# TOOLS OF THE SIDEWALK TRADERS



ACCORDING to the dictionary, a tool is a device used to perform or facilitate manual or mechanical work. It is something necessary to the carrying out of one's occupation or profession.

Primeval tools such as the spear and the wheel , enabled homo sapiens to raise himself to be the ruler of his surroundings. Throughout history, tools often played a pivotal role in the making and breaking of civilizations.

As a software engineer, I too had to learn and respect the use of tools in my profession. Some tools were absolutely necessary to do my job; others saved time and improved product quality.

For most people the tools of software engineering remain invisible. However, when I returned to Bangladesh after many years abroad, I discovered a very visible set of tools on the sidewalks of Dhaka. Numerous street vendors employ this useful set of tools to earn a livelihood. If they are selling a product, the tools are used to prepare or enhance the product for selling. If they are selling a service, the tools are used to provide that service.

These tools range from mundane (tea-making) to unexpected (fortune-telling parrot); from simple (scale) to complex (making talismanic rings); from precise (shoeshining) to disorganized (stencils for making posters).

Our sidewalk tools are thus a testament to the creativity and resilience of our small business entrepreneurs.

**Captions for the photos:**
1. A typewriter is handy for typing up legal documents. 2. Scales used to sell carrots. 3. Metals used to make nobogroho talismans from eight metals. 4. A cart used by vendors to carry and showcase products. 5. Tools needed to shine a pair of shoes. 6. Crushers are used for extracting sugarcane juice. 7. A rickshaw mechanic needs a whole hierarchy of tools. 8. A parrot tells fortune by pulling an envelope with a message inside. 9. Stencils used to make fliers and posters. 10. A paanwallah has tools to mix paan spices and light the cigarettes. 11. A tailor's tools. 12. A tea maker's tools for serving up a refreshing cuppa.

## Profile of photographer

IHTISHAM KABIR is an amateur photographer who has photographed Bangladesh since 1984. He writes the acclaimed and popular weblog Back to Bangladesh (backtobangladesh.blogspot.com) and produces a daily photo-blog on Bangladesh (www.bangladeshimages.com). In 1996, his Web Exhibition, "Discovering the Children of Bangladesh," was recognized as one of the Web's ten best photo sites. In professional life, Ihtisham Kabir is a software engineer who worked in Silicon Valley for over two decades. His work revolved around digital image processing. He is the author of several patents and the book "High Performance Computer Imaging."