Beitrag ID: **10**   Typ: **20-minute paper**

Resist, Remember, Repeat: Bookselling Under Siege in Old Delhi's Sunday Book Bazaar

Donnerstag, 11. September 2025 14:00 (20 Minuten)

For decades, Old Delhi's Daryaganj Sunday Book Bazaar was a vibrant marketplace for second-hand and pirated books, deeply embedded in the city's cultural and economic fabric. In July 2019, however, the bazaar was declared an 'encroachment' and removed from its historic location, sparking a legal and regulatory battle. Civic authorities relocated the bazaar to a new, 'sanitised' site, raising broader concerns about the erasure of public spaces, the constraints on independent booksellers, and the enforcement of censorship under the guise of regulation.

This paper examines the intersection of bookselling and legal suppression, focusing on how oral memory became a tool of resistance. The removal of the bazaar led to a broader movement, as booksellers, activists, and trade unions mobilised both digitally and physically to preserve the market's legacy. Drawing on ethnographic interviews, I explore the personal narratives of attachment (*lagaav*) shared by the booksellers and buyers, highlighting how their stories of resilience helped shape a collective memory that resisted legal suppression.

The paper argues that oral memory serves as a critical counterbalance to formal legal frameworks and censorship, offering an alternative archive of resistance. As both an ethnographer and participant in this struggle, I reflect on how these oral histories not only document the community's fight but also act as a vital tool in resisting state-led efforts to reshape cultural spaces. Daryaganj's story underscores how communities can harness memory and lived experience to resist, remember, and repeat their acts of defiance in an increasingly regulated and bureaucratic world.

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