Hong Kong International Journal of Research Studies, ISSN: 3078-4018
Volume 4, Issue 2, July-December, 2026
Available online at: https://www.octopuspublication.com

Analysing Mall Culture vs Footpath Culture in Nagpur through the Lens of Cultural Studies: A Critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines Nagpur's mall and footpath culturesthrough the viewpoint of cultural studies. Nagpur provides a unique case of retail evolution, from the century-old bazaars of Itwari and Mahal to the dominance of Sitabuldi between 1980 and 2000, to the high streets of Sadar and West High Court Road, and now to new hubs confronting VR Mall, London Street and Manish Nagar. This study contends that malls and walkways are co-constituted creations of space that disclose deeper relations of class, caste, gender, and citizenship, despite popular discourse framing them as opposites of modernity vs tradition.The article reads mall and footpath as cultural texts, drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Michel de Certeau's strategies and tactics, Henri Lefebvre's production of space, Raymond Williams' concept of culture as ordinary and his framework of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures, and Appadurai's analysis of locality and global flows. Empress City, Eternity, and VR Malls provide as examples of mall culture, which is analysed as a regulated, air-conditioned non-place that offers spectacle, set prices, and relative gendered safety while limiting entry through cultural capital, dress requirements, and surveillance.Itwari, Sitabuldi, Sadar, Dharampeth, and Variety Square's footpath culture is interpreted as a lived space where social interaction, bargaining, and subaltern strategies sustain livelihoods; yet, pedestrian space is seriously endangered because of missing footpaths, encroachments, and selective enforcement. The article highlights the conflict between the right to walk and the right to a livelihood, contending that envisioning an inclusive right to the city is more important for Nagpur's future than replacing footpaths with malls.

Keywords: Nagpur, Mall Culture, Footpath Culture, Cultural Studies, Production of Space, Street Vending, Right to City, Informality.

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY NAGPUR MATTERS

Space is never neutral in cultural studies. Space is a social product where power relations are inscribed, fought, and reproduced, according to Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre 26). Geographically located in the heart of India, Nagpur provides a prime location to study this production of space through two opposing consuming regimes: the mall and the footpath. On the one hand, Nagpur has a number of city centers that are recognized for its customary use as markets, such as the Mahal area created by Bhoslas and Sitabuldi, which is well-known for its street shopping (Transformation of Historic Markets 1).However, it has also seen the rise of shopping malls, which are the modern markets of today's society and the ideal illustration of the changes that have taken place over the past ten years (Transformation of Historic Markets 1). What each exposes about class, caste, gender, and citizenship in modern Maharashtra is the question, not which is superior.

2. THEORETICAL LENS: KEY CONCEPTS FROM CULTURAL STUDIES

2.1 Culture is Ordinary - Raymond Williams

According to Raymond Williams, culture is a way of life that includes commonplace activities like visiting bazaars, and he famously rejects the elite definition of culture as great art (Williams, Culture and Society 18). Later, he constructs the triad of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures, in which new meanings are emerging but remnant aspects of the past continue to function (Williams, Marxism and Literature 121). In Nagpur, mall culture predominates, footpath culture is residual, and hybrid areas like London Street confronting VR Mall are emerging.

2.2 The Production of Space - Henri Lefebvre

Lefebvre makes a distinction between lived space that people have given meaning to, perceived space of daily routine, and imagined space created by planners (Lefebvre 38–39). The mall, a privately owned public area with air conditioning and CCTV surveillance, is the epitome of a well-thought-out facility.The road no longer serves a single

civic purpose but instead serves as a marketplace, pedestrian corridor, parking bay, and traffic artery. Street stores and sellers have taken over the footpath, while carts occupy live traffic space (Hitavada 1).

2.3 Tactics vs Strategies - Michel de Certeau
According to De Certeau, the weak use tactics to steal space, while the powerful use strategies to control it (de Certeau xix). Mall management uses dress standards, security guards, and set prices to implement their approach.Customers stopping in the middle of the road to peruse, handcarts placed parallel to moving cars, and display racks stretching into lanes are some of the strategies used by footpath merchants (Hitavada 2). Tactical appropriation is their entire existence.

2.4 Representation and Encoding/Decoding - Stuart Hall
According to Hall (Hall, Representation 21), representational systems rather than the item itself produce cultural meaning. A Paithanisaree at Itwari market, the city's largest collection of jewelry stores (Our Nagpur 2) and a thriving sarafa marketplace, embodies Marathi customs and kinship purchasing. Prominent Trent brands like Westside and Zudio decided to open across from VR Mall rather than on conventional high streets, and the identical saree in the Westside store facing VR Mall (Nagpur Today 3) embodies aspirational middle-class modernity.

2.5 Modernity, Non-Places and McDonaldization
Arjun Appadurai postulates that locale is created under the influence of global fluxes (Appadurai 178). Malls, according to Marc Auge, are "non-places that produce solitary contractuality without history" (Auge 77–78). According to George Ritzer, efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control make such places McDonaldized (Ritzer 12). Malls in Nagpur are prime examples of all three.

2.6 Cultural Capital - Pierre Bourdieu
According to Bourdieu, taste categorizes the classifier rather than being innocent (Bourdieu 6). In the Sadar and Dharampeth regions, bargaining is essential (Wikivoyage 2); lower-middle class people's cultural capital is their ability to negotiate. Mall fixed prices are the cultural capital of the upper middle class, who show their distinction by refusing to haggle.

3. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF NAGPUR RETAIL

From VR to ItwariThecenter of gravity has frequently changed, and Nagpur's retail scene has never remained static (Nagpur Today 1). Itwari was a traditional center in the past and was well-known for its everyday goods, jewelry, and traditional clothing (Nagpur Today 1). It has been in business for more than a century (News Dirt 2). Sitabuldi became the indisputable heartbeat between 1980 and 2000, connecting contemporary showrooms with traditional street shopping (Nagpur Today 1).Active bazaars in the Sitabuldi region are mentioned in a treaty from 1818, indicating their presence over a century before municipal corporation (News Dirt 2).Retail moved to Sadar and West High Court Road as Sitabuldi collapsed due to traffic (Nagpur Today 1). However, WHC Road is currently experiencing structural issues that are pushing retail toward more recent hubs like London Street, South Ambhajheri Road, Manish Nagar, and most significantly, the commercial market that is growing right next to VR Mall (Nagpur Today 1). The incorporation of excellent parking infrastructure into recently constructed commercial complexes is a major factor contributing to this new market's explosive growth (Nagpur Today 2).This demonstrates Harvey's spatial fix, in which capital develops new geographies to address previous congestion concerns (Harvey 183).

4. MALL CULTURE IN NAGPUR: A CRITICAL READING

Due to the fact that metropolitan malls offer entertainment in addition to shopping, they frequently remain packed, especially with window shoppers (Our Nagpur 2). Not only have young people discovered their newfound shopping passion, but those with family orientations have also discovered it. While Central Mall and Landmark are popular shopping destinations, Empress City Mall, Eternity Mall, Poonam Mall, and JaswantTuli Mall offer multiplex hours to unwind with a variety of stores (Our Nagpur 2).

4.1 Mall as Panopticon and Class Filter
Mall is a panoptic area, according to Foucault, whom cultural studies regularly references. Only specific bodies are welcome thanks to security, CCTV, and entry profiling. The mall extends the aristocratic pleasure of Dharampeth Shopping Street, which is lined with jewelry boutiques (Our Nagpur 2). The impoverished may go window shopping but experience what Bourdieu refers to as habitus dislocation (Bourdieu 56).

4.2 Mall as Deodorized Space
The smell, perspiration, and noise of Nagpur's 47 degree heat are all eliminated by the mall. With so many stores and shopping centers that promise entertainment, shopping in Nagpur is considered a synonym for excitement and fun

(Maharashtra Tourism 1). This guaranty is created by removing labor, such as the delivery workers who are hidden from view and the housekeeping personnel. Williams points out that dominant culture conceals its own production conditions (Williams, Marxism 115).

4.3 Mall as Gendered Safe Space

According to Doreen Massey, critical feminist geography demonstrates the gendered nature of place (Massey 179). Compared to footpaths with uneven surfaces, broken paving blocks, exposed utility chambers, open manholes, and missing slabs, malls provide young women in Nagpur with safe recreational opportunities (Times of India, Right to Walk 3). However, this safety is contingent upon consumption; in order to sit, you must purchase coffee.

4.4 Mall as Non-Place

Non-places, according to Auge, lack identity, relationships, and history (Auge 77). Before the next shift (Nagpur Today 4), the area around VR Mall and London Street has a lengthy future because they are easily reproducible non-places. They generate what Appadurai refers to as deterritorialized subjects.

5. FOOTPATH CULTURE IN NAGPUR: A CRITICAL READING

Bargaining is essential while purchasing household items at Sunday Foot Path Market (Wikivoyage 2). Due to the abundance of stores and street vendors, Itwari, Sitabuldi, Sadar, and Dharampeth are particularly well-known as shopping destinations (Wikivoyage 2).

5.1 Footpath as Lived Informality

Ananya Roy contends that planning creates informality rather than it being outside of it (Roy 148). According to a RITES survey, just 42.2 percent of Nagpur's 643.6 km road network has footpaths on both sides, while 296.9 km, or 46.1%, have none (Times of India, Right to Walk 2). Hawkers, unlicensed sellers, and car salespeople have taken over sidewalks in commercial hubs like Sitabuldi, Mahal, Itwari, Gandhibagh, and Cotton Market (Times of India, Right to Walk 3). The lack of footpaths is not an accident; rather, it is a planned decision that prioritizes automobiles above pedestrians—what Lefebvre refers to as the "abstract space of capital" (Lefebvre 285).

5.2 Selective Criminalization

While the rest of the city suffers, the NMC and traffic police seem fixated on removing vendors from Sitabuldi Main Road (Times of India, Vendors 1). At Jhansi Rani Square, which is only 100 meters from Sitabuldi, vendors have taken up entire footpaths while the Aapli Bus terminal is in operation (Times of India, Vendors 1). Vendors at Indora Square transformed significant areas of the road into temporary marketplaces (Times of India, Vendors 2). Narrow roadways are more congested in commercial hubs like Gandhibagh and Itwari (Times of India, Vendors 2).Unauthorized vending has increased, according to officials, but enforcement is still restricted to Sitabuldi Main Road, and the municipal commissioner is said to be the source of directions (Times of India, Vendors 3). A perfect illustration of Hall's concept of moral panic selectively implemented, this selective enforcement demonstrates class bias by protecting Sitabuldi's wealthy merchants but tolerating subaltern sellers elsewhere until it becomes politically problematic (Hall, Policing the Crisis 218).

5.3 Street as Palimpsest of Labour

Carts full of clothes, socks, and winter clothing take up live traffic space at Variety Square, where street stores and vendors swarm the sidewalks (Hitavada 1). Pedestrians abruptly emerge from behind displays onto flowing traffic, while stalls and carts near turning points restrict sight lines (Hitavada 2). Long before municipal transportation infrastructure existed, business practices relied on handcarts, bicycle rickshaws, and pedestrian foot movement; this anarchy is not disorder but alternative order (News Dirt 2). It is a persistent residual economy.

5.4 Festive Carnival and Crackdown

In major hubs around Diwali, haphazard parking, unapproved vendors taking road space, and insufficient traffic staff deployment exacerbate the situation (Times of India, Diwali 2). Although there are over 70 committed NMC enforcement officers, unlicensed merchants still use roadways and footpaths (Times of India, Diwali 3). Due to encroached footpaths, a resident served the municipal commissioner with legal notice (Times of India, Diwali 3). Bakhtin refers to this yearly cycle of invasion during festivals and symbolic action prior to festivals (Times of India, Vendors 3) as "carnivalesque," or a temporary inversion of hierarchy (Bakhtin 10).

6. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: FIVE ANTAGONISMS

6.1 Right to Walkvs Right to Livelihood

According to the Supreme Court, Article 21 guaranties citizens the fundamental right to walk on unobstructed footpaths, which is an essential part of their right to life (Times of India, Right to Walk 3). The Street merchants

Protection Act of 2014 gives merchants a means of subsistence. Nagpur reveals a conflict between two rights. Critical cultural studies reveals contradictions rather than finding solutions.

6.2 Visibility vs Invisibility

The footpath hyper-exposes labor, while the mall conceals it. Because exploitation is hidden, one is aesthetically beautiful, whereas the other is called chaotic because exploitation is obvious.

6.3 Authenticity vs Aspirational Modernity

Oranges, cotton goods, and handicrafts from Sitabuldi, Itwari, are among Nagpur's most well-known exports (Wikivoyage 2; Maharashtra Tourism 1). These are real. Mall sells aspirations for all of India. According to Appadurai, modernity both creates and destroys nostalgia for authenticity (Appadurai 77).

6.4 Public vs Private

According to the Times of India (Right to Walk 3), vendors and entrepreneurs are privatizing the footpath by expanding their enterprises into public areas. A mall is a private area that is turned public by patronage. Both are privatizations—one by companies, one by the impoverished. The state facilitates the second while acting against the first.

6.5 Citizenship

Massey contends that spatial behaviors result in citizenship (Massey 186). Who is the perfect citizen? Are you a bargaining customer at Itwari or a window shopper at Empress City Mall? The ideal citizen is a middle-class consumer rather than a pedestrian or vendor, according to Nagpur Municipal Corporation's concentration on Sitabuldi being devoid of hawkers from 9.30 am until late at night (Times of India, Vendors 3).

7. CONCLUSION: BEYOND BINARY

Williams argued for viewing culture as a dynamic entity and cautioned against thinking in terms of old versus new (Williams, Culture and Society 18). The retail geography of Nagpur demonstrates that footpath culture and mall culture are not mutually exclusive but rather co-constituted. Because VR Mall offers excellent parking facilities, the new market is thriving (Nagpur Today 2). Formal malls rely on the unofficial footpath economy of parking attendants and chai tapris.Therefore, a critical viewpoint does not romanticize footpaths or demonize mall.Rather, it poses the question of whether Nagpur can envision what Lefebvre refers to as a "right to city"—a city where malls pay social impact fees for pedestrian infrastructure, vendors have defined vending zones, and 46.1% of roads lack footpaths (Times of India, Right to Walk 2). The current situation, where Manish Nagar's parking problems began before it could develop into a significant retail area (Nagpur Today 2) and where the stalls in the variety square block sight lines (Hitavada 2), is unsustainable.Nagpur, at the heart of India, is at the center of a question that cultural studies raises for all Indian cities: is development about reclaiming lived places like Itwari, Sitabuldi, and Variety Square, where everyday life in de Certeau's sense still uses strategy, or is it about creating more non-places like malls?

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