

Ethnography of Trust and History as Circulating Commodities in Chauta Bazaar, Surat.

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Abstract

Focused on an unorganised and unregulated market place called Chauta Bazaar of Surat (Gujarat, India), this paper looks at the question of trust and its social ramifications in a landscape of a non-metropolitan city. An ethnography of this market place reveals the manner in which history plays crucial role in the shaping the contours of trust between customers and the shopkeepers. The question of trust is further linked with issues like taste, intimacy and the politics of ethnicity and language. Following Clifford Geertz's study of the markets of Sefrou, this study argues that in Chauta, the narratives of trust are also transmitted through generations leading to an accumulation of social capital ('*saakh*'). Buying and selling in such a milieu often begins with an informal conversation but social interaction and friendship does not translate into bargaining or a discount in the prices. In the popular perception, this bazaar has a history of five centuries of continuous survival. In the last five-six decades, with the fast growth of the city, dynamics of this marketplace has also undergone significant changes. The influx of migrants (both from neighbouring areas of Gujarat as well as from other parts of the country) has helped in crystallizing perceptions of outsiders/others among shopkeepers and residents of this market place. The migrant traders' *otherness* is visible in subtle forms such as dichotomy between what is considered traditional and therefore trustworthy, and the modern emerging markets with 'imported' brands. This ethnography throws a number of issues pertaining to market places as socially embedded and culturally dynamic entities and role of history as a circulating commodity in the making of social capital in an age of shopping malls and globally circulating formats of buying and selling. At a wider level, this paper goes beyond the historical trajectories of this market place and looks at the narratives in which history is mobilised as legitimizing agency shaping social and economic dynamics of a market place.

Impressions

Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there men, and over and above them *space*;... To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations. And only because mortals pervade, persist through, spaces by their very nature are they able to go through spaces. But in going through spaces we do not give up our standing

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in them. Rather, we always go through spaces in such a way that we already experience them by staying constantly with near and remote locations and things... The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken. (Martin Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking*)²

Sitting on a pavement of grey octagonal bricks at Bhagal (Bhagol), seventy year old Navinbhai sells spices. After months of regular interaction, I ask him, “Do you ever feel that Chauta and Bhagal would completely vanish in the coming years because of the shopping malls and superstores? He smiles at me (his grey eyes hold the sharp twinkle) and says, “Chauta and Bhagal have a history of continuous existence. These markets have seen and ‘faced’ the Marathas, Khojas, Dutch, Memons, Britishers and people from so many countries. These markets have catered to all sorts in their own way. People have left, but the market is still thriving. And so it will be, forever.”³

Introduction

Stemming out of a possible difference between the markets and the market places, this study aims to look at an unorganised and unregulated market place called *Chauta Bazaar* of Surat (Gujarat, India). Thus, while we have a good number of studies on different dynamics of markets, forays into markets as spatially located and socially embedded entities have been sparse in India. Various reasons can be attributed behind this. In this discourse, markets appear solely as economic nodes, as trading dots on the map connecting hinterlands with the wider circuits of commerce and commodity flow. Along with such a historiography, different variants of markets such as *bazaars* in medieval period and *haats* in the colonial period are recognised as sites of alternative political authority embodying

² Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking”, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1971: 141-159 (here 154-55).

³ Field notes, Nishpriha Thakur, November 2013.

potential to challenge and resistance to the court or the colonial government respectively. The close linkages between economic and political roles of the markets and market forces (albeit in different manner and not necessarily as an alternative site of authority) have been studied by C.A. Bayly in his *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars* where he has contested the notion of eighteenth century in India as a dark age by arguing that “much of north India the ‘decentralisation’ of political power during the eighteenth century encouraged the further growth of a rooted service gentry and a homogeneous merchant class operating around small town centres”.⁴ Such a concern has been further linked with the social history of towns and merchant class, mercantile networks and trading institutions. At another level, markets have also been explored by locating them in the wider discourse on urban centres, their rise and decline across the historical periods in Indian history and beyond.

Thus, to claim that the markets have not been looked at as spatial and social entities must not mean that markets are devoid of their geographical contours, regional locations or the absence of a social history of merchant class. At another level, we have studies that treat an entire city as market, a point pertinent in the case of trading centres and port towns like Surat. Thus, historians like Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, who provides probably the most comprehensive account of the history of market in Surat. Yet, in his dense account we get Surat as a market and trading centre and almost an absolute silence on the market places of the city.⁵ In these writings, the location of market remained merely geographical one and devoid of the social-cultural moorings, everyday ness and other such particularities whose

⁴ C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992:8.

⁵ Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, *Surat in the Seventeenth Century: A Study in Urban History of Pre-Modern India*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1979:93-115.

absence from modern knowledge system and social theory has been pointed by scholars like Michel Foucault and later by Edward Soja.⁶

Anthropological writings (though small in Indian context) have been helpful in addressing some of these concerns. Denis Vidal's study of market economy in the grain market (*Naya Bazaar*) of Delhi and Gerrett Menning's work on the question of trust in the textile market and production in Surat are worth mentioning.⁷ In both these studies, anthropological tools and questions are deployed to eventually understand the economics of the markets. In recent years, scholars have moved beyond economics of the market and have brought a wide range of thematic and perspectives in looking at market places in India.⁸

In many ways, such a move to transgress the strict boundary of economics and locate markets and market places in the everyday social has also a precedent in South Asian milieu when we have several wonderful illustration of market places coming from non-academic prose forms. "The Splendours of Hira Mundi or Tibbi" by Pran Nevile is one such example.⁹ In the field of literature, many such examples can be sited as the language and bazaar has always closely interacted with each other. At times, the two have been synonymous for each other as we see in the case of Urdu that was once upon a time

⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*; Edward Soja, *Post Modern Geography*

⁷ Denis Vidal, "Markets and Intermediaries: An Enquiry about the Principles of Market Economy in the Grain Market of Delhi", in Vernique Dupont, Emma Tarlo and Denis Vidal eds., *Delhi: Urban Spaces and Human Destinies*, Delhi: Manohar and Centre De Sciences Humaines, 2000:125-139; Gerrett John Menning, *City of Silk: Ethnicity and Business Trust in Surat City*, Ph.D dissertation in Anthropology, Santa Barbara: University of California, 1996.

⁸ See Paolo Favero, "Phantasms in a 'Starry' Place: Space and Identification in a Central New Delhi Market", *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.18(4), Nov 2003: 551-584; Sanjay Srivastava, "Shop Talk: Shopping Malls and Their Publics", in Nita Mathur ed., ; M. Voyce, Shopping Malls in India: New 'Social Dividing' Practices", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.42(22), 2007:2055-2062; N. Mathur, "Shopping Malls, Credit Cards and Global Brands: Consumer Culture and Lifestyle of India's new Middle Class", *South Asia Research*, vol.30(3):211-231.

⁹ Pran Nevile, "The Splandours of Hira Mundi or Tibbi", in Bapsi Sidhwa ed., *City of Sin and Splandour: Writings on Lahore*, Delhi: Penguin, 2005:74-80.

interchangeably used for ‘market place of the city’ (*urdū –e mua‘lla*).¹⁰ Building upon this corpus of academic and non academic writings, we focus on one particular market place called *Chauta bazaar* of Surat.

Location

Chauta bazaar is located in the centre of what is know often referred to as ‘old city’ of Surat. It is an area on the right hand side beneath the main road that connects *Chowk* (location of the dilapidated fort) with the railway station. The patch identified as *Chauta* is constituted of a number of bylanes forming an artery like structure, a crowded open air market and shops alongside the not so wide road and narrow by lanes. At times, these by lanes merge with the main street (*chaowk*-railway station) and at times seamlessly disappears into residential neighbourhoods (one area sides with the bridge of *Bhagal*, another with the *Golwad*, and another conjoins with *Gopipura*). The area on the main street is called *Bhagal* or *Bhagol* and due to this confluence of shops of arteries and by lanes with those located on the main street we often hear *Chauta Bhagol* not as two separate bazaars but as one unit. The conflation has spilled knowingly unknowingly over this study too.

Some say that this is the place where people from Burhanpur used to come and sell their products. So originally, it is *Burhanpuri Bhagal*. Mugatlal Bawisi, in his *Surat ni Itihaasdhara* says that Bhagal was close to the central region of the city and it is called Burhanpuri because that road led to Burhanpur.¹¹ *Bhagol* in Gujarati means outskirts and that might refer to the space that was in the outskirts of the fort area in Chowk. There is a

¹⁰ Shamsur Rehman Faruqi, “ A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture” in Sheldon Pollock ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004: 805-863 (here pp:811-812).

¹¹ Mugatlal Bawisi, *Surat ni Itihaasdhara*,

very old market for vegetables in Bhagal, which is called *Bhajiwali Pol*.¹² The vendors buy fresh vegetables in wholesale price from the main vegetable market in Sardar Bazaar, close to the Surat Station and reach Bhagal at around five in the morning every day. The faith in the authenticity and in bringing good stuffs is renewed through narratives that have passed from generations and the fact that still this place has maintained its quality and standards.

Bhagal refers to the market that starts on the Rajmarg. Rajmarg was the main road connecting the Surat Station and the fort. The walled city had many *Darwaza* or gates so the areas are named after the gates, though the walls do not exist now. The first gate (from Surat Station to the fort near Hop bridge) on that route is Delhi Gate, probably that route was the way to Delhi. There are small shops on the main road and they continue till Lal-gate (Lal means red and the gate was probably painted red) which is the end of Rajmarg. The outer area of the fort, close to Rajmarg was called *Bhagol* and later it came to be known as *Bhagol*.¹³

Chauta bazaar is splendid. It glitters not only with the glitters of jewelry, utensils, clothes, but also glitters of shopping spree in the eyes of women. Every street looks complete in its own, small vendors displaying all sort of things, whereas shops displaying cosmetics, toiletries and apparels, and there is always a sugarcane juice center at the end of every street.

Young boys carrying display of kerchiefs, socks, *bindis*, knives, hair clips etc could be seen in the market, looked more like a *Mobile market*. Mr Kapadia said that it is because of these vendors that the shops have not been able to pull up a good profit. Most of the people compromise on quality and buy stuffs that are cheaper. Every shop had two to three vendors that were sitting on the corners; they had to leave the space for the customers to

¹² *Bhaji* means vegetables

¹³ *Bhagol* means Outskirts in Gujarati

enter the shop, that's all. The feminine whiff of air passes when you see those eager eyes and the bargaining voices. Women elbow each other and move further on the streets, some peep in by raising themselves on toes, others mutter into their companion's ears and plot strategies to get things at a cheaper rate in the shops.

There are all kinds of shops, including the variety of ways they can display their works. The shops are very well renovated as well as there are shops which still have the reminiscences of the floods of 2006, well maintained shops, shops with mannequins, shops with display on plastic strings. They had plastic covers stretching so that the vendors on the streets could get a cover from the rains. If you take the street that started from *Gopipura* and move straight in the line, you'll see display of apparels and cosmetics, and after the crossroad, if you keep moving in the same direction; you'll come across the fragrance of many spices and pickles. Of course, this is not as grand as the *Khari Baoli* of Delhi, but this is somewhat closer to that when it comes to the popularity part. Many *Kathiavadi* women come here to buy grocery items, spices, dresses and laces. A small shop at the end of the same street sells imported fruits like strawberries, lychees, avocados. The fruits are seasonal and are sold in neatly covered packets.

If we take a U-turn and come back at the crossroads, take a right turn and move on the street, then we'll come across various shops that sell imitation jewelry, especially diamond studded scarf pins. The customers for these scarf pins are the Muslim women that reside closer to the *Chauta bazaar* area, like *Salabatpura*, *Jhanpa bazaar*, *chowk bazaar* etc. The shops know what to cater to whom. They have *Mangalsutras* at one end for the *Hindu* women as well. As we move forward, we see small restaurants, eateries, juice centers that have been there since a long time. Here, people fill in so as to gain energy for the shopping. Usually, people come from far off places and so they come with a huge list to buy. I heard that there are people from all over Gujarat that come to shop here. Women from nearby towns and villages like Kim, Kosamba, Bharuch, Mandvi etc come here during the time of

festivals and weddings to shop in bulk. The trend has changed in the dressing styles these days and women prefer Salwar suits and western clothes over Sarees. Mr. Kapadia sees this as a matter of concern because if the market is dull for sarees, then there's loss on lots of fronts. With sarees, one has to buy safety pins, matching blouse pieces, matching petticoat, bangles, broach, clutch etc and so the business of all these things is affected because of the recent trends. He had two shops but he closed one of them because the business was not going well. He has a name in the market so he sells wholesale as well as retail blouse pieces, but he mentioned that there have been many shops that have closed because of recession in the textile industry. His family has been in this business since past sixty years. He gets the material from various places like Balotra, Pali (Rajasthan), Echil, Karanji, Bhiwandi and other salesmen from Bangalore, Kolkata come here to sell their products on a wholesale basis.

Surat

Widely known for diamond polishing and synthetic textiles, Surat is one among the most prominent and rapidly growing cities of India. According to the provisional population table of the Census of India 2011, Surat urban agglomeration has a total population of 4,585,367 persons.¹⁴ Standing at the ninth position in the country in

¹⁴ “Provisional Population Totals, Urban Agglomerations/Cities having population 1 million and above”, *Census of India 2011*, http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/india2/Million Plus UAs Cities 2011.pdf (accessed on 17/03/2013).

The Census of India deploys four primary categories to distinguish nuances in non-agricultural settlements that are often commonsensical clubbed as urban units. These are Statutory towns, Census towns, Urban Agglomeration and Out Growths. An urban agglomeration is defined as “a continuous urban spread constituting a town and its adjoining outgrowths (OGs), or two or more physically contiguous towns together with or without outgrowths of such towns. An Urban Agglomeration must consist of at least a statutory town and its total population (i.e. all the constituents put together) should not be less than 20,000 as per the 2001 Census. In varying local conditions, there were similar other combinations which have been treated as urban agglomerations satisfying the basic condition of contiguity”. See “Provisional Population Totals: Urban agglomerations and Cities”, *Census of India 2011*,

terms of population size, Surat is only second to Ahmedabad (6,352,254) in her home state.¹⁵

Year	Population	Growth rate
1901	129500	
1911	125220	-3.31
1921	127356	1.71
1931	110739	-13.05
1941	185955	67.92
1951	237394	27.66
1961	317519	33.75
1971	493001	55.27
1981	930246	88.69
1991	1527623	64.22
2001	2811614	84.05

Table 1: Status and Growth History of Surat. *District Census handbook Surat*, 2001, pp: 560-1.

Surat city, a major stakeholder of this urban agglomeration was carved out from earlier Chorasi taluka. This new Surat city taluka includes complete area of Surat Municipal Corporation, 31 villages and part of the area of Mangrol (city) and Dindoli (part).¹⁶

As the table suggests, 1941 Census witnessed 67.92% growth. This was exceptional and it is possible that such a growth might be a result of under represented figures of 1931 when a good number of people refused to participate in Census operation as part of their civil disobedience with the British government. It may be relevant to note here that though Surat was always classified under the Class I cities in Gujarat since

http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/India2/1.%20Data%20Highlight.pdf (accessed on 17/03/2013). Surat agglomeration consists of Surat Municipal Corporation, Bhatia(OG),Bhatpor(OG),Kavas(OG),Talangpor(OG),Pali(OG), Ichchapor(Census Town), Sachin(CT), Sachin (Industrial Notified Area or INA),Hazira(INA), Magdalla(INA),Lima(CT), Kanakpor-Kansad(Municipality) and Pardi-Kande(CT).

¹⁵ Eight cities ahead of Surat are Pune, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi and Greater Mumbai. http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/india2/Million Plus UAs Cities 2011.pdf (accessed on 17/03/2013)

¹⁶ This change took place vide Government notification GM-97-117-M-PFR-2697-2590-L, 15 October 1997. District Census Handbook, Part XII-A&B Surat, Census of India 2001, Director of Census Operations, Ahmadabad.

1901, it slipped in the category of Class II cities in the period of 1931-41.¹⁷ This may be a reason for a dip in the rate in 1951 Census data. However, since 1951, we get a steady increase and from 1971 this is consistently above 50 per cent reaching to even 84 and 88 percent in 2001 and 1981 respectively. This consistent rise in number can be partly explained through inclusion of new areas with city limits and modification in definitions and scope of categories (i.e. coming up of a category of Surat Urban Agglomeration). The area of Surat city expanded from 3.19 sq. mile to 8.84 sq miles) during 1961-71. In this period areas like, Toonki, Umerwada, Anjana, Athwa, Kathorda, Majura, Umra, Navagam and Kathargam were included within city limits of Surat.¹⁸ With the expansion of city limits and inclusion of new areas, this period also witnessed massive influx of people from outside. According to a survey conducted in October-November, 1973, covering 1964 families from different blocks, selected through random samples from different wards of this decade old corporation (in 1964 Surat municipality became a corporation), almost every other family came from outside and 16 per cent of the total families came to Surat city only in the last eight years.¹⁹ This report further claims that one third of emigrant families came from different states of India, but mainly from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. 25 per cent of emigrant families were from the same Surat district. Such heterogeneity gave this city ‘a cosmopolitan character’.²⁰

Located on the west coast of India and surrounded by the fertile land of south Gujarat region, Surat boasts an illustrious history. Surat was already a growing and prosperous city before the Mughals and the rise of Surat goes back to 1530s and owes a lot to the decline of a neighboring city of Rander. Sanjay Subrahmanyam claims, “The Mughals may have contributed to its efflorescence after the 1570s, by linking Surat directly to the rich hinterland of the Gangetic *doab*, but there is a sense in which they seized hold of a port that was already in a formidable position in relation to its

¹⁷ R.K.Trivedi, *District Census Handbook, Gujarat: Surat District, Census 1961*, Government Printing and Stationary, Ahmedabad, 1964, p.15. For a larger trajectory of urban growth in Surat see chapter II (“Urban Growth in Surat—A Retrospect”) in Biswaroop Das, *Socio-Economic Study of Slums in Surat City*, Centre for Social Studies, Surat, 1994, pp:9-29.

¹⁸ I.P.Desai, *Glimpses of Surat*, p.33.

¹⁹ Ghanshyam Shah, *Urban Tension: A Case Study of Surat*, (year of publication not mentioned) Centre for Social Studies, Surat, pp: 12-13.

²⁰ Ghanshyam Shah, *Urban Tension: A Case Study of Surat*, p.14.

rivals.”²¹ The city was a hub of a number of important trade routes (roads and coastal waterways) connecting inner manufacturing centres within Gujarat (i.e. Bharuch, Cambay, Ahmedabad) as well as other areas of the country (Bengal to Malabar and Sind to north Indian plains). The overseas routes were spread in the Indian Ocean (to Persian Gulf and the Red Sea), eastern Africa and Southeast Asia, China and Japan. This vast trade facilitated the stay of people and groups from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (like traders from Armenia, Arabia, France, Netherlands, England, Turkey to name a few).

The city is popularly believed to be founded by Malik Gopi or Gopinath, a brahmin trader-administrator in the early decades of sixteenth century. Early Portuguese writers like Duarte Barbosa mention the port of Surat but in this period it was clearly overshadowed by its twin, Rander located on the other bank of the river Tapi. Rander was also known by its community of Navayat Muslims or Malik Momins who were Shi’as and traced the origin of their group to a bunch of the Abbasid Khaliphas living at Kufa around A.D. 750. These were famous in the western Indian Ocean as pilots and navigators. Now a part of Surat, Rander was at the distance of two miles from the old city of Surat and had its own administrative officials governing it. It was described as a pleasant and wealthy place for the Moorish inhabitants who used to trade in their own ships with Malacca , Benguala, Tenasserim, Pegu, Martaban and Sumatra in spices, drugs, musk, benzoin, porcelain and many other wares. In 1529-30 Portuguese under Antonio da Silverira burnt Rander along with Surat and destroyed 20 ships and many smaller vessels in the port. In this phase, Rander witnessed its decline and was reduced as a storage and weighing place for goods en route from Ahmedabad to Surat. The decline of Rander paved the way for the rise of Surat and by 1540 it emerged as a major centre of trans shipment and a staging point between Sumatra attracting merchants from both Southeast and West Asia.

The Ottoman officer Khwaja Safar-us-Salmani who came to the city in 1920s played a vital role in building Surat as an alternate to two other dominant ports of west coast-Diu (by now in Portuguese hands), and to Cambay. He started the fortification of

²¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “A Note in the Rise of Surat in the First Half of Sixteenth Century”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 43, no. 1. 2000, p.28.

Surat from about 1539 to safeguard his independent politico-mercantile ambitions. Surat was however, under the rule of the Sultan of Gujarat, Mahmud Shah (1537-54) but his role in the growth of the city is not clear. In the early years of Mahmud Shah's reign Surat continued to grow and resist Portuguese domination. Even after Khwaja Safar-us-Salamani and the port, and fortress, passed after 1546 to his successors who were known by their title of Khudawand Khan Rumi, and then in the late 1550s was seized by Chengiz Khan (son of the notable 'Imad-ul-mulk Aslan al-Turki), after killing the second Khudawand Khan. In turn, after Chengiz Khan's own violent death in 1567, the fortress was taken over by the Timurid Mirzas (the Central Asian cousins of the Mughal dynasty, who played a destabilizing role in the politics of the period), before being besieged and captured eventually by the Mughal king Akbar, as part of his Gujarat campaign in 1573. The Mughals contributed to Surat's prosperity by linking it directly to the rich hinterland of the Gangetic doab.

Surat during the Mughal period turned into the emporium of India, exporting cloth and gold. Its major industries were textile and shipbuilding. The city was famous for *kinkhab* cloth. The weaving of coarse saris, silk cloth, *kinkhab* dupattas was a major traditional occupation in the city. In 1795 there were 15,777 looms, one third of them operated by Muslims and the rest by Khatri and Kanbis (now known as *Patidars*). The river Tapi which meanders round the city and connects the city with the sea (at a distance of 15 kilo meters) was described as gliding by the town in swift tides and at spring tides bearing ships of 100 ton burden up to the surat walls. Large ships and boats were also built here and in 1650 extensive repairs to English ship Falcon (500 tons) were carried out. The ship building yard at Surat was maintained till 1785 when it was transferred to Bombay. Surat's prosperity grew manifold under the Mughals throughout seventeenth century. It was also an important pilgrimage centre for Indian muslims as the port of embarkation for the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). For this reason, Surat was also known as "Babul Macca," Gateway to Mecca. The city had various *caravansarais* (inns) as well as mosques to cater to both the trading communities as well as pilgrims. These *sarais* (inns) were used by merchants from Persia, Arminia, Turkey and Central Asia. A British traveler Ovington has mentioned a large hospital for animals and birds in Surat. The City was surrounded by beautiful gardens. In its hay days the city has been compared with Venice and Tyre by

medieval travelers. Peter Mundy writes that Surat had ‘some reasonably long straight streets’ but we also find that in 1691 outbreak of an epidemic carried away 200,000 people in 18 days. It is very probable that sanitary condition in Surat deteriorated in 1660s and later because of over crowding. We also find the description of city in this declining phase as filthy and ugly with mean hamlets and tottering mansions.

For almost one hundred and fifty years, Surat was truly a multi-cultural and cosmopolitan city. The first Europeans to confront Surat were Portuguese. After Vasco Da Gama’s historic voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to Calicut in 1498 the Portuguese with their naval might rapidly occupied strategic locations in the Indian ocean area. By 1559 they entrenched themselves in Daman, a coastal settlement located south of Surat in route to Mumbai. They started controlling the oceanic empire in the Indian Ocean sweeping off the Arabs from the Arabian sea lanes and imposing their own passport system (*cartez*) on Indian shippers for safe conduct on the high seas. The advent of Dutch and English however spelt the end of the Portuguese century in Asia. The English captain Thomas Best inflicted on their armada a sanguinary defeat off Surat in 1612 and in 1640 Dutch had wrested Malacca from them. English had a continuous station in Surat since 1612 and probably from 1618 the English chief at Surat was called as the President of the Factory. Dutch came to Surat in 1602 the year that saw the foundation of the United Dutch East India Company. By 1615 Dutch had a regular establishment in Surat. Peter Van den Broecke was the founder of the Dutch trade in Surat. French were the last among European traders and they also remained in Surat for a brief period. French factory was established in Surat in 167 though French ships had sailed in the Asian areas before their establishment of Surat Factory and French Capuchin missionaries were active in Surat much before the arrival of French merchants.

The continued presence and extensive operations of the European traders was a fact of extraordinary significance in the commercial and urban history of Surat. The English, Dutch and the French lived and worked alongside each other competing for buying Indian goods and selling European and Asian merchandise more or less on a footing of equality of opportunities. They drew into their network a large class of brokers who depended on the European traders for their wealth. Leading merchants such as Virji Vora and Haji Muhammad Zaid became their influential commercial contacts and

brokers. Such conditions in a city of size like that of Surat did not exist in any other Indian city except perhaps Ahmedabad and Agra but the nature and volume of trade in the last two cities were both qualitatively and quantitatively different. Neither of these two cities saw the rise of a large and wealthy commercial class which was dependent to such an extent on foreign trade. Despite pluralism, the city was bound together by strong economic ties and had developed both the appearance and spirit of a thriving metropolis whose ties stretched far beyond its immediate surroundings to towns and cities hundreds of miles away.

However, even during its days of prosperity, the city faced a number of calamities among which scarcity and famine of 1631-32 was the most devastating. The English, Dutch, Mughal and Gujarati accounts are filled with grim and heart rending descriptions of it. We also have accounts of disturbances created by Mughal princes in 1623, 1626 and 1656. Similarly, there have been accounts of the conflicts among the European traders and the Mughal Government engulfing the entire city within its fold. However, the most serious among such threats came from Marathas when Maratha leader Shivaji (1627-1680) attacked Surat in 1664 plundered the city and collected around two and half million of rupees, gold, silver, rubies, pearls, diamonds and emeralds from the homes of Virji Vohra, Haji Zahid Beg, Haji Kasim and other rich merchants. Five or six days attack could have been about eight million rupees. He again attacked and plundered the city in 1670.

By the second quarter of the first half of the eighteenth century Surat began declining with the downward trend of the share of Indian merchants in Asian overseas trade in the eighteenth century and with the emergence of English as the sole power in Indian Ocean trade. This also coincided on the one hand with the declining authority of the Mughal empire after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and on the other hand the concentration of activities shifted to Bombay which was suitable to British. By 1750 even the cycle of Surat's decline came to its completion and for the next two centuries the city remained nothing but a husk of its own past, reduced to the status of a *mofussil* town.

The genesis of the contemporary Surat however, goes back to the decade of 1960s and in the coming decades the city witnessed a phenomenal growth of textile (artificial

silk) and diamond polishing industries. In the early 1980s, the prolonged textile strike in Bombay led by Datta Samant provided further impetus to the power-loom industry in Surat. As production of textile cloth declined in Bombay, entrepreneurs began to invest in power-looms in Surat which had no labour problem. Some families which were traditionally engaged in weaving have played a pivotal role in the growth of power-looms in the city. These were mainly socially belonging to upper and middle castes of *Khatri*, *Kanbi* and *Vania*. Over the years, in addition to power-looms these families diversified into processing art-silk fabrics, filament sizing, twisting and texturing, textile machinery manufacturing and wrap knitting. Apart from *Khatri*s and *Kanbi*s who constitute the largest social group in power-loom sector *Vania*s (both *Jains* and *Hindus*) and *Patidars* also have major shares. Other groups with considerable share in power-looms are that of *memans* and *Khojas* among muslims. By an estimate these two own around 12 to 15 percent of power-looms. Over the years, migrants from Punjab and Rajasthan who worked initially as traders and commission agents in the 1960s have also started investing their capitals generated through usury and commodity exchange in looms and other processes of cloth making. With the growth of power-looms the processing industry also developed.

The growth of the city since 1960s also attracted a good number of social groups from outside as migrants into the city. However, in very many ways the historically dominant vaisya baniya tradition has continued and has defined public spaces, everyday life and economic fabric of the city in a number of ways.²² There is a street named after Atmaram Bhukhanwala (the famous money lender) in the *Chauta Bazaar*. He was the first one to start the *Hundi* system and it was a local belief that if a person presented a bill of exchange written by him to a tree, even the tree would give money.²³

People have recounted that ships would be unloaded close to the castle and seell/purchase goods and that is how part of the Rajmarg in vicinity of the castle was also a port market. Today, most of the shops on the Rajmarg cater to the male

²² On the heterogeneity inherent within a blanket category of *bania* see Makrand Mehta, "Some Aspects of Surat as a Trading Centre in the 17th Century", in *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Historical Perspective*, Delhi: Academic Foundation, 1991:33-55. Also see Gokhale, op.sit., pp:117-136.

²³ See Gujaratmitra, 150th Anniversary Edition, 2013.

consumers showcasing bags, stationeries, coats, pants, shirts etc. The jewellery shops that are on the Rajmarg side were originally in the Nanavat area of Surat, considered as one of the richest localities along with Sahpore. Even these shops have their *saakh* in the minds of *Suratis* and that is why their shift in terms of space to the rajmarg did not affect the flow of customers. Coming back to the idea of *Saakh* or *Abru* two names feature in most of the responses: Atmaram Bhukhanwala and Norra Dosa(*Dosa* means an old man in Gujarati). The inherited businesses by the lineage of Atmaram Bhukhanwala could run without expertise because of the *Saakh* and importance Atmaram's name had. Some of his grand sons opened a petrol pump which ran smoothly because of his name. Noora Doas was a muslim and he had a huge mansion in *Kot Vistaar* (Haripura) and he had multiple businesses. Even his name was so important that people would buy gold from him without any doubt. The myth that circulates is: "even if you send a five year old with money to buy gold from Noora Dosa's shop, you can be rest assured that the child will come back with more than what it should be".

In the eyes of customers, *Chauta Bazaar* has been very trust worthy since 'history' and that has added to the space. Not only have the space and people accumulated social capital, but the history of the *Bazaar* has also possibly accumulated social capital. Many respondents related the working of *Chauta Bazaar* with the religious importance it has gained. *Chauta Bazaar* has approximately fifteen old temples in what is know identified as market place as well as in its vicinity. The purity or the '*pavitrataa*'(the word used by most of the respondents) that it has gained since ages because of the temples helps in the smooth functioning of the *Bazaar*.²⁴ The area

²⁴ A religious booklet "*Surne Shirdi* ([in all probability, this is half title of the book as the complete title is missing from the torn out binding of the booklet], written by Shantilal Z. Rana, Published by Mahendra Kumar Nathu Bhai Katargaamwaalaa, Dholikui, Varachha raod, Surat, 1970) writes " on one side there exists Parsi's Saiyyadpura like a pure Rajput lady (*Chokkhii Chaarani*) and on the other side exists Oswaal's Gopipura glistening like silver. In the ever crowded market of *Chauta*, Vaishnav's *Haveli* is located in its most valued corner (*chede* lit. corner is deployed here more in terms of the corner of a cloth piece or *pallu*). The moment it strikes five, devotees run to the temple chanting Jaishrikrishna Jaishrikrishna for the *darshan* of the deity. On the other side of this market, there lies *Sarvapati Balaji maharaj* temple and did you see the *Shakti* cult's temple? that is considered to be second most important pilgrimage centre in Gujarat...Amidst all these gods, there is *Vitthalnathji*'s temple, *Ranchhodji*'s temple, *Ramchandra Bhagwaan's Ram* temple, *Bhir Bhanjan Mahadev*, *Bhagwaan Dutt Prabhu*, *Satyanarayan's* temple, *Mahakali*,

that comes across as *Chauta bazaar* was a residential area twenty five years back, inhabited by *Vaishnav vaniyas* and they sold these houses to the businessmen and the market extended. *Mota Mandir* was the temple where all the *Vaishnavs* of the city met and did prayers and henceforth it was the shopping hub around. Since 1990's, the residential areas have been sold off/given on rent and slowly all the nearby streets changed to a market. Now if someone wants to go the Chauta Bazaar and takes an Auto-rickshaw, the auto-rickshaw will not drop him near the Mota Mandir but he will drop him to other street that has come to be known as Chauta now. Very few people know that the original market was the Mota Mandir market.²⁵ A shopkeeper tells me that the reason number of people who come to the Mota Mandir has decreased because the temple opens at a specific time, just for fifteen minutes. People who come from far off areas sometimes miss that time and are not able to visit the temple. This rigidity has caused a lot of people not come to this market.

“I seek directions for the *Mota mandir* and take my way to go there. It is on the left side of the crossroad. After reaching the crossroads, I move around hundred meters and see a wooden signboard on the wall of a shop in the left corner. The wood must have been painted blue but now it depicts a discolored hue, the arrow and the name are painted in white, in Gujarati. In that shop, sits a middle aged man, who is weaving a string of pearls on a bangle. I thought that he makes jewelry, but then he tells me that he gets imitation jewelry from Kolkata. It would be very expensive to go all the way to Kolkata to buy jewelry and sell it here so I asked him how he affords it and he told me that he doesn't go there, but the salesmen from Kolkata come here and sell them in wholesale. When asked if the local people in Gujarat can make these, he replied that they can but the finishing won't be as good as the ones from Kolkata. This reminds me of the remarks by people in the *Textile Market*, that sarees from Kolkata have better finishing than the ones from Surat. It seems that the finishing and the polishing works are usually carried out in Kolkata and that product is in demand in Surat. He sits with the pearls and bargains with a lady who asks him to do it for two hundred and fifty rupees. He tells her that this is his hard work and he has to charge for that and closes the deal at three hundred rupees. This street has only one shop that has imitation jewelry, all the other shops have silver idols of *Krishna* and various accessories that adorn *Krishna*, like small attractive flutes, earrings, necklaces, *Paghdis*, small clothes for the idols, swings and all such things. This street looks the shopping place for *Krishna*; especially for people who are *Vaishnavites*. The reason this street is full of

MahaLakshmi, *MahaSaraswati* and *BhadraKali*'s temples! In fact, even *Jhatpatiya Hanumaan*'s temple is also there.

The whole locality (*Chauta*) is the nose of the city considered as the hub of *Vaishnavas* and *Jains*. The moment people heard of *Saibaba* (having a muslim name) they shrugged in despise. Even in this locality land for the saibab's temple was arranged. Ibid., p.174 (translated by authors).

²⁵ There are around fifteen temples in this vicinity, the oldest ones are the Balaji temple (17th Century) and the Mota Mandir (16th Century).

these shops is that this street takes us to the *Mota Mandir*, lord *Krishna's* temple. The names of the shops are also the different names of *Krishna*, like *Govardhan*, *Murari*, *Krishna*, *Kanhaiya* etc. Mostly, there are elderly people on the street, their ages ranging from sixty to eighty. They have come to visit the temple in the evening. I also got to know that the *Vaishnav* crowd of Surat doesn't prefer coming to the *Mota Mandir* because of the timings. The temple opens for a very short while (around ten to fifteen minutes) in the evening at six thirty. A lot of *Vaishnavs* shifted to various areas in Surat and sometimes they got late while coming to the temple and by that time, the temple was closed. As this used to happen frequently, they stopped coming. Whereas the elderly people couldn't stop coming and they visited the temple regularly despite of these issues.

I take a visit to the temple but I am very early to get a *Darshan* of the lord. It opens at around six-thirty whereas I reached at five-thirty. I could enter the temple and I see elderly women sitting and chatting amongst themselves. There are one or two kids as well. The temple is at the ground floor of a wooden building. The building looks very old, with faded shades of yellow, orange and blue. I am told that this temple is around five hundred years old and has been the same since then. Everyone asks me if I want to take the blessings of the *Guruji*.

I agree, knowing nothing about the place. They take me to the first floor of the same building. There is a man sitting on a swing and talking on phone. He's wearing a white *Dhoti* and a *Kurta* and has a "U" symbol made on this forehead by sandalwood. His face looks bright and he's busy conversing on a smartphone. I touch his feet and he blesses me. I go back downstairs and get to know that this is a lineage that has been going on since past five hundred years.

I travel all these years on a small staircase and come back to the past twenty five years that have been repeated in the *Chauta bazaar*.

The departing note gives me a flavor of the trade that happens here. The core element is *Metaphor/Simile*. Direct and indirect comparison between various commodities can be seen when you the sellers converse with the buyers.

"Is this plastic bottle durable?"

"Of course it is. It is of imported material." (God knows what imported material means)

"But what if it breaks?"

"Well, anything will break in due course of time. The saree that you are wearing will tear in a couple of years. Haven't you bought that?"

One can see that to make the customer believe that he is investing in the right product, there are comparisons made throughout the transactions.

"Why does this taste so bitter?"

"It will taste a little bitter, it has fenugreek seeds."

"But it cannot be this bitter."

"If you eat the Salampak, won't it taste spicy? It has various spices. So will this as this has fenugreek seeds. You have to get used to the taste and it is very healthy too."

Taste is compared too!

"What if these diamonds come out of this hair pin?"

"If you want them to, they will. If you try to tear the straps of your sandals deliberately, they'll come out. It all depends on how you handle."

There are on the spot comparisons with the things that you've already bought or the ones you are wearing.

Another interesting point was that if the sellers don't want to reduce the price or bargain, they'll straight away use the term "*Imported*" for the product saying that the material used is *Imported*. It is to be taken for granted that anything that is *Imported* is of the best quality, is very durable and has its own charm.

I remove myself from the tempting sights that invite me to stay there and shop for myself. After all, who wouldn't want a diamond studded hairband for twenty rupees!"²⁶

There are shops in the Chauta Bazaar, where the sellers would stand outside and shout the range of products they have in their respective shops. They would first gauge a person moving in that street, that too in a fraction of seconds and guess exactly what that person might want. "The day I went with my sunglasses, in a t-shirt and jeans, they would shout, "please come inside the shop, we have very good collection of nighties"²⁷." If on the other day, if I am wearing a *Salwar Kurta*, they would shout, "Please come inside, we have amazing *Kurtas* here." I observed them for an hour everyday and I realize that what one wears makes a lot of difference on their offers. The bargaining offers also matched with the way a customer was perceived. If they got an idea that a certain person would be able to afford even expensive products, they would not bargain

Later, as I familiarized myself more with the market, I realized that not only the appearance, but the language also makes a difference. There are people from all over Surat, as well as neighbouring villages and areas. The languages vary in their own ways in all these areas as well as in different communities. Some have tonal variations, whereas some have a different set of vocabulary. For example, if a customer is a Surti, his/her 't' sound would be a retroflex and likewise all the non-retroflex sounds would be retroflexed, if he/she is from the *Kathiwad/Saurashtra* region of Gujarat, then there would be tonal variations. Being in this market has also made the sellers adept to the generalization of the customers. Most of the times, they are accurate. Though sometimes I would not be interested in buying, they would know what exactly to mention to grab my attention, for example, one time I went wearing old shoes. The moment they saw them, they started shouting, "Come here, we have sports' shoes, we have slippers and flip flops. Come, at least have a look at them." They did not ask me if I was interested in looking at heels or some gaudy

²⁶ Nishpriha Field notes. September 2014.

²⁷ Refers to night gowns and lingerie

looking footwear. They definitely were aware of my tastes, or at least made a mild guess.”²⁸

The crossroads arranged perfectly in the ‘chaotic’ *Chauta* and *Bhagal*... no sharp turns, no perfectly finished pedestrians, the shapes do not fit perfectly with the space, more like a *mosaic* painting...The colour combination was on the duller side, something that would strike your eyesight and it would blend with the dull skies full of polluted clouds. The Tower clock on the Rajmarg, painted in reddish brown stands out in this maze. “If place making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of doing human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions, and in the process, personal and social identities. We *are*, in a sense, the place worlds we imagine.”²⁹ Small octagonal bricks, arranged with the small old wooden pillar that acts as a support to the shop, and the small gaps between the bricks covered with dirt, some gaps unidentified with the rolled wrappers of tobacco, chocolates and the covers of groundnut. Dark red and brown spots of spit of *Paan*³⁰, of the dark grey patches of dirt and the white inscribed fonts turned into ochre because of dust and pollution. The colours of all these elements matched with the grey of the pedestrian path. A constant movement of people, cars and winds but then the shopkeepers in their shops, stationary with newspapers and gossips.

There is a very fuzzy boundary between the residential, social and commercial arena in *Bhagal* and *Chauta Bazaar*. If one street starts with some shops, it might end up in a residential area, with old *Surti* houses.³¹ One could spot multiple verbs in a single

²⁸Nishpriha, Field notes,

²⁹ Keith Basso, Page 7, *Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*, University of New Mexico Press Albuquerque, 1996

³⁰ Paan is a preparation of betel leaf combined with areca nut and/or cured tobacco.

³¹ *Gala* type houses of Surat. The structure is usually narrow, length is elongated as compared to the width. These houses are attached by adjacent walls or even back to back in some cases. These were adapted according to the trade and business of the *Surti* communities, having long powerlooms for cloth and *Jari* production.

dimensional gaze. One would be an old man, sitting right next to his commercial products, reading newspapers, another would be a bunch of kids playing cricket and other games in the sun, as well in the shade of the *Surti* houses. The idea of play also emerges in this scenario, as it has been mentioned in an article by Els Verbakel that the objects in the field could become stimulators for playful interactions and the idea of unpredictable appropriations of space.³² This inter-playfulness also mingles with the gap between public spaces and the informal spaces. Women sitting on the pedestrian footpath, breastfeeding children, sitting in a squatting position and other children running with balloons and small toys in hand- all this coincides with the idea of play, as discussed by Johan Huizinga in his *Homo Ludens*.³³ Chauta has another form of players. Mannequins and hangers displaying clothes on the street, young men carrying baskets full of combs, pins, clutches, neck pieces, earrings and other small accessories move around in a very organized chaotic manner. The eye balls of women conversing by their movements, whether the mentioned price should be lowered down, pinches and elbow signs that are visible. The shops are old as well as new. The newer ones have glass doors with hangers to display their products whereas the older ones have their display inside the shops. The older ones exhibit their oldness in their display though Pistachio shades and the greenish walls, through their traditional names on the boards. Another interesting things is that most of the older shops have their names written in Gujarati, in the same script. Even if they mention about any English word/term, they would use the Gujarati script. The street next to the *Chauta Bazaar* has a lot of migrants from Bengal, also known as the Ambaji Street and most of the shops on this street have names written in Bengali script. The language and its display create its own niche through these juxtapositions on the spaces. There are other binaries as well; you could see a fluorescent colour t-shirt hanging outside an old shop having dull grey walls. A dark blue plastic cover displays trinkets that sparkle all through, combining the ideas of subtle and showy, combination of different *tastes*.

The second sense performs with the verbs in decibels. It enters through the constant honking of two wheelers (There are hardly any Trucks or big vehicles seen on these

³² Bezalel papers on Architecture, article on 23/07/2011

³³

streets). The shouting of the sellers is not prevalent in Bhagal but it is prevalent in the Chauta Bazaar. Bhagal entertains the busy road with lots of vehicles and traffic jams. Chauta has the sellers trying their best to grab the attention through their constant deals on various products. Somewhere, on a latest *Samsung* mobile phone, you can hear the *Bollywood* songs. Somewhere, you can hear abuses in a typical *Surti* manner because one did not park his/her vehicle properly.³⁴ In the evening, you could hear the prayers of *Azaan* from the mosque near the Bhagal *Chaar Rasta* (lit. Where four roads intersect; cross roads) or the bells from the temples in Chauta and Bhagal, small vendors carrying playing flutes to tempt children.³⁵ Amidst all this, you see an old man sitting silently, watching the passerby and waving his hand as a greeting sign and a house sparrow's chirping mingled with his silence.

The aroma/smell/ fragrance of the place hits your nostrils...the mixed smell of rose talcum powder and the sunny sweat, some jasmine oil with the scalp sweat. Sweat mingled with different kinds of clothes, like the strong one from the synthetic cloth and nylon, milder one from cotton and spandex/lycra. On the streets, the atmosphere carried an inherent smell of spices, of cardamoms and fennel seeds, of various *Ayurvedic* powders made of herbs and leaves, typical pungent smell of the streets covered with dust and dirt, smell of the gram flour frying in oil, fruits spreading their individual fragrances, for example guava with its strong smell because some of them are displayed sliced and the smell enters the market, fragrance of tea boiled with milk on the street corners and the shop of *Jaising Bhajiawala* spreading its fragrance of snacks, inviting the visitors to buy some and relish it on the street. A young girl sits on the corner of the street preparing garland and hair adornment things out of Jasmine and Rose flowers dipped in water. That water leaks from the old

³⁴ Surtis are famous for their abuses in the Gujarati language.

³⁵ There are more than 15 temples in that vicinity, the oldest ones are Mota Mandir and Balaji Mandir.

plastic bucket and mingles with the small wooden and iron parts of a lorrie carrying blouses, giving a wet wooden smell.

The pricking sunlight hits your head in the mid-noon, but if you move further another hundred metres, you will definitely come across the plastic shades put up by the shops. The small Lorries baskets would hit your knees and elbows and remind you that you experience all kinds of touch. The bones of elbows around might touch you, some strands of hair might cross your eyes or your face, the space to move individually is really less. You move in unknown groups, the touch of the crowd somehow pushes you. Even the distinction regarding *Proxemis*³⁶ would not be able to explain the various forms of distance, touch and experiences. Sometimes, you are hit by a bulky cow, sometimes by a load carrying three wheeler and sometimes you feel the plastic wrappers and glasses under your feet. On a busy day, you brush across the hanging lingerie across the street because you have to turn your head every now and then to move, you feel the eyes of vendors rather than the physical touch and in the touch of living beings as well as non-living being are felt the same.

The taste of *Pani Puris*³⁷ and the fried potato balls are unique, their taste, as they say would not be catered by any other ‘hi-fi’³⁸ places. *Surtis* are famous for their taste-buds, they love food and Surat has the best eateries and street food. There is also a famous saying in Gujarati, “*Surat nu jaman ne Kashi nu maran.*” which means that food in Surat and dying in Kashi³⁹ are equivalent. If you have lived in Surat, you would know that this is not

³⁶ Coined by Edward T. Hall in 1963, emphasized the importance of using space in the interpersonal communication.

³⁷ A popular street snack in India,

³⁸ The locals refer to posh restaurants and shopping malls as *hi-fi* areas.

³⁹ Kashi refers to Varanasi. It is an auspicious place in the Hindu mythology and dying in Kashi means going to heaven.

exaggeration, there is a '*Khaudhara Gali*'⁴⁰ close to Bhagal Char Rasta and people from all around the city come there to enjoy food. Chauta, too, has famous places to eat *Dosas* and other snacks. There are other famous places for Sugarcane juice as well, whereas people would come and drink all the sugars they have lost in shopping. Star fruits arranged in baskets, spiced tamarinds, berries, black berries taken in Lorries tempt the visitors to munch some of them and experience the spicy sour taste.

Ethnicity, Belongingness and Being

Nitin Bhajiyawala has a shop of snacks and other eatables in the middle of the Chauta Bazaar. He lives in a house that is very old and is in the street adjacent to the market. His house has a huge wooden gate which opens to a courtyard of a typical Gujarati house of a village. There is a *Tulsi* plant in the middle of the courtyard, two cows tied in the corner, a small *Shiva* temple and a platform raised upto three feet as the entrance. This *Shiva* temple, he says, is very old as it was built around the time of Shivaji. There is a myth that Shivaji never looted the house or the vicinity that had *Shiva* temples and so when he had come to Surat for looting, this house was saved. Also, there is a tunnel that starts from the window of a bedroom in the house and one can slide away jewellery and money from that window to safeguard, if the need arises.

Sitting on a wooden swing, on a thick mattress and puts his hands around pillows he smiles at the question why has he not moved to other localities of Surat. He believes that the heritage of the place, the role of community in this area, emotional proximity – are so rare that he can never think of moving to any other place. He takes a walk in the evening, with his grandchildren and discusses social life, politics, business with his neighbours. “It would

⁴⁰ Khaudhara gali means street for gluttons/foodies. Khaudhara means glutton/foodie and Gali is street/lane.

be too difficult to find this kind of an arrangement in the posh localities, people there are just concerned about themselves. Here, if I shout once, ten people would come running to me, asking if I need any help.” This place gives a feeling of social security rather than just the emotional security. About the economic part, it is pretty visible from his lifestyle that he can afford expensive products. He has two cars parked in his garage, his bedrooms have Air conditioners, the newly painted walls are beautiful, as if they have an affinity with the old ochre coloured tiles and the small wooden pillars in the corners. He has an ‘I pad’ on his *Shetti*⁴¹ and a LED screen Television.

“A lot of families from our area moved to the posh localities like *Ghod Dod road, Citylight* and *Piplod*, but now they regret it. The whole flavour of this society creates nostalgia in the minds of people who leave because they can never get that anywhere else. They left because of traffic jam issues because Chauta is a small place but are not they facing the same kind of trouble where they live now? They come here to celebrate all the festivals and occasions, because they *belong* to this place.”

Nitinbhai has two sons, both of them handle the shop. They wake up at four in the morning, prepare the snacks and sell it all day. They divide the shifts amongst themselves and close the shop at eleven in the night. The Chauta market closes at around nine in the evening but their shop remains open till eleven in the night. He responds that there are people who get free around that time, a newspaper seller, an industrial worker, a *jari* maker and no other shop would be open that late. They keep their shop opened so that these people get their dinner. The profit margins during these hours are very low but then they believe that it is their responsibility to help the society in their own way. Nitinbhai recalls that even when his father used to sit in the shop, he would ask his next door

⁴¹ Couch, a Gujarati styled.

neighbour if he wants to have *Ratalupuri*⁴² and he made that exclusively for his neighbour. There was no profit involved in selling two hundred grams of the same but then it is the Social capital that his father cared about.⁴³

The accumulation of social capital and symbolic capital is placed above than the economic capital. It becomes necessary for Nitin bhai and his family to maintain a balance between the two, or sometimes, give more importance to the social capital. The community labels matter to the individual sellers. The functionality of the social capital plays its role as the invisible hand. The reputation of a particular ethnicity has its own roles and functions.

Garret Menning has argued that the community in a sense cannot be the '*trust container*'; instead, for any individual within the community, is compartmentalized and concentrated among particular individuals, and these are likely to be relatives.⁴⁴ The comfort with the clan and family members avoids the business partnership complications. But in Chauta Bazaar, even those who are business partners but are from different communities, the relationship extends to informal meetings, celebration of festivals together and it also guarantees the entry to each other's social life.

It would be awkward to see faces in Chauta or Bhagal not to have familiarity with the place, or with the shopping experience. Nitinbhai and his sons sit on a platform raised above in their shop. The moment someone enters the shop, they would ask about their family, whether their children finished school, whether their children got married, whether they are interested in voting for a certain political party. These conversations usually end with an informal invite to their houses for tea saying "*Cha piva aavo kyarek ghare.*"

⁴² A gujarati snack

⁴³ Two forms of capital are particularly important in the field of cultural production. *Symbolic capital* refers to degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honor and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*Connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*). Pierre Bourdieu, *Fields of Cultural Production*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993: 7.

⁴⁴Garrett Menning, *City of Silk*, Op.cit. p. 301.

(Come to my house someday to have tea). The customer pays for the snacks bought and leaves. He will not be charged if he goes to their house to have tea, and enjoy the same snacks. The space for economic transaction creates its own niche and though the conversations are personal, the transactions shall be professional.

Govardhanbhai*, an eighty year old man, sits on the same platform attached to the *Krishna* temple in the Balaji street. He is a caretaker of the temple and the priest. His great grandfather and the following generations have been *servicing*⁴⁵ this temple since then. They are ten members in the family and all of them live in a small two room flat right above the temple. The temple has to be opened twice a day for the *Vaishnavites*, it has to be cleaned, and chanting has to be done every evening. When asked a question, how does he manage all this at this age, he says that his grandchildren and his daughter in laws help him with it. About the financial source, he says that a lot of devotees donate money and that is how they sustain their livelihood. He further adds, *devotees like you* to see if I could donate something too.

He says that a lot of people have stayed here because of the piousness of the area. There are about fifteen temples in the vicinity and they have always sustained the growth of the market. He believes that anyone who comes to this area flourishes because of the spiritual element in the *soil*. In between the conversation, he waves his fragile hands to the passer-by, faintly saying ‘*Aavjo*’.⁴⁶ He says that a lot of *Khatris* donate lakhs of rupees in the temples and that is how god blesses this place. While talking about the *Khatris*, he says that they earn a lot but at the same time they spend a lot because they eat a lot of non-vegetarian food and consume liquor. He compares this with a Brahmin saying that Brahmins need very little to live as they do not consume non-vegetarian food (Which

⁴⁵ He used this term so I have quoted it as it is.

⁴⁶ Way of greeting in Gujarati. Literally means “Please come”

would be comparatively expensive). He also expresses his displeasure towards these habits of the Khattris but at the same time also justifies their actions by feeling a solace in their charity: 'at least they spend a lot on the temples'. This is quite similar to the money spent by the *Vaishnavs* on the *Mota Mandir*, the donation for the cows and the temple, to gain a kind of social capital and then use that in the economic platform. On the question of shifting to some posh locality and yet continue working as a priest in a temple there, he smirked that the cost of living would be unaffordable there, also this area gives him a comfort zone to confide into his old memories of the place.

Janaki* and her family live right next to the Balaji street. They are six members in the family-her in-laws, her two children and her husband. The couple had decided to move to the Citylight area three years ago. They bought a newly constructed house, decorated with the stylish furniture and moved in. But within a couple of months, they had to think about relocating to Bhagal because her in-laws felt nauseated in that area. Her father-in-law would complain everyday about the place that he cannot go out for evening walks. Janaki asked him to try the local park there, but he did not like that idea too. They came back to Bhagal. He goes for the evening walk, sits at the verandah of a closeby shop, gossips with the shopkeeper about politics, about other people and comes back home smiling. Janaki has accepted this because her husband wants to fulfil the wishes of his parents. She talks about Chauta and Bhagal in a condescending manner that the products are usually for low class people and that is why they are so cheap. In a different conversation chord, her husband tells me that Chauta and Bhagal cater to all the tastes, be it high or low. Even the expensive branded stuffs could be found here and there are far more varieties here than the shops in the posh localities. This subtle difference of opinion strikes because these could be biased according to the interpersonal relationships, because of the belongingness to Bhagal and Chauta (Janaki does not belong to this place, whereas her husband was born and brought

up here). The acceptance of the superiority of another region, or its contest as a posh area is not accepted by Janaki's husband. He still thinks that Bhagal and Chauta are the original and genuine places for shopping.

Kanak* comes at eight in the morning every day in Chauta Bazaar. He has a tea stall close to the Chauta Pul/bridge. When asked why he chose this place, he says that people here are very amicable and friendly. He moved to Surat twenty years ago from a small village in Karnataka. His story follows a familiar migration pattern, where one of the relatives/family members invites others from their hometown. There are a lot of migrants like this in Chauta and Bhagal who have come from their village through some 'contacts'. Kanak is also one of them. He believes that people in this market are genuine and they help each other during the times of trouble. He lives with his wife and children and he does not speak *Kannada* but Gujarati at home. He says that he considers himself as a *Surti* rather than *Kannad*. The place has given him so much, a platform to work on, sustaining lifestyle and a peaceful life. There is a sense of loyalty exhibited for this place when he mentioned this bordering on the performance making it difficult to distinguish the said from what the meant. The expressions remind me of faithfulness towards a space, a place to which your *nationality* adheres.

Similarly, Ramesh* moved to Surat in 1982 from Hoobly, Karnataka. He moved because his cousin brother lived here. Ramesh used to work as a waiter in a Beer Bar in Hoogly. He could earn money but then he also started drinking every night. Whatever he earned, he would spend on buying alcohol and most of the times, he was wasted in the bar itself. Ramesh blames the environment for this because he had to clean up tables of people who came to drink, he would witness gambling games every day and so got drifted. Gujarat, is a dry state and so people are not so open about drinking and so he could concentrate more on

work and life. He credits his living to the Surat city, had he not been here, he believes he would have died of excessive alcohol consumption. He works as a labourer in a bag/purse making shop in Chauta Bazaar. When I asked his employer who was he, the employer could not say that he is a labourer and hesitantly said, “He is like our brother here.” Ramesh smiles because this designation is certainly more personal than professional. He cuts the gelatine to be put on the finished products, folds the saree covers and goes outside to put them on display. He stays there and converses with the customers.

With Ramesh out of our conversational frame, this same employer tells that Ramesh is just a labourer. That he would have been ruined if he had not been employed under him. When asked the wage Ramesh gets the employer returns the question bland, “How much do you think he should be paid?.. Most of the people would not believe if I tell them I pay him ten thousand a month. Usually, he would be paid seven to eight thousand but then we are considerate people so we pay him more. More than that, he has been working with us since past twenty years, he deserves it.”

Pavankaka migrated from Maharashtra just before the great flood in 1968. His parents lived in Surat and he was just eight when he had come to Surat. His parents passed away in the flood. He roamed around in search of work and that is how the owner of Razaq band found him. The owner employed him to clean up the place every evening, carry those huge light stands during wedding processions (Baarat) and so on. Later, the employer taught him to play saxophone so that he can assist during the musical processions. Pavankaka is too old now, he looks weak, with soggy eyes. He says that a lot of *outsiders* have come to the place and disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of Surat. It is because of them that the property price has increased, that the food price has increased. He also attributes corruption to the intrinsic nature of the outsiders. He believes that since the outsiders belong to Bihar,

Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bengal, they are least bothered what happens to Surat, they are not loyal to the city that gives them money (It is interesting to note that he does not mention about Maharashtra, his own native state in this league). He says that Orissa and Bengal have 'very good' governments and because of that, the food prices never increase, even the poor can have meals two times a day whereas in Surat, everything is expensive. The prices are high because the government does not care. All his blames bottom down to the coming of the *outsiders*.

But what is the definition of *Outsiders* , at least according to people residing in this area? Pavankaka thinks people who migrated from Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa are the outsiders. Whereas there are some other respondents in the market believed that outsiders are the people migrated from the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, also referred as Kathiawad. An owner of a very old and renowned shop in Bhagal told me that the fun-loving *Surtis* have been duped because of their innocence and honesty. The outsiders (people from Kathiawad) have come here and they did a lot of things just to make money. If you see in the powerlooms, a lot of Kathiawadis stole electricity by destroying electricity metres and paying a lot less than what they had to. This is how they made money whereas innocent *Surtis* paid everything honestly and so suffered heavy losses. The Kathiawadis spray oil on the grey yarn just to make that cloth weigh heavy and that is how they charge a lot of money from the buyers. He is not concerned with the migrants from the other states of India because he feels that they are helpful in the economy of Surat. He distinguishes the migrants- people from other states come as labourers and they are never going to make a lot of money or dupe people because of their not-so-powerful position and the other category is of the people who come from Saurashtra who form a collective community within themselves, gather huge capital and then invest together. Their position is threatening because they have a lot of money (jointly collected) and they have great trading

and business skills. Timberg (1978) noted that the regional attitude toward commerce may be an important determinant of the success of an emigrant trading group⁴⁷. The position of the Kathiwadis in this case reigns between the dichotomy of what is beneficial as well as what is threatening for them. Their power, in terms of economic capital and the social capital is contested constantly with the reputation in the market. The first one usually wins.

If you ask the Kathiawadis in Chauta and Bhagal regarding what they think of the Surtis, you will have mixed responses. Some would say that Surtis are very friendly people, who give a platform to everyone coming from anywhere around the world whereas some would say that Surtis have indulged too much into the consumption of alcohol, gambling and roaming around and that is why they never succeeded as traders. The perceived Surti life is indeed very extravagant in its own terms. Surtis are known for being spendthrift, especially on food and alcohol. It is an accepted fact that a Surti would definitely take his wife for a ride in the night, at least drink one glass of soft-drink at any shop, and would roam on the bridge and in the Piplod area and come back home. If you go to the Piplod area in Surat on Sunday, you would find a lot of Surtis seated on a mat on the pedestrian path, eating boiled eggs or chicken, chatting with family and friends. It is their idea which fits with the norm- “work while you work and play while you play.” At the same time, it is accepted that a Kathiawadi might keep his shop open on Sundays also because for him the most important thing is business and trade. If he is having his meal and a customer interrupts in between asking about some product, he would get up in the middle and start displaying the product and if a similar thing happens in a Surti’s shop, he will ask the customer to wait till he finishes (Of course, in a very pleasant manner) and will entertain only when he is done.

⁴⁷ Garrett Menning, *City of Silk*, p. 237.

The ethnicity certainly plays a huge role in determining the business and trading skills in the markets of Surat. And not only ethnicity, but also the way the seller engages with the buyer, whether he /she is able to enter the personal domain and whether he/she is able to create that element of trust in the other.

Chauta and Bhagal in the age of shopping malls and arcades of Surat

Most of the shops in Chauta and Bhagal are old, in their texture as well as display. The element of display might affect the *traditional* consumers of this market, who respect the oldness and the authenticity of these shops.

people from different areas in Surat come to shop in Chauta though they have fully developed markets in their own respective areas. If you visit various areas in Surat, you will come across many small ‘arcades’, ‘plazas’ and ‘shopping complexes’. There is also a *mini* chauta bazaar in the Adajan area of Surat, which has developed over the past ten years. There is one thing common in all these markets, including Chauta and Bhagal- the set up. There are small eateries reasonably priced, there are shops where the customers bargain endlessly (except the shops in the posh localities) and there is an emphasis on the duplicate tags of the famous brands, for example, ‘Nike’ would be written as “Nikey” with a similar looking swoosh, ‘Puma’ would be ‘Pooma’, fake ‘Louis Vuitton’ designs copied, sold at an exponentially lower price compared with the original. But still, the question perplexes, why Bhagal and Chauta, when everywhere we have a similar kind of set up and products?

Several customers and the shopkeepers in Chauta and Bhagal had similar kind of answers and one common theme was about the versatility of the market. If the shopkeepers and the customers in Chauta and Bhagal unanimously say “You can get a safety pin as well as

garland for the dead in Chauta and Bhagal region. It is a ‘complete’ market in its own.”, you sort of agree with them once you survey these markets. The streets in Chauta Bazaar are divided into sections, one street, you would find the shops that have blouse and petticoat cloth pieces, another one you would find imitation jewellery and scarf pins. The market looks exclusively for women, each street specializing in its own way. There are shops for scarf pins, lingerie, make up kits, head bands, ruffles, sarees, dresses, imitation jewellery, kids’ wear, beauty products and cosmetics, utensils, pickles, spices, grocery and a lot of other commodities. Sanjaybhai* says that Chauta is very popular among women in Surat because of the variety of products it has. The market was established here because a lot of women would visit *Mota Mandir* in the evening every day. Initially, this market was just a street close to the Vaisnavite temple *Mota Mandir*, displaying various things needed for rituals and altar offerings- incense sticks, sweets offered as *Prasad*, small clothes for Krishna’s idol, small flutes to adorn them, sandalwood paste, garlands, auspicious necklaces, etc. Slowly, utensils and other items followed. Later, the whole market started catering to what a woman might want, be it a young girl who needs dresses or a married woman who needs sarees. A woman can come here and get almost anything that she needs, it is typically a woman’s market.

It may be amusing to see that materials for altar and rituals are *assumed* to be for women, the utensils, cooking materials and the home décor elements also fall in the same line. Why is she the one who would invest time in decorating the house, or think about how she should please her in-laws and husband by buying spices for their respective favourite dishes?

Apart from variety of products in the market, there is also the element of ‘trend’ that dominates in the market. Those who come to shop here, ask for a particular pin that some

actress had worn in some movie. The dresses displayed in the Bollywood movies and television shows are a big hit in these markets. The designer dresses shown in the magazines and movies are replicated and sold here, at a very reasonable rate. The durability of the product is not guaranteed, but then the trend is followed.

Tuheena*, who comes from Ghod Dod road and is a college student, tells that she comes here because she can get anything at a very reasonable price and so she can buy a lot them.

Tuheena*, who comes from Ghod Dod road and is a college student, tells me that she comes here because she can get anything at a very reasonable price and so she can buy a lot them. When questioned the customers as well the sellers in the markets about the durability and the quality, they jokingly answered, “What else do you expect to get in such a cheap price? It follows the latest trend and even if it lasts for a very short period, one can at least satiate desires of wearing different trendy clothes and accessories every day.” The usual desire for people coming in these markets is not sustainability of a product, but it’s the price, the affordability of the products.

Chauta and Bhagal are famous for their wholesale market rates. A person from middle class can come here and buy a lot of things he/she needs and as far as the display and the way it looks are concerned, it matches the latest trends. The way shopkeepers would describe a dress or an accessory is, “Look at this dress, this was the exact one that Kareena Kapoor wore in that movie.” People get moved by these claims and their decision on buying these becomes firm once they see that associated tags. The customers here prefer to look like the showcased actors of the Bollywood and to imitate their dressing styles.

A shopkeeper in Bhagal, who showcased bed covers, home décor and linens in his shop, explained to me a similar strategy regarding how he chose products. He goes to the customer’s houses as a part time interior decorator and then suggested designs for their

sofa covers, their curtains, mattresses and bed sheets. They also sell high end products i.e. a mattress worth twenty five thousand in his shop. When asked who buys these hugely expensive and luxury items he smirked and said that a day before yesterday he had delivered twenty mattresses in a bungalow in Surat. Asking about how do they get to know if there are such mattresses and designs? He replied, “Very simple! They see all this in a television show, they notice the details and then come to me.

Another reason is the affordability of the products. Chauta and Bhagal are famous for their wholesale market rates. A person from middle class can come here and buy a lot of things he/she needs and as far as the display and the way it looks are concerned, it matches the latest trends. The way shopkeepers would describe a dress or an accessory is, “Look at this dress, this was the exact one that Kareena Kapoor wore in that movie.” I observed that people get moved by these claims and their decision on buying these becomes firm once they see that associated tags.

The market might seem having its own space, with its own social life but the trade that goes on in the market, is certainly influenced by the ‘other’ invisible markets. These invisible markets are the huge hoardings displaying actors and actresses in gaudy dresses, these could be the photographs in the newspaper clippings and magazines. there the interconnectedness through these mediums is also shaping the market in some way or the other. Probably, we could use the cliché, ‘globalization’. Something that is termed as classic is translated to kitsch through Chinese whispers’ game. But there is another term, ‘glocalization’, made popular by sociologist Roland Robertson. This term is close to the Japanese word, *dochakuka*. It is actually a Japanese marketing strategy to sell a standard ‘product’ with the flavour of a particular market. This term is useful particularly because it does not consider ‘local’ as a mere victim or recipient of the process of globalization. It

also emphasizes that the binarism between ‘global’ and ‘local’ is not mutually exclusive and unproblematic and both the terms are interdependent⁴⁸. Definitely, there is simultaneity, the co presence of universalization and particularization. This explains something about the constancy of customers in the Bhagal and Chauta markets. Why after the co-existence of the so called markets with the globalized brands in display, people still come to shop here. It will certainly not be just the aspect of affordability, there must be something else as well.

The shop of Chiman Bhai* is opposite to the shop with stacked bowls of spices in display. This grocery store has all the beauty products, food items, toiletries that a mall in Surat would have. Chiman Bhai was sitting on the stairs of the shop, reading a book. When asked why does he think that shops like these still function in the markets and why would people come all the way to Chauta just to buy these if they can get that in any market in their area? He said, “You see that car freshener? It is a latest product in the market. Of course, you can get the same in the malls but then, here I demonstrate to my customers how to use it. I do not mind spending time with them, teaching them every bit and at the same time, I take care that I do not make them feel inferior because of this. Not everyone knows how to operate internet and if they go to the malls, buy some product, they might get puzzled how to use it. Honestly, there is no personalized relationship in the malls where a person comes to you, explains everything. It is all like, if you have money, buy it or leave.”

This personalization act could be one of the reasons why people feel comfortable to come and shop in Chauta and Bhagal. They are given time and attention to know exactly what they are buying. Also, they can come back and exchange the product if they do not like it. Sometimes, they are refunded the money. Jayesh*, who owns a shop of hangers,

⁴⁸Sachin Ketkar, “Globalization and the new Marathi poetry”, Issue 3, *Muse India Archives*, 2005: 1 (personal communication).

mannequins and towels in Bhagal, tells that if you go to a shopping mall or other markets, they will not refund you back the money easily, also they might ask for the bill if they do. They have long queues and you have to wait for hours just to exchange a product or register a complaint regarding a particular product (This same idea was voiced by many shop owners in Bhagal and Chauta). He said that the customers value time and they do not have much time engaging in these 'fruitless' activities of standing in a queue, arguing with a seller and then finally be able to negotiate. If a person is rich, he might just leave without a refund or exchange and that product will be wasted, of course this can be afforded by rich people and not the middle class or the poor as they value every bit of money. Jayesh tells that he sells hangers and mannequins to all the apparel shops in the region and sometimes, they bring back a whole lot saying it did not work, he immediately refunds them the money. People might think that this was a loss on his business, but he thinks that this is investing in his social capital. Not every time a person would return the products back and whenever they would think of buying hangers and mannequins, they would think about buying from his shop. Shop owners in Chauta and Bhagal go for long term plans, rather than sell, make money and leave.

The shop owners in Chauta and Bhagal consider the customer's time as very important whereas they invest their own time to save the customers' time. They would sit, chat and sip tea with the customers and discuss about the products that might interest them. So the products here come coupled with a personalized aspect where the sellers will explain everything to you, where you can come back and air the complaints in a very friendly manner.

One can always move around in these markets, smell/taste the food item they are trying to buy, wear accessories and look in the small mirrors provided by the vendors and then buy

accordingly. To feel, touch and taste- makes it more trustworthy. It is very different from the packaged products that have no other authenticity other than their brand in the market. You can always ask the vendors/sellers to give you one bite before you want to buy. Sometimes, they would themselves offer to taste, “Please taste this snack, this is freshly made. You would not forget its taste and would come back to us once you have it.” Visiblity is often at play in shopkeepers’ claims; these snacks are prepared right in front of the eyes.

The other markets/shopping malls are flooded with shops that have ‘ready to eat’ curries, two minutes ‘potato fries’, ‘popcorn’, ready to serve ‘chicken kababs’, ‘ pav bhaji’ etc. There are a lot of traditional ‘ready to eat’ cuisines too. For example, you can buy the ‘dosa mix’, ‘rava-idli mix’, ‘paav bhaji’ and these would all contest to the fact of giving the original authentic taste. The preparation of these cuisines, takes a lot of time because of the complexity involved- getting all the spices, which might be more than ten to fifteen, frying/sautéing till the right flavour, adding ingredients at the right time and then consuming the prepared cuisine in the preferred time. This all could be escaped if one buys the ‘ready to eat’ products from the malls and other markets but then there is no authenticity of taste in this one.

Chauta and Bhagal have specific spices, the traditional ones, which are especially for all the Gujarati cuisines. Women, who come to shop here, look for that authenticity as they have to cater the same in their houses. Surti women are expected to prepare the cuisines during festive occasions. Even with different seasons, come different cuisines which are not only delicious but also are made kept in mind the health issues. For example, during winters there are sweets like ‘*salam paak*’, ‘*khajoor paak*’ and snacks like ‘*methina vada*’ or ‘*undhiyun*’, these require home grounded spices like cardamom, cinnamon, fennel seeds,

cumin seeds, and special ingredients like *ghee* (preferably from Jamkhambhaliya district in Gujarat, famous for its purity and taste in ghee), or may be dates from a particular region. Preparing these is not only time consuming, but also collecting all the right ingredients. Women, who perform this task, are usually categorized as ‘homely’ ones. Also, the class is determined through who can come and spend time in buying every particular item versus who can go to the markets, buy the ‘ready to eat’ and serve at home.

A lot of women customers in these markets shared that in today’s generation, there is no time for husband and the family. They think that current global scenario, in which women are employed, poses a threat to the traditional norms, to the old authentic cultural symbols. The whole idea boils down to making a lot of money and then spending on expensive products. There is no ‘touch’ of personal affection in their behaviour and the food they serve.

This constant classification within the gender bias also puts forward another element of looking at women as ‘other’ women. This *otherness* is categorized through who comes to these markets, spends time involving in buying authentic spices and discusses personal lives. The time spent here translates into their personality and class.

Formal and Informal Economies

Chauta and Bhagal are filled with vendors carrying small baskets full of combs, hair pins, socks, inners, kerchiefs etc. They also put up a small stand/stall in front of shops and pay rent to the shop owners for letting them put their stalls. The rent usually is between 200-300 rupees per day. This also means that they can put their baskets in the respective shops at night and take it back next morning. Most of these vendors are migrants from other states and they usually rent a small place, where they live in groups. Their monthly income

is usually between Rs. 6000-8000. This is exclusive of the rent they pay to the shop owners and the everyday illegal commission of ten rupees to the officials from the municipal corporation. They do not have to pay taxes to the government.

Any place, where there is a formal economy, there will also be informal economic activities (Peraldi, Foughali and Spinouza 1995, Peraldi 2001, 2002). Chauta and Bhagal exhibit this informal economic activity and there are a lot of changes in these markets after the influx of vendors who have migrated from different places and sell informally. People have generally informed that the vendors started coming from the late nineties. Some shop owners are not affected because of this whereas some people think that this has lowered the ratio of people shopping from the shops.

Nikhilbhai* thinks that a lot of shop owners have used a strategy to earn money if their business does not go well. For example, a lot of shop owners earn through these vendors by giving them a space outside their shops and get around twenty thousand per month through this. There is one problem that has happened- the customers usually do not enter the shops but they buy from these vendors. Those shop owners who see this threat and have a very good on-going business, put the stalls of their own products outside the shops. This saves them from two things- 1) from the vendors who occupy the space and are able to get all the attention from the shopkeepers and 2) from the customers who come and park their vehicles right in front of the shops and block the entrance to the shops. Parking is also a big nuisance in these markets. Though there is a big parking plot⁴⁹, close to Rajmarg, people do not take pains to go and park in that parking lot, instead they park randomly to save time walking from the parking lot to the markets. Residents and shop owners in these areas

⁴⁹ Also very close to the Chauta bazaar. Right in front of the Saibaba temple, this parking lot is close to both the markets.

think that market looks crowded all the time not because of the customers, but because of these vendors.

Radha*, who comes from Muglisara everyday to sell fruits in the crossroads of Rajmarg, says that she goes to Sardaar market, buys fruits at wholesale rates and sells them here by standing all day. She tells that she has been working here since past thirty years, selling fruits at the same place. She does not make a lot of money but enjoys the culture of these markets. She is a little sad now as a lot of old customers have shifted to other areas of Surat and a lot of outsiders are breaking trusts as vendors. She says that one day, they will sell fruits, the other day they will sell cups, and they are not constant. Also, they have created nuisance after the demolition period. The demolition was carried out to create more spaces in these markets, to avoid traffic issues but then the vendors plant their stalls right in front of the shops, occupy all the space and pay something to the government officials. For her, the vendors who are constantly moving are the 'others'.

Nikhilbhai adds that these vendors are adding up day by day. Each one brings the others from his native family and the nexus has increased over a period of fifteen years. People who come to Chauta, are lured by the cheap prices offered by the vendors and so they never enter the shops. A three tier level of trust is quite visible here- Shopping malls and other market spaces are not trustworthy in terms of their quality of product, the vendors, though sell in the same place/space as Chauta and Bhagal, are not trustworthy because they are not fixed in their space and they keep on moving in the market and the third one- established shops in these markets are trustworthy because they are not going to move from that particular place, would be able to take care of all the complaints by the customers and are of course, very genuine in terms of quality of the product.

The informal economic exchange also attaches a tag of being mobile and therefore not accessible. But then, But then, when asked the customers regarding this, they said that it is alright to buy from them because the products they sell are usually cheap and even if they do not work/ turn out to be faulty, one does not incur a huge loss. The vendors are usually on the risk taking basis. They would buy the items in bulk from the wholesale market behind the Chauta bazaar, opposite to the *Mota Mandir* and then sell them with marginal profit rates. Though the profit margins are high (around fifty percent), they would lose because a lot products would turn out to be defective and they have to suffer the losses as well. They can swap their businesses easily because all they have to do is to sell the total items and then start up a fresh business.

There are a lot of people crossing a single gaze but then these markets stand still, in their patience and persistence. There are lot of women buyers and male sellers in the market as if the gendered roles have been assigned. The market spaces change as the vendors change their position every day, but still the market looks almost the same. The usual feel of the market never alters. Why do people come from all over Surat and from the areas around, I argue that it is the sense of *communitas* they experience. Probably, it is a ritualistic act to come to Chauta and Bhagal and experience it. In the *Porta Palazzo*, Rachel E. Black has compared the *passaggiata* of Italy, places in the Italian towns where people can go and socialize, with the *Porta Palazzo* of Turin. She has argued that these kinds of markets are persistent because of the social life that is embedded in these markets. Giovana Del Negro calls this as ritualized performance of the town's culture which is essential for social cohesion (2004:3)⁵⁰. I find the markets of Chauta and Bhagal on a similar trajectory, like a

⁵⁰ See Rachel E.Black, *Porta Palazzo, Anthropology of an Italian Market*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 172.

place where people can socialize, talk about their lives, buy the stuffs they need and then experience the complete ritual of shopping in these markets.

Nimesh*, who lives here, believes that these markets are more like fairs, where people can enjoy in the open air. In the shopping malls and complexes, everything is in a close structure. One feels suffocated and bounded in those markets. These open air markets not only provide the platform to choose, buy in an affordable range, but it also does not make them intimidated by the huge imposing structures. Instead, they are small self imposing spaces, where the residential houses are also intertwined, giving it a more homely kind of touch.

There are series of social interactions going on in these markets which add a substantial meaning to the spaces in these markets. People are interested more in accumulating the social relationships here. If a product does not suit you/or is not good for you, the seller will tell you that you must not buy it, even if he incurs a loss to him. This will certainly enhance the element of trust in you. Because you know that if you do not like something, you can always come back here and return. Also because you know that the most important criteria is not profit making, but to interact and engage socially with all the people around. There are no unions or organizations that administer these markets. The issues are resolved within the markets itself and usually there are no disputes, as almost everyone in these markets has told me. This is unlike the Textile market in Surat that has a governing body FOSTA (Federation of Surat Textiles Association). The decisions are made mutually, the celebrations of different festivals are through unitary contributions of money and the small disputes are talked over and resolved.

There are many reasons why these markets still exist, even after so many alterations and the coming of newly developed markets with the latest technologies. If the shopping

complexes have elevators, the shop owners in these markets have broke the high platforms of their entrances for the convenience of the customers. They definitely try their best to make their customer feel comfortable in whatever possible ways they can. This is because of the social relationship they share. The market may seem like an outdated institution that should have been done away with long ago; it can even be considered as a form of resistance to modernity⁵¹. This market offers much than the economic exchange, it offers a social life, reasonably priced food, constant change in the trends and the space according to the need and a working space for almost anyone who wants to enter the market and earn livelihood. The immensely satisfied faces of old men and women are visible in these markets, where they sit with magazines, books and tiffins along with some product to sell, who have children studying abroad, who have sons going to the offices in the posh areas, who have daughters married off to guys settled in London and the States. They still sit here, with those faces filled with happiness and say that they would never leave this place because this is all they need. This place provides them enough food for their life, enough to survive and they do not need more.

Everyone needs spaces like these where they can go and experience a different kind of social life, engage in the ritualistic act of shopping in Chauta and Bhagal and come with bags full of items reasonably priced.

⁵¹ See Rachel E. Black, *Porta Palazzo, Anthropology of an Italian Market*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 173.