

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

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Abstract

Focused on a historically evolved marketplace, Chauta Bazaar of Surat (Gujarat), this article looks at the question of trust and its contours. In the popular perception, this bazaar has a history of five centuries of continuous survival. This account of a marketplace reveals everyday practices, popular investments in terms of its historical embeddedness and the manner in which notions of trust circulate in this market. The study argues that the narratives of trust are spatial as well as transmitted through generations. The ethnography throws a number of issues pertaining to this marketplace, popularly considered as a women's market. At a wider level, the article goes beyond exploring the historical trajectories of this marketplace and looks at the narratives in which history is mobilised as an active agency shaping the dynamics of trust in a marketplace.

Keywords

Trust, ethnography of market, history as commodity, Chauta Bazaar, Surat

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Impressions

Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are 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...The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken.³ (emphases added)

Sitting on a pavement of grey octagonal bricks at Bhagal (Bhagol), seventy-year-old Navinbhai sells spices. When asked the question: ‘Do you ever feel that Chauta and Bhagal would completely vanish in the coming years because of the shopping malls and superstores?’, he smiled (his grey eyes hold the sharp twinkle) and replied: ‘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.’⁴

Introduction

Stemming out of a possible difference between the markets and the marketplaces, this study aims to look at an ‘unorganised’ and ‘unregulated’ marketplace called Chauta Bazaar of Surat (Gujarat, India). 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 to this. In the existing discourse, markets appear solely as economic nodes and 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 and contemporary times are recognised as sites of alternative political authority embodying potential to challenge and offer resistance to the court or the colonial government, respectively.⁵ At another level, markets have also been explored by locating them in the wider discourse on urban centres and by aligning them, in analytical frames, with the rise and decline of these urban economies in Indian history.

³ Martin Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, NY: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), 141–59.

⁴ Field Notes, November 2013.

⁵ 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 in ‘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’; see C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8. Such a concern has been further linked with the social history of towns and merchant class, mercantile networks and trading institutions.

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 an 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 such as Surat. For example, historians, such as Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, provide a comprehensive account of the history of market in Surat. Yet, in his account, we come across Surat itself as a market and trading centre and meet with an eerie silence on the marketplaces of the city.⁶ In these writings, location of markets remain merely geographical ones, cartographic points bereft of the social-cultural moorings, everydayness and other such spatial particularities. This reminds us about an absence or subordination of space in modern knowledge system and social theory as has been pointed by scholars, such as Michel Foucault and later by Edward Soja.⁷

Anthropological writings (though small in Indian context) have been helpful in addressing some of these lacunae, by shifting the focus beyond economics of the market or by expanding the ambit of economy itself. These studies have foregrounded a wide range of themes and perspectives in looking at marketplaces in India.⁸

In many ways, such a move to transgress the rigid boundary of economics and locate markets and marketplaces in the everyday social life has also a precedent in South Asian milieu when we have several wonderful illustrations of marketplaces coming from non-academic prose forms. 'The Splendours of Hira Mundi or Tibbi' by Pran Nevile is one such example that this study particularly likes to emphasise.⁹ In the field of literature, many such examples can be cited as the language and *bazaar* have 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

⁶ Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, *Surat in the Seventeenth Century: A Study in Urban History of Pre-modern India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1979), 93–115.

⁷ Edward Soja, *Post Modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, (Spring) (1986): 22–27.

⁸ 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. In both these studies, anthropological tools and questions are deployed to eventually understand the economics of the markets (Denis Vidal, 'Markets and Intermediaries: An Enquiry about the Principles of Market Economy in the Grain Market of Delhi', in *Delhi: Urban Spaces and Human Destinies*, ed. Vernique Dupont, Emma Tarlo and Denis Vidal (Delhi: Manohar and Centre De Sciences Humaines, 2000):125–39; Gerrett John Menning, *City of Silk: Ethnicity and Business Trust in Surat City* (PhD dissertation in Anthropology, Santa Barbara, CA: University of California, 1996); Denis Vidal, 'Markets and Intermediaries: An Enquiry about the Principles of Market Economy in the Grain Market of Delhi', 125–39; Gerrett John Menning, *City of Silk: Ethnicity and Business Trust in Surat City*; M. Voyce, 'Shopping Malls in India: New "Social Dividing" Practices', *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 22 (2007): 2055–62; N. Mathur, 'Shopping Malls, Credit Cards and Global Brands: Consumer Culture and Lifestyle of India's new Middle Class', *South Asia Research* 30, no. 3 (2010): 211–31; Paolo Favero, 'Phantasms in a "Starry" Place: Space and Identification in a Central New Delhi Market', *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2003): 551–84; Sanjay Srivastava, 'Shop Talk: Shopping Mall in Public', in *Entangled Urbanism: Slum, Gated Community, and Shopping Mall in Delhi and Gurgaon* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 241–59.

⁹ Pran Nevile, 'The Splendours of Hira Mundi or Tibbi', in *City of Sin and Splendour: Writings on Lahore*, ed. Bapsi Sidhwa (Delhi: Penguin, 2005), 74–80.

was once upon a time interchangeably used for ‘market place of the city’ (*urdū-e-mua’līa*).¹⁰ Building upon this corpus of academic and non-academic writings, we focus on one particular marketplace called Chauta Bazaar of Surat.

While narrating the everyday life and perceptions as well as stereotypes circulating in this crowded marketplace, we will be particularly attentive to questions pertaining to trust and history. There is no dearth of scholarship on either of these two crucial coordinates. Yet, the interlinkages between the two have hardly caught the attention of scholars. Trying to break away from the dominant treatment of these two themes, the idea is to locate them in the midst of the everyday life of this marketplace, excavate the narratives where faith (an essential component of trust) plays a crucial role and to move away from disciplinary notions of history for an ambiguous and layered engagement with the past coming from the bazaar. The question is how to approach the interplay of the two—the intersecting narratives of trust and history coming from this marketplace of Surat, Gujarat.

Surat

By a conservative estimate, Surat has forty-seven shopping malls, shopping complexes and arcades.¹¹ This excludes a number of complexes (which primarily cater to the business of textiles and fabrics), various neighbourhood shopping arrangements and weekly markets. While shopping malls are recent entries, arcades and complexes came up at different point of time after 1960s when the city began expanding in size and grew many fold in population. Chauta Bazaar in its vibrancy and history stands apart in this maze of retail markets of Surat. In popular perception, this is the oldest existing market and the most thriving one.

Located on the west coast of India and surrounded by the fertile land of south Gujarat region, Surat boasts an illustrious history. In the Medieval period, Mughals contributed to its efflorescence in late sixteenth century up till mid eighteenth century, by linking Surat directly to the rich hinterland of the Gangetic *doab*. The city was a prominent hub for a number of important trade routes (roads and coastal waterways) connecting inner manufacturing centres within Gujarat (i.e., Bharuch, Cambay and 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 (from Armenia to Netherlands). Surat was also an important pilgrimage centre for Indian Muslims as the port of

¹⁰ Shamsur Rehman Faruqi, ‘A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part I: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture’, in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from India*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 805–63.

¹¹ <http://www.suratonline.in/city-guide/shopping-malls-in-surat> (accessed 11 August 2015).

embarkation for the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and was also known as ‘Babul Macca’, Gateway to Mecca.¹²

For almost 150 years, Surat was truly a multicultural and cosmopolitan city. The continued presence and extensive operations of the European traders was a fact of extraordinary significance in the commercial and urban history of Surat. Coinciding with the declining authority of Mughals, emergence of the British as the dominant player in Indian Ocean trade and the rise of Mumbai, by the second quarter of the first half of the eighteenth century, the trade in Surat began to decline. For the next two centuries, the city remained nothing but a husk of its own past.

A city known for its diamond polishing and synthetic textiles, Surat is one among the most rapidly growing cities of India. With an official population of more than forty-five lakhs,¹³ Surat urban agglomeration stands at the ninth position in the country in terms of population and comes under the census category of million plus cities urban agglomeration/city.¹⁴ 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).¹⁵ The lineage of such a massive urban growth of Surat directly goes back to the decade of 1960s when the city acquired an unprecedented momentum in terms of size as well as population. The area of Surat city expanded from 3.19 sq. miles to 8.84 sq. miles during 1961–71 and several new areas were included within the city limits of Surat for the first time in 1963.¹⁶

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, 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.¹⁷ 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. Of the emigrant families, 25 per cent were from the same Surat district. Such heterogeneity gave this city ‘a cosmopolitan character’.¹⁸ In terms of visibility and influencing the economic

¹² Ashin Das Gupta, ‘Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat c. 1700–1750’, in *India and the Indian Ocean World: Trade and Politics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); 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* 43, no. 1 (2000): 23–33.

¹³ Census of India, ‘Provisional Population Totals, Urban Agglomerations/Cities having Population One Million and Above’, (2011), http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/india2/Million_Plus_UAs_Cities_2011.pdf (accessed 17 March 2013).

¹⁴ <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/metropolitan/276-surat.html> (accessed 22 December 2015).

¹⁵ *District Census Handbook*. ‘Part XII-A&B Surat’, Census of India 2001 (Ahmedabad: Director of Census Operations, 2001), 560–61.

¹⁶ I.P. Desai, ‘Glimpses of Surat (Census of India 1971, Paper No. 1 of 1972)’, Office of the Registrar General of India (Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1992).

¹⁷ Ghanshyam Shah, *Urban Tension: A Case Study of Surat* (Surat: Centre for Social Studies, 1974), 12–13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

landscape of the city, the influx of Marwari communities from Rajasthan and the communities of Kanbi Patel from Saurashtra (popularly known as ‘Saurashtrian Ptel’) are the two most prominent social groups entering in this period. These two have eventually made deep inroads and came to dominate textiles and diamond polishing sectors (the two most crucial industries of Surat), respectively.¹⁹ In the last four decades, since the time of above mentioned survey, Surat has been recipient of migrants from various other states in India. Trading communities from Rajasthan, power loom workers from Orissa and labourers from northern states, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are predominant among them. According to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) study based on Census of India 2001, Surat receives the largest percentage of internal migrants in million plus cities of India.²⁰

However, in 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.²¹ For example, scholars, such as Haynes, have emphasised upon the idea of philanthropy and gift giving as performing a major role in mercantile relations during colonial times and gradually contributing towards the social capital or ‘*abru*’ in the merchant culture of Surat.²² Such a cultural milieu is particularly relevant for our discussion of our area of study—the Chauta Bazaar, as the market evolved around a Vaishnavite temple, Mota Mandir.

Chauta Bazaar is located at the centre of what is now often referred to as ‘old city’ of Surat. The patch identified as *Chauta* constitutes a number of by lanes 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 and at times seamlessly disappear into residential neighbourhoods. 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 (see Figure 1). The conflation has spilled 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 was *Burhanpuri Bhagal*.²³ *Bhagol* in Gujarati means outskirts and that might refer to the space that was in the outskirts of the fort

¹⁹ On the community of the Saurashtrian Patel in Surat, see Miranda Engelshoven, ‘Rural to Urban Migration and the Significance of Caste: The Case of the Saurashtra Patel of Surat’, in *Development and Deprivation in Gujarat: In Honour of Ja Berman*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah, Mario Rutten and Hein Streefkerk (Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2002): 294–313.

²⁰ Marina Faetanini and Rukmini Tankha, eds. *Social Inclusion of Internal migrants in India: Internal Migration in India Initiative* (Delhi: UNESCO, 2013), <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002237/223702e.pdf> (accessed on 1 December 2015).

²¹ Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, *Surat in the Seventeenth Century: A Study in Urban History of Pre-modern India*, 117–36; for the inherent heterogeneity within the social category of *baniya*, 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.

²² Douglas Haynes, ‘From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western Indian City’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (1987): 339–60.

²³ Mugatal Bavis, *Surat ni Itihasdhara* (Ahmedabad: Adarsh Prakashan, 2011).

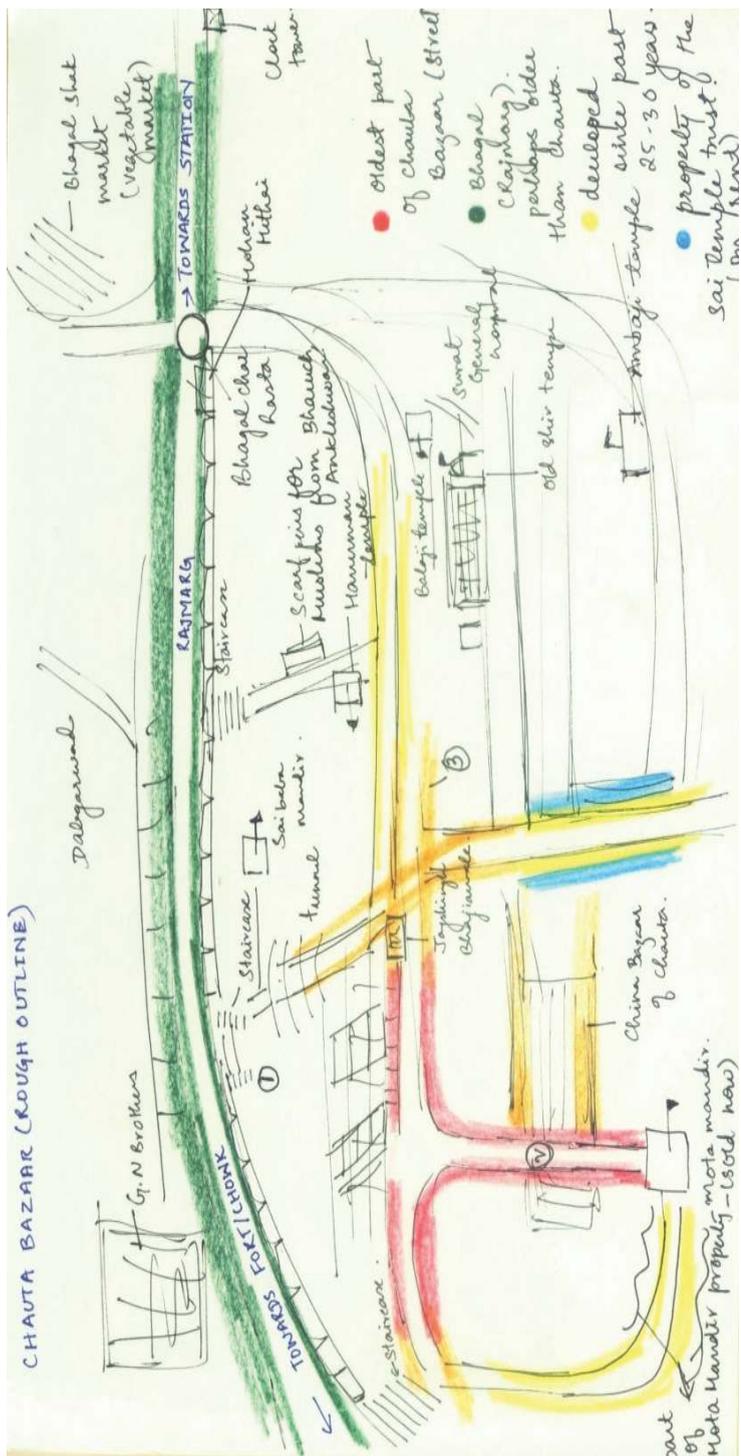


Figure 1. Map of Chauta-Bhagal
Source: Hand Drawn during the field work by the authors'.

area in Chowk. There is a very old market for vegetables in Bhagal, which is called *Bhaji wali Pol*.²⁴ 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. 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 Hope Bridge) on that route is Delhi Gate. There are small shops on the main road and they continue till Delhi Gate.

During field work, people recounted that ships would be unloaded close to the castle and sell/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 consumers showcasing bags, stationeries, coats, pants and shirts. 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 Shahpore. 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. A small roadside marker near 'Navdi Ovaara' informs about a customary practice from eighty-four countries.²⁵ These small markers were shown during the fieldwork (conducted in 2012–13) to claim the 'vaibhav' (royal demeanour) of the city since time immemorial.

Unlike Bhagol, Chauta Bazaar is primarily seen as a women's market. Chauta Bazaar also creates a vivid feminine image of the marketplace through the commodities that circulate and their sensorial engagements with the space.²⁶ In one of the initial visits of the bazaar, some of these images also catered to the categorisation of Chauta as a 'Ladies Market'.

'Young boys carrying kerchiefs, socks, *bindis*, knives and hair clips could be seen in the market, looked more like a *Mobile market*.' Every shop had two to three vendors who were sitting on the corners; they had to leave the space for the customers to 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.

The *bazaar* glitters with jewellery, utensils, clothes, but also of the shopping spree in the eyes of women customers. Every street looks complete in its own, small vendors displaying all sort of things, whereas shops displaying cosmetics,

²⁴ *Bhaji* means vegetables.

²⁵ Navdi Ovaara is the old port area of Surat, near Nanpura. Every Sunday, river Tapi is worshipped because it has nourished the city. In addition, this is where the Customs Office from colonial period was located.

²⁶ Usually, commodities categorized as 'Ladies' create an imagery of the shop/marketplace as being feminine as Emile Zola describes a shop as 'Ladies' through commodities that are displayed in and around the shop; see Emile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise* (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1886), <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks14/1400561h.html> (accessed on 12 August 2015). However, in Chauta Bazaar's case, this form of categorising emerges interestingly as it is tied to the temples in that vicinity and how various practices immersing in the senses also produce an imagery of space.

toiletries and apparels and there is always a sugarcane juice shop at the end of every street.

The shops are well renovated. These shops still bear water mark, reminiscences of the floods of 2006. 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 will see display of apparels and cosmetics, and after the crossroad, if you keep moving in the same direction, you will come across the fragrance of many spices and pickles. Many *Kathiavadi* women come here to buy grocery items, spices, dresses and laces. A small shop at the end of the same street sells relatively expensive fruits, such as strawberries, litchis and avocados 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 will come across various shops that sell imitation jewellery, especially diamond-studded scarf pins.

The customers for diamond-studded scarf pins are the Muslim women that reside closer to the Chauta Bazaar, such as Salabatpura, Jhanpa Bazaar and Chowk Bazaar. They have *Mangal sutras* at one end for the Hindu women as well. Customers come from far-off places with a huge list. Women from nearby towns and villages, such as Kim, Kosamba, Bharuch and Mandvi 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.

The market has approximately fifteen old temples in what is now identified as marketplace as well as in its vicinity. The oldest ones are the Balaji temple (seventeenth century) and Mota Mandir (sixteenth century). Many respondents for this study related the working of Chauta Bazaar with the religious importance of this place. The purity or the '*pavitrataa*' (the word used by most of the respondents) that it has gained since ages is because the temples help in the smooth functioning of the *bazaar*.²⁷ It may come as a surprise today that the area that comes across as Chauta Bazaar was a residential area twenty-five years back, inhabited by *Vaishnavvaniyas* who then sold these houses to the businessmen which helped to extend the market. Mota Mandir was the temple where Vaishnavs of the city met and did prayers and

²⁷ 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 in 1970 writes

on one side there exists Parsi's Saiyyadpura like a pure Rajput lady (*Chokkhkhi 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 *Sarvapathi Balajimaharaj* 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 *Vithalnathji's* temple, *Ranchhodji's* temple, *Ramchandra Bhagwaan's Ram* temple, *Bhir Bhanjan Mahadev*, *Bhagwaan Dutt Prabhu*, *Satyanarayan's* temple, *Mahakali*, *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 *Saibaba's* temple was arranged. (see Shantilal Z. Rana, *Surne Shirdi* [Dholikui, Varachha Road, Surat: Mahendra Kumar Nathu Bhai Katargamwala, 1970], 174; translated by authors)

henceforth it was the shopping hub around. Since 1990s, the residential areas around Mota Mandir have changed their character. The powerloom machines in the walled city area of Surat were moved to the set-ups on the periphery of the city—especially Udhna, Khatodara, Althaan and a lot of families who had powerloom machines *inside* their houses in Chauta, either gave the ground floor on rent to the upcoming shopkeepers or started their own small-scale businesses, such as apparel, eateries and imitation jewellery. However, families continued to live on the first floor of the same shops. Mr Kapadia owns a shop for blouses and petticoats in Chauta, his shop looks more like a house from inside and when one closely looks at it, one can see that the third floor of that shop is inhabited by a family. According to him, it was much easier to start a business in his own house, where people in the vicinity know him quite well and their family has been quite well known. About the contemporary situation in the markets, he said that it is because of these vendors that the shops have not been able to pull up a good profit.

Now if someone wants to go to the Chauta Bazaar and takes an auto-rickshaw, the person will not be taken to Mota Mandir but to the other streets that have acquired the name, Chauta. Very few people know that the original market was the Mota Mandir market. A shopkeeper said that during old times, women regularly visited Mota Mandir every evening for prayers and *aarti* and during that time, they shopped around Mota Mandir area. As the city expanded, a lot of families shifted from the nearby areas to other areas of Surat. Timing of evening prayers (from 6:15 PM to 6:30 PM) further led to a decrease in the number of visitors. This rigidity has dissuaded a lot of people for visiting this market. Although, it may be highly conjectural to conclude a direct linkage between decrease of women coming to the temple for prayers and shift in the nature of customers for the market. Yet, in the popular imaginations and practices, there occurred a disjuncture between the temple and the marketplace and this happened not in a distant past. Yet, in this popular domain, the co-relation between marketplace and women has continued. However, before moving to a discussion of Chauta as a ladies' market, it may be helpful to briefly touch upon issues related to spatial sacredness.

Govardhanbhai*,²⁸ an eighty-year-old man, sits on the platform attached to Krishna temple in the Balaji street. He is a caretaker of the temple and it's priest. His great grandfather and the following generations have been *servicing* this temple. 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 he manages all this work 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 says that a lot of people have stayed here because of 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 this conversation, he waves

²⁸ * indicates name changed for confidentiality.

his fragile hands to the passer-by, faintly saying ‘*Aavjo*’.²⁹ He says that a lot of *Khattris* donate lakhs of rupees in the temples and that is how god blesses this place. While talking about the *Khattris*, 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. He also expresses his displeasure towards these habits of *Khattris* but at the same time justifies their actions by feeling a solace in their charity: ‘at least they spend a lot on the temples’. On the question of a possibility of shifting to some posh locality and yet continue working as a priest, he smirked that the cost of living would be unaffordable; in addition, this area gives him a comfort zone to confide into his old memories of the place.

There is another dimension to the sacrality of the space which belongs to the popular history associated with the city, this locality and the figure of Shivaji who invaded the city a number of times in the late seventeenth century. For example, in a very old Ambaji temple right inside Chauta, there is a small room dedicated to narrating ‘temple’s history’. The room also holds a number of pictures of the goddesses. Along with these, there is a big painting in which Shivaji is praying to the goddess and there is a small note right next to the painting that depicts the details of taxes the merchants have to pay at the customs’ office, how there was a lot of money in the Nanavat area of Surat and how Shivaji made sure to maintain the sacrality and piety of the space by taking money from Surat for ‘Hindu Religion’. This story is narrated in different forms among the shopkeepers. This form of safeguarding the sacral space transgresses temporality and is narrated about many leading traders and communities as well. Such an spatial investment in sacrality also has a mundane dimension. This everydayness has definite gender dimensions as also mentioned earlier.

In a novel set in Bhagal area of Surat in late 1960s, *Surat na Dhuliya Mohallama*, Nanubhai Nayak has described Chauta and Bhagal vividly and the markets appear predominantly gendered. In the novel, the protagonist preferred to accompany his wife to Bhagal for products, such as bags, pens and optical glasses, but would not accompany her to Chauta for routine commodities, such as groceries, spices, kitchen utensils and hair bands.³⁰

Both Bhagal and Chauta are in close proximity yet they differ. While visit to Bhagal has been considered as ‘a visit to market’, going to Chauta is not registered as an activity outside one’s daily routine. In the context of Surat, the inner city area has houses that have a small porch like area outside, also known as *otla*, where women get together and socialise routinely. Women who live in other areas of Surat come to Chauta with their friends to socialise, eat snacks or just spend some time away from confines of their homes. However, women who live in the vicinity of Chauta and Bhagal do not come here to socialise, rather they go to distantly located and recently developed areas, such as Piplod and Magdalla.

²⁹ Way of greeting in Gujarati. Literally means ‘Please come’.

³⁰ Nanubhai Nayak, *Surat na Dhuliya Mohallama* (Surat: Sahitya Sangam Press, 1968).

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 that 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 up to three feet as the entrance. This Shiva temple, he says, is very old and was built around the time of Shivaji. There is a myth that Shivaji never looted houses or vicinities which had Shiva temples and this house was saved. In addition, 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, he puts his hands around pillows and 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 and 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 and business with his neighbours. 'It would be too difficult to find this kind of an arrangement in the posh localities; there people are merely concerned about themselves. Here, if I shout once, ten people would come running to me, asking if I need any help.' Two cars parked in the garage, air-conditioned rooms, freshly aesthetically painted walls, an 'I Pad' on his *shetti*³¹ and a LED screen TV which complete the setting also testify a modest level of prosperity and that economic reason cannot be behind his stay in this same house. He emphatically adds:

A lot of families from our area moved to the posh localities like *Ghodadod road, City Light* and *Piplod*, but now they regret it... They come here to celebrate all the festivals and occasions, because they *belong* to this place.

The Chauta market closes at around nine in the evening but Nitinbhai's shop remains open till eleven in the night. He responds that there are people who get free around that time that is, 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 neighbour if he wants to have *Ratalupuri*³² 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 'symbolic capital' that his father cared about.³³ The community matters to the individual sellers. The social capital plays

³¹ Couch, a Gujarati styled.

³² A regional snack.

³³ Symbolic capital here refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*); see Pierre Bourdieu, *Fields of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 7.

its role as an invisible hand. The reputation of a particular ethnicity has its own roles and functions.

Garrett Menning in his study of textile market of Surat has argued that the community in a sense cannot be the 'trust container'; instead, for any individual within the community, the trust is compartmentalised and concentrated among particular individuals, and these are likely to be relatives.³⁴ The comfort with the clan and family members avoids the business partnership complications. However, 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.

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 and 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 pivaaavo kyarek ghare*' (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. Buying and selling in such a milieu thus often begins with an informal conversation but social interaction and friendship do not translate into bargaining or a discount in the price as if faith between the customer and the seller precedes. The faith, however, is neither undifferentiated nor devoid of generational moorings.

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 City Light area three years ago. However, within a couple of months, they had to think about relocating to Bhagal because her in-laws felt nauseated in the new area. Her father-in-law would complain everyday about the place that he cannot go out for evening walks. They came back to Bhagal. Janaki talks about Chauta and Bhagal in a condescending manner saying

I never go to Chauta to buy anything, I do not even like going for snacks or meeting friends there. Here, in Chauta, parking is such a nuisance. Everyone who comes to Chauta with a two wheeler, parks here. For them, it is a commercial place, but we live here. A market is a nuisance for people who live inside it.

In a different conversation chord, her husband tells that Chauta and Bhagal cater to all the tastes, be it high or low. He says,

you get everything here! Even the expensive branded stuffs could be found here and there are far more varieties here than the shops in the posh localities. We have always loved sitting by the porch and watching the market transform, especially till Limda chowk. It is wonderful to get everything right close to the house and moreover, it is trustworthy because we know all the sellers, not only them but their great grandfathers (laughs).

³⁴ Gerrett John Menning, *City of Silk: Ethnicity and Business Trust in Surat City?*, 301.

This subtle difference of opinion is striking. Janaki does not belong to this place, whereas her husband was born and brought up here.

On the issue of belongingness, the case of Ramesh* offers another perspective. He had moved to Surat in 1982 from Hubli, Karnataka. Ramesh worked in a Beer Bar in Hubli. He earned money; however, he had started drinking every night. Whatever he earned, he would spend on buying alcohol and most of the times, he would have to be dragged out of the bar. Ramesh blames the vicinity for his behaviour. He had to clean up tables of people who came to drink and he would witness gambling every day and he believes that is how he got drifted. He says, 'Gujarat, is a dry state and so people are not so open about drinking and so I could concentrate more on work and life. I could live because of Surat city, had I not been here, I would have died of excessive alcohol consumption.' He presently works as a labourer in a bag/purse manufacturing shop in Chauta Bazaar. When enquired from his employer about Ramesh, 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. He is like our brother. In Chauta, relationships are intimate.

Having said so, the shopkeeper says prepares for his stall right next to his brother's stall. They settled their property disputes some years back by dividing the property and separating the businesses. Both of them sell bags, right next to each other and yet behave cordially, at least in public.

In all these three cases (Nitinbhai, Janaki and Ramesh), there are subtle hints to what could be perceived as a market space and the role it plays in everyday transaction. As mentioned earlier, most of the spaces in Chauta and Bhagal are both commercial as well as residential. Many times, shopkeepers would be seen eating their lunches inside the shop, or a not-so-famous shop might have a shopkeeper taking an afternoon nap inside. For those who sell/live inside these markets, transactions also constitute a part of everyday living. For example, feeding a poor might be a personal practice, or inviting someone home could be a personal thing, but this is executed in a market space for Nitinbhai Bhajiyawala and his family. In addition, adapting according to the changes might mean buying the latest gadgets, or equipping the house accordingly; however, the space does not lose its significance for Nitinbhai. The fact that parking of vehicles bothers Janaki and not her husband could have stemmed from the aspect that her husband has been

brought up in the marketplace. For him, the noise, the space and small quibbles are integral and embedded constituents of living. This is like regimes of pasts which go in the making of any space. For him, it is this embedded ness that generates trust, the fact that he knows the ‘*pedhi*’ of all the people around and those who have lived and traded here will always have the most durable and trustworthy products (even branded!). For Ramesh, this space is more like a ‘family’ where he was taken out of his miseries and has been given a job. But more than that, his employer calls him as ‘brother’, an employer who does not mingle with his own brother when it comes to trading. It is a unique situation because both brothers have shops right next to each other and both sell bags. They are usually clubbed into one by several customers who come to buy bags. When asked about them, one customer said, ‘This shop was famous for good ropes during my grandfather’s time. They sold excellent ropes. Now if they are selling bags, could that be bad? They will always sell durable stuff.’ The trust travels across the generation and so do few mythic names.

During fieldwork in 2013, two names featured prominently in most of the responses: Atmaram Bhukhanwala and Noora Dosa (*Dosa* means an ‘old man’ in Gujarati) regarding the idea of *abru* and *saakh*, circulating particularly in the *Kot Vistar* of Surat. For example, 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.³⁵ The inherited businesses by the lineage of Atmaram Bhukhanwala could run without expertise because of the *Saakh* and importance Atmaram’s name had. Even in the case of Noora Dosa, his name was so important that people would buy gold from him without any doubt. The myth says: ‘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.’ While narrating this story, a *Ghanchi* shopkeeper laughed and said

Jena dukaane ek vaar sari vastu vechaay tyan hamesha saari j vastu vechashe ne?shu vechay enathi shu! (If a good product is sold in a shop, then that shop will always sell good products, no? How does it matter what it sells)

Atmaram Bhukhanwala’s grandchildren drifted into other businesses but all of them did well because their family was renowned in the market. While the *saakh* of these figures have continued to circulate, there has been a sharp change in terms of perceptions about customers making it pertinent to bring in the figure of the customer in the ambit of our discussion. For any script of trust has to be coauthored both by a seller and a customer. The identity of a customer is clearly articulated along the line of outsider (migrant) and Surti.

This perception of an outsider comes before us in and through markers of *taste* and language inside the market. In a small shop of sarees and blouse pieces, Jatin* tells:

³⁵ Mohan Meghani, ‘Surat no ghodo hamesha win ma’, *Sima Chihn*, 150th anniversary issue, *Gujarat mitra* (October 2013): 30–32.

It is so easy to identify a Kathiawadi or a Marwadi. They always wear gaudy sarees, full of glitters. When a Kathiawadi or a Marwadi woman comes to my shop, I can easily identify them through the language, the intonations. And then I show them sarees accordingly. You see, Surti women would never wear such gaudy clothes. They wear simple and classy ones. All of Varachha (area inhabited mostly by Kathiawadi) is full of people wearing such glittery clothes. It is really too flashy.³⁶

The figure of migrants from the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, also referred to as Kathiawad, dominate the mindscape of people here. An owner of a very old and renowned shop in Bhagal narrates this contrast in perception:

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.

Here, 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 who come as labourers with those who come from Saurashtra and 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 too.

If you ask the Kathiawadis in Chauta and Bhagal regarding what they think of the *Surtis*, one gets 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. *Surtis* are known for being spendthrift, especially on food and alcohol. 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.

Along with ethnicity, the way the seller engages with the buyer, whether he/she is able to enter into the personal domain of the customer and whether he/she is able to create that element of trust in the other is crucial. Like *taste*, language is another crucial component determining the status of a customer in the transactional space. The jewellery shops have their own trading language that is used inside. Known as *Choksi bhasha*, to the best of our knowledge, this language is in circulation only in South Gujarat and has been developed by the jewellers. Primarily meant to keep trade secrets, this language has a vocabulary to distinguish customers.

³⁶ For the outsiders, the term used by him was 'bahar walao'.

A lot of shopkeepers and sales people have shifted to different businesses, such as apparel, mobile shops in the same locality; yet, they often converse in this language to just talk about discounts to be given to a particular customer.

Chauta and Bhagal in the Age of Shopping Malls and Arcades of Surat

In a small lane, there are various kinds of lingerie displayed close to a wall and there are four men standing right next to them. They are engaged in explaining the fitting and various varieties to women customers. Women/girls of various age groups can be seen here and the men are comfortably asking the sizes of inner wear. Women are not shy while sharing this and are glued to the new varieties available. When asked to one of the girls, she says

I do not feel embarrassed at all here. We have been coming here since long. In the malls, there are ladies who sell lingerie but they always assume that we know about a lot of things, or at least we are *supposed* to know. I rather feel much more comfortable asking for anything here.

In the same lane, after about twenty shops, there is a grocery store. It has all kinds of spices, fruit jelly, pulses, rice, juice, Nestle products and some toiletries. Parojanwala, the shop owner, is sitting inside the shop, constantly measuring something. There are two women standing and he says, 'Look at this new *Aggarbatti* (incense stick) dispenser!'

One of the women responds saying, 'But we do not need this, neither do we use this!'

Parojanwala laughs and says, 'You do not have to buy, just see. It is a new thing in the market. Later on, do not tell me I did not tell you about the latest product.'

They laugh and refuse to see saying they will come back again sometime later.

Parojanwala cordially said, '*bole tena bor vechaay, aavu mara dada bolta hata*' which translates as 'The seller who speaks gets his products sold, this is what my grandfather used to say.'

When asked to compare shops in Chauta with those from shopping malls, he said,

See, in Chauta, the shopkeepers never assume or judge the customer. They explain everything about a product. For example, I have to tell someone how to use this freshener, otherwise how would they know? Everything is written in English and it might be difficult to understand. Here, apart from explaining the product, *we also engage with the life of the customer and we know him/her quite well. It is also a happy experience for women to come and haggle in Chauta and Bhagal and talk for while!* (emphasis added)

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 developed markets of different kinds, that is, small 'arcades', 'plazas' and 'shopping complexes' in the vicinity of their residential or working places. Yet, Chauta attracts

and also gets replicated in different ways. For example, there is also a *mini* Chauta Bazaar in the Adajan area of Surat, which came up in recent decades.

Several customers and the shopkeepers have a common thread running in their responses on why Chauta remains a buzzing place attracting customers from far-off corners of the city: the versatility of the market appears as the key in such responses. They would 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.' Apart from a variety of products in the market, there is also a whip of 'trend' that dominates in the market. The designer dresses shown in the magazines and movies are replicated and sold at a reasonable rate. The durability of the product is not guaranteed, but the trend is followed.

Tuheena*, a college student from a posh neighbourhood of the city (Ghodador road), comes here because she can get anything at a very reasonable price and so she can buy a lot of 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.' Chauta and Bhagal are famous for their wholesale market rates.

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 and toiletries that a mall in Surat would have. He tells,

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 personalised relationship in the malls where a person comes to you, explains everything. It is all like, if you have money, buy it or leave.

In addition, 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, 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. 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 negotiate. If a person is rich, he might just leave without a refund or exchange and that product becomes a waste. Rich may afford it but not the middle class or the poor as they value their 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 may incur a loss, but for him, it is an investment in the 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. Along with such simple gestures, the shop owners, here, hugely invest in customer's time. They would sit, converse and sip tea with the customers and discuss about the products that might interest them.

Chauta and Bhagal have specific spices, particularly required for traditional Gujarati cuisines. Women, who come to shop here, look for the authenticity of taste and flavour of spices. Preparing such regional and seasonal cuisines which require these spices is not merely time consuming and labour-intensive exercise but demand a great deal of energy in preparation as well as for the collection of ingredients. Women, who perform this task, are usually categorised as 'homely', thus creating a fuzzy differentiation along the axis of who can come and spend time in purchasing these particular ingredients as against those who prefer to buy the 'ready to eat' spices, ingredients or the finished delicacy. Such a differentiation then leads to a circulation of stereotypes. The time spent here at Chauta translates into their personality and class.

The Question of Trust

This article has so far remained focused on the shopkeepers and customers. Another crucial figure (who is also immensely visible and vocal) is that of a vendor. Though a detailed treatment of vendors is beyond the scope of this article, yet it will be unjustified to brush them aside.

People have generally informed that a large flux of vendors started coming from the later years of 1990s. A lot of shop owners earn through these vendors by giving them a space outside their shops and in return they get even up to ₹ 20,000 per month. Radha* 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 market. 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. For her, these outsiders have created nuisance in the post-demolition period. The demolition was carried out recently (in various phases as recently as in 2014 and 2015) by municipal administration to create more spaces and to avoid traffic issues. However, with the connivance, she accused that the vendors plant their stalls right in front of the shops, occupy all the space. For her, the vendors who are constantly moving and shifting their vending locations are the 'others'. However, the imprecise location of vendors hardly appears as a constrain in the mind of customers as 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. Nikhilbhai adds that the flow of these vendors increases day by day. Each one brings others from his native family and the nexus has grown manifold over a period of fifteen years. Chauta customers are lured by the cheap prices offered by the vendors and so they often lack any further motivation to enter the shops. Yet, vendors and shopkeepers are hardly at loggerheads and often act in tandem with each other.

Along with these shifting vendors, we also have vendors having precise vending locations as many of them sell from the front areas of the 'well established' shops. In such cases, the reputation of the shop/seller adds certain value to these vendors. In these cases, the generational trust endowed in the shop gets an extension and embraces the vendor sitting in front within its fold.

At a rudimentary level, one can observe a three-tier level of perception of trust in this market. In this affective zone, first we hear that shopping malls and other market spaces are not trustworthy in terms of their quality of product. Second, the vendors, though sell in the same place/space as Chauta and Bhagal, are also not trustworthy because they are imprecise and instable in terms of their location within the market. Third, an established shop in this hierarchy occupies the top and are considered as the most trustworthy as they are tied to particular location, have generational pedigree, take care of all the complaints by the customers and are, of course, very genuine in terms of quality of the product.

The question remains, how to make sense of this trust. Even when the regimes of the trust appear to be differentiated and hierarchical, why do people pour into Chauta? On a critical scrutiny, when one can clearly see flows in the offered justification about cheapness of commodities and their better quality in Chauta, why do shops in the spacious and shining malls appear lacklustre and narrow by lanes of Chauta are abuzz with customer crowds? The question, in the absence of statistical details about volume of transaction or customer flow at both the ends (at Chauta and at shopping malls), is not to achieve a comparative picture but to engage with people thronging to Chauta from different parts of this city and its neighbouring areas. What do an account of Chauta Bazaar offer in terms of not merely a place of economic transactions but beyond that as a social space?

Market as a Social Space

In the study of markets of *Porta Palazzo*, Rachel E. Black has compared the *passeggiata*, places in the Italian towns where people 'walk up and down along boulevard or park socializing' 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. Following Giovana Del Negro's coinage of such spaces as "ritualized performance" of town's culture which is essential for social cohesion', she has made a case for *Porta Palazzo* as

a place where people negotiate their changing society, where gender roles are challenged, the economy is discussed and politics are sometimes marched down the street in a protest. One difference is that people who socialize during the *passeggiata* generally know each other or have a social connection. This practice of public sociability and display generally only occurs in small towns; *passeggiata* generally does not happen in large cities in Italy. Scale remains a problem.³⁷

³⁷ Rachel E. Black, *Porta Palazzo, Anthropology of an Italian Market* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 172.

With a caveat already placed by Black, one may also add that Chauta is quite different in terms of its function as a social space. Unlike *passeggiata* where people generally know each other, in Chauta (located in one of the fastest growing cities of India), customers may not talk to other customers. Yet, first, we should also keep in mind that women often go to Chauta in groups, some time with members of extended family, at other occasions with neighbours or friends. Thus, shopping has often been a collective experience. Second, even if we assume that, over the last five decades, streets and markets of Surat have acquired basic characteristics of alienation and anonymity, the exchange of social information has taken a different route in a marketplace, such as Chauta. As mentioned earlier, it is between customer and the shopkeeper. Customers do share little information about their family and personal life with shopkeepers. A bond between customer and the shopkeeper often precedes the transaction, giving shape to confidence and faith. However, neither sharing nor confidence comes before us as socially ignorant categories. As we saw earlier, these are punctuated along the axis of language (case of Choksi language) and notions of Surti and Kathiawadi (case of taste). We shall discuss the implications in the next section. However, before that, it may not be unwarranted here to extend an aspect closely related to sharing and confidence—absence of intimidation in the marketplace.

Nimesh*, who lives here, believes that these markets are more like fairs, where people can enjoy 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 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. Shopkeepers have often claimed that based on their interactions, familiarity and impressions of the customers, they recommend or dissuade them to purchase or reject a commodity. Such advices often result in immediate loss but they aim to achieve long-term gain. Such a strategy may not at first sight appear any insightful. This claim of a shopkeeper may also be brushed aside as a statement against the shopping malls which (except in high-end stores offering personalised attention) largely lack such personal counselling having a factor of risk of losing immediate profit. However, in a second look, this may be suggestive of the confidence of a shopkeeper in the customer's future visits to the same shop. Such a calculated investment in the future also keeps the shopkeeper attentive to shifts in shopping trends taking place in contemporary milieu.

If the shopping complexes have elevators, the shop owners in these markets have broken the high platforms of their entrances for the convenience of the customers. Arrangements and display of goods have changed over the decades, allowing customers a walk through to shelves so that like a departmental stores and malls they can pick and choose commodities in shops too. One may or may not agree with the argument that the market seems like an outdated institution that should have been done away with long ago; it can even be considered as a form of resistance to modernity.³⁸ Yet, these thrive and Chauta is a good example.

³⁸ Ibid., 173.

The immensely satisfied faces of old men and women are visible in these markets, where they sit with magazines, books and lunch boxes along with some products to sell. These are the people who have children studying abroad, who have sons going to the offices in the posh areas and who have daughters married off to men settled in London and the States. They still sit here with faces filled with happiness.

The narratives of confidence, sharing of personal and family information and calculated faith in customer that she will return and enhance the repute of the shop are directly connected with trust. For Georg Simmel, 'confidence, evidently, is one of the most important synthetic forces within society'.³⁹ He further goes on to say that 'the confidence is intermediate between knowledge and ignorance about a man. The person who knows completely need not trust; while the person who knows nothing can, on no rational grounds, afford even confidence.'⁴⁰ At this stage, uncharacteristic to his oeuvre, we come across a long footnote where Simmel brings in 'another type of confidence' standing 'outside the categories of knowledge and ignorance'. This he calls 'the faith of one man in another'. However, he also distinguishes between 'religious faith' which 'is a primary, fundamental attitude toward the other' and 'is mediated neither by experiences nor by hypotheses'. Unlike this faith, he says,

in regard to men, it always, presumably, needs some stimulation or confirmation by the knowledge or expectation...On the other hand, even in social forms of confidence, no matter how exactly and intellectually grounded they may appear to be, there may yet be some additional affective, even mystical, 'faith' of man in man.⁴¹

The ambiguity which is inbuilt in Simmel's idea of faith and central to his notion of trust may not help understand the nature of investment made by shopkeepers and customers in Chauta. Yet, the way he 'presumes a much weaker link between the identifiable bases of trust and actual expectations that human beings have when they reach the state of trust' (as aptly identified by Guido Mollering) not only makes a ground for us to recognise but also appreciate the nature of relationship between customers and shopkeepers at Chauta.⁴² We further need to be reminded that Simmel also brings in the category of 'acquaintance' where he places no onus of having 'knowledge of one another', 'involves no actual insight into individual nature of the personality. It only means that one has taken notice of other's existence, as it were'.⁴³ Perhaps, such a notion of acquaintance most appropriately captures the essence of relationships in Chauta. People prefer to visit markets and shops with which they are acquainted with.

³⁹ Kurt H. Wolf (translated and edited), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1964), 318.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Guido Mollering, 'The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension', *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2001): 403–20.

⁴³ Kurt H. Wolf, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 320.

In Simmelian framework, trust is essentially between people. In this framework, narratives from Chauta reveal social wrappings of acquaintance, confidence, faith and trust. Informed with this perspective, this account of Chauta also allows us to go further and appreciate trust as spatially located concept. Second, we also need to bear in mind that acquaintance, confidence and faith takes shape not in a timeless present but gets accumulated over a course of time. The emphasis on generational dynamics of *saakh* for which shopkeepers aspire for even at the cost of immediate loss and the image of Chauta as an 'old' marketplace are crucial here. It is on this point, history acquires immense significance. However, to comprehend the role of history and its relation with the trust, we need to step out of the dominant paradigm of history as a pedagogic discipline. We need to engage with what is often labelled as popular history, history as it circulates on the streets.

Towards a Conclusion

If dwelling is about staying with things where space is not external as we saw in the words of Heidegger mentioned in the beginning, then staying with a place allows us to think history differently. Here, history is not about the knowledge in and through which a marketplace comes down to us. In the narratives of people from Chauta, history is about their experience of staying with the place. They dwell in the market. To elaborate the point, it would be appropriate to explain the role of history here.

Two dominant pedagogical frames circulate about past in South Asia. On the one hand, we have disciplinary mould of history with its roots in Western science and its close entanglement with colonialism. While the concerns of the colonial archive have largely dictated the content of this history, science has provided the analytical tools to decipher and interpret its meanings. Here, history is singularly an exercise in understanding the past. The sole objective has been the production of knowledge. On the other hand, we have an alternate. Probably, more popular and culturally embedded engagement with pasts comes in the form of myths, epics, sayings and legends. The history as science was predicated on the epistemic violence, a separation between past as object of analysis and present as the location for the production of this knowledge. However, in the alternate model (notwithstanding selective appropriation and projection for meeting specific political end), pasts in its mythic and folk avatar are essentially heterogeneous, plural and therapeutic for the social moral. These two models (one based on science having in its core an idea of a dispassionate and distanced relation with the past and another premised on the cultural experiences and entangled domains of pasts and present in the psychogeography of society) are often pitted as mutually opposites and in conflict.

This study opens up a possibility for another mode in which pasts circulate in the present. At the most basic level, it is at the level memory of events, figures and images of the pasts, which are historical in nature in the sense that they can be traceable and verifiable. These are not about epochal and mythic in the sense of transcending historical time. Thus, figures, such as Atmaram Bhukhanwala, and

places, such as Mota Mandir and Rajmarg, continue. However, framing historical traces in the forms of these memories will hardly allow us any fresh insight, as memories fundamentally constitute fluid zone and they by default bring together the past and the present. Such a perspective will not allow to engage with the manner in which repeated assertions are made by shopkeepers about Chauta as an age old marketplace. History in this realm is an investment in time. In addition, this deep investment, this idea of history circulates as commodity—to borrow a provocative title from Michael Taussig.⁴⁴ In this review essay, Taussig engages with the manner in which images of the pasts circulate and gets consumed in the present. He writes that ‘Like the commodity, (hi)story has two modes; in its thing-form it is something that (hi)storian can rise above and manipulate; in its fetish-form it is self-empowered and irresistibly real. As a commodity, therefore, History is the story that men make and makes men.’⁴⁵ In Chauta, past is not a remote territory which requires a dissection for its archival traces. Through a lineage going back to Mota Mandir, notions of faith personified in the names of Atmaram and fetish of an old market, dwelling in time constantly gets consumed in Chauta as an ‘additional affective’.

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⁴⁴ Michael Taussig, ‘History as Commodity: In Some Recent American (Anthropological) Literature’, *Critique of Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (1989): 7–23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10–11.