

## Marketing Happiness

*by Joe Lapp*

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On a Tuesday not long ago I went to a Sunday bazaar. Call me simple minded, but the very idea of going to a Sunday bazaar on a Tuesday makes me smile. And that's not the only thing about the bazaar that makes me happy.

When I'm tired of ordered Islamabad streets lined with mini-palaces for the rich, I go to the bazaar to be a part of an every-day Pakistani scene. In the blur of busy customers, din of bargaining and shopkeepers crying out their prices, haze of dust and feathers, in this spice-filled air I forget my blues, if I have any, and get swept up in the pleasure of market sights and sounds.

The bazaar (open on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays) fills a square quarter-kilometer of space in the open area between Islamabad's G-8 and G-9 sectors. It feels to me like the Pakistani version of the Wal-Mart superstores that dot the American landscape and attract shoppers for bargains on everything they need in a big warehouse-like store under one roof.

Except the bazaar has no roof to shelter its wares, unless you count the tarps strung on ropes above some of the small, individual shop areas. There is no floor, either, just the bare earth, dusty in the sun and muddy after rain.

Every time I go into a climate-controlled Wal-Mart in the States I feel stifled, numb, gloomy and – despite the sparkling tile floors – somehow unclean. By contrast, I walk the open shops at the bazaar and feel alive, free, and untroubled.

You can find just about everything you need to make you happy in the Sunday bazaar. There's sandals and sneakers to gladden your feet, serving spoons and paper towel holders to bring cheer to your kitchen, cardamom and curries for ecstatic cooking. There's heads of cauliflower that are bigger than my head. They are piled head-high beside perfectly stacked circles of succulent strawberries.

Generous scales and flexible prices make me happy, too. It pleases me to see the fruit sellers weigh dates with hand-held balance scales, expertly changing the weights until the pans hang level. I applaud their generosity as they throw in an extra handful for good measure or knock a few rupees off the price-per-kilo, just to keep the customer cheery.

On my recent visit I smiled as I watched a resourceful shoe seller draw a crowd. With no shop to call his own, he set out his slippers and sandals in the middle of a pathway. So skillful were his enticements that the established shoe stores nearby emptied of customers while his impromptu layout drew a crowd of women. They talked excitedly to their friends while they tried on his offerings.

Very little makes me sad in the bazaar, except perhaps the orange-vested porters, thin, older men hired by shoppers to carry goods for a pittance. How melancholy they seem as they wait without work, how fragile as they fill their round baskets then hoist the heavy loads to the tops of their heads.

This sadness evaporates, however, in the face of my chief happiness, which is the joy of seeing so many women interacting in public. Like most Westerners, I find it hard to understand some Pakistanis' desire to keep women covered up and at home, unable to have an open life or to use their gifts in the public square.

Here at the bazaar, however, it seems acceptable for women to come and wander the shops, largely unattended and unmolested. The bazaar must make these women happy, too, offering them a bit of freedom in the outside world. Perhaps they smile to themselves as they find a good bargain or stop to snack on a samosa.

Unfortunately it looks to me like this happy place may soon be in an unhappy position. The bazaar's makeshift shops sit on land reserved for a major road between sectors G-8 and G-9. That road is being built now, with construction already reaching to the walls of the market on two sides.

Farther up, the Diamond Cricket Club also sits on this road right-of-way. Another playing space is being built for them a kilometer away so that the road can take over their current space. Will the same be done for the Sunday bazaar?

Whether it stays despite the road or gets moved to new grounds, I hope the bazaar survives, refuge of the bargain shopper and guardian of so much happiness.