interview of a Mogra seller*



Shirish Kamble Has been selling chameli (Jasmine) and Mogra flowers at Dadar for the last 35 years. He had a job before, he said - It used to get him 800 Rs per month. This was 35 years back, and it was a good job. But then he had to get married, and had to go back to his village near Pune.

When he came back, circumstances made him a flower seller. He is happy, he says. He is selling his family's produce at this market, and it has helped him raise his family for the last 35 years.





*Garlands*





*Garland Making*



These heavy, expensive garlands are intricately made with gulchadi flowers, rose petals, and sometimes marga as well, along with the usual garland flowers. This makes them beautifully fragrant. They are adorned with accents like thermocol balls, and shiny plastic strings. Such garlands sell for Rs. 800 apiece!















This seller makes garlands of five different flowers and leaves. He makes the garlands as he sells them, right from 4.30 am after buying flowers from a vendor in the same market. He charges 120/- per garland. Roses and carnations are used to adorn the ends of the garlands.





# *The Boquet Flowers*









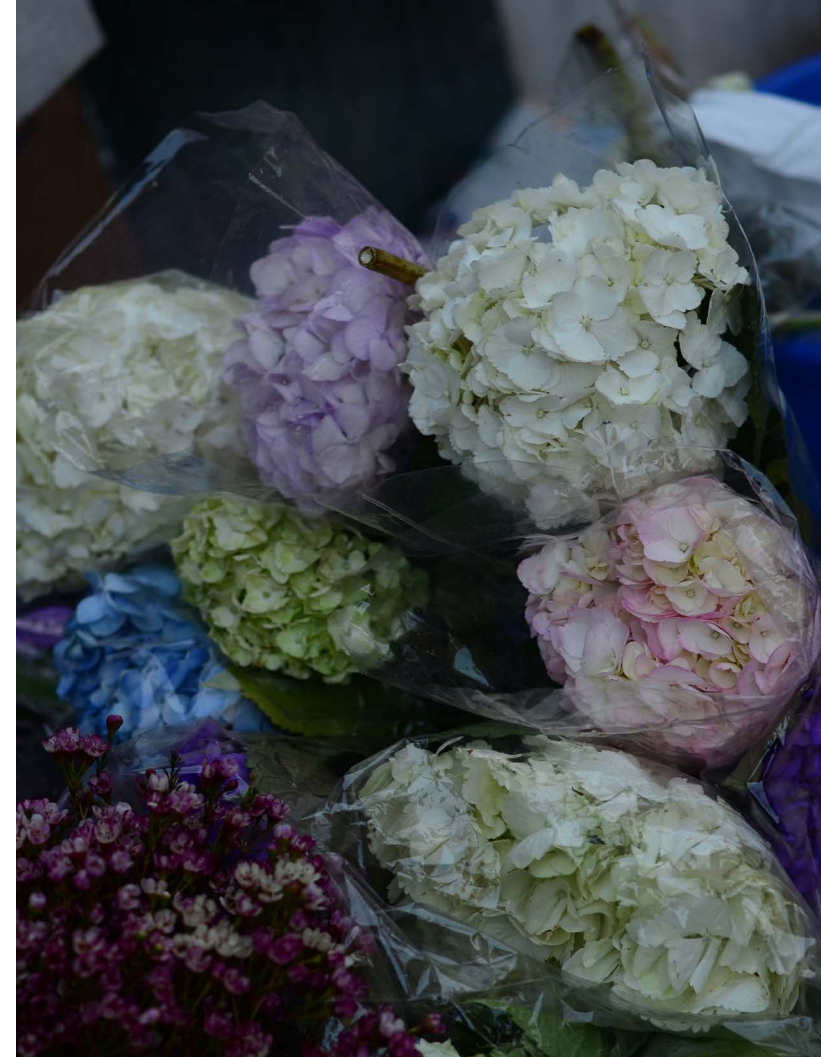
# *The Exotics*

The exotics stand out, as proud as peacocks, with their exquisite plumes.

They are foreigners in this land, and are destined for spaces of opulence and grandeur. Their shops too, stand at the end of Phool Gully, still in the hub, maintaining a distance.

They look impossibly perfect, in their plastic and rubber packaging. They have just embarked from an airplane.

They are, Spider Crysanthumum, Hydrangeas, Waxflowers, Liatrus, Orchids, Tulips.













*The Irony,  
But the bees  
know better!*







## *A day in the life of a vendor*

- 3:20 AM.....The vendor transports his wares by the Virar Local, jostling for space with fishermen, and other commuters.
- 4:15 AM .....The flower seller sets up shop and simultaneously starts making Gajras, Venis, or other products.
- 4:45 AM .....Business Hours, the wholesalers start coming in, flowers are sprayed with water to keep them fresh and ready.
- 6:00 AM .....Peak business hour, there's hardly time to do anything else.
- 7:30 AM .....The vendor looks to sell his remaining stocks to another vendor, who would set up business post 9am
- 9:30 AM .....The vendor packs up, and leaves, back to home, for a hard day's work in the fields









## *Rush Hour*





*Pack Up*







# Conclusion

The Dadar flower market is quite an anomaly among markets, bursting into life at dawn, and quickly wrapping up its major business by mid morning. It is an entire eco-system, around flowers. For us, flowers are things of beauty, but for these sellers they are just commodities. In huge quantities.

Markets are the hub and soul of every city, and when it comes to Mumbai and flowers, Dadar flower market is the place! It is fascinating to know that almost every flower, from stalls in temple complexes, suburban markets, florist shops, flower arrangements in plush hotels, to the simple fragrant jasmine in a lady's Gajra, all come from here.

The lives of the vendors are fascinating as well. Hardworking and perseverant, they are a tough lot. Most of the older set have been here for more than twenty years, and it is their ancestral business. The most noteworthy are the homegrown flower-sellers, whose hard lives, both as farmers and vendors, are noteworthy. The atmosphere in the market is always work-oriented - buyers are always the top priority,

as would be expected - but that aside, most vendors are a chatty, jocular lot. They would all happily pose for pictures, calling their friends and other sellers to be photographed as well. An old, rather serious Mogra vendor I was interviewing, was ragged by all the young vendors around, who started throwing- guess what, genda flowers at him! Chai breaks are never real breaks, they are just hurried sips of tea between quick deft movements with the thread-and-needle or the baskets that they constantly seem to be handling.

Buyers go away satisfied, sometimes lugging sacks of flowers themselves, to be sold elsewhere.

And so the cycle continues.

For me, the experience has been extremely uplifting! I am from this very city, yet had never got a chance to visit the place. My daily visits gave me some rich insights about the lives of people, and made me see a side of Mumbai that is unforgettable. The market made me a part of itself, and I realized that there is place for

everybody here -for the hardworking vendors, for the individual and wholesale buyers, for the devotees of Siddhivinayak who stop here for their expensive garlands, for people who bring Ganesha or other idols home during festivals, and make floral decorations out of sheer enthusiasm and devotion, and the oddest of the lot - the camera totting, diary carrying girl who goes around sitting with the vendors, observing everything and listening to their stories.





