

Although most shopkeepers sell local things with Indian brands in Paan Gali, the border-tension has caused a great damage to the businesses on both sides, **Ayesha Bhatti** talks to traders in Paan Gali

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You need a shampoo of Indian formula or hair oil of Dabur Vatika? No problem, you can find it in Paan Gali. Or if some wedding in family is approaching and you have to purchase Banarasi sarees and other finest materials, Paan Gali is the only trusted option. It is the place known for having all the Indian products we know of.

The residents of the city living for long time even before the partition are familiar with Paan Gali. Situated towards the end of Anarkali, Paan Gali comprises just two narrow lanes with about 40 to 50 shops. The first lane still largely deals in paan and tobacco, the actual business of the market as the name shows, even before partition, and the customers spotted there are usually paan wallas. The second lane,



So what are the plans?

clothes and dressing, imported from India. The business has always flourished there giving a tough competition to the gigantic shopping malls with fancy shops. But now things are quite gloomy for the shopkeepers of Paan Gali since the immobilization of Samjhota Express. The business has reduced to 25 per cent of what they had before the tensions between Pakistan and India in December after the attack on Indian Parliament. This brought the business of Paan Gali to a halt.

Samjhota Express. I have few relatives in India who managed to bring lots of things that I could sell with good profit". He further said that his business has also suffered due to the ban on Indian channel. "Whenever people saw ads on those channels they were sure to find their desired products in Paan Gali."

The effect of the tension can be witnessed on the faces of shopkeepers here. Haider, who has been selling Indian jewelry for the last many years, is not happy. "Due to the political situation, I barely manage to take mere hundred rupees home." "The market for Indian jewelry in Pakistan is very good, but what can I do when there is nothing to sell?" He admitted that most of the jewelry in his shop is Pakistani. "Many times I have to sell the Pakistani jewelry as Indian as I don't want to lose the few customers who come here looking for Indian stuff", he said flatly. So are they planning to move away from here? Some are seriously thinking about it, "When I think of my family, I really look for other opportunities", answered one shopkeeper. But it may be difficult for them to do so. Almost all the shopkeepers have been there since beginning. They never left the place and never opted for other businesses. They have weathered many such times when the two countries were on the brink of war. They still are importing the Indian products via Dubai, which costs them little more than usual due to currency difference and payable taxes yet the difference is not remarkable.

Another route of Kabul-Peshawar is also keeping them in business. But many think that the way things are going on, they have enough stock for the coming years to sell as number of customers is decreasing every day. However, the fact cannot be denied that since December, it has been a long time of low business and the people are losing the spirit of the gone days. One of the oldest shopkeepers is Nawab Ali, whose sons have also joined him. "We were the first one to set up our business of clothes here as we had come from India at the time of partition", said Zahid Khan, son of Nawab Ali tracing the roots of his family from a state in India, Jhajhar. "We have seen such good times", he said, remembering the times when they even sold many Pashminas. Commenting on the geopolitical conditions, he said the economy is in such a bad shape that there are no more potential clients buying Pashminas and original Banaras. Now the potential clients are only those who come for bridal shopping. When asked about the future of Paan Gali, Zahid Khan said that people would wait for the good days patiently yet with uncertainty. "There are some shopkeepers thinking of converting their business of Indian stuff to something more profitable. "There are some who have already gone back to the paan business but we cannot do it. The reason is more emotional than situational; almost every shopkeeper knows he other one. The place has witnessed the second and even the third generation", said Zahid.



Illustration by Khalid

however, has much more to offer, attracting female customers in drove from all classes. Local women as well as those visiting Lahore from other cities find it obligatory to pay a visit to Paan Gali.

There is Indian cotton, silk, chiffon and any other material you can think of suiting to every one's needs and pocket. These shops were actually meant for business of selling paan and tobacco before the sellers jumped into the business of

Rana Aleem has been in the business in Paan Gali since 1954. He has almost all the products that have been hammered to our memory thanks to the Indian channels before they were banned. Oils of Dabur vatika and Parachute, Vicco, Indian soaps, beauty cremes, bindis, and whatever you remember from Star Plus and Zee TV is available in the shop of Rana Aleem. "My business is really in bad shape. My business depended a lot on