

# Discover India

FEBRUARY 1992

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BANGALORE — A serene sophistication



Glitz and glamour



CHAUPADS — Where shopping is the scene



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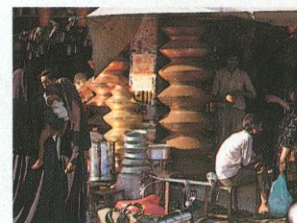
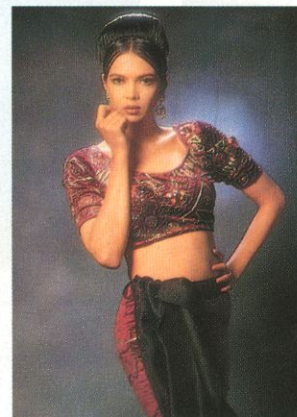
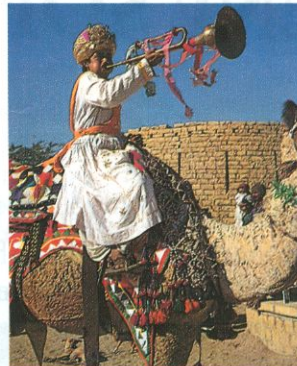
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# CHAUPADS WHERE SHOPPING IS THE SCENE

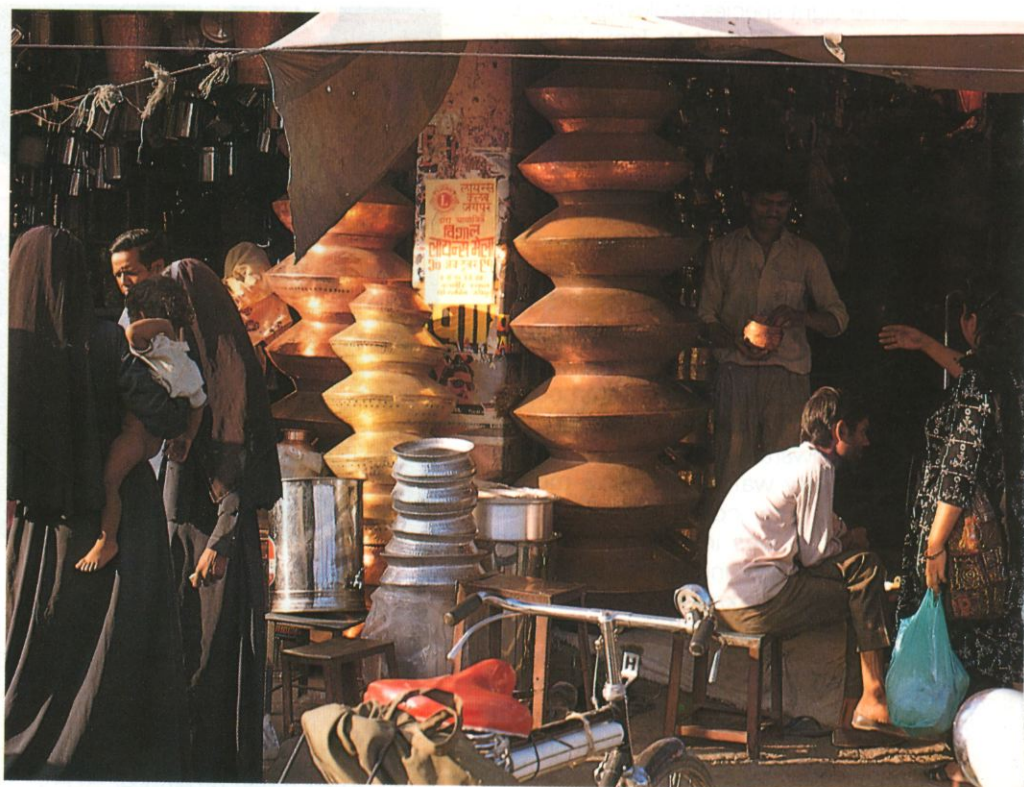
Text and photographs: Nihal Mathur

An intrinsic element in the town planning of Jaipur, Chaupads are located in the heart of the walled pink city. The crowded bazaars throb with dynamic energy and vibrancy.

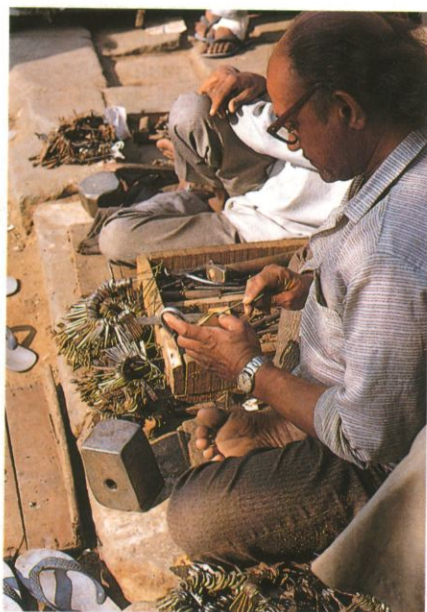


Although each bazaar has its own charm and character, the Chaupads of Jaipur are indeed unique. Unlike most bazaars which grow and develop gradually and haphazardly over a period of years, these Chaupads were designed by the astronomer king, Sawai Jai Singh in 1727 with as much attention to mathematical precision as to spontaneity of function.

In a city laid down in a grid pattern, the Chaupads were placed where the principal streets cut at right angles. Two major civic spaces—like plazas—were created as natural meeting points for the people. It was these open quadrangular spaces that were called Chaupads, after an ancient Indian game (played in the epic Mahabharata with disastrous consequences) on whose geometric shape they were designed. An intrinsic element in the town planning of Jaipur, Chaupads are located in the heart of the walled pink city. In the east is the



Utensil sellers



Badi Chaupad or the larger square while the Choti Chaupad or the smaller square is in the west. Their names belie the fact that they are both equal and identical in shape and size. There is also the Ramganj Chaupad which developed later, but somehow never became as important as the other two.

Lined by shops on all four sides, in the centre of each Chaupad there once used to be a square enclosure for water. The watering source was an underground aqueduct which supplied drinking water at the street level. Barely a hundred and fifty years ago, these small water squares were

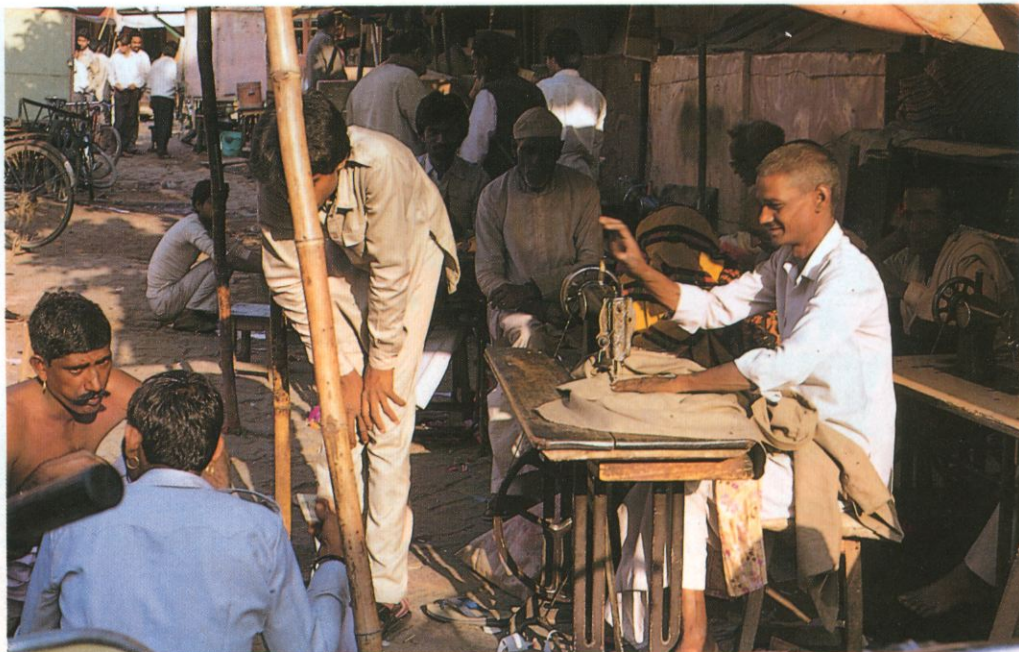
Locking and unlocking

passive restful spaces, actively used for social purposes, unlike the traffic roundabouts they seem to have become today. People washed and refreshed themselves here while waiting for friends and relatives or simply congregated at times of public or religious occasions.

Later on in the 19th century, Sawai Ram Singh II converted them into garden squares and added the ornamental fountains on marble bases and balustrades. It isn't hard to imagine a world of camels, horses and elephants instead of the chaos of cars and scooters that clutter the place today. But it isn't as if the animals are all gone now.



With its meandering cows and camels amidst the fruit and vegetable stalls, Choti Chaupad presents a typical village ambience. It is here that villagers from neighbouring areas of Jaipur bring some of their agricultural products to sell in the city, in what can be best described as a fluid situation that often resembles a free-for-all scenario. Besides the omnipresent pedestrian and the cyclist, there is at any given moment, all manner of traffic from rickshaws to hand-pushed *thelas* that jostle for space with horse drawn tongas and camel carts with drivers unmindful of the honking tempos inching ahead while scooters and motorbikes quickly manoeuvre past cars and buses, proving that trucks and tractors are really the noisy irritants in an otherwise manageable situation. Mingling in this madness are all types of living creatures, in what can best be described, once again, as a free-for-all scenario. With an air of complete self-confidence, buffaloes park themselves to chew the cud, defying all traffic regulations,



Freelance tailors

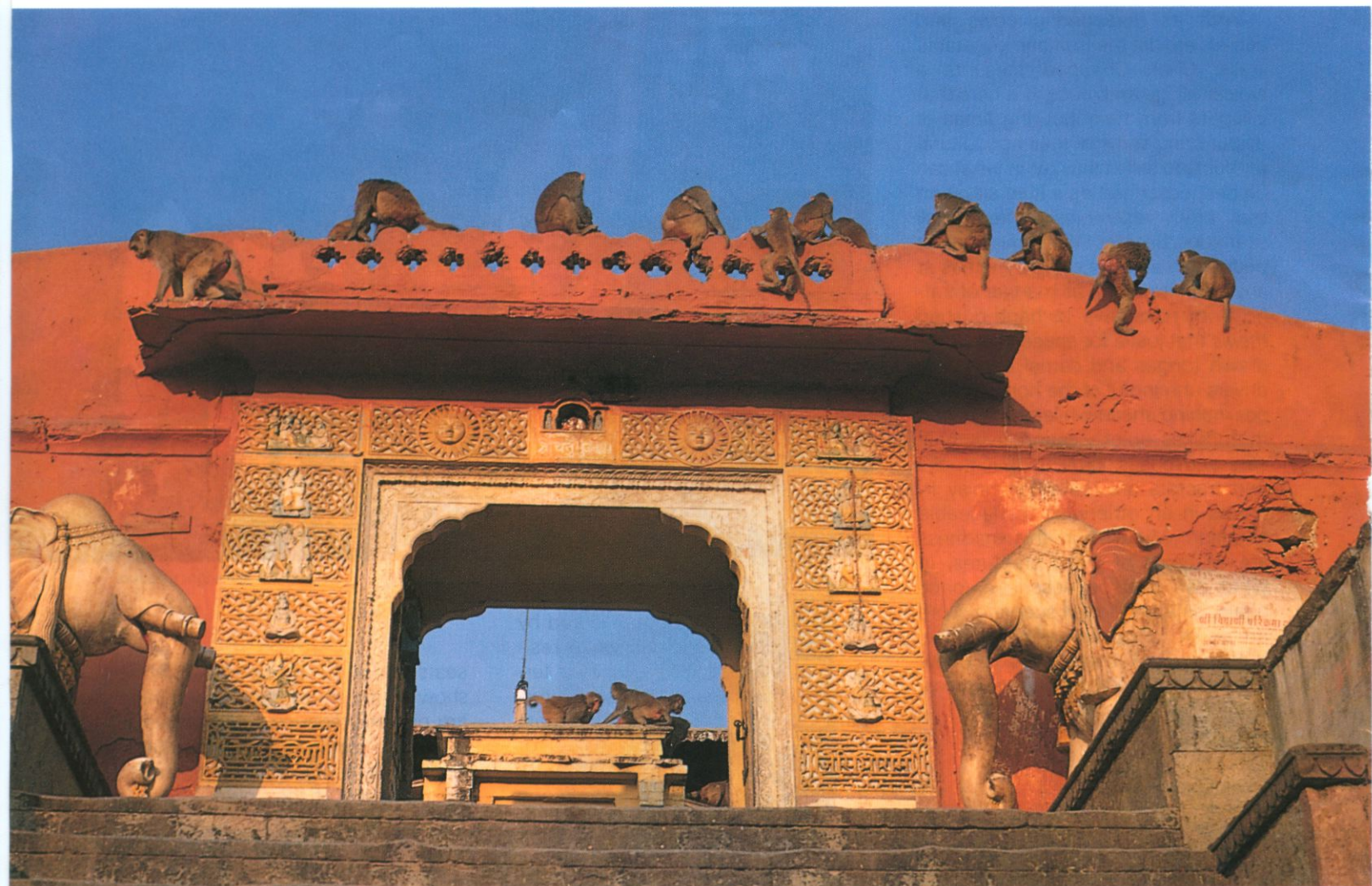
as a herd of sheep and goat drift by. Tonga horses take a break injured by the insane surroundings while resident cats and dogs prowl their territories. Occasionally, elephants returning from Amber fort lumber past load-laden donkeys while bands of opportunist red-faced rhesus monkeys occupy first floor balcony

seats above the shops to watch the show on the street below. Then there are pigeons, sparrows and crows all of whom, judging by their numbers, seem to be doing well for themselves with a space of their own.

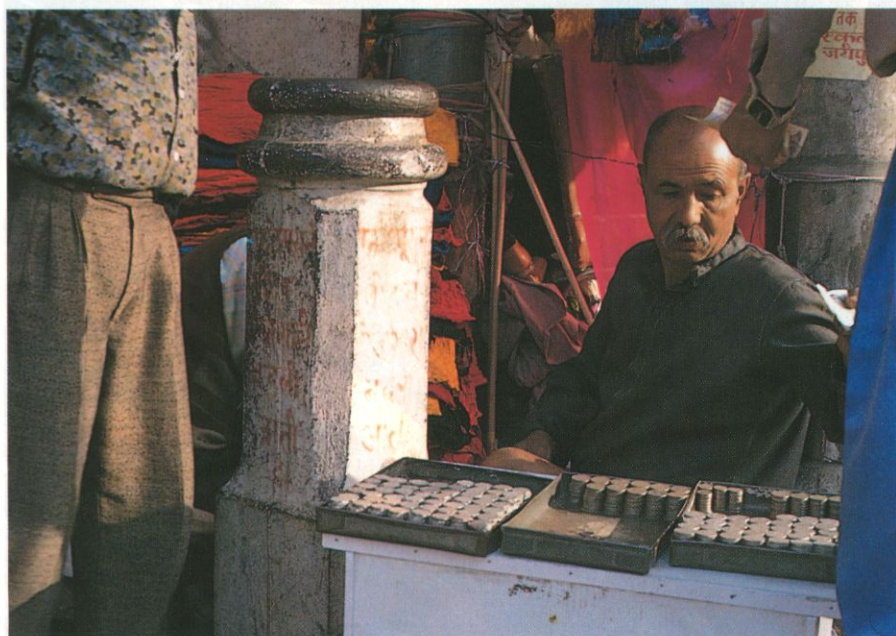
Selling jaggery—Choti Chaupad







Monkeys at the entrance of the Vishnu Temple



Selling change and old coins

**P**racticing their art in this little universe are pavement professionals that deserve special attention for the many ser-

vices and facilities that they provide around the four sides of the Chaupad quadrant. To become street smart there are shaves and haircuts available by the curbside barbers who would also cut your nails. But cleaning ears is a full-time occupation for some who are experts in extracting wax.

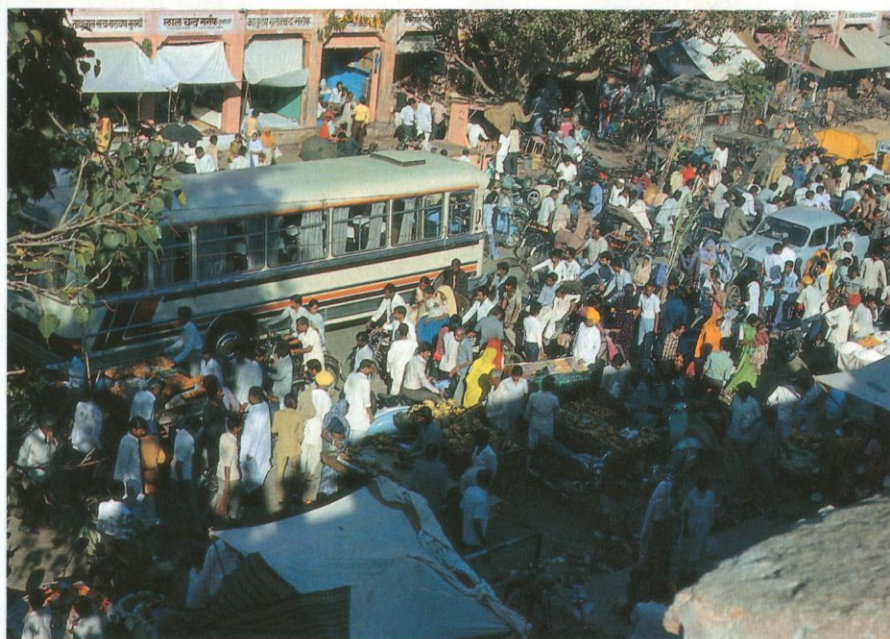
However, pulling out a rotten tooth is left to the roadside dentist who sits next to a herbalist with his collection of strange-looking cures that include power stones. A healing touch is also provided by the astrologer who for a fee unlocks the future though not as successfully as the prosaic but prolific professional—the locksmith many of whom abound on the pavements along with the shoe shine masters. To get away from it all, one can always climb up the stairs of the Vishnu temple in the western quadrant and go up to the pigeon feeding point for a general view and a breath of fresh air.

Shopping is the scene at Badi Chaupad, which is a fashionable market for neighbouring villagers who flock in groups to spend their money on a range of things on sale here, giving it a festive look. A good place to begin a round of the Badi Chaupad is the northern quadrant where there are trinket and junket jewellery stalls, usually crowded with young girls try-





Flower sellers at Badi Chaupad



Milling crowds at Choti Chaupad

ing to catch up with the latest that the city has to offer. Yards of colourful lengths of *bandini*, *laharias* and other fabrics displayed outside textile shops beckon not just village women but the ethnic chic and western designers as well, who find the traditional patterns

of high fashion value. There are freelance tailors around with their period machines who can, on short notice stitch *ghaghras* and *cholis* for women, or pajamas and shirts for men.

The western quadrant specializes in accessories for the marriage market where one can buy the best gear for brides and bridegrooms or take it on hire. Particularly fascinating are the

turbans, locally called *safa* or *pagdi* and the garlands made of currency notes. Sitting on the ground but strategically placed in some street corner, are money changers, not the shady dealers in dollars, marks and pounds, but those who replace torn notes for new for a fee of course. Some of them have collections of old coins that might interest a numismatist. Below the big banyan in the southern quadrant are flower and perfume sellers, all in one long row. Underneath the spread are also paan and tea kiosks, cold drink sellers and fast foods stalls selling samosas and pakoras.

From the vantage point above the shops, reached by a flight of stairs leading to a temple, one gets an overall perspective of the Badi Chaupad and a slightly different view of the famous Hawa Mahal and other landmarks of the walled city. Reflecting on the swirling traffic and almost out of control situation below one can truly appreciate the fact that in India, there is a method in the madness or even order in chaos.