

Introduction

This Element looks at Old Delhi's Daryaganj Sunday Book Market, popularly known as Daryaganj Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar, as a parallel location for books and a site of resilience and possibilities. The first section studies the bazaar's spatiality: its location on the streets, its relocation to a gated compound called 'Mahila Haat', and its subsequent respatialisation. Three actors play a major role in creating and organising this spatiality: the sellers, the buyers, and the state. I study the bazaar in the precise moments of transformation when the pressures of municipal regulations and the neo-capitalist standardisation of urban space forced a semi-formal book bazaar into a bounded, formalised book market. The second section narrativises the biographies of book vendors to offer a map of the hidden social and material networks that support more informal modes of bookselling.

Located in Old Delhi (or Shahjanabad, as it was known when the city was founded), Daryaganj Sunday Book Market is a serendipitous site marked with a historical past that made it conducive to informal trade. I use ethnography, rhythmanalysis, and interviews conducted between June 2019 to February 2020 to argue that while selling books on the streets is not a new phenomenon, the uniqueness of this bazaar lies in its distinctive mechanisms and the specialisations of the booksellers of Daryaganj, and the significant role that these play in serving the speculative category of the reading public of Delhi. However, the very dynamics that have led to the commercial success of the Patri Kitab Bazaar – entrepreneurship opportunities for its booksellers, a healthy resale trade, and a growing urban population in need of affordable books – are also the dynamics that contribute to the increasing regulation of the city that threatens the continued existence of the bazaar.

Daryaganj Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar runs on a combination of order and chaos. Despite the external and internal forms of regulation and boundary work, the bazaar depends on a serendipity derived from the space of the street. Its visually and culturally vibrant aesthetics comprise booksellers setting up their stalls (stall *sajana*, in Hindi) and pedestrians/book buyers walking around and buying books, which are arranged in neat stacks or placed together in heaps. The books that are 'found' on the streets

of Daryaganj are a result of what I call 'double chance encounters', whereby the booksellers find books that make their way to their godowns (warehouses) and book stalls, and readers/pedestrians find these books at the book market. The search algorithms that this book market incorporates are marked by characteristics such as 'accident', 'arbitrariness', 'unpredictability', 'contingency', 'wonder', 'excitement', and 'randomness'. The *find* (n.) then embodies serendipity. However, as one of the booksellers exclaimed in an interview: 'There is a *machinery* working behind this market.'

This 'machinery' comprises three '*parallel*' communication circuits of books at the Patri Kitab Bazaar: (1) the 'traditional circuit', where used and rare books are sold; (2) the 'study-material circuit', which branched off from the traditional circuit, and which includes syllabus books and their ancillary, 'out-of-syllabus' books; and, finally, (3) the 'duplicate circuit', where pirated/duplicate books, or what the vendors call '*D ki kitab*' are sold in various formats.¹ When books exit the 'proper' Darntonian circuit (1972) as waste, excess, or due to a shift in their utility, there is an alteration in the book's worth. Notably, in the case of South Asia, where informal and illicit markets often co-exist with formal and licit ones, the limitations of Darnton's model² can become the point of departure for the uncovering of the subsequent lives – or afterlives – of the book outside the Darntonian circuit.

In their afterlife, all books at the Daryaganj Sunday Book Bazaar are *nayi-jaisi*, or 'like new', and they are sold in a (recom)modified, parallel

¹ Kanupriya Dhingra, *Book History in India* series, volume four: this forthcoming book chapter is a detailed exploration of the three parallel circuits of Daryaganj Book Bazaar.

² Robert Darnton's seminal scholarly work provides us with three pivotal questions when confronted by the book object: 'How do books come into being? How do they reach readers? What do readers make of them?' With regard to the second question, Darnton believes that all printed books pass through the same 'life cycle' (What Is the History of Books? *Daedalus*, 111 (3), 65–83; 67). The principal actors in Darnton's circuit – which I refer to in this Element as the 'proper' communication circuit – are the author, the publisher and/or the bookseller, the printer, and other intermediaries such as suppliers, binders, and shippers. The site of a bookshop – or what I call the 'proper' bookshop – is the enabler of this circuit.

format: second-hand, rare, photocopied, or pirated. There are precise methods for evaluating a book's value when it leaves the proper circuit. A book's 'departure' is not fixed either. Daryaganj books, especially in the traditional circuit, exit from the proper model at various points. Books are sieved from an eclectic, hybrid stock of 'paper-waste' or *raddi*. They also arrive via the private libraries of readers from Delhi on their demise, or are discarded by public libraries and institutions. Then there is the cross-border trade in waste books: developing countries such as India are the wasteland for what the readers of the first world have conveniently discarded. Apart from ship equipment, garments, and e-waste, containers from the United States and the United Kingdom are also one of the earliest sources of books in Daryaganj. Remainder stock from publishers is another important source of books in Daryaganj. Once they are deemed inappropriate to enter the 'proper' market space, publishers auction books cheaply. The booksellers at Daryaganj also bought books from each other, creating value out of each other's sourced material.

Hence, the location of the book stalls on the pavements, the booksellers, the book buyers, their experience of selling and buying, and the marketing and circulation circuits of books in the bazaar are all *parallel* to the official, formal, more 'respectable' habitats of publishers, bookshops, chain stores, e-retail, and the like. 'Parallel', as opposed to 'proper', represents alternative trajectories, the elasticity of the circulation network, the characteristics of the books, the spatiality of the market, and the nature of the business.

Unlike in the West, where book history can productively draw on archival sources such as publishers' records, trade journals, catalogues, trade figures, and the like, South Asian book historians are constrained from the outset by a lack of such records. This is particularly true of post-independence India, where successive attempts to measure the size and scope of the book trade have yielded inadequate results. This is due not only to the lack of publishers' archives and the Indian practice of selling junk paper to the friendly neighbourhood *kabadiwallah* (paper merchant/scrap dealer), but also to the largely unregulated nature of the book market, which has grown in the current climate of desktop publishing and print-on-demand. To turn this lack into an advantage, drawing on my

experience of the Sunday Book Bazaar, first as a buyer and then as a researcher, I have set my investigation within a primarily ethnographic framework.

Overall, I aim to preserve the stories of the bazaar and its booksellers to demonstrate how bookselling is shaped by and shapes local needs and contexts. This Element, then, calls for scholars to engage with the diverse modes and significant geographies of bookselling.

1 'Locating' the Sunday Book Bazaar

Vignette 1

On a Sunday morning, prior to 21 July 2019, you face the now-closed Golcha Cinema on Netaji Subhash Marg in Daryaganj, Old Delhi. You could be a local, a recent migrant to the city, or a tourist. On any other day, most of the regular shops on this road are open, selling medical equipment or musical instruments, located alongside publishers' offices, sex clinics, local and multinational food joints, and a government-owned beer and wine shop. On Sundays, most of the regular shops and offices on this busy commercial road are shut for their weekly day off. Instead, starting from around 9 a.m., you spot a flea market on the footpath (or *patri*) that spills over to cover the closed shutters of the shops behind them. Like any other weekly bazaar in Delhi, there is an elongated line of vendors on the sidewalk. That line has a dominant and rather distinct visual presence. It has changed how Daryaganj looks on any other day of the week. It is because of this line of vendors – most of whom are selling only books – that the *patri* is occupied by pedestrians, in much higher numbers than on weekdays. Most are here to buy books. The books they are after are laid out on the ground or have been creatively arranged by vendors – either neatly on the ground so that the titles are visible to the walkers or heaped together with distinct, colourful signs declaring their price per kilo or per book. The books are of various kinds and varying degrees of newness. Their diversity matches the diverse ways in which the books are displayed and priced at each bookstall. The bookstalls attract casual pedestrians and the regular Daryaganj aficionados (or *shauqeens*) whose motion may be arrested by a title they see. They bend over one stall after another. You walk towards the crowd to become part of it.

Further on, as you walk along Netaji Subhash Marg, you also encounter a few bookshops, both makeshift and permanent, along the sidewalk. These are quite unlike the regular bookshops you might see across Delhi, such as the famous Bahrison's at its original location in Khan Market or its new branches in Select City Walk Mall in Saket or Ambience Mall in Vasant Kunj, or The Bookshop in Lodhi Colony – all shiny mirrors and air-conditioned coolness.

The bookshops on Netaji Subhash Marg have a milieu similar to the stalls on the *patri*: books are piled together, mostly divided by genre, on elevated surfaces covered with paper or cloth. The prices are fixed, and books are sold by weight, unless they are 'rare books'. To learn the price of these rare books, you must ask the bookshop owner. Some of the crowd on the *patri* enter these bookshops as well. One could claim that the bookstalls look like an extension of these bookshops, only we know which came first: the stalls. You might have spotted similar stalls or bookshops on the smaller lanes leading into Daryaganj via Netaji Subhash Marg. As you follow the trail of book vendors on the footpath leading towards Delhi Gate (or *Dilli Gate/Dilli Darwaza*), you turn right onto the sidewalks of Asaf Ali Marg. You continue walking from Delhi Gate Metro Station, exit number 3, and do not stop until you have reached Delite Cinema, which, like Golcha, is one of the city's historic cinema halls. Here, the line of booksellers ends.

If, as you walk from Golcha Cinema to Delite, you find a book that interests you – because it is old and/or inexpensive, your grandmother had a copy, or for any other peculiar or personal reason – you buy it. You might also have to bargain here unless you buy it from the 'fixed price' lot. You could have exited the book market at any point since it has no specific beginning or end, despite the fixed geographical span. This L-shaped market was known as Daryaganj Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar until it was shut down in July 2019, and relocated, in September 2019, renamed as 'Sunday Book Bazaar, Mahila Haat'.

Vignette 2

On a Sunday morning, soon after 28 September 2019, you walk out of one of the exit gates of Delhi Gate Metro Station and into Daryaganj. You look for the book market on the pavements. Instead, you find very few booksellers with hardly any books lying before them, who tell you that this is all that is left of the Daryaganj Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar. What are they still doing here, you ask. They tell you, or you overhear some of them telling the media, that they are raising their voice against the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to retain the footpaths of Netaji Subhash Marg and Asaf Ali Marg as the official vending zone

for second-hand books. They have been struggling for the last two months and now the bazaar has been relocated. It is evident that most booksellers are dissatisfied with the relocation. '*Beti Bachao Beti Parhao: Bina Kitab Ke Kaise Parhegi Beti?*' ('Save the girl child, educate the girl child: How will she study without books?') is one of several slogans they have put on display (Figure 11). The book vendors claim that Daryaganj Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar was an institution and part of the larger education economy in the city and the country. You are given a pamphlet explaining their struggle. Nostalgia for the street is still brewing inside the bookshops that used to be extensions of the *patri* (footpath) bookstalls: the bookshops at Netaji Subhash Marg are unusually crowded, with buyers lining up to the cash counter. Most of the buyers used to purchase their weekly stock of books from the Patri Kitab Bazaar and are now flocking to the bookshops that, in the absence of the Sunday Book Bazaar, carry on the same book trading tradition.

Suppose you are more informed since you have followed the news about the relocation via online or print reports. In that case, you walk further along Asaf Ali Marg to the Broadway Hotel, another significant landmark in the Old City. This is where you spot 'Mahila Haat': the new, officially designated location for the sale of second-hand books in Delhi and an alternative to the Daryaganj Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar.³ You enter the Haat from the only entry gate, which leads to an elevated platform. (There is a second gate at the other end of the Haat, but it is not in use.) Along the stairs, a newly built pavement allows rickshaws and lorries to enter the book market so that books from the nearby storage units that belong to the booksellers can be brought in, although with much difficulty and labour. Once you've climbed the stairs, you can see a book market, all at once. The stalls are spread across the length and breadth of the bazaar. There are numbers painted on the marble floor, and the whole platform is marked and divided into uniform rectangles, six feet wide by four feet long, outlined with yellow paint. The books here are arranged in similar yet somewhat diverse ways compared to the streets. Some booksellers are exploring novel practices, such as putting books on low, elongated tables

³ In Hindi, 'haat' refers to a quasi-permanent marketplace.

instead of directly on the ground or building forts with the spines of the books facing outwards or inwards and the bookseller standing inside to guide you through them and negotiate the price. Some stalls have installed tall umbrellas to protect the bookseller from the sunlight, as well as other accessories such as standing bookshelves and stools, which were not previously used in the Patri Kitab Bazaar. As you walk inside the Haat, you find a book that interests you – because it is old and inexpensive, your grandmother had a copy, or for any other peculiar or personal reason – and you buy it. It is possible that you had to bargain here as well unless you bought it from the ‘fixed price’ lot. You exit from the same gate you had entered as and when it pleases you, without necessarily having explored the furthest corners of Mahila Haat.

These two vignettes offer a glimpse of what the Sunday Patri Kitab Bazaar looked like on the streets of Daryaganj and how the experience is being recreated inside Mahila Haat by the sellers, the buyers, and the civic authorities – the three actors of the bazaar – even if only partially. Building on these visual samples of the appearance, experience, and rhythms of the two incarnations of the book bazaar, this section focuses on their spatiality: what goes into making the character of the space of the book bazaar, before and after its relocation, and the experience of being inside and traversing these spaces, or what I call ‘locating’ these book markets. The act and process of ‘locating’ is a three-way engagement between several actors: booksellers, book buyers, and civic authorities.

Over time, booksellers have periodically turned some streets in Daryaganj into a book market by negotiating with the available urban space. The civic authorities have regulated (and continue to regulate) the use of this space, forcing, pushing, or prompting the sellers to create new, additional patterns of occupation. The book buyers who have motivated the creation of these official and unofficial patterns of occupation and navigated through them are, I feel, rather unacknowledged participants in the geographical and sensory dimensions that the space of the street has to offer. I will discuss how these actors have enabled the spatialisation of the streets of Daryaganj into a *parallel* book bazaar such that the book bazaar created distinguishable rhythms of its own, simultaneously merging with and divorced from the regular rhythms of the total space of Daryaganj.

1.1 Streets and Serendipity: A 'Natural' Book Bazaar

There are several origin stories for the book bazaar. The now-relocated market is said to have operated since the Mughal Empire. Akbarabadi Mahal, emperor Shahjahan's wife, built Faiz Bazaar near Dilli Darwaza (Delhi Gate) in its earliest form in CE 1650: 'a 1050-gaz-long and 30-gaz-wide bazaar', confirms Sayyid Ahmed Khan in *Asār-Uṣ-Sanadid*. 'It had stone shops on both sides, and a canal used to flow in the centre.'⁴ The name *Daryaganj* means 'a market across a river', where *Darya* refers to a river (here, the river Yamuna) and *Ganj* refers to a site where trade is conducted. It was not always the same product that was traded here. Daryaganj only became synonymous with the sale of used, rare, pirated books in the 1960s. According to locals, Daryaganj started as a consumer goods market adjacent to the walls between Subhash Park and Kasturba Gandhi Hospital. There were vinyl records and record players, radios, transistors, mechanical goods, medical goods, and used clothes; books, too, found their place. After a few minor relocations not significantly far away from the lanes of Daryaganj, a few booksellers moved to the now absent *Lohe ka Pul* (Iron Bridge), near Golcha Cinema, from where the street market began to expand. Before its recent relocation to a nearby site named Mahila Haat, the bazaar extended to Delite Cinema Hall. The market structure was shaped like a long 'L', with books stacked on the sidewalks of Netaji Subhash Marg and Asaf Ali Marg, and it hosted more than 250 vendors (Figure 1).

The identity of the place surrounding Daryaganj, especially near Delhi Gate and behind Red Fort, has been associated with various marketplaces or 'bazaars', such as Sadar Bazaar, Urdu Bazaar, Chawri Bazaar, Chandni Chowk, and Nai Sarak, to name a few. While this historical past has made the streets attractive to small-scale entrepreneurs and prospective vendors, serendipity has played a role in the making and operation of the Sunday Book Bazaar for the last six decades. In fact, as the book bazaar became more established, the commercial locality became associated with second-hand books, and not only on Sundays. In other words, there developed a collective understanding among the city dwellers (the *Dilliwallah*) and even

⁴ C. M. Naim. 'Syed Ahmad and his two books called 'Asar-al-Sanadid'.' *Modern Asian Studies* 45.3 (2011): 669–708.