

borders is a source of great loss. On one hand, people are unable to see their dear and near ones and on the other, the trade matters are damaged and those relying on this very trade are forced to think about something else to make their both ends meet.

Ghazanfar Ghafoor writes that the recent slump in business demands considerate steps from the government

The Paan Gali, which is famous for the Indian goods, is suffering from the worst period of its life. As it is said that "*Mot or Gaahak ka koi aitbar nahi*", the shopkeepers are passing their days waiting for customers.

The Pan Mandi became an Indian goods market with the arrival of Indian Muslims selling the supari, (Pan) and various other merchandises. They started bringing other items from across the border like betel nuts (chalia), chewing tobacco, cardamoms (ilaichi) and betel paste (katha), and Paan Mandi became a regular market attracting the people offering them the finest Indian Paan.

"The Indo-Pak tension is also a reason of this slump," a shopkeeper stated. Both governments had banned the

imports and exports due to crucial circumstances and Samjhot Express is already stopped. However, alternative route via Dubai is still being used for the trade but it is not affordable for them as it makes the products more expensive. "As we are already facing slump in the business so how can we invest money when people do not have enough purchasing power", said Tariq, a shopkeeper in Paan Gali. According to the shopkeepers if the situation at borders remains alike, Paan Gali would become an ordinary market.

Pan Gali is famous for the best Paan, imported from Sri Lanka and India. The stoppage of Samjhot Express has not much affected these paan wallas as such as compared to those dealing in clothes and other Indian stuff. For the last few years, Pakistan is also growing Paan. A shopkeeper told that Sri Lankan paan is sold for Rs 500 per kg whereas the Indian paan is available at Rs 400 per kg. As compared to these costs, the cost of Pakistani paan is up to Rs 60 per kg.

The Paan business is also more profitable because the shopkeepers sell the Pakistani Paan with the Indian or Sri Lankan brand and the customers purchase it on the guarantee of the shopkeeper. The other items such as chalia (betel nut) are imported from Thailand; however the tobacco lovers prefer the Pakistani brands such as Peshawari tambaku and Pakistani banarsi. The local Lucknow wala tambaku is as good as guru ratna from India. These items have a large margin of profit. This does not mean that the quality of Pakistani Paan is not good; only an expert can differentiate between all three brands.

A shopkeeper told that it is upto a person who is preparing a paan that he mixes all the

ingredients in their right quantity. "If he knows the balance in *Chuna* and *Katha* then no customer can complain. It is imported from Karachi yet paan from India is also kept by a couple of shopkeepers."

According to the shopkeepers, all the items available here are locally made and Indian stickers are pasted on them when they are manufactured. People just go for brands and buy them once they read some Indian brand.

Most of the shopkeepers in the

business of Paan belong directly or indirectly to Karachi. The reason may be that they all themselves are in the habit of chewing paan, which is more customary in Karachi than in Lahore. "The main producers of Karachi are cooperative, and it is good to do business with them," said Tariq who has been importing paan from Karachi for the last one year. "They show understanding whenever there is some problem with the stock sent by them".

Despite this slump in the Paan

Market, the shopkeepers are still satisfied with their business and they don't have any plans to change their business. They are of the view that since the number of local paan users remains the same, the demand for betel leaf will increase.

Unlike those in business of Indian clothes and other stuff, the paan wallas are still having a flourishing business. Some of the shopkeepers selling some fake products in the name of imported had done damages to the

market's reputation. If the customers know that the products are fake, why would they come to buy them. Another reason of this business slump at Paan Gali is the sale of fake products. These fake products are not from Pakistan only but come also from India. Pakistani markets have a very good production of Indian fake products because there is no check on the imported items in Pakistan so Indian products are easily sold out in the Pakistani markets.

Paan Gali — losing its charm

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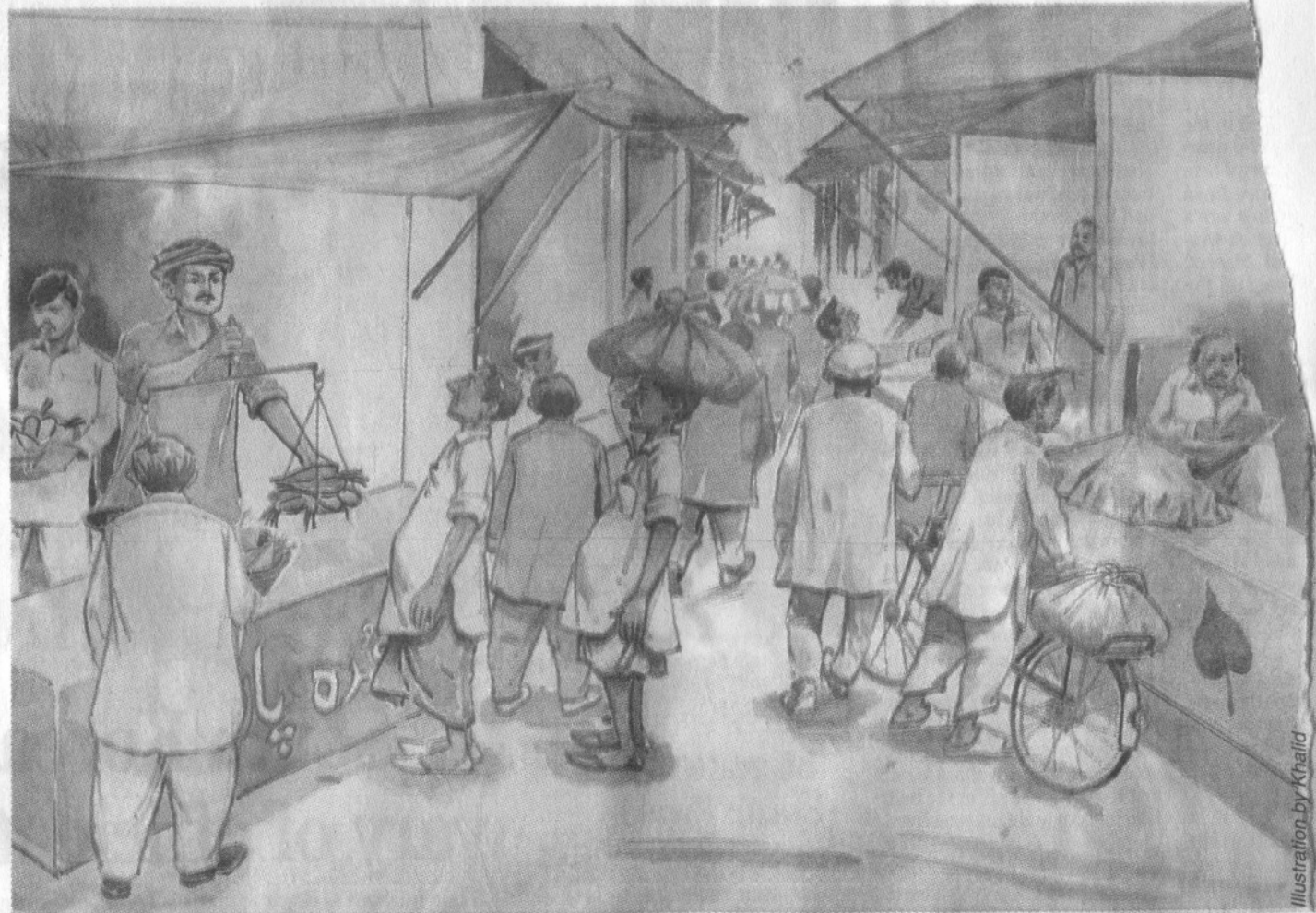


Illustration by Khalid