

# Location of Indian Bazaars: a future routed in history

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## Abstract

*In the second century CE, the roman senator Pliny the elder was heard calling India “the sink of the world’s gold”, owing to the huge trade already prevalent in India. The vivid depictions of bazaars from distant lands and time periods by prominent travellers, the intricate narratives of the exotic goods traded to the nobility, and the myriad aspirations of the common folk, have since; elevated bazaars/ markets to dynamic spaces. They serve not only as hubs of commerce but also as arenas for social interaction and community engagement.*

*This research paper aims to delve into the historic and geographic evolution of bazaars in India, exploring how trade routes, and transportation networks have influenced their growth over a period of time.*

*The scope of this study is to select several historic markets in India and analyse their history, location and spread with regards to the above mentioned parameters, preferably from their origin to their present day scenario. Given the vast number of markets within India's geographic boundary, a reliance on secondary case studies of well-documented markets and trade routes will be paramount.*

*Qualitative research methods, including surveys involving all stakeholders in marketplaces, as well as data collection from newspapers, articles, previous research papers, and books, will be employed to gather data. This will be followed by a quantitative analysis to derive meaningful results.*

*The outcomes from this research could help to identify the importance of locations, in sustaining markets in the present day context, along with helping generate ideas and frameworks for the future.*

**Keywords:** Bazaar/Market, Location, Trade route, Transportation network, Future framework.

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## Introduction

A bazaar is a very common and important entity in the day-to-day life of the people today, and India is known for several of its markets. All these markets have their own stories, of the past and the present, of why, what, when and how of their existence, and all these stories combined, could give a picture of the BAZAARS of INDIA.

This understanding of bazaars with regards to their geographic location and trade routes and transportation networks could form an essential base for understanding the influence of location in the present day scenario.

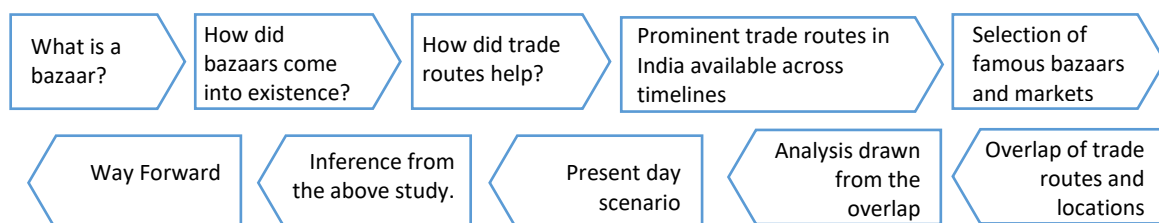
**AIM:** To understand the influence/ significance of geographic locations with respect to trade route and transport networks.

**OBJECTIVE:** To understand trade routes in ancient, medieval, and present-day India, and if the same played a role in determining geographic locations where bazaars sprung up or vice-versa. This papers also tries to understand the influence of these locations on the sustainability of the bazaars in the current times.

**SCOPE:** To identify some historic markets in India and accumulate knowledge about their geographic location and relation to trade routes to analyse if any of the above holds true in the present-day scenario.

**LIMITATION:** The study would majorly be based on secondary sources, given the vast geographic expanse of India. The study will be focused on land routes for this study. A few of the many bazaars, with prominence determined by occurrence on several online platforms, will be selected for the same.

**METHODOLOGY:** The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative approach, with secondary studies of some of the famous bazaars. Secondary study under the following questions could give an idea of the intent of the research paper.



**A BAZAAR:** The term 'bazaar', though widely used in India, has its routes somewhere in the Middle East. "Bazaar" is believed to have originated from an old Persian word meaning a 'place of prices' (Khan, 2014)<sup>2</sup>. In Italy too, a similar sounding word called 'Bazarro' was in use since the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD which also meant a place of goods. So 'Bazaar' simply means a market/marketplace.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF BAZAARS:** Initially, human-beings were hunter-gatherers with the main objective of filling the stomach. With time, they started settling down and started practicing farming. Initially, this was also just a part of necessity. Later, with better tools, a greater number of people staying together, better security, production started to be surplus, and the need for

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<sup>2</sup> Khan, S. M. (2014). A Tale of Bazaars: The Impact of Cultural Change on Tangible and Intangible Heritage. *THAAP*.

other types of goods too, started increasing. This led to the days of the barter system, where something would be taken in exchange of some other thing. Slowly, this phenomenon of exchange of items, started to take place in specific areas, which could be considered as the earliest form of markets.

Open air, public markets were known in ancient Babylonia, Assyria, Phoenecia, Greece, Egypt and on the Arabian Peninsula. (Byrne, 2003)<sup>3</sup>. Mentions of trade and network of markets during the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean area have also been found with substantial evidences. (Moloy, 2016)<sup>4</sup>. In the Middle-East, documentary sources suggest that a form of bazaar first developed around 3,000 BCE. (Mehdipour, 2013)<sup>5</sup>. They were mostly linear. With increase in trade, there was not only a spread of goods, but also ideas. More and more bazaars started developing in all trade centres and routes. The growing importance of markets moved them to the town centres. (eg Greece, Leptis Magna, Carthage). Greek agora and roman fora became prominent areas with marketplaces. Later on, markets started developing near prominent buildings like Churches, Palaces etc. Unlike the European cities, the bazaars of the middle-east were peripheral. They were more related to the Sarais that served the travelling traders. A structure dedicatedly made for a market was first initiated here. On the other hand, trade in America developed independently and markets were mostly local gatherings, rather than proper demarcated areas.

**TRADE ROUTES AND THEIR INFLUENCE:** The earliest known trade route is by far the Silk Route that connected China to the Mediterranean region via south-central Asia and the Middle-east. The route spanned approximately 7000 miles and was active between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 14<sup>th</sup> century AD (Behera, 2002)<sup>6</sup>. This route not only helped in the exchange of commodities, but also helped spread different attributes of the different cultures that it passed through. One of it was the idea of formal Bazaars. Spreading mainly from the middle-east, its influence can be seen as far as China. Though not as old as the Sarai Bazaars, china also had markets that were centrally located in the city centres.

India as its boundaries stand today, was not very much under the influence of the trade route, except its extreme northern parts, reaching south only till the Indus Ganges plain. Trade in India via silk route was not as prominent as its influence as a distributor of religious and social beliefs. Moreover India being a predominantly agrarian society, the trade oriented mentality was also lacking (Hari Sreekumar, 2016)<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, the mention of trade during the interim of the BC and AD between centres in India and the Roman empire, not only find mention in texts, but also have a lot of physical evidence to prove that a part of India was having healthy trade relations with the said. Though there is a lot of mention about trade and trade routes, there is almost no mention of Bazaars during this period in India. Some texts depicting social scenarios do depict gatherings with exchange of goods but the recognition of the same as a haat or bazaar or market is not much seen. Even later, during the medieval times, there are mentions of spice trade without mention of dedicated markets back then.

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<sup>3</sup> Byrne, L. P. (2003). *The Urge to Splurge: A social history of shopping*. ECW Press, 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Moloy, B. (2016). Of Odysseys and Oddities: Scales and Modes of Interaction Between Prehistoric Aegean Societies and their Neighbours. In B. Moloy, *Sheffield studies in Aegean Archaeology* (p. Chapter 11). Oxford: Oxbow.

<sup>5</sup> Mehdipour. (2013). Persian Bazaar and its Impact on Evolution of historic urban cores: The case of Isfahan. *The Macrotheme review*, 5

<sup>6</sup> Behera, S. (2002). India's encounter with the silk road. *JSTOR*.

<sup>7</sup> Hari Sreekumar, R. V. (2016). *History of Marketing in India*. Routledge, 391.



The silk roads in Antiquity from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD



The silk roads in Antiquity from 5<sup>th</sup> century AD to beg of 13<sup>th</sup> century AD



The silk roads in Antiquity from 13<sup>th</sup> century AD to 16<sup>th</sup> century AD

Figure 0.1: Silk route through the ages

Source: (UNESCO, 2009)



Figure 0.2: Silk route through the ages

Source: (Rodrigue, 2020)

**DEVELOPMENT OF BAZAARS IN INDIA:** The exact time-period of when the concept of bazaars came to India is still debatable. The influence of the silk route in the shaping up of bazaars in India has not been found to be very prominent. Owing to the vast geographic region that 'India' had, historically (India included Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and parts of Afghanistan as well), it is very difficult to narrow down on a streamlined history for the whole subcontinent. A major part of it, though, had a different kind of bazaar, known as the 'Haat'.

A 'Haat' is an open air bazaar that comes together at the same place, not regularly, but usually twice a week or less. With growing demands, some haats increased their frequencies, whereas some others have become permanent. The middle-eastern Bazaar concept was probably introduced to India with the advent of the Delhi Sultanate during the 13th century AD. Market places find mention in the planning of forts and cities since that period. (Yang, 1998)<sup>8</sup>. In southern India, there are mentions of *Kadai*(shops), *Angadi*(market), *perangadi* (big market in inner city) during the Chola period between 850-1200 AD. (Upadhyay, 2017)<sup>9</sup>. Bazaar as we know it came into existence only after the Delhi sultanate started. The Sultanate rulers were from the middle east and already knew about the concept of bazaar as we have seen in the previous part.

The Persian rulers started having proper areas where people could come, buy, and sell goods. One such example is seen in Mandu, where a rich merchant set up a huge complex just for the purpose of trade, in 13<sup>th</sup> century AD.



**Figure 0.3: Market complex at Mandu**

**Source: Author**

The prominence of Bazaars happened with the rise of the Mughals. Meena bazaar was perhaps the most interesting market back then. It was supposed to be only for women and happened during Naoroz(new year) for about a week.

The most famous one that exists today is the Meena bazaar in Delhi.

The other famous market of the Mughal times that still exists today happens to be the Chandni Chowk market in Delhi. It was built when the foundation of Shahjahanabad was laid by

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<sup>8</sup> Yang, A. A. (1998). Bazaar India. *Berkeley*.

<sup>9</sup> Upadhyay, R. (2017). The idea and evolution of Bazaars. *NA*.



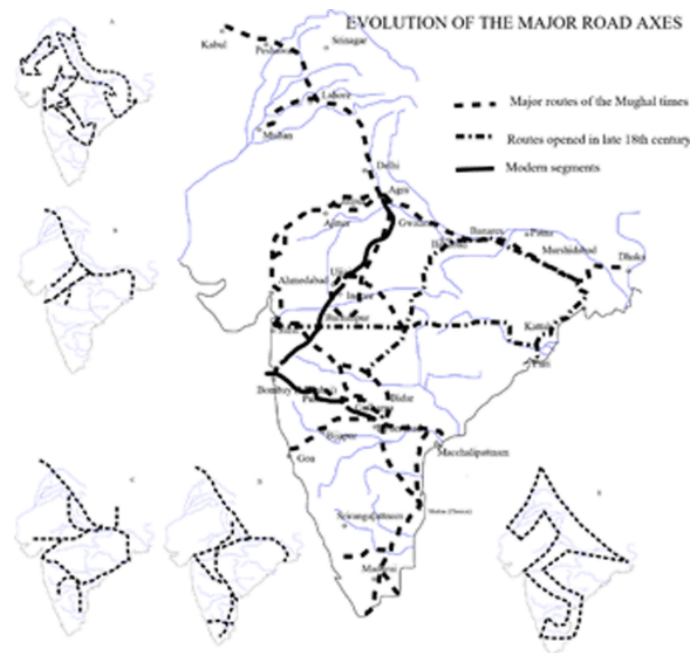


Figure 4: Evolution of major road axes from the Mughal period Source: (Encyclopedia, 1967)

Table 1: Matrix to determine famous old markets.

| Times India               | hipoto                  | Traveler                     | news                               | Culture trip                       | traveller                 | Traveller                | hip advise               | Traveller                | Traveller               | herald                       |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Ima Keithel, Imphal       | Bara Bazaar             | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi     | Meena Bazaar, Delhi                | Ima Keithel, Imphal                | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi  | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi | Sarajini Market, Delhi  | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi     |
| Chandni Chowk, New Delhi  | Jew street, Kochi       | Devaraja Market, Mysore      | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai                | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur              | Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj      | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur    | Sarajini Market, Delhi   | Jew street, Kochi        | New Market, Kolkata     | Mahidharpara Diamond Market, |
| Chowringhee Lane, Kolkata | Chandni Chowk, New      | New Market, Kolkata          | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur              | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai                | Jew street, Kochi         | Jew street, Kochi        | Khan Market, Delhi       | New Market, Kolkata      | Chandni Chowk, New      | Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj         |
| Johari Bazaar, Jaipur     | Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad  | Floating vegetable market,   | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi           | Floating vegetable market,         | Devaraja Market, Mysore   | Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj     | Dilli Haat               | Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad   | Pondy Bazaar, Chennai   | Sardar market, Jodhpur       |
| Jew street, Kochi         | Bhindi Bazaar, Mumbai   | Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad       | Mahidharpara Diamond Market, Surat | Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj               | New Market, Kolkata       | New Market, Kolkata      | Sarafa Bazaar, Indore    | Ima Keithel, Imphal      | Hazratganj, Lucknow     | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai          |
| Meena Bazaar, Delhi       | Begum Bazaar, Hyderabad | Ima Keithel, Imphal          | Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj               | Dadar flower Market, Mumbai        | Floating vegetable market |                          | Anjuna Market,           | Devaraja Market, Mysore  | Colaba causeway, Mumbai | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur        |
| Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj      | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur   | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur        | Sardar Market, Jodhpur             | Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad             | Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad    |                          | Janpath Market, Delhi    | Flea Market, Goa         | Janpath Market, Delhi   |                              |
| Zaveri Bazaar, Mumbai     | George town, Chennai    | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai          | Khan Market, Delhi                 | Mahidharpara Diamond Market, Surat | Ima Keithel, Imphal       |                          | Crawford Market Mumbai   | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai      | Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad  |                              |
|                           | Sardar Market, Jodhpur  | Jew street, Kochi            | Aminabad, Lucknow                  | Crawford Market Mumbai             | Johari Bazaar, Jaipur     |                          | New Market, Kolkata      | Aminabad, Lucknow        |                         |                              |
|                           | Ima Keithel, Imphal     | Meena Bazaar, Delhi          |                                    | Zaveri Bazaar, Mumbai              | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai       |                          | Chor Bazaar, Mumbai      |                          |                         |                              |
|                           | Ittar Bazaar, Kanauj    | Flea Market, Goa             |                                    | Jew street, Kochi                  | Flea Market, Goa          |                          | Devaraja Market, Mysore  |                          |                         |                              |
|                           | Devaraja Market, Mysore | Sarajini Market, Delhi       |                                    | New Market, Kolkata                | Meena Bazaar, Delhi       |                          |                          |                          |                         |                              |
|                           |                         | Mall Road, Shimla            |                                    | Chandni Chowk, New Delhi           |                           |                          |                          |                          |                         |                              |
|                           |                         | Commercial street, bangalore |                                    | Daryaganj Sunday book Market       |                           |                          |                          |                          |                         |                              |
|                           |                         |                              |                                    | Flea Market, Goa                   |                           |                          |                          |                          |                         |                              |

Shahjahan in the mid-17th century AD. Not many historic markets are still in use. The some that

are, mostly belong to the British period. The British brought the concept of “Markets” to India. The idea of having a roofed area just for the purpose of buying and selling was perhaps a flair given by the British.

**SELECTION OF MARKETS:** Based on the available online resources, following is the list of 10 old and famous Indian bazaars that will be looked into in this paper. This list has been created on the basis of popularity among public by comparing some renowned online resources which include newspaper publications, journals, articles and blogs.

The details have been represented in Table 1.

**LIST OF FAMOUS OLD INDIAN BAZAARS(selected based of occurrence in matrix)<sup>10</sup>:**

- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. Chandni Chowk, New Delhi | d. Ima Market, Imphal      |
| b. Johari Bazaar, Jaipur    | e. Ittar Market, Kanauj    |
| c. Chor Bazaar, Mumbai      | f. Jew Street, Kochi       |
| g. New Market, Kolkata      | i) Devaraja Market, Mysore |
| h) Laad Bazaar, Hyderabad   | j) Meena Bazaar, Delhi     |

**OVERLAP OF TRADE ROUTES WITH LOCATION OF FAMOUS BAZAARS:**

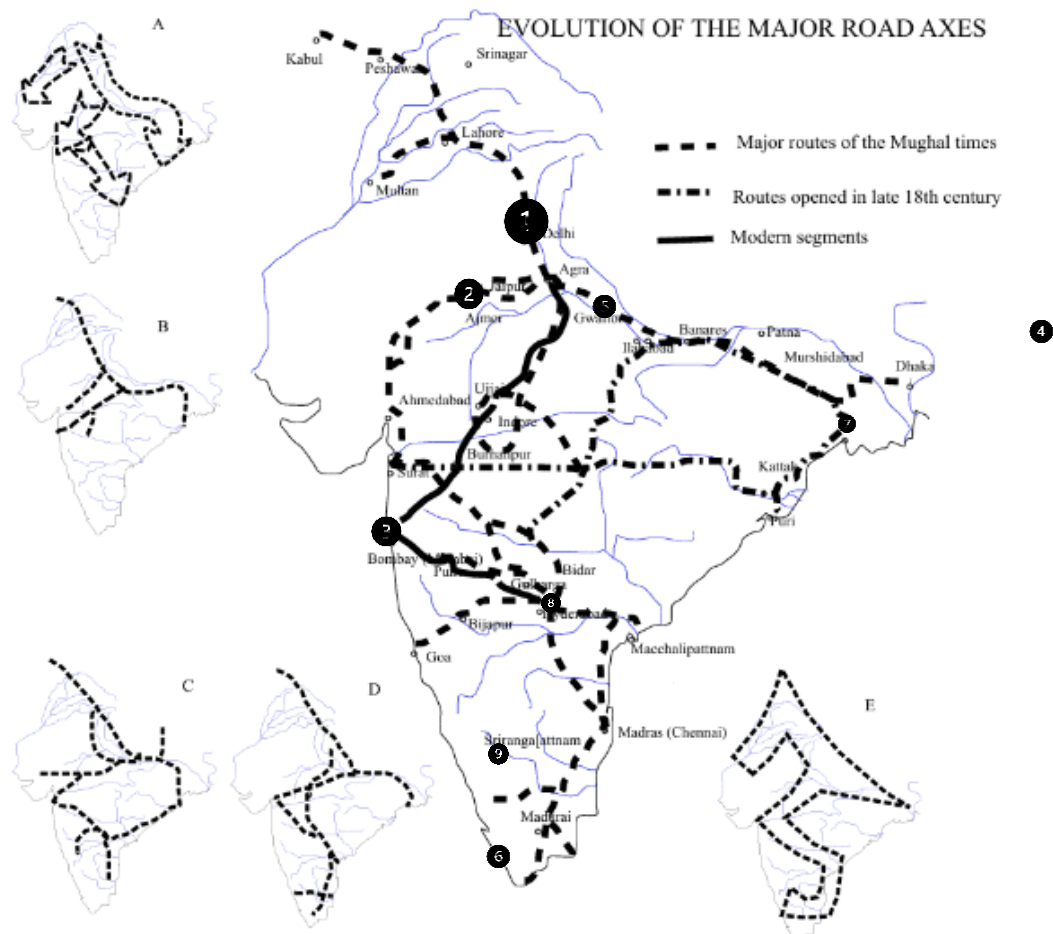


Figure 0.4: Evolution of major road axes

Source: (Encyclopedia, 1967), Author

<sup>10</sup> Comparison sites/articles: Times of India, Tripoto, Travel.earth, India TV news, Culture trip, Tricky traveller, Outlook Traveller, Trip adviser, Today's Traveller, Wion, National herald

ANALYSIS: The plotting of the 10 most famous old markets (old refers to at least a 100 year old) shows that 7 out of 10 fall on routes that have been regularly used since the Mughal times. As has already been mentioned previously, the silk route had a little to no influence on the Bazaar scene in India, except maybe the name of it.

OVERLAP OF FAMOUS BAZAARS PRESENT-DAY SCENARIO:

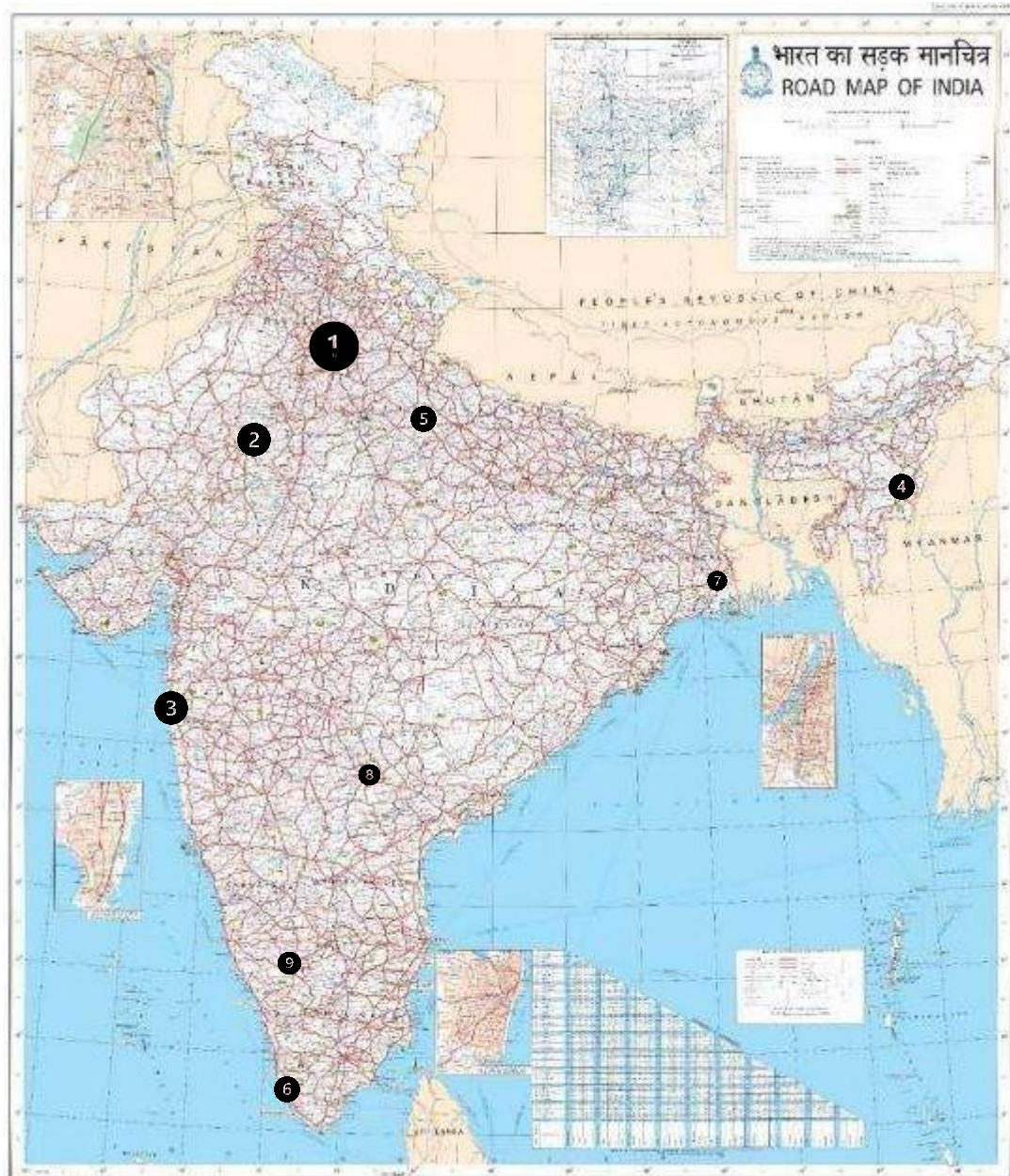
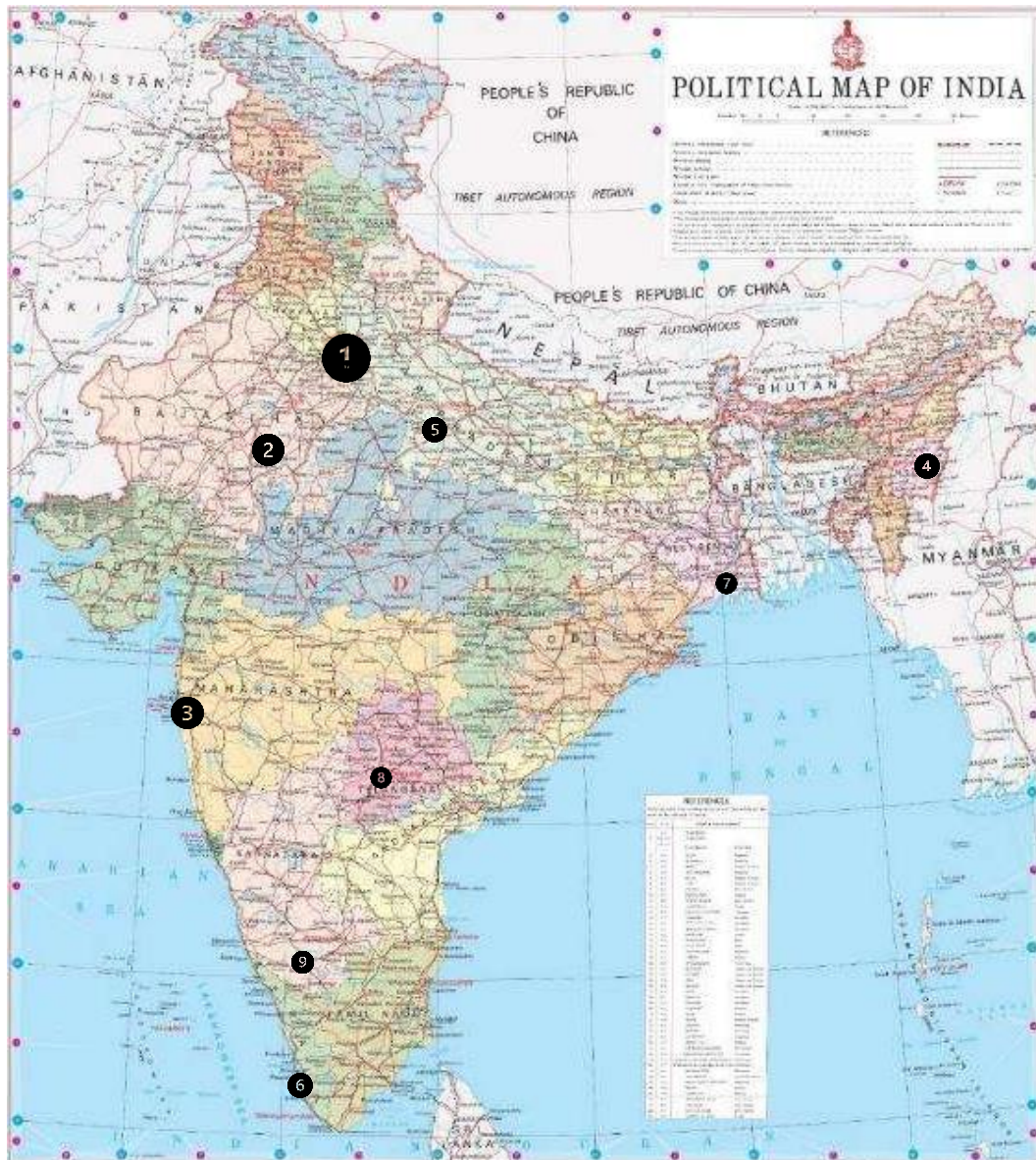


Figure 0.5: Road map of India with overlay of selected markets

Source: (India, n.d.), Author

ANALYSIS: The overlay on current road network is indeterminate, given the fact that road networks have expanded exponentially over the past few decades.





**Figure 0.6: Political map of India with overlay of selected markets.** Source: (India, n.d.), Author

**ANALYSIS:** The overlay on current political map of India shows that the locations of the selected markets coincide with capitals of states in 7 out of 10 cases.

**INFERENCE:** The analysis of the Figures 5, 6 and 7 give an idea how trade routes could have played an important role in determining the locations in which the bazaars flourished.

- i) The majority distribution shows that trade of goods did need a space that was easily accessible to the transport networks of the respective eras. The major ones got reinforced and are part of the current transport network too.
- ii) Some of the markets that are situated in state capitals in the present day also show that there has been continuous and consistent trade in these areas, that helped them become an integral part of the settlement too, perhaps leading them to becoming prominent cities.
- iii) From the above, it seems certain that location does play an important role in sustaining markets/bazaars.

WAY FORWARD: This paper gives an idea about the importance of location of a market that has survived the test of time.

- i) Further studies need to be done to understand how sea trade routes might also have influenced locations.
- ii) The influence of locations need to be reinforced with primary studies, so that the real picture of the present day can be upheld.
- iii) A study of dead markets could also help in understanding what went wrong for those and if location played a part there too.
- iv) An enquiry into the value of locations with the advent of online shopping platforms also needs to be delved into.
- v) The compilation of all these studies could give an idea if and how locations play a role in markets, and how could that be implemented into different frameworks for taking ahead the legacy of bazaars.

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