



The Dadar-Matunga-Wadala-Sion scheme of 1899-1900 was the first planned suburban scheme in Mumbai. The City Improvement Trust formulated this plan to remove congestion in the centre of the town following the plague epidemics of the 1890s.

There's something about Dadar, finds Radhika Raj, as she catches up with a group of old residents whose book captures the rich heritage of the suburb

Long time ago, before Gokhale Road turned into a bustling junction known for its epic traffic jams, it used to be a sylvan hamlet complete with its own resident ghost. At least that is how Bhalchandra Kavli, 82, remembers Dadar — a wilderness dotted with a few red-roofed cottages, *methi* fields that stretched to the beach and a headless ghost who ventured out after dark. His terrified mother frantically dragged him home every evening. "After sunset the *maan-kapya* (headless neck hunter) was supposed to behead lone wanderers. The only police station in the vicinity was in Mahim, and the police, even then, were no use. That is how this place got its name — Shaitan Chowki," grins Kavli. Tucked away in the middle of Shaitan Chowki's busy lanes, is Kavli's home — the oldest cottage in Dadar dating back to the 1850s. "My great-grandfather built this house with sand and stone," he says. "There was no cement during those days." Stretching on a creaky wooden chair in his verandah, Kavli says that he knows more about Dadar than any other resident in Mumbai.

No wonder his house was one of the first stops made by Prakash Kamat when he started work on *Bahurangi Bahudhangi Dadar* (Multicoloured, Multifaceted Dadar). The book, which was released recently, documents the many moods of the suburb. "The Dadar Sarvajanik Vachanalaya (Dadar Public Library) turned 100 last year and the committee decided to mark the occasion with a book," explains Vivek Kulkarni, chairperson of the library. "One of the first things we did was to chalk out a list of the neighbourhood old timers and spent hours listening to their fascinating stories," adds Kamat, who has edited the volume.

For four months, Kamat and his team of ten reporters worked out of a tiny room in the library, subsisting on endless cups of tea and working through the night to document the interviews they collected. None of the team members are trained researchers, but they share a deep affection for their neighbourhood. "For days I just wandered aimlessly through the streets," laughs Vikas Patil, one of the reporters. Soon, however, he started unearthing some well-kept secrets. For instance, the fact that Dadar used to be full of lakes and ponds until the mills started coming up in the 1920s. The coke and carbon produced there was dumped into these lakes, which were turned into *maidans*.

For Patil, working on the book was also a journey of discovery about his surroundings. "I have lived around the Khanke buildings for years and I never knew that they had such a great history," he says. An old resident recounted the fascinating story to him. "Khanke was an ordinary *shimpi* (tailor) known for stitching school uniforms in the 1930s," says Patil. "One afternoon a British officer offered him a contract for stitching uniforms for British soldiers fighting in the Second World War." The war stretched on for years. When it finally ended, the corner tailor had made enough money to construct ten Khanke buildings.

According to *Bahurangi Bahudhangi Dadar*, much of what makes Mumbai special can be traced back to this locality, like the first Navratri utsav, the first rangoli competition and even the first coaching



Stairway to history: (L to R) Prakash Kamat, Vivek Kulkarni, and Vikas Patil on Tilak Bridge; (below) Kavli's 150-year-old home. Photos by Hashim Badani

Tigers, tailors and headless ghosts

The 150-year-old house owned by the Kavlis in Shaitan Chowki will soon be brought down by a builder. The owner is trying to work out a deal because he cannot maintain the crumbling structure.

—Vikas Patil



classes. "Pinge's classes, which are now so famous, started right here," says Ashok Jadhav, researcher. "He used to charge Rs5 per subject in those days." Jadhav has also researched the links between the Big Pat Maharashtrian wedding and Dadar. "Back in the 1900s people used to conduct marriages at the girl's home, but as the city started developing, people started looking for other options. Vanmali Hall in Dadar was the first such marriage hall in Mumbai," he says. With weddings came caterers, and that is why Dadar has Mumbai's oldest catering service too. "Maharashtrian couples came all the way from Vasai to get married here," says Jadhav. "That is why Dadar has everything you need for a wedding — right from saree shops to the *pandits* even today," he smiles.

The book also documents the rise of another made-in-Dadar icon — the Shiv Sena. Patil talks about the initial days of Balasaheb "Tiger" Thackeray's movement

for the Marathi *manos*. "Two theatres opened in the 1930s in Dadar — Kohinoor (now Fame Nakshatra) and Plaza," he recalls. "In 1960, Kohinoor screened *Songada*, starring Marathi film legend Dada Kondke." The movie played for a week to a lukewarm response until the theatre owner changed it for *Tere Mere Sapne*, starring Dev Anand. Patil remembers watching a charged young Balasaheb standing on a truck, asking people to protest against the owner's action. "The movie was changed the soon. *Songada* ran house-full for thirty-six weeks after that incident," he says.

Unfortunately, as the book's contributors point out, many of the things that gave Dadar its unique character are disappearing under the onslaught of the urban sprawl. "Dadar used to be known as a cultural hub of the city. Jhankar Orchestra, the first orchestra in Mumbai, was born right here and there were several theatres

and *natak* companies in the area that showcased Marathi theatre," says Patil. As a child, he remembers going to watch open-air plays in large *maidans* that have now been swallowed up by buildings. "Now, due to the rising prices Maharashtrais have moved out of this area and with them Dadar's rich culture has disappeared. Soon, it will become just another crowded suburb, like Andheri or Mulund, with no character of its own."

For Jadhav, the change is most evident in the way people in the locality relate to each other. "Dadar was all about tiny *wadis* and *chawls* where people used to live together and share their lives. The *wadis* are being replaced by building complexes and small theatres are turning into massive multiplexes. Dadar is 'developing'," he says, with a sense of resignation. "Though I want to hold on to the Dadar I grew up in, there is nothing I can do about it." Even Kavli's 150-year-old house, which represents the old grace of the neighbourhood, will soon be a thing of the past. "The owner is already working out a deal with a builder because he can't maintain it any more," says Patil. "Soon, it will also be torn down."

Despite the sense of loss, the group plans to work on the second edition, complete with old pictures. "Four months of research isn't enough" says Kamat. "We need to work more on a place with such a rich heritage. This book was just a trailer. Picture to *abhi baaki hai*."

r_radhika@dnaindia.net

URBAN WOLF

Lawrence of suburbia

After having spent all my life as a dyed-in-the-wool South Bombaywalla, the wife and I decided to re-locate from Colaba to Bandra recently.

Our south Mumbai friends were aghast! "YOU — of all people — are going to become a suburbanite. Chheee!?" As if living beyond Haji Ali automatically results in contracting some deadly social disease.

I tried to explain to our hopelessly out-of-sync-with-the-times friends that we were simply making a calculated, rational decision to improve the quality of our lives by cutting down on endless hours of commuting. Besides, Bandra is a vibrant locality to live in, still retains vestiges of its old charm and is now increasingly the address of choice of young, successful professionals.

"Better to change my profession than leave my beloved Breach Candy, dahling", sneered a forty-year-old fop who hasn't done a day's honest work in his life and still lives with his parents. "You do realise you are committing social suicide, don't you?" remarked a Cuffe Parade Diva, arching an eyebrow and warning of the social ostracism that would result in having now officially become a "burbie". "Do invite us to your house warming but give ample notice so we can obtain a visa to visit you," chortled a smug Malabar Hill fat cat, only half joking.

Now one could easily take umbrage at these remarks but then I am reminded of a time not so long ago, growing up, when we South Bombay types only ever went beyond Haji Ali Circle to reach the International Airport. The overpowering, pungent odour of Mahim creek became synonymous with the "stench of the suburbs".

I remember once taking detailed directions to the then newly-opened Goa Portuguese restaurant as a trip to Mahim was a dangerous and exciting culinary expedition for us Cathedral and Bombay International School boys and girls. Needless to say we still managed to get lost in the by lanes of Shivaji Park. One Altamount Road princess became completely hysterical in the car fearing we might be raped and killed by the natives if we stopped and asked someone for directions.

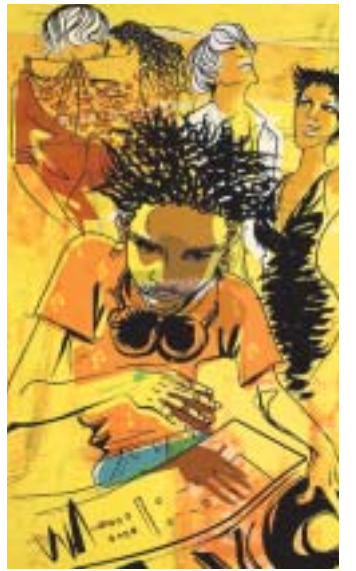
However, over the last ten years the demographics and geography of the city have changed radically and hitherto alien words like BKC, Lower Parel, Upper Worli, Malad and Mulund have entered our lexicon and our ambit.

I am staggered at how amazingly self-important South Bombay still purports to be. Are its denizens in utter denial that it has ceased to be the power centre it once was?

Think about it: The finest, most coveted schools are now all located in the BKC area. The offices of the biggest corporations have shifted northward from Nariman Point. Suburban 5-star hotels are more opulent, spacious and hip than their crumbling South Bombay counterparts. Bars and fine dining restaurants are now certainly as good as those found in Colaba. Suburban apartment complexes offer modern, state-of-the-art amenities that old money, old rent South Bombay secretly aspires to. Swanky malls and multiplexes have re-defined the suburban landscape leaving even the snootiest snob completely gob smacked. A changing urban landscape represents a dynamic, vibrant city and so rather than resist change we should embrace it. South Bombay was once a piece of real estate, now it's a state of mind. It's high time we changed our minds.



Fahad K Samaar



Bars and fine dining restaurants are now certainly as good as those found in Colaba

inbox@dnaindia.net

PAST PERFECT

The man who made up faces

Leela Chitnis and Shammi Kapoor could face the arc lights without a worry, thanks to his skills. Taran N Khan speaks to make-up maestro Ram Tipnis

One of the many things veteran make-up artist Ram Tipnis has learnt to be prepared for is villains with flame-coloured hair. "We were shooting in middle of the night in a remote location when the director called for a red wig for the villain. I had only black wigs," recalls Tipnis, 86. His assistant panicked, but Tipnis *dada*, as he is affectionately called, kept his characteristic cool. "I walked around and saw that some of the walls of the location were painted with red *choona*," he says. "I rubbed the black wig against it, fixed it with hair spray and handed it over to the director. My assistant came running, asking — *dada*, where did you get this? I gestured to him to shut up," he chuckles. "In this industry, you have to think on your feet."

This capacity for quick thinking and innovation helped Tipnis thrive for over 60 years in an industry notorious for its fickle trends and short memory. Over the span of his career, he fixed up three generations of stars with beards, tears and glamour and weathered the shift from the subtle shades of black and white to the robust pinkness of early colour film. He has also seen fundamental changes in the industry itself, as it moved from the pioneering adventure of the 1940s to the hierarchical, super-specialised process of today.

Ironically, Tipnis's entry into film production was prompted by a decline in his family's first passion — Marathi theatre. "My father was one of the best artistes of the Marathi stage," says Tipnis. But as the audience started moving to the cinema, hard times came upon the theatre and Tipnis was forced to look for an alternative livelihood. In 1941, he took up his first job on a film called *Municipality*, working as an actor but also doubling as production man and make-up assistant. "After that, I was working on *Kisi Se Na Kehna*, star-



(left to right): Tipnis with Shammi Kapoor on the sets of *Janwar*; receiving an award from Yash Chopra; K. Shankar (with hat), Shammi Kapoor and Tipnis (in white) while shooting *Rajkumar*



ring Leela Chitnis, when the main make-up man fell ill. I was asked if I could complete the picture and do the hero's makeup. I was only 21 then. I said yes!"

Tipnis credits a large part of his learning experience to his stint at Rajkamal Studio, helmed by the legendary V Shantaram. "Shantaram would do everything himself — from hammering in nails to spreading tar on the sets," he says. "The man knew every trick in the book."

For Tipnis, it was more challenging to work on black-and-white film. "It required real skill. Dark red would register as gray on film, so we

would use rouge to create tones on the actor's faces." With colour film came a different set of challenges. "The earlier stock used was Geva Colour, and it gave a yellow glow, so we had to use more pink in the make-up." Filming also required strong lights to be kept trained on the actors at close distances to avoid shadows on their faces. "We had to keep an icebox and chamois leather handy because their faces would burn," he says.

Tipnis's success as a technician was equaled by his knack of making friends wherever he went. "There was a great sense of camaraderie back then, with no sense of dis-

tance between the stars and the rest of the unit." Dilip Kumar, already a star, would travel by local train to Bandra. "Often, he would come and sit in the third class compartment with us because he would get bored by himself in the first class." Tipnis also recalls an incident from the filming of the Shammi Kapoor starrer, *Rajkumar*. "We were shooting a song, where one of the boats had to float into the shot," he says. "The director said '*chalo*', and everyone, including Shammi Kapoor, rolled up their sleeves and pulled at the boat. That's how simple it was."

Even today, says Tipnis, when he runs into his old colleagues, they meet him with affection. "We worked hard with no thought for money, unlike the new breed. If you give respect, you get respect in this line." But at least part of his popularity must be stemming from the fact that he is the keeper of powerful secrets, being one of the few men who know what the beautiful people really look like.

"They were all good-looking," he says tactfully, "but many had some problem that had to be hidden from the camera." For instance, one leading beauty had to undergo lengthy make-up sessions to disguise the fact that one side of her face was larger than the other. The only truly perfect face Tipnis recalls was Nutan's. "Her features were classically beautiful," he says simply. "She needed no help."

Tipnis *dada* retired from active make-up work in 2005, having accumulated a clutch of awards, most of which he gave away because "there was no place to put them." What he has held on to is his zest for his craft and his critical edge. "Today's makeup artists have many more resources open to them, but I don't see much evidence of skill. In our time, each heroine was known for her particular look. Now, I look at these new girls and I can't tell one apart from



There was a great sense of camaraderie back then. We were shooting a song, where one of the boats had to float into the shot. The director said *chalo*, and everyone, including Shammi Kapoor, rolled up their sleeves and pulled at the boat. That's how simple it was."

the other." He does admit, though, that some things about the industry haven't changed a bit, like its affinity for gossip and scandal. "In 1948, I was offered a cheque for Rs 25,000 to spill the beans about something that I saw," he recounts impressively. "I refused. These things shouldn't be brought out in the open." The sentiment does him justice. It seems only right that the veteran make-up man should move in, with his brushes and his magical skill, to cover up the unsightly spots on the otherwise bewitching, timeless face of Mumbai cinema.

k_taran@dnaindia.net