

Flower-sellers in Varanasi

DRS report

Guide

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Introduction



My DRS location was the spiritual capital of India, Varanasi, also known as Banaras or Kashi in Uttar Pradesh. Varanasi is a city on the banks of river Ganga. I did not decide before hand what my research would be but I chose to select my topic around the river.

I read about varanasi on internet and got an idea about the city. Also I read about the Ghats and the *artis* of varanasi. I decided to find my topic around the artis and river Ganga.

As I stepped into varanasi i could feel the the different lifestyle of people. I spent the whole day observing the ghats and Artis. And during the Arti at Dashashwamedh Ghat in evening I found many children selling flowers to all, foreigners Indians from different states. Those children spoke english and many other foreign languages. I was mesmerised by this. And this is hoe I found my topic for Design Research Seminar.

The Beginning

I spent whole day on ghats. I began in morning from Assi Ghat to Manikarna Ghat. I spent the whole day observing the river, people and what all happens on the banks of river. All the sadhus chilling, meditating, preaching. I saw many children playing cricket on the banks. Men and women selling eatables, lemon tea and ornaments and bracelets on the banks. Before arti begins on the most renowned ghat Dashashwamedh many flower sellers come and sells dronas which has flowers in it along with a diya. Most of the sellers of these drona are kids aged from 10 years to 15 years old.

All these speak hindi as primary language. But depending on the customers they can also talk in different languages. Observing them got me excited and found the DRS topic.

I observed them and tried talking to them. They come around 4:00 pm in evening. The kids usually come in groups of two to three. Boys and girls sell their flowers around a ghat. As crowd gathers for Arti, these kids double their efforts and go from person to person to sell their flowers. They talk to all foreigners and also cover group of tourists. they convince them to buy these flowers and *arpan* them in river ganga after arti.



Varanasi

Varanasi is a city on the banks of river Ganga in Uttar Pradesh state of North India. It is the spiritual capital of India. Varanasi is also known as Kashi or Banaras. It is considered as holiest of the seven sacred cities. Varanasi has been the centre of religious practices since ages. Many sadhus have been to Varanasi. Varanasi has been the centre of Hindu intellectuals and scholars. Varanasi is a major centre of pilgrimage. Varanasi is known for the ghats along the banks of river. Ghats are areas made out of stone in the form of stairs along the banks of river. Art is an integral part of lifestyle of people living in Varanasi. Main tourist attractions are the ghats and the art that takes place on ghats. Varanasi is also famous for its art like varanasi saree or ivory sculptures. The city speaks about its culture. The complete city gives a vibe of Hinduism and its close association with Ganga.



Ganga Arti



The most beautiful thing to watch in varansai is its Ganga arti at Dashashwamedh ghat. Preparation begins at 4 itself. A priest starts preparing diyas and spreading sheets on the place. People come early to find a good spot to view the arti. Fery people arrange their boats and allow viewers to watch ganga arti from front for some amount of money.

Ganga arti is done by many priests wearing a same dress. The Arti is done by many elements. Fire, Flowers, water are among them. After the arti is done. People put their basket of flowers into ganga and pray her. These basket contains merigold flowers along with diya of Ghee on the top.



Talking to kids

Talking to them initially was a difficult task. During Arti children would not talk and concentrate on selling flowers. They being children and having a basket with them they used to walk and run and jump to every visitor and sell them flowers. They used to climb boats and roam around ghat covering every area. Along with kids there were few women and men who had their stalls at one place and sell flowers along with other things like Arti materials or ganga jal.

Next day I went around 3:00 pm and waited for kids to come. Around 4:00 pm kids generally come with their baskets. That was the time I talked to them. Most of the kids were frank and gave honest answers. If someone on them speaks wrong other kids would correct him. Many of them became friends as they sell their flowers daily. Most of the kids have same story or same life style. Talking too them was very refreshing and got to know a different social structure of varanasi.



Research



I spent all my day on ghats talking to flower sellers. Arti at Assi Ghat in morning around 6:00 am is well known. So I visited it too. There I met a women, mother of two who came to sell flowers. I asked her about her schedule. And with no awkwardness she told me. She usually wakes up at 4:00 prepares the basket of flowers and Diyas. Prepares breakfast and have a cup of tea and goes to Assi ghat at 5:00 am. She sells the flowers till 7:00 am and after that she goes to her house and prepares food. After that the goes to school as she is a cook in school. In evening also she comes to sell flowers but not consistently. She has been selling flowers since her childhood.



Pragati a 10 year old girl was also selling flowers. Her innocence of selling flowers was irresistible and hence many people would buy from her. After she is done selling, she goes home eats and get dressed for school. She does not sell in evening as she has to help her mother in household chores.

Nitesh and Nikhil and brothers. I talked to them on ManMandir ghat besides Dashashwamedh ghat. Their parents prepare two baskets for them make diyas. Each basket has specific number of flower sets. And they charge each set of flowers ten rupees. Nitesh and Nikhil come from school and have food and come on Dashashwamedh ghat to sell flowers. They stay on ghat till 8:00 pm and after that they go home have dinner and complete their homework and sleep. Their father drives an Auto and mother makes tandoor. They have a good

income from father and mother. But kids work too just to get an extra penny.

Many men and women had fixed stalls to sell flowers. Out of them one was of a man named Pappu. His age was about 40 years old and even he was not sure of it. He said that he is selling flowers from 26 years. Along with flowers now he sells eatables and Ati materials. He has different types of baskets of flowers. Small for individuals and big for couples. He charges around two hundred rupees for big baskets. His approx earning is five hundred rupees per day. On asking the purpose of why do we arpan flowers to ganga he replied " As we arpan flowers to god, We arpan flowers to Ganga because Ganga is God."



Life of children





Every child I talked to has more or less the same story. Every child's parents are working and still these children are sent to work for an extra penny. A day's Average income in around two hundred to three hundred rupees.

Mother and father prepares these small basket in abundance in their houses. They have these baskets prepared for two to three days as flowers stay healthy till that time. their parents prepares diyas made out of ghee a day before selling and thus a batch is ready to sell. Their parents gives them these small basket(drone) in a specific number.

Children come in evening around 4:00 pm on ghats to sell these baskets. These kids come in groups of twos or threes. Most of them become friends with another sellers as they are selling from years.

They have alot of fun during their shift. They run from places to places. Jumps from one height to another. Crack jokes during their work. As evening approaches these kids get serious and start selling with more efforts as its the best time.

These kids have learnt few sentences in other languages like Japanese, English and many more. They learnt it from the tourist itself. All the children doesn't work under any large institution but they work as a helping hand for their parents.

Sundays are usually off and these kids play in their locality or on the ghats. They feel good about working because most of them do the same work.

Conclusion



When I saw them I felt bad about them. Though I was mesmerised by the energy of them and they all talking in english to sell their flowers some where I felt that its bad on their part that they have to work at such a small age. I was struck by an idea of child labour. But as I got a close look at them, I got to spend time with them I found out a different story.

These kids were not under any sort pressure. Also working conditions are not harmful instead they are good. All of them come at ghats. All of them are friends so they earn together and deal many things together. When I talked to them I could sense their unity and also care for one another. As soon I started talking to one others surrounded me. I could feel their care and community building around the act of selling flowers. I felt that selling flowers has become a part of their growing.

Most kids I talked to were very matured than normal kids I have dealt with. These kids would not ask their parents for costly gifts. Instead they would earn and save and then take some money from their parents to buy toys cloths etc. Hence they have a sense of attachment towards their toys and clothes. These kids also had a sense of responsibility for their family.

At end I am left with a question what can be the most suitable environment for kids. One where parents provide all the comfort and kids just play and study and they become so called intelligent in maths and geography Or kids who earn

and learn, who gets matured at very early stage, contribute to family's income, and learn the way of life more than their school subjects.



Thank You