

A QUEST FOR NEW CLOTHES

My Journey to Chandni Chowk and Beyond

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All my life I have stared at beautiful girls in their beautiful outfits and wondered how they put together these well thought-out looks, when I can barely even bother to change out of my pyjamas everyday. I was entirely dependent on my fashion conscious mother for all of my clothing and designing needs until she left the country last year to get a PhD. Since then, I have become as fashionably handicapped as Taher Shah. I refrained from buying new clothes for over six months because I did not trust my own judgment. But this summer, I realised that I was desperately in need of a new wardrobe, so I gathered up the courage to go shopping at the mythical land of Chandni Chowk and accompanying areas.

I called my cousin whom I have chosen to act as my mother for the time being (she's only a year senior to me but that doesn't matter), and we picked a date and time to go on this laborious adventure to New Market, Chandni Chowk and Doza Market. Upon hearing the news of our imminent expedition, many of our family members expressed concern, telling us that we're noobs who should only go shopping at nice air-conditioned boutiques. However, I had found out from my calculations that the opportunity cost of going there instead of Chandni Chowk would be four entire outfits.

Forsaking the air conditioning and fixed prices, we went to buy scarves at our first destination, New Market. This is where I got my first ever lesson in the art of bargaining, and let me tell you, I finally learned to appreciate my mother for the tremendous effort she put in to convince the shopkeepers to let her get away with paying less than half the price of what they asked. My cousin did most of the talking but she says I did well for my first time. Then we stepped out to explore Chandni Chowk in the pouring rain, battling our extreme desire to buy 150 tk Chanel knock-offs from the overbridge.

Then I tried going through all the pointers I'd gotten from my expert friend, and though she tried to make it as easy as she could, I remem-



PHOTOS: DARSHAN CHAKMA

bered the conversation like this:

Friend: Go inside then walk 67.8 metres to the left and you will find some "gauge kapor". You will have to divide the price they ask for by three, then multiply it by 0.59 and then pray to God that they charge you less. If you want to buy three-pieces then you will have to turn 80 degrees to your right and walk 26 metres. Oh, and there's a shop on the left that sells crêpes.

Me: They sell desserts there?

I later found out that crêpe is also a kind of fabric. That day I learned many other things, such as the word *bohor*, and that my mother had been such a good bargainer that she is considered a legend among the shopkeepers there. I apparently look like her, so many of these sellers recognised me and gave me a huge discount. My cousin, who is surprisingly good at navigating the thin, maze-like passages at Chandni Chowk and Doza market, made sure we didn't get lost. Turns out, my friend's instructions were actually quite simple: fabrics on the left, three-pieces on the right.

As I now consider myself a veteran in shopping for clothes, I shall leave you with a few words of wisdom. New Market has always been one of my favourite places, and you don't need much expertise to get around there. Chandni Chowk tests your patience, bargaining skills, ability to tolerate the heat but it has amazing, inexpensive fabrics and clothes. As for navigating the place, it helps to have an expert with you. But Doza Market is a legit maze and I doubt anyone (except maybe my mother) can claim that they have mastered the art of navigating it and have unlocked all its mysteries. I wish you luck in all your expeditions to these wonderful yet perilous places, and I hope you all find a cousin who loves you enough to accompany you in these adventures.

Aanila Kishwar Tarannum started hating on everything the moment she realized why her parents put so many As in her name: because they knew her transcript would be devoid of any vowels. Find out about her relentless rants at aanila.tarannum@gmail.com

