

Shops on the Move

Sanjay Chaurasiya's *paan* cart is less than half a kilometre from my flat. Next to him is Ratanlal's tea cart. Sanjay came to Delhi from a village called Beesipura near Pratapgadha, and the tea *walla* Ratanlal from Sasaram. They both use pushcarts as shops for the simple reason that they can run away pushing their carts on first glimpse of the municipality worker. Although policemen patrolling on motorcycles often pass through the area, they do not pose such a danger because their *hafta* or weekly bribe is fixed. Ratanlal gives the police Rs. 500 per month and Sanjay Rs. 750...

Ten steps from them is Madanlal, who repairs punctures. Across the road, right in front, is cobbler Devideen, and some distance from all sits Santosh who repairs scooters and auto *rickshas*. Santosh came to Delhi from Sitamadhi some four years ago. Madanlal and Devideen come from a village in neighbouring Haryana. They have set up shop directly on the ground. By evening, the Kquality ice cream vendor, Brajender will also land up with his electronically illuminated, colourful fibre-body cart, names shining in English. In the evening also comes the boiled-egg seller Rajvati with her husband Gulshan and their three children. Behind her shop is an area cordoned off by a brick wall. The place is fairly secluded. The car *wallas* usually come in the night and ask Gulshan to get whisky or rum. Since all liquor shops are shut by this time, Gulshan picks up his bicycle and manages to buy in black a 'half' or a 'quarter' bottle from somewhere. Some customers also take chicken *tikka* in addition to the boiled eggs. That is available from Sardar Satte Singh's pushcart at the next red light. Gulshan gets that as well. He would sometimes be given a little liquor and a few bucks as a tip. Rajvati doesn't object to this, as English liquor for free is a million times better than buying local *tharra* from their own pocket. The pouch of *tharra* is adulterated, consumption of which can sometimes result in blindness or death...

This is also the space where the *ricksha* pullers stop to catch their breath or to pick up passengers. So the place witnesses a great deal of activity. Most of the *ricksha* pullers came from Bihar or Orissa. For some days, at a corner close to the wall, Tufail Ahmed who had come from Nalanda, Bihar had started sitting with his sewing machine. Since he had no fixed address, nobody would leave their clothes with him. So he would mostly repair the bags of schoolchildren or work on altering the clothes of *ricksha* pullers. He has not been coming for the last fifteen or twenty days. Some say he is ill, others think he has gone back to Nalanda, and yet others say that he came under a BlueLine bus and died. His sewing machine is lying behind the police station. Similarly, Nattho and her husband, who sold *chhole-kulche* near Rajvati's cart, have been traceless for months now. Somebody said that Mangeram had cancer in his stomach and Nattho was completely ruined on account of his treatment and after his death she went off to live with a *kulcha walla* in the trans-Yamuna area.

This is the norm here. Almost a rule. The person who comes here every day can disappear all of a sudden, never to be seen again. Nobody will be sure about their whereabouts, so tracing them is not really a possibility.

Uday Prakash, "Shops on the Move"
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PROHIBITED

Plucking of Flowers

Cooking, smoking

Pitching of tents, umbrellas

Loud speakers

Shooting

Washing of clothes

Swimming

Bathing, playing cricket

Sticking of bills

Cycles, football, hockey

Dogs except 8am to 5pm

Not to carry plastic bags in the garden

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