

## THE WEEKLY HAAT

I behave like an amateur garbage archeologist on Tuesday mornings! The garbage littering my morning walk route provides an interesting insight into the *homo economicus* inhabiting the environs of Vasant Kunj and its neighborhoods.

Monday evening is the time for the weekly market in Vasant Kunj. The haat, as it is called, is organized on a long, straight stretch of road next to a park. The whole enterprise can serve as a case study in organization to business schools! Late on Sunday night, a truck hired by the “organizer” comes along with tables which have been picked up from wherever the Sunday market was held. By 6 in the morning, the whole road has more than several hundred tables, dumped on the roadside.

During the course of the day, the hawkers in the market come and hire these tables and set up their stalls. By the late afternoon the stalls are in place and the crowds of people gather. The denizens of the slum clusters and nearby villages walk with their children to do their weekly shopping- for them it is a festive occasion. The women from the flats are also there with their maids carrying the vegetable baskets to do their vegetable and fruit shopping.

In fact, the geography of the market presents an interesting contrast- on one end of the road are the vegetable and fruit sellers while on the other end are the hawkers selling orange jalebis, noodles for Rs. 5/- and other such goodies. In between are hawkers selling everything from mobile phone covers to cute FM radios to combs, bindis and everything else! On the fringes are the hawkers with their own carts. On the vegetable side is a long line of cars with the flat people not venturing too much beyond the vegetables and fruits. The slum dwellers buy everything that they need from the market, haggling animatedly while the kids on their shoulders are busy eating the goodies.

This goes on till late at night. Then the shopkeepers pack up and leave. The organizer's truck comes in, gathers up the tables and transports them to the location of the Tuesday market- all this is done in an extremely orderly way. But what is left behind is a whole road filled with garbage. Vegetable remains, packaging, plates on which the kids have eaten their noodles and so on.

Morning brings another set of people to the road. The really poor come and scrounge for the odd tomato which is not rotten. Or the remains of cauliflower for their goats and cows. Some ragpickers pick up the occasional plastic bottle or wrapper; dogs rummage through the remains to find something to nibble and at least two old women, search for pieces of noodles left in the discarded plates to satiate their hunger. Later in the day, sweepers hired by the organizer come and clean up the road. The hawkers pay some money to the organizer for this service!

But it is the packaging which tells an interesting story- apart from the regular gutka packets ( which have become a part of landscape anywhere in India now) and occasional bindi packet, there is almost nothing which is made in India! FM radios, combs, mobile phone covers, calculators, cloth-tags- everything tells a tale of the Chinese capturing even this low end of the market! It is not just Wal Mart which sources from the workshop of the world but also the humble weekly haat at Vasant Kunj! It is only a matter of time before the gutka packets will also be “Shikhar Gutkha”, made in

Shenyang! After all, if Sambalpuri sarees can be made in Shenyang now, why not gutka and khaini?