



Shopping in Anarkali: A different experience.

# The quality-price combination

By Arslan Rafiq Bhatti

Anarkali, one of the oldest bazaars in Lahore, is said to be named after the beloved of the Moghal king, Jehangir. Her name was Nadira Begum, and she was a maid in the court of Akbar. As the legend goes, Akbar could not countenance Jehangir's attachment to the beautiful Anarkali, and in a typically kingly gesture, had her walled up alive. It is said that the Anarkali bazaar stands in the place where the tragic Nadira Begum's fate was sealed.

A walk through the bazaar, however, does not recall romances of the past as much as the commercialism of the present. The bazaar caters to the needs of thousands of buyers every day, and anyone visiting the city is sure to make the pilgrimage round Anarkali's alleys. It doesn't matter whether you have to buy or not; just the trip is fun enough in itself.

Anarkali is famous for many things. It is made up of a number of smaller bazaars which sell specialised goods. Women, for example, are the most familiar with Bano bazaar, where cloth, garments and little fashion accessories are sold. When the wedding season draws near, the women flock to Bano bazaar for all kinds of silks, satins, lace, *gota* and *kinari*. Conveniently placed is the sandal market, right next door. In this particular area of Anarkali, you can find hundreds of shops selling shoes, chappals and sandals for men, women and children. And since most of the visitors to the bazaar are from the middle-class, the shopkeepers charge very reasonable prices and are willing to bargain. Anarkali also plays the role of a wholesale market of sorts, and shopkeepers from other cities buy items from the bazaar to supply their shops. What Anarkali has in its favour is the combination of good prices and a wide variety.

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and inflation is reaching new heights. But a trip to Anarkali can soothe the nerves as the shopkeepers charge wholesale prices. This is a huge advantage for the people buying in bulk, for they get room for a profit margin when they sell the same goods at retail prices in their own shops.

Muhammad Abdullah Butt, a trader who comes from Sialkot to buy garments, says he prefers Anarkali because "the prices are lower as compared to other wholesale markets. There is more variety of garments and you can easily choose the colours and sizes. You can find everything you need here, and don't have to make any trips to other places."

Abdullah Butt owns a garment shop at Sialkot, and his clients have especially asked him to keep in stock a large variety of women's and children's garments. Also, the greater the variety, the more customers he attracts. "I look in the other wholesale markets as well, but I always come to Anarkali, if only to check the prices. And I always buy children's garments from here, because they are more colourful and durable, and people prefer them."

Similarly, Saleem Ahmed owns a cosmetic shop in Muridke, as well as an artificial jewellery store. "I visit Anarkali three times a week in order to look at the jewellery that is available here. The designs on the market are changing so rapidly these days that sometimes I have to come every day. And Anarkali has all of them. The clientele in my shop is slow, but people come to my shop because they want the new designs." Saleem Ahmed says further that apart from the availability of the newest designs, Anarkali also boasts reasonable prices, "and so I can make a better profit when I sell them at my own shop. I've been buying from Anarkali for eight years now, and I've never found a reason to complain."

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who has a sandal shop in a small village near Narowal, was also found buying various chappals and haggling with the shopkeepers in Anarkali. "I come to Anarkali to buy my stock because there is a wide variety available here, and the prices are reasonable. I get a good profit if I sell even a single pair of shoes I've bought from Anarkali."

According to Iqbal Ahmed, even the people in the rural areas have developed a cosmopolitan fashion sense with the advent of the dish antenna. "In Anarkali, the new designs come in as the fashions change. I buy from other places as well, but most of my stock comes from Anarkali. Earlier, I used to visit the shoe market in the walled city, but I realised that none of the new designs got there. So I shifted to Anarkali, and even though I have to pay a few rupees more, it is not much for the quality and the convenience."

Ahmed runs his shop on the basis of a fixed profit margin. If he buys an expensive item, he sells it at a similarly high price. "And the people buy the goods because they are getting quality for a price that is reasonable still." Iqbal was unwilling to tell exactly how much profit he makes, but stated that "my bank balance has been good ever since I started this business." He also said that before the shoe shop, he used to have a paan and cold drinks shop in the same place, but he used to earn less. "My wife and I would fight over money every day. But since I've started this business, everything has been fine, and my regular trips to Anarkali also mean that I can get her many things she likes."

Wajid Shah owns a shop in Kasur, and he is involved in the business of taking orders and selling wedding outfits. He was also found in Anarkali, haggling with a shopkeeper over the price of a dress. "In the past, I used to have the dresses sold at my shop made myself. But after a while, I realised that I was never going to be able to make a profit designing the clothes myself. So I simply came to Anarkali; after a chat with a few shopkeepers, I developed good business contacts. Now, I take orders from clients and pass them on to the shops in Anarkali. This leaves me room for a good profit margin, and the customers like the arrangement as well."

When asked why he selected this particular bazaar, he replied, "Due to easy access, low rates, quick work and neat embroidery. In the past I used to go to Rang Mahal and other bazaars, but the quality of work was poor and I always had to face embarrassment because they never delivered the orders on time. There would be a problem in the dress every time, because I think that the craftsmen would not understand the design properly and would change it to suit their own convenience."

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All in all, it is clear that Shah, like all the other shopkeepers, is more than satisfied with the quality, variety and the prices of all that Anarkali has to offer. It is a haven for independent shoppers as well; but why say more. Anarkali's fame precedes it.