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TENSIONS IN TRANSITION: A TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN ORDER AND CHAOS AT DASMANTPUR

On an early morning in September (1998), in the nondescript Dasmantpur market (Haat) in Madhya Pradesh, the vendors began preparing themselves as usual for a busy day. The Dasmantpur *haat* was an open market that served as a trading hub for the locals. While on the one hand, there were people going to the market with their stocks of produce, carefully balanced over their heads, many others used bullock carts. By 9 am, the vendors were busy setting up their respective 'selling space', brooming it and fixing a synthetic cloth over them to serve as a shade. By 9:30 am, the market transactions began, while a vehicle on official duty slowly pulled in.

Lalit, a young district officer got out of the car and stood there watching the haat-day unfold. Lalit's visit was not surprising to the locals given the complaints of exploitation raised through news media during the previous weeks. Some of them, who were low-income entrepreneurs had raised concerns over price regulation, shoplifting consumers, land encroachment, and extortion by the powerful within the marketplace. In fact, even a few customers had raised concerns over product quality, overpricing, disrespectful behavior, and unethical practices. These complainants expected Lalit to propose a solution at the earliest. However, his hands were tied so far, since the markets were governed privately by a few influential individuals within the village, and thus, operated informally. Nevertheless, he did consider bringing the

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markets under the state's purview, because he felt that a formalized structure of the market would offer stability to the market, and would propagate fair rules of exchange.

But he wondered how would the market operate under a formal structure. What would the adjustments be like for both the entrepreneurs and customers? These indeed were relevant and important questions that needed suitable answers, as several livelihoods and daily needs of customers were directly tied to these markets.