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“Chauta Bazaar: A stimulation towards generating cultural exchange.”

The article reflects the relationship between migration and exchange among the society and how they are interdependent to generate processes and patterns of any city. The author has included certain everyday instances of a “local market” specifically the one which is located in Surat, Gujarat. And her key idea is to map the story of that bazaar in respect to migration and understand how it leads to different configurations of communal interaction as a whole.

Exchange and Exploration due to relocation

Migration and culture are the two factors that co-exist together. The interdependency has remained unchanged for a very long time which makes these two determinants completely co-related to one another.

As discerned; some people migrate in search of stability, some in quest of education, some as to achieve freedom from social plus religious norms, some due to overpopulation or a situation of disaster and others migrate due to their curiosity regarding different cultures. And sometimes even because of influence. But all these factors act as a trigger point to accelerate “exchange and explorations.”

By exchange it means, social, cultural as well as political. And by exploration, it means; exploration of their career. Social and political exchange happens when disparate people with unlike perspectives gather around and cultural exchange happens when people get familiarized with various languages, the history of various people and most importantly the lifestyle of different human beings.

Communication leading to Integration

Since industrialization, it has been observed that migrants have adopted different cultures not only to glorify their businesses but also the built environment around them. And all these things occur solely because of communication.

Communication is a key to integration. It is a source of unification and a factor that controls human perceptions.

Human cognition revolves around the “idea of interaction”. And interaction among divergent cultures is a single parameter which fascinates

and occupies a human mind in one way or another. It increases the willpower to explore and to know things along with incorporating seeds of knowledge. Through interaction; they seek information and through information, they understand what is “necessary” and what is “unnecessary.”

Well, that’s because humans tend to search for what’s vital. Not only that but they try to store maximum information possible. Their cognitive power combined with memories allows them to relate and choose their surroundings. Because that’s what they have been taught since the day they are born; from storing information related to the reorganization of people around them to learning things as they evolve.

Not only that, but they also allow themselves to find different ways to implement that knowledge in one or the other form.

From cultural implementation to social aspects, communication plays a very important part. From daily “necessity” to looking for employment; history has witnessed that communication and exchange have played a major role in the implementation and sharing of poles apart details in its best way possible. But both the elements stimulate on a large scale on one common ground; which is “migration”.

One of the major examples of this stimulation is a street market in Surat which is a result of “a shift in movement” accompanied by the “confluence of cultures.” The place is known as “chauta bazaar” and often called “chauta pul” where, pul in Gujarati means a bridge and chauta being the name of the street. It is a place that is an amalgamation of interaction, emotions and exchange at the same time. This exchange is mainly initiated due to migration. So Quite evidently, it has held a very significant “social as well as cultural value” in the heart of the city since its past.

1. exchange: the act of interchanging ideas, information and goods.

Trading as a part and parcel

321 years ago, that is the early 1700’s, Vaishnav traders started selling goods under the bridge

known as chauta pul and later on when people realized that the second factory of India was established by the Dutch East India Company in Surat, more people migrated for trade and employment. Not only that; but also, due to the influence of Surat as a flourishing "Textile and a diamond hub."

Trading of grocery, utensils and everyday requirements commenced with these small vendors, plus migrants selling the favorable goods from their peculiar cities and movement of pop-ups or temporary stalls/ cycles which are known as laari's.

They are now very prominent in the city of Surat. In addition to that, since the 1600's it has remained an exchange hub allowing more immigrants to pursue trading as their business. So, the inflow of immigrants just kept on increasing till the '80s which later led to shortages of shops and houses as well.

But after the late '80s when people from Surat migrated to Mumbai to expand their linkages the existing migrants also utilized their abandoned shops for "storage and manufacturing." Some of them remained abandoned but most of them got occupied as time passed.

For instance; local food vendors re-used them for storage of raw vegetables; some of them used those shops to store utensils and cook food while others used them to collect and dump the overused "laari's". It is a street with its commuters organizing themselves to create an example of a multifunctional market that dated back to the '70s.

A single street created multiple functions and the nature of usage ended up becoming quite diverse. At the end of the day, they adapted to the scenario and made the utilization of space as coherent as possible.

Being a bazaar that is full of diverse commuters, people of different cultures and languages, the inhabitants started negotiating and combining their businesses as time passed.

The place itself became an exemplar of multicultural environment exhibiting multiplicity². It became an intersection where Vaishnav traders made peace with Muslim people to create a balance in their market and even the consumers increased due to the coalesce. Besides, all these fluctuations acting together, it made the space very structured at the same time bustling in the old street of Surat. Altogether, the migration

MIGRATION LEADING TO TRADE AND ARCHITECTURE OF "BAZAAR"



Source: Author

of people made it very composite and intangible by nature.

Multiplicity of Liminal Networks

One glaring example of this synthesis or multiplicity and complex nature are the "Multiple networks" of the street incorporating numerous pockets within itself.

For instance, while walking towards the inner pockets, it is observed that the experience of each space as fragmented parts; kept on changing from one point to another; In the end, it felt like a never-ending maze.

Additionally, a lot of active and inactive pockets became a major part of the scenario as the street bifurcated itself into secondary and tertiary ones.

It seemed like a convergence and divergence of different zones, or what it is referred to as expansion and contraction of spaces in architectural terms.

It occurred in the sense that the most active shop and oldest one became a major part of the larger pocket; increasing the emotional value for the commuters whereas the least occupied zone with minimal exchange became the smaller pocket and the least utilized by the commuters.

2. Multiplicity: diversity/ a range of different entities or migrants belonging to varied cultures

While all of these happenings directly affected the amount of cultural exchange, it also made the space an intersection point of information; that is knowledge about different goods, social values and services with ideas; which are cultural as well as financial met exchange and emotions. There were times when there was a breakthrough; when all of the four factors met; that is when the utilization became most efficient and the whole market acted like a liminal space 3. A liminal space where there is a cultural exchange between the old and new generation and each shop is unique and organized in its particular way: A space that adopted several methods and techniques of innovations due to migration; A space that is full of clustered, as well as dispersed shops, where every shop on the street has its own story; A street where the visual movement of people speaks for itself and there is no definite boundary between old and new. There is no clear line that divides the people. There is no sense of clarity as to where which node ends. It is a space where every alternate pocket becomes a transitional space for the next street itself. A space where you don't realize which shop to go to because everything looks alike. And in the end, the multiplicity in form of these patches makes you feel that there is only one culture that regulates every minor one in the bazaar; that is the "Culture of trade."

This "Culture of trade" is a very extensive result of migration. Moreover, it has grown through a mixture of so many different types of traders. The youngest one being an eighteen-year-old Muslim boy, known as Aamir Bhai, and the oldest one, being Prakash Bhai dana Chana Wala, a Hindu vendor who experienced

how the "bazaar" expanded and developed. Talking to both, created a perspective that migration can conflux people at the same time generate income.

Another interesting aspect was, both of their fathers used to trade here together but as time passed, they grew into a different business. Ancestors of Aamir Bhai ended up selling bangles and Prakash Bhai got interested in food. Since the 1800's the space has undergone a major transformation not only increasing the cultural bond between Muslims and Vaishnav but also between Gujarati Jains who migrated after the late '80s. Muslims started speaking Gujarati and Vaishnav's expanded their trade from clothing to groceries. One significant change that happened by the inflow of these "Gujarati Jains" was the establishment of confectionaries and greater intermingling of culture.

The first-ever confectionary store was "Shah Jamnadas C Ghariwala" which was established by an immigrant Gujarati family in 1899. The architecture of the space changed such that due to sudden migration selling was initially done on laari's and as it developed, they got a permanent shop encompassing chiefs and small manufacturing units. Including all this, the confectionaries bought people of varied cultures together and people started adopting "Gujarati" as their first language. The boundary between Muslim, Vaishnav and Jains became blurred and the shops expanded from 100 in numbers to 250s and more.

More people started migrating intercity and interstate as well. Apart from groceries, utensils and food, vendors also incorporated "textile" as a part of their exchange. Low budget clothing which could be afforded by people became the main attraction source. Apart from low-cost vegetables and daily requirements, local jewellery came into the picture.

3. A liminal space: a crossing over space that allows formation of various interesting nodes

The whole street became an architecture of "Cultural exchange." Previously they used to sell around their residence. But in the 1890s they could afford two to three floors in a building where the ground floor was used as a trading center and other floors for their families to stay.

Most of the vendors started feeling that there is a shortage of space for storage but as they combined their business, they also combined their housing rents and housing space which in a way unified different cultures too. For instance, many Muslims and Gujaratis started negotiating together, plus at times they also encouraged "inter-caste- marriage". This consequently made expansion a lot easier and created ethics to work together as a community. The migration of immigrants made this street from a bazaar to a community and created an architecture of communal exchange.

It also triggered different types of trading and initiated social values in everyone as to integrate people

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through language, food, clothes, buying, selling and most importantly communication. It created a sense of unity in diversity, and it promoted a balance between migration and financial income by creating a lot of employment opportunities.

So, although the architecture depends on the history of vendors converting their laari's into permanent shops or them getting familiar with the construction technology as their knowledge increased, the unorganized chaos and melding of culture because of migration is what makes this place “chauta bazaar.” Thus, today it has become the most well-known public space of Surat and its public (user group) is making it more alive with a different experience for each consumer as well as a seller, including the public who may just use this place as a transitional space. The way people circulate, the way migrants utilize the shops unfolding on the streets, the idea of exchange plus the emotional attachment because of a strong history are the things that govern the experience of this space.