

Commodification of Education in Pakistan: A Case Study of Urdu Bazaar, Saddar, Karachi

By

Aaisha Salman & Ali Ashar Anjum



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CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUALIZING THE ‘BAZAAR’ AS A SITE OF LITERARY CONSUMPTION

Introduction

As noted by Alyssa Ayres in her study of the relationship between language and nationalism, “the choice of Urdu as a national language was neither obvious nor natural” (Ayres, 2012). This is because the Pakistani state aligned itself with Urdu as a national language, even though it was spoken by less than 9% of the total population after the inception of Pakistan in 1947. It is Urdu that the state chooses to iterate and represent itself on a national level formally, and so we are interested in the politics of the national circulation of Urdu. Some of the questions we grappled with, as we articulated this project, were related to what insights we could garner from how institutions frame, allow, expand literacy, and Urdu was a starting point to gain this insight.

We want to approach Urdu literary studies through a non-traditional lens, by moving away from a focus on the progressive Urdu literary texts post-partition, which are

often made object of study by scholars in/from the Global North. Instead, we want to investigate the “contemporariness” of Urdu and its “literary-linguistic terrain” (Mufti, 2010) because it can help us understand how literacy and language is housed in Pakistani institutions.

We have chosen print cultures as a site of study because they exist at the intersection of two disciplines: literature and history. They can show us the materiality, the patterns, the nexus of the historical trajectories literacy and literature has taken in Pakistan. We are invested in these materialities because we are invested in the question of access: who has access to the materiality of literacy of a national, formal language and on what terms? What kind of reading publics exist in Pakistan and who has access to reading, and indeed, publicness? In a postcolonial context, in a country fraught with the politics of language.

We, therefore, chose Urdu Bazaar in Karachi as a site for our study. This is because the word “bazaar” connotes a public place, which is a place for a public transaction. The history of the bazaar can be traced back to the Mughal era, where the bazaar was a particular kind of urban space that still signifies “publicness”. Since language is a severely contested entity in Pakistan, fraught with issues of access, we wanted to investigate the circulation and consumption of language in a place that signifies publicness.

The post-coloniality of this setting is also important to investigate because a post-colonial lineage of state means that language bears the burden both of a “unique” representation of nation-ness and the burden of articulation in lieu of a colonial state structure – there is the double bind of inheriting English through history, having it structured such that it is the language of global access, and having to articulate a national language and vernacular for unique identification, which makes a “national” language an important site of study.

The Urdu Dictionary Board’s online dictionary defines the ‘bazaar’ as an open space, an “*aam guzargah*”. It is this publicness that the space of the bazaar connotes/denotes that this project rests on. Ravi Sundaram, a scholar who works at the intersection of the study of post-colonial cities and electronic media experiences, conceptualizes the bazaar as the “main public institution” of the traditional city when European traders first arrived in the subcontinent in the 16th century (Sundaram, 2010). He writes in an article titled “The Bazaar and the City”:

Bazaars were the main public and commercial spaces in the traditional city, in the Moghul capital of Delhi for instance, there were around 150 of them many trading in single commodities. From the 18th century onwards, European travellers began writing horrified

narratives on the Indian bazaar, with its density and apparent lack of regulation, its chaos and smells, and an inability to produce a healthy commercial society. [...] Weber drawing from the travel writings of Bernier and Melucci saw the Asian city as nothing less than a Central Asian horde in permanent military encampment. As for the bazaar, Weber maintained caste restrictions doomed it to a marginal status and incapable of rational accumulation.

Relegated under the misnomer of “disorder” and “chaos”, the bazaar was also not part of the urban modernity planned for India or Pakistan post-partition. For example, Le Corbusier’s design for the city of Chandigarh had no space for the bazaar. Islamabad, designed by Doxiadis, also imagined itself in opposition to this disorder of the traditional city.

In this lexicon of urban development and modernity, the order/disorder binary also seems to correspond to state regulation/informal economies that are not regulated. Although as the work of scholars such as Ananya Roy has shown, the informal and the formal do not exist separately in urban spaces in the Global South, and there are many grey areas in between, there is still something to be said about how the ‘traditional’ and ‘informal’ space of the bazaar exists in relation to a ‘formal’ economy of, say, a shopping

mall, which is a distinctive, and in many ways oppositional urban space. Informality, amongst other things, is also associated with an access to non-elite sections of the population: informal economies that provide affordability and access in absence of state provision.

Urdu Bazaar is one such public place, and, as this research will argue, a crucial site to examine the process by which literary transactions take place in Pakistan's largest urban centre. Literature, literacy and publicness is an important intersection to examine because it shows us the ways in which Karachi's citizens have access to linguistic capital – how they read, what they read and the politics surrounding this literary consumption.

As early as 2002, *Dawn* published a report on the Urdu Bazaar losing attraction, citing institutional neglect, encroachment and improper supply of books as reasons. In this report, the Urdu bazaar is described as follows:

Be it a search for textbooks or educational materials, maps or charts, copies or journals, Urdu classics or latest fiction and poetry collections, legally imported medical, engineering, electronics, computer books or piracy edition or photocopies, one is never disappointed as the shops have it for all groups of people. (Alam, 2002)

Similar to the tone set by this newspaper report, although Urdu Bazaar is a microcosm of what literacy means and operates in Pakistan's urban centres today, it is also a site to examine institutional failures in regards to literacy, which are often called the "decline" of literature in Pakistan. Although it is not useful for the purpose of this research to think about "decline" per se, it is important to think about the politics of access, and how institutional access is made possible or impossible for certain segments of the population.

This section will first examine what makes the Urdu Bazaar a public space, the nature of public transactions and how reading publics are created around Urdu texts. Secondly, this section will examine the different currents of capital that run through the bazaar and the intersection of formal and informal economies. Lastly, we will map out the spatial arrangement of the bazaar in order to explicate the materiality of this public literary culture.

The establishment of Urdu Bazaar

Aziz Khalid, the director of Urdu Academy Sindh and the chairman of the Pakistan Booksellers and Publishers Association, a publishing business that has passed down the hands of three generations, details the history of the Urdu Bazaar when it was first set up after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

Aziz Khalid recounts the establishment of the first publishing businesses in Pakistan after partition, since, in his account, the major publishers that existed in Karachi belonged to the Hindu population that migrated to India in 1947. As such, there was a void in publishing, that publishing businesses such as the Urdu Academy Sindh filled in for. Urdu Academy Sindh was set up near Dow Medical College soon after partition, along with the other handful of publishers who began set ups in the same area. At that time, the Urdu Bazaar did not exist, but the area around Dow Medical College became a small hub for those who were engaged in the publishing business. According to Aziz Khalid, this small hub consisted of seven to eight companies in the area, which included Urdu Academy Sindh, Allies Book Corporation, Shaikh Shaukat Ali and Sons, Feroz Sons, Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons and the Madina Publishing Company.

However, when in the late 1950s, the expansion of Dow Medical College took place, the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) decided to designate the space available in front of the Women's College on Frere Road to booksellers from all over the city, to create a market for the trading and selling of books by the name of Urdu Bazaar. Historically, the Urdu Bazaar had been part of major cities

in the 19th century such as Delhi, where the sale and purchase of books took place. Deploying this name was meant to create a lineage and reference to the historical existence of the Urdu Bazaar in the subcontinent, to name a distinctive space meant exclusively for a market catering to readers all over the city.

Today, the Urdu Bazaar in Karachi located at M.A. Jinnah Road includes two fifty shops that come within the KMC owned area, and where shop-keepers and owners are required to pay rent to the KMC. The Urdu Bazaar is surrounded by other retail and wholesale markets such as the Bahadur Shah Zafar Market and the Aurangzeb Market, which sells spare parts for motorcycles.

Hence, from the late 1950s, Urdu Bazaar was regulated by the KMC itself as a public space for literary and textual consumption and sale, meant to cater to the population across Karachi.

Urdu Bazaar as a public literary space

In an interview Mubeen Mirza, the owner of Academy Bazayaf, located in Urdu Bazaar since the last 23 years, detailed the structural change of the Urdu Bazaar in the last 12 years. According to him, when the Urdu Bazaar came into existence in the late 1950s, almost 70% of the books available here were classified under ‘General Books’, a

category that includes literature, history, poetry, autobiographies and other non-fiction books. However, he said that now only 25% of the shops cater to general books, and the rest consist of stationery, Islamic books, text-books and scientific equipment of laboratories. Sajid Fazlee, the owner of Fazlee Sons, confirming this trend, said that now only 300 copies of a book are published for sale.

It is first important to consider what the name of the bazaar implies – Urdu is the national language sanctioned by the state, and it has been deployed by the state to create a national public. The question then is, in what forms does Urdu exist in the bazaar, within the public? What kind of transactions are possible in Urdu? According to Sajid Fazlee, Urdu is accessed in its literary forms only by a limited segment of the population, those who are “addicted to reading”. The declining books published: reader ratio indicates that reading publics are limited in Karachi – although there is a larger reading public in Urdu than there is in English, all of our interviewees pointed at changing reading trends. Many pointed towards the influx of technology and social media which contributed towards people, and most significantly youth, moving towards other forms of entertainment and leisure as opposed to reading.

While social media is a significant contributor in how reading publics are shaped, there is also a larger context to

how Urdu within the bazaar comes to be. Urdu, in the bazaar, or in a public place of transaction does not exist exclusively as a literary commodity. On the other hand, the modes it takes are Islamic books, meaning the printing of *Quran*, *dua* books, *tafaseer* and *hadith* that people turn to in order to fulfil the religious needs and obligations.

The publicness of Urdu that comes to light through these reading trends is that although Urdu exists as a literary commodity, it also exists through alternate textual cultures that are not conventionally classified as “literature”. As disciplines such as Cultural Studies have shown, literature is an unstable category and takes different trajectories. Edward Said, for example, explains how the novel as a literary form and institution became possible within colonialism that allowed for both the tools and imagining of an overarching narrative. Hence, the materiality of literature is shaped by sociopolitical contexts.

Within Pakistan, the literary commodity in its conventional sense remains accessible or marketable to only a limited segment of the population. The bazaar is a site where we can see that this literary commodity is produced in lesser numbers than it did in the 1950s, when the bazaar was first set up. The bazaar as a public place of literary transaction, then, has undergone significant change in the past twenty years. We want to detail this structure of literary transaction

within the bazaar through a focus on the different currents of informal and formal economies running through the bazaar, and the spatial arrangement of the bazaar that allows us to conceptualize the various literary and textual forms that co-exist within a space of literary transaction.

It is also worth noting how we can categorize these literary commodities within the bazaar. According the field research we did, the following categories of literary/textual items are sold within the bazaar:

- i) ‘General Books’ – vendors, shop-owners and publishers referred to this category to mean non-fiction, which includes history, poetry and autobiographies. It also includes books such as cook-books and self-help books.
- ii) Textbooks – the Urdu Bazaar is dominated by publishers and shop-owners who sell textbooks, for the purpose of formal education in public and private schools. The textbooks within the Urdu Bazaar are locally printed and distributed to libraries, to schools or colleges, or directly to students.
- iii) Stationery and lab equipments – The shops in front of the Women’s College at Frere Road also sell stationery items, scientific equipment for laboratories, school bags and learning tools for

early learners, such as alphabet books and games. This section of the bazaar targets students from the primary to the secondary level at both private and public schools.

- iv) Islamic texts – these include printed *Qurans*, *dua* books, printing of select *surahs* from the *Quran*, as well as *hadith* and *tafseer* books. These kind of texts are either purchased by consumers for daily use, or in bulk for *madrassahs* in Karachi.

As such, within the bazaar it becomes apparent that Urdu exists in a range of forms that are not limited to literature in the conventional sense.

Spatial arrangement of the Urdu Bazaar

The Urdu Bazaar is divided into four distinct spaces:

- i) The area in front of the Women’s College on Frere Road where a range of booksellers and publishers are located; the set-ups here range from stationery shops, Islamic booksellers to publishers’ showrooms.
- ii) The Nosheen Centre which caters exclusively to the needs of students, selling textbooks, reference material and preparation material. It also includes some second-hand book shops.

- iii) A newly constructed Book Mall opposite Nosheen Centre, which is a grey, modern structure of two floors in stark opposition to the structure of the rest of the bazaar. The Book Mall is mostly host to suppliers' offices and shops that do not rely on walk-in customers.
- iv) Stalls set-up by hawkers along the streets of the Urdu Bazaar, which sell registers, books and stationery.

This spatial division is important to examine because it lays out the different economical spaces built into the bazaar: first, there are the shops that pay rent to the KMC and are part of the formal book economy. Secondly, there are the hawkers who are always subject to conditions of precarity, as they are often levelled with charges of encroachment. As early as 2002, a news report from *Dawn* suggests that these hawkers were being subject to encroachment charges; according to this report, the government takes actions against hawkers on its own will.

We interviewed Munawwar Hussain, who operates a stall on a street of Urdu Bazaar. Munwaar Hussain's stall is piled up with books, most of which are either pirated or second-hand, those that have been sold to him by readers who no longer want their books, and a stock of stationery and books given by shop-keepers that Husain sells for lower prices that he has

to return to shop-keepers on a commission that he keeps. These kind of set-ups are not protected by the law; the owner of Dar-ul-Ishaat at Urdu Bazaar told us that these street hawkers have always lived in conditions of precarity. This is because the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) has repeatedly made efforts to “clear” the area off street hawkers in the name of encroachment.

However, we also found out that Munawwar Husain pays a Rs.150 tax for his stall at the Urdu Bazaar to officials of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. Urban studies scholars such as Ananya Roy have shown that while urban informality is defined by a disregard to a formal system of capitalist transactions, it also exists in relation to and is connected to formal economies. She writes, “Informality is not a separate sector but rather a series of transactions that connect different economies and spaces to one another.”

It is this connection between different economies and spaces that the stall of the street-hawker exemplifies. Lined against the shops of Urdu Bazaar, there are many hawkers with stalls containing registers, stationery, old books and school accessories, such as school bags. These hawkers are part of the ‘informal’ economy of the bazaar as they are not sanctioned by the state, and are repeatedly cast in the light of “illegality” by government institutions such as the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC).

Shops at the Nosheen Centre that cater to students also have multiple circuits of trading that might not be officially sanctioned. For example, the shop-owner of Ismaeel Book Centre whom we interviewed told us about the dealing of “notes”, which are detailed answer keys to questions that are expected to appear in exams conducted by the Boards of Secondary Education in Karachi. He told us that students sell these notes to the shop once they are done with their own exam preparation and then these notes are passed down to other students. The ownership of these “notes” becomes contested in this economy, because tuition centres across the city who publish these notes do not have access to the profits being made through them.

Similarly, Nosheen Centre as well as the street hawkers lined against the streets of Urdu Bazaar also host an array of pirated books. For instance, we found several pirated copies of the popular poetry book in English, “Milk and Honey” by Rupi Kaur, a U.S. based poet. Sajid Fazlee explained to us that since publishers in the U.S. cannot take action against the cheap printing and distribution of pirated books, piracy in English is rampant within the bazaar. Therefore, piracy is one aspect of the informal economy that runs through the bazaar, which often escapes the official economic apparatus of the state, but which also makes books in English affordable and accessible to students. While the same book,

“Milk and Honey” is priced at Rs. 550 at Liberty Books, a high-scale outlet, it was available for Rs. 50 on one of the stalls set up by a hawker. These kinds of stalls also attract swarms of students – within the field, we noticed that students from the nearby Dow Medical College stood out by virtue of their white-coats, as they grouped together to look through the stock of cheap and pirated books available at the Urdu Bazaar.

As such, one of the defining features of literacy and literary consumption within the public bazaar is that literary texts have to circulate through both formal and informal economies in order to be accessible to the wider public.

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTION OF PRINT CULTURE AND URDU BAZAAR: A HISTORICAL STUDY

Karachi, the commercial and finance hub of Pakistan, is home to several iconic buildings of architectural ingenuity, reminiscent of its colonial past and generous patronage provided to its cultural and educational upliftment by philanthropists belonging to Parsi and Hindu community, who remained active before India's eventful partition. Today, modern concrete and glass office, commercial and apartment buildings, often vying for the space and scares resources, stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Victorian style and Gothic structures, reminding the onlookers of the city's checkered and rich history.

Karachi has many traces of British influence in the city's architecture and heritage. The iconic architecture of the Empress Market or Frère Hall are among the buildings

depicting such influence. The old city of Karachi, however has an area—a book market— established in remembrance of the Mughal era and the love of Urdu literature in that period. Historians claim that there was an Urdu Bazaar in the city of Delhi during the Mughal era. It came up with the recognition of Urdu as a local language following the arrival of Muslim armies. The real Urdu Bazaar in Delhi, near Red Fort, according to some of historic evidences, was destroyed in the War of Independence in 1857. Famous Urdu poet Asad Ullah Khan Ghalib, wrote a melancholy to a friend in 1861: “This whole city has become a desert”. Moaning on the devastation of Delhi after the failure of this war, he said,

Delhi people still pride themselves on Delhi language! What pathetic faith! My dear man, when the Urdu Bazaar is no more, where is Urdu? By God, Delhi is no more a city, but a camp, a cantonment. No Fort, no bazaars, no watercourses... (Dalrymple, 2008)

These words depict the importance of Urdu Bazaar in Delhi as the symbol of a great culture; the attack on the Urdu Bazaar was not about shattering the book stall, but it was a devastation of Muslim culture and heritage. The grief of Ghalib was realized by many, when, on restoration of the

Urdu Bazaar in Delhi, the historic book stores were replaced by merchants hawking clothing, fragrance and other items. An author has written in this connection that, “the original Urdu Bazaar continued to dot the streets of the city for years to come, it was nothing but a shadow of its former self” (RS, 2018)

For many Muslims, Urdu Bazaar was not only a book market, but a symbol of Muslim culture and heritage. Therefore, after independence in 1947, similar bazaars were setup in major cities of Pakistan, including Rawalpindi, Multan and Peshawar; however, the largest of all was in Lahore. Regrettably, most of the Urdu Bazaars have slowly transformed into gift shops and roadside eateries, itself depicting the diminishing interest of people in literature and learning. Even within this slow social fiasco, Urdu Bazaar at Saddar, Karachi, remained resilient and survived to maintain its crux and legitimacy.

The history of printing culture in South Asia

With the arrival of modern era in South Asia, this region was exposed to the printing press. It enabled the dissemination of information via newspaper and printed books. These publications included literature on various social movements in South Asia as well.

In 1761, the East India Company, set up its first press in Madras. The company's press in Calcutta, published both government regulations and commercial publications. In 1784, the press started issuing the Calcutta Gazette (Pickett, 2011). Similarly in 1822, one of the Company's Employee, Ram Mohan Roy, started the Persian newspaper *Mirat-al-Akhbar* (Emiko, 2013). Late eighteen century can be considered as the time in South Asia when the printing culture really emerged.

It was the founder of Islamic modernism, Sir Saiyid Aḥmad Khān (1817–1898), who played a pivotal role in the resurgence of Muslims. After the miserably failed attempt to dislodge British rule in the War of Independence (1857), he urged Muslims to seek modern education. Also during the 20th century, Maulānā Saiyid Abū al-A'lā Maudūdī (1903–1979), founder of the Islamic Party in South Asia, influenced a large group of people by his writings. Maududi campaign was significantly sustained and spread by the print (Robinson, 1993). Although the print culture was initially downplayed by Muslim scholars, it later aided them in the wide dissemination of their religious teaching. The revolutionary impact of print in the Muslim society became evident with time.

Post-partition print culture and emergence of Urdu Bazaar

The dramatic events of the partition left a temporary vacuum in the printing and book selling vocations of Karachi, as mostly non-Muslim printing press and book owners shifted their businesses, relocating to post-partition India. Thereafter, the void in these professions was filled by the arrivals of émigrés as well as locals willing to continue the tradition of book reading and learning. It proved vital for the survival of Urdu language's as the lingua franca of Pakistan (Shah, 1693). Two major cities of Pakistan, Karachi and Lahore developed as the center for printing industry. During the 1950s, as the "symbol of self-reliance", local language dictionaries and school text books were printed in plethora (Emiko, 2013).

In 1970 there were 111 public libraries in East Pakistan and 123 in West Pakistan and, at that time, Karachi had the leading numbers of publishers and booksellers. i.e. 181, followed by 149 in Lahore (Emiko, 2013). After ten years, according to a UNESCO report, the number of booksellers in Pakistan totaled 3000 during the 1980s, while the aggregate number of books in all the libraries reached a total of eight million. Of those, Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi together held 75% of the books. To cater for the huge volume of books there were more than two thousand printings

presses in Pakistan and they were usually hand operated (UNESCO, 1980).

During the 1960s and 1970s, an autonomous governmental organization, the National Book Center, Pakistan, issued reports on the reading preferences in Pakistan. Quoting the Punjab Academy one of its report said that in West Pakistan(now Pakistan), on an average, teenagers used to read nine books in a month, at that time urban people reportedly bought 30% and borrowed 70% of the books. Some of the popular genres were history, novels and religious books (Ahmad, 1964). In a report in 1974, it was highlighted that the number of readers remained the same but the popular readings also included poems among all social groups, and during this time many people had also switched to Urdu newspapers and magazines. The UNESCO report in 1980, however, noted general lack of reading among the literate population. The report unveiled that between 1967-77 there were 15 million literate people in the country, out of which 75% of the population had no access to books (UNESCO, 1980). The report also claimed that digest, paper back magazines, and popular fictions were generally read at that time, as some editions used to issue 150,000 to 200,000 copies of the publication.

The volume of book publication of general books was not big enough, no publisher printed more than 10 books per

year, besides, majority of general books were printed by the authors themselves (UNESCO, 1980). Overall every year about 3000 books (excluding text books and children books) were published and every edition had 1000 to 2000 copies (UNESCO, 1980).

Urdu Bazaar sprawling with time

Ever since the creation of Pakistan, Karachi took on the added role of hosting one of the largest migrant communities of northern and central India, besides providing the administrative structure for the fledging nation. The émigrés brought with them an engrained attachment and appreciation for Urdu literature.

A market redolent of the original Urdu Bazaar, set up in the port city, initially comprised 15 to 20 stalls majorly owned by the immigrants, who opted to leave their homeland for the newly-created country. In the early sixties the market was shifted to the city's business center, Saddar, MA Jinnah Road. Eventually, the market started sprawling and turned out to be a lucrative place for the most of the bookshops in Urdu Bazaar. Now the shops of Urdu Bazaars, are owned and run by the second and third generation of the migrants.

The location of the bazaar itself has importance as the buildings and architectures depicts British invasion of the old city area quite evidently. The vicinity of Urdu Bazaar has

various markets which includes, clothes, electronics, shoes etc. Many educational intuitions are also situated around the bazaar like, NED City Campus, DJ Science College, SM College, SM Law College and Sindh Madarsatul Islam University. In the busiest region of the mega city, Urdu Bazaar is carrying its distinctiveness, catering not only to the needs of its vicinity but also serving as one-stop source for all the students of the city.

Even though the historic market has physically worsened with time, but still it is considered as the one-stop source for any person needing any book of any genre which includes children's story books, biographies of foreign scholars, Islamic theology, academic literature and so on. Considered as the hub for students, with the passage of time, the Urdu Bazaar has been catering to all their requirements from stationary to printing. Therefore, many stationary shops, paper wholesalers, small printing presses and local vendors have also opened their shops in this bazaar.

The emergence of Urdu Bazaar is also quite enigmatic as no official record is available concerning its establishment and sprawl. During our interview with the people, we came across different stories in this connection, some records suggest that it was established just after independence but it was shifted to its current location in late 1950s. Some others

suggest that it shifted to its present location in the 1960s. Astonishingly, some shopkeepers, claim to be here since partition.

The eminent historian, Abdul Ghafoor Khatri, while sharing his insight on the history of Urdu Bazaar claims that before 1960s there were some shops of booksellers. Those book shops were situated adjacent to Napier Road and near the Lee Market. During that time the number of students was not massive as today, and the city's population was only limited to old city area. At that time 5 to 6 shops near Lee Markets were enough to cater to the need of the students and bookreaders. Some of the famous book shops included "Abbasi Kutb Khana" and "Ishaqqi Kutb Khana". (The former is selling books for almost 70 to 80 years.). Those shops used to sell all text books, general books and stationary and were enough to cater to the need of that time. Another business of buying and selling of old books was started in the 1950s with 7 to 8 shops, which were situated under the pavilion of the KMC Ground, opposite to Kharadar station, near Civil hospital (Khatri, 2020).

In 1963, when the city administration of Karachi started to build markets on the *nullahs* (water-courses), those markets included Bahadur Shah Zafar Market, Aurangzeb Market and Urdu Bazaar. Bahadur Shah Zafar Market was initially

built as the market for buttons cufflinks etc. but soon, with the sprawl of Urdu Bazaar, this market was also considered to be a part of the Urdu Bazaar (Khatri, 2020). Bahadurshah Zafar Market was named after the last Mughal Emperor who was also an Urdu poet, The both identities share a common root —Mughal era, Delhi and the Urdu Bazaar. The passion of Bahadur Shah Zafar towards Urdu can be observed in his writings, and perhaps because of his spiritual love for Urdu, Bahadurshah Zafar Market, which was initially started for a different purpose, now serves the purpose of Urdu Bazaar.

In 1964 there were very few book shops in the current Urdu Bazaar (Khatri, 2020). After the KMC shifted the old books market at KMC ground to the Urdu Bazaar, the bazaar developed as the centre for books and complimentary stuff with the passage of time. During the 1960s and 1970s, people were accustomed to buying used books and afterwards selling them to the shopkeepers dealing in books. During this period, a person usually bought a book on 50% discount and sold it back at 35% discount to the shopkeeper, who then sold it again to the new students. In this way a circular book market was created in the Urdu Bazaar, almost every shop keeper used this strategy (Khatri, 2020). After the 1970s, people started buying new books; and with this, Urdu Bazaar also got an opportunity to explore its potential in this

directions. With the passage of time, old books shops switched to new books as their demand increased.

The major shift from old-books to new-books was caused not only by the upward social mobility of the society, but by another hidden reason— political instability and drastic change in the educational policies of the country. Before 1970, apart from public educational system, major educational institutions were either community based or run as welfare organizations. As part of ZA Bhutto's nationalization policies, all educational institutions were also nationalized, on the other hand, during the General Zia privatization era, education sector was majorly captured by the business community. Turning a fundamental right of the citizens into a commodity, they not only charged high schools fees, but also urged students and their parents to buy latest books, which eventually favored giant publishers. Such a practice in schools also shifted the preference of consumers to buy new books instead of old.

Since the 1980s, Urdu Bazaar has become a prominent one-stop solution for avid readers, students and scholars. The bazaar is for all the people, who need new books or old books. Who read in any language or text. In terms of text books Urdu bazaar is selling books of each qualification:

Primary. Secondary, Higher secondary or Engineering, MBBS, CA, SAT, GRE, CSS or IELTS.

The widespread utility of this bazaar has forced many publishers and books sellers, in different areas of the city, to either shift their shops to Urdu Bazaar or open another branch in the main market. Since 1980s many publishers have become part of the running businesses of the bazaar. Maktab-e-Fazlee was initially started in the 1950s near Federal Urdu College, but in the 1980s they shifted to the main Urdu Bazaar. Some records also suggest that there was a bomb blast in 1992, but the consequences of the disaster was not lethal as the devastation of Urdu Bazaar in 1857 at Delhi. The resilient citizens of the mega city were able to sustain the Urdu Bazaar and other markets of Saddar.

In 2020 Urdu bazaar is still having its presence, although technological advancement has led to a decline in book sales as people switch to e-books, but still the market is lucrative for the shopkeepers. However, there is a drastic change in the preference of the readers, the reasons for the change in preference are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Urdu Bazaar demolition notices and their withdrawal

The land of the current Urdu Bazaar was granted by the city administration i.e. KMC. And it has already been stated that

the KMC had built this market on the *nullahs* (water courses). In 2019 Supreme Court issued an order to the city administration to clear all the encroachments and demolish all illegal shops. The whole Saddar Market, including the Empress Market was demolished under that order. As Urdu Bazaar was built on the water course, so it was necessary for the city administration to clear the land for better drainage in this overpopulated city, as once in a year, there is danger of urban flooding especially since 2018.

The city administration was about to crash this vital market which is a source of self-reliance for many but, as the news of demolition of Urdu Bazaar roared, many social activists, avid readers, students and market union held protests against this move and finally succeeded in persuading the authorities to withdraw their decision. However, it is evident that in a few years the authorities might again try to demolish this bazaar. The old city area has heritage buildings and the authorities are also trying to restore them and renovate the city area. That was one of the reasons why the Empress Market recently became a victim of an anti-encroachment drive.

An Urdu Bazaar Mall is also built near the Urdu Bazaar, which mostly comprises stationary shops, or have giant publishers. Currently the mall is not as active as it should be, but if the Urdu Bazaar get demolished that mall will serve

the purpose of the Urdu Bazaar, however, the shops then will be owned by big publishing giants instead of local book retailers. Fortunately, with the expansion of the city many small Urdu Bazaars have been operating in various areas of the city, they are filling the purpose to an extent, but again, majority of them are just selling text books and stationary items.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF PUBLIC READING TRENDS

The Urdu Bazaar has played a vital role in Karachi, as it has been the supply center of almost all the published national and international books. In schools, colleges, universities, libraries and all institutions books are supplied from this market. Even all book retailers around the city buy books from here.¹ Situated along the coast of Pakistan, Urdu Bazaar sells/distributes international books all over the country. This bazaar in Karachi has gone through periods of transition, the tale of this transition not only depicts the development of the book market of the megacity but also illustrates the evolution of the society with in a period. As a living reality, at least three generations of the Karachiites formed a vigorous relationship with this bazaar. Unfortunately, the present generation has not been able to

¹ Interview 8: Syed Jalil Ashraf, shop keeper Darul Isshaat.

maintain this relationship that the bazaar had with their ancestors.

Karachi is a very diverse city, one can easily find every ethnic and religious segment of the Pakistani society in this large city. This diversity is beautiful if it promotes tolerance and harmony. The city, as it sprawled and fragmented into communities on the bases of ethnicity and religious practices. This led Karachi to build its own culture and heritage. Urdu Bazaar acted as the center of cultural amalgamation and harmony with its diversified and rich literature from all over Pakistan. This bazaar has suffered inimically because of chaos in our society in recent years which is the result of a change in societal attitudes, particularly towards reading.

In the last two decades reading behaviors have decayed drastically. According to the publishers, in the last two decades, general books of history, literature, culture etc. have been replaced with cooking, fashion and health books; the latter genre is contributing nothing to the society relative to the effect of the former genre concerning the critical growth of one person². This readership behavior affects the market demand, which urging the sellers to adopt a new business strategy for a better sale. A seller has been forced

² Interview 1: Mubeen Mirza- Academy Bazayaf

to restrict themselves around one to two genre, thus limiting diversity in books. Therefore, veteran readers not finding the books of their interests in this bazaar, now search for different alternatives which include Sunday market (at Regal) and other book outlets.³The disruptive nature of technology, however, demands timely innovation and adaptation at the earliest. Sensing the disruption, and utilizing the technology, a good majority of booksellers are, therefore, now accepting orders of the books online, via WhatsApp and Facebook.⁴

The cross-cultural harmony and Urdu Bazaar

The Urdu Bazaar used to be the centre of inter-cultural interaction through literature. Any book that was published in any area of Pakistan, one can find it in Urdu Bazaar easily. The Punjab Book House was one of those shops where the buyer could find any book published in Punjab of any genre. Unfortunately, like many other shops, Punjab Book House have left this market due to decline in readership. After the exit of such shops, the inter-cultural literary connection has come to an end. Now, neither big publishers of Karachi can reach to other cities readers, nor publishers from other cities can reach to Karachi readers with ease as before.⁵ A major

³ Interview 1: Mubeen Mirza, Academy Bazayaf

⁴ Interview 3: Muhammad Ismaeel – Master Book Centre (Nosheen Centre),

⁵ Interview1: Mubeen Mirza, Academy Bazayaf

reason for this pause is declining readership. In fact, in the last 10 to 12 years, readership has declined exponentially and this has effected the book business across cities.⁶ With the decrease in demand, the import of books from other cities has decreased. As per the economies of bulk, ordering only three books instead of 50 increase the mobilization cost of the book per unit. Another reason has been lack of business ethics; businessmen usually import books from other cities on credit, delayed or abandoned the payment create distrust among publishers and shop owners.

Urdu Bazaar then and now

Having books of poetry, novels, critical review books (*tanqeed ki kitabein*), biographies, *afsaaney* etc., Urdu Bazaar, has been a centre, where an avid read could easily find book of his/her interest. It helped people, especially students to know their history, culture, society and heritage.

Unfortunately, even 25% of the present Urdu Bazaar is not the same, as it used to be 20 years back. Earlier more than 70% sales were of general books. Not only the number of book publishers has declined to 6 from 10 in a street, but previously when 8 out of 10 publishers published general books, today 4 out of 6 publishers publish textbooks. While only 2 publish general books.⁷ Around 25 to 30 years back,

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Interview 1: Mubeen Mirza, Academy Bazayaf

one edition of any published book had 1000 copies now this number is reduced to 300 copies. This is despite increase in population, 300 books for a population of 17 crore!⁸ One famous Urdu magazine, *NauNehaal*, popular among youth for decades, at one instant its production was around 125000 thousand, but now it has dropped to 28000⁹, even though Pakistan currently has the largest population of young people; 64 per cent of the total population are below the age of 30, and 29 per cent are between the ages of 15-29 years.¹⁰In term of publication Islamic books are majorly in demand, these books are not bought for reading purpose but for distribution to other people. Similarity *Quran Shareef* is also in demand but for donation and distribution purpose.

The decline in the sale of general books is the indicator of social change, it shows how our society is deviating from premium knowledge and books. The simple supply-demand rule of economics is operating here: demand attracts market, and seller usually sell commodities according to the demand of the society. If people, by some magic, revive the culture of reading, demanding Urdu classics, like novels of Quratulain Hyder and Muntazir Hussain Tarar, or demand the poetry collection of Parvin Shakir, Faiz Ahmed Faiz and

⁸ interview 2 : Sajid Fazlee, Fazlee and Sons

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ National Human Development Report (NHDR) report launched by UNDP in 2018

Ahmed Faraz etc., all the new spare parts and register shops will again turn into a classics book shops.

The declining readerships is not only affecting the quality of books in the market, but shrinking market has also left the household of writers starving. Books writers who cannot earn much with a single professions opt book writing as a part-time profession. This profession is, therefore, now only limited to professors and teachers. The writers have no incentive to write good books. Even the government is also not patronizing in any way.

According to the shop keeper of Darul Ishaat, the sale of a book was twice and thrice about 25 years ago, previously people used to read books, respect culture and the society was curious to seek knowledge and educational institution ensured character and personality development of a person but nowadays people lack values as educational institutes are only focusing on grades and completing their respective syllabus, personality is not the concern for a teacher nowadays: “We (shop keepers) experience that many very highly qualified people sometimes use abusive language and behave arrogantly. This shows that our education has failed to ensure basic etiquettes, this trait is also reflected in the reading trends”.¹¹

¹¹ Interview 8 with Syed Jalil Ashraf, shop keeper Darul isshat,

The new sales trends depict that now people are more inclined towards biographies, followed by history, particularly Islamic history; the people seldom buy poetry and storybooks. Unfortunately only selected buyers are left, books are only bought by addictive or veteran readers, or who are part of intellectual circles. Moreover, the people who have moved to Canada, America, the USA and other countries, visit bookshops in the city whenever they return.

An effort has been made by the government by building a Book Mall in Urdu Bazaar, but the mall shops generally comprise stationery shops. These shops are majorly owned by wholesalers, distributors, and some brands (including Nafees, a local brand and Signature, a ball pen company).¹² As there is hardly a walk-in customer in the mall, that is why a general shop of book or stationary could not survive there, however, this mall is working as a warehouse for distributors from where they can distribute their items in the various markets of Saddar, Bolton Markets and other markets of Karachi south.¹³

¹² Interview7: Nazir Ahmed – Nazir Book Bank

¹³ Interview 4. Monis – Bin Anis (shop keeper at Mall)

The lucrative business of Urdu Bazaar

The general book publication and readership has declined drastically with time, nevertheless, Urdu Bazaar still is a lucrative place for the shopkeepers, as they are smart enough to trace a map of demand and limit their inventory to the textbooks. The bazaar is still a place of Karachi where one can find any book, however, this statement is now more valid for textbooks. The collaborative work of shopkeepers help to increase their profit margin, every shop owner limit his inventory to a certain genre or education standard, some shops only sale textbooks of primary to matric, some are dedicated to competitive exams like SAT, GRE, IELTS and even CSS, while some others have Cambridge Board books. And all shop keepers help one another by referring their customer to the relevant shops. However, it is feared that this lucrative market will also be wipeout as the private schools now force parent to get textbooks from schools.¹⁴ Textbooks cost is included in the annual fees. So the private schools are prominent competitors of the textbook market of Urdu Bazaar

The lucrative market of the Urdu Bazaar respond to the educational demands of the society. On the demand of students, many shops keep preparation notes of coaching centres, like Practical Centre, Adamjee etc, however, before

14 Interview 5: Muhammad Zahid – Global Books (Nosheen Centre),

students use to rely more on guide books of different subjects but now they prefer notes, as they get good grades while preparing with notes.¹⁵ To get good grades students also prefer books and material which could complete their whole syllabus, assignments.¹⁶ The social learning approach is quite evident: initially a student used to prepare for exams by studying from books, followed by using a guidebook, and now they find a more simplified version in the form of notes. The shopkeepers also confirmed that the tradition of buying and selling old books is on, because of reduced price people prefer the second-hand books.

Piracy culture in Urdu Bazaar

Piracy is an illegal trade, but this culture is common in Urdu Bazaar, Sparing, majorly general books, English professional textbooks published abroad are available in pirated version as they subsidize students to a great extent¹⁷. a book of Rs1000 is easily available in 50-100 rupees in the market due to piracy. Some publishers and shop keepers, prefer not to sell pirated books because of a fear of raid by FIA or other agencies, piracy gets temporarily halt, at the time of such raid.

¹⁵ Interview 5: Muhammad Zahid – Global Books (Nosheen Centre),

¹⁶ Interview6: Nazar Ahmed Fareedi- maktab-e-fareedi,

¹⁷ Interview 8: Syed Jalil Ashraf, shop keeper Darul isshat,

Urdu publishers are safe, as pirated version of their books are not available. These books are, therefore, lucrative for sale.

Exponential decline of readership

Within two-decades, Urdu Bazaar has faced a decline in the readership of general books. This has not only affected the businesses of publishers and booksellers, but has also ruptured the reading culture of the society. A society can never change so quickly until or unless several factors are not at force to accelerate this change. Some of the major factors that have been highlighted in this connection, during our research, are as follows:

1. *The family structures*: Modernity brings some good aspects in to our society but it also disturbs some very important societal practices and the institutions. The shift from joint -family to the nuclear-family is one of such examples. In a joint family system grandparents usually take charge of their grandchildren. They teach social values and ethics and good social practices; reading newspapers and books for example are among such practices. Parents in such families encourage their children to learn literature. In the world of modernity and nuclear family, on other hand, mothers and fathers are so busy in their roles that they need tutors for their

children to complete their homework. In the world of technology, children prefer videos games over book reading. In a nutshell, we have not only failed to communicate our values and culture, but also, to inculcate good reading habits among our children which used to be part of every household. We have surrendered our self before television, electronic media and social media, thus compromising the transmission of good practices into our children. In Europe and other western countries, this syndrome has not been witnessed by the youth as before adopting any new technology or any practices an attempt is made to mitigate its challenges. Change is brought about smoothly, avoiding its dire consequences.

2. *Adopting the Technology*: Television an important source of information. This technology has brought about many changes such as, newspapers is replaced by news headline which is broadcasted every hour, novels and *afsanney*(short stories) has been replaced by telefilms, drama and movies. Initially, television was for limited hours only (between 5 pm to 10 pm), but with the emergence of the television industry, television is televised round the clock 24/7. According to Mubeen Mirza “they are not

entertaining the population rather they are producing fanatics, ill-minded people, lethargic minds, they are producing a very paranoid society”¹⁸. The television is not alternative to books, while reading books we use our imaginative powers to visualize the content of the book, every other person visualize by using his/her creative skills, the televised material altered the visualization of audience, producing a whole generation that lacks imaginative and creative skills. In contrast, strong institutions in Europe, despite introduction of technology, preserved their book reading culture in a better way. ¹⁹ In Pakistan usually people claim that internet has become an alternative for books, but in Europe internet is the reason for reading books.²⁰

3. *Commodification of education:* Reading habit is developed in a child at home but eventually schools take up this major responsibility to guide students towards reading books. In Pakistan, before 1971, the teachers and school owners were more concerned about their students, and majorly those private schools were funded by the trust of business tycoons

¹⁸ Interview 1: Mubeen mirza, Academy Bazayaf

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Interview 2: Sajid Fazlee, Fazlee book shop

of the country as their philanthropy and welfare task toward the society. Habib Public Schools, Dawood Public School etc. came in this category. All schools were nationalized in 1973, General Zia took reversed this policy and the people who jumped into the education business this time were pure capitalists, their bread and butter were depended on the schools, they were more concerned about the profit they earned on their capital instead of educating the students. In this way, the whole education system got commercialized. In this commoditized system, students are more concern about higher grades, than reading books and getting really educated. This has brought about a change in the thinking of teachers, students and parents.

a. Teacher: A teacher is now more like a manager and has to achieve a certain target at the end of the year. Schools pitch their number of good grades to increase enrollment in school. Management usually force teachers to focus on improving the grades of the students. Previously parents praised and encouraged students to read poetries and literature, secondary students used to memorize poetry of Allama Iqbal, Maulana Hali and so one and, in prose Sir Syed and

Maulana Azaad were read by the teenagers. Due to this practice, students developed an interest in different genre of pieces of literature and books. Even a decade ago, teachers focused more on what they were teaching and they provided all related material, unlike nowadays where teachers mainly relying on notes. Students use the same approach in universities, relying on notes of good students rather than teacher's lectures and reference material.²¹ This simplified approach resist students to read books (even textbooks). The induction of coaching centres, dependence on notes sabotages the reading culture of the society. The future generation is in great danger as their parents have not developed themselves as good readers, so they are unable to inculcate traits which are not in them.

- b. Parents:* Parents are investing in their children for their better future. They try to provide them the best possible environment, they choose the best possible school and hire a good tutor as well. After investing so much they expect better results, coerce their child to only focus on

²¹ Interview 6: Nazar Ahmed Fareedi- Maktab-e-Fareedi,

syllabus, instead of book of general nature. The ambitious parents want their children to get educated in such a way that they could get better jobs in the increasingly competitive world.

- c. *Student*: Brought up in the well-controlled environment of the teacher and parents, a child is coerced to focus only on his studies, a routine of the normal student is more hectic than an employee. A normal student spend 6 hours in school, a half-hour in the *madrakah* for religious teaching and one and half-hour for tuition, so how can we expect that child to read general books. And he/she is even himself keen to get good grades to avoid pressure from his/her teachers, parents and relatives.

Conclusion

Urdu Bazaar is the identity of Karachi and the trends in Urdu Bazaar portray the social circumstances of the city. The transition in the Urdu Bazaar is the transition of the society and its institutions. Education performs a major function in a society. American sociologist, Talcott Parson, claimed in 1960, that there are certain pre-requisites of the society and unless or until they are not fulfilled, a society cannot function in an effective manner. He termed those as AGIL (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency) model. Latency, focuses on how to maintain and renew the social system for longer time along a pattern in an established manner. This means institutions like family and school, have a key role to play as they transfer or mediate belief systems and values between an older generation and its successor (Parson, 1960). The education institutions are meant to maintain the pattern of the social order for longer time but our educational system, it appears, has helped in eliminating the basic and vital practices of the society.

The uncontrolled and ill-managed education system throughout decades not only hindered our social values and culture, but has also not produced good labour force for the nation. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith emphasized that the ‘cause of economic growth and development was the “improvement in the productive powers of labour” (Sackrey, Schneider, & Knoedler., 2008). Investment in human capital should be made by strong educational institutions otherwise nor can our human capital compete in this neoliberal, globalized world, nor can we have people who dream and strive for a better and a just world.

The education institutional catastrophe indicates the current crises of the Urdu Bazaar. Declining readership itself portrays the state of our society. Our public libraries are shut down, people utilizing those libraries are usually preparing for their competitive exams. In the age of internet and technology other countries manage to maintain their reading culture but in our country majority of schools have no libraries. The elite schools, however, have libraries and student from that background are encouraged to read more and more. They are intellectually strong, get the best jobs, but are generally cut off from the mainstream. They also enjoy a schizophrenic existence in a society where education system keeps in accentuating class difference.

In the history of education in Pakistan Urdu Bazaar has been a neglected space, this case study conclude that this bazaar has been a major indicator of our society and education system, its depicts the reading trends, people's priorities and social consensus of the society. It used to be a place of inter-cultural harmony, which sprawled throughout the city and connected different parts of the country. The replacement of books with text books has brought a halt to this sprawl, it reflects not only the trend of increasing intolerance and social chaos in the society, but also calls for a strong educational system that can help in ending social decay.

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Personal interviews

Interview 1: Mubeen Mirza- owner of Academy Bazayaf (6-Apr-19)

Interview 2: Sajid Fazlee-owner of Fazlee and Sons (9-Apr-19)

Interview 3: M. Ismaeel- shop keeper at Master book Centre- Nosheen Centre (6-Apr-19)

Interview 4: Monis-Bin Anis- Shopkeeper at Mall (6-Apr-19)

Interview 5: Muhammad Zahid- shop keeper at Global book - Nosheen Centre (6-Apr-19)

Interview 6: Nazar Ahmed Fareedi- owner of Maktab e Fareedi (6-Apr-19)

Interview 7: Nazir Ahmed- owner of Nazir book bank (6-Apr-19)

Interview 8: Syed Jalil Ashraf- shop keeper at Darul Ishaat (9-Apr-19)

Interview 9: Usman Ghani Tahir-Owner of Taher and sons (9-Apr-19)

Interview 10: Munawwar Hussain –Thela Owner (6-Apr-19)

Interview 11: Historian Abdul Ghaffar Khatri (24-Dec-2020)

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