



Structure and functioning of periodic markets in Assam: A case study of Behora Market

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Abstract

Periodic rural markets, locally known as haats or bazaars, constitute a vital component of the rural economy and social life in India. In Assam, these markets play a particularly significant role in sustaining agrarian livelihoods by facilitating the exchange of agricultural produce, household goods, and traditional crafts. The present study examines agricultural marketing practices in Behora Weekly Market, located in Golaghat district of Assam, with the objective of understanding the structure of participation, nature of goods traded, income patterns, and customer motivations. The study adopts a descriptive approach and is based on primary data collected from vendors and consumers operating in the market. Findings reveal that the market hosts a heterogeneous group of participants, including primary producer-vendors, retail traders, intermediary sellers, and traditional artisans, alongside a predominantly rural consumer base comprising local households, small eatery owners, and visitors from nearby villages and tea garden areas. The vendor profile indicates male dominance, with most traders belonging to the economically active age group and possessing moderate levels of education and business experience. Fresh vegetables and fruits emerge as the most widely traded commodities, followed by fish and meat, spices, garments, and handicrafts, generating varying levels of daily income. The product composition reflects both daily necessities and seasonal demand, supported by local farms, nearby districts, and external wholesale centers. Customer motivation analysis highlights the availability of fresh produce and competitive pricing as primary factors attracting visitors, supplemented by social interaction, access to indigenous products, and traditional market habits. Overall, the study underscores the continued economic, social, and cultural relevance of periodic rural markets in Assam's agricultural marketing system and rural livelihood framework.

Keywords: Agriculture, marketing, markets

Introduction

Periodic rural markets, commonly referred to as haats or bazaars, constitute an integral component of India's rural and semi-urban economy. These markets extend beyond the narrow function of buying and selling, operating instead as dynamic spaces of social engagement, cultural continuity, and economic integration. Over generations, they have played a pivotal role in sustaining local trade networks, fostering community interaction, and linking isolated settlements with wider commercial systems. As such, weekly markets function as essential pillars within the rural livelihood framework. Within the state of Assam, particularly in districts such as Golaghat, weekly markets occupy a central position in the everyday life of agrarian populations. They serve as accessible marketplaces where marginal farmers, traditional artisans, and small vendors can directly market their products to consumers, thereby reducing dependence on middlemen. Owing to Golaghat's strong agricultural foundation, extensive tea cultivation, and ethnically diverse population, the district accommodates numerous weekly markets, each reflecting distinct local identities and fulfilling region-specific economic and social roles. Nath (2025) ^[6] stated that A study on the Morigaon Town Weekly Market (MTWM) in the central agro-climatic zone of the Brahmaputra Valley examines the organization, functioning, and features of an urban periodic market. Based on extensive fieldwork, surveys of vendors and customers, and group discussions, the study reveals growing urban demand for locally produced agricultural goods. It highlights regular vendor participation and strong rural-urban linkages, emphasizing the role of periodic markets in strengthening regional economic integration and informing market-supportive policy interventions. Borborah (2020) ^[1]

A study of a Karbi community-owned bazaar in an urban village of Guwahati highlights the centrality of trust and a sense of belonging in sustaining market operations. Moving beyond the conventional view of periodic markets as mere sites of exchange, the study demonstrates that shared ethnicity and social capital bind stakeholders together. Trust emerges as a crucial social mechanism enabling regular market functioning and active participation among community members. Deka and Bhagawati (2020) Research on periodic markets in the Brahmaputra Valley emphasizes their continued role as key centres for the exchange of goods and services in rural Assam. Focusing on a market in Kamrup district, the study analyses spatial organization and movement patterns of commodities, vendors, and consumers through detailed field surveys and mapping. The findings reveal close linkages with peasant society and highlight the relevance of spatial analysis for planning sustainable management of periodic markets amid changing rural economic conditions. Malarvizhi and Revathy (2012) highlighted that street vending plays a significant role in sustaining livelihoods in Tamil Nadu. Economic deprivation emerges as the primary factor compelling individuals to engage in vending as their main source of income. Conditions such as unemployment, inadequate earnings, and absence of family backing, low educational attainment, and limited occupational skills restrict access to alternative employment opportunities, thereby encouraging dependence on street vending for survival. Konwar (2015) ^[4] pointed out that restricted access to formal financial systems constitutes a major challenge for street vendors. Deficiencies in financial awareness and literacy, limited knowledge of institutional credit facilities, and low income levels discourage vendors from approaching banks. As a result,

informal lenders often become the preferred option during times of financial need. According to Borah (2018) [2], widespread poverty and scarcity of job opportunities in rural regions push individuals to migrate to urban centres in search of employment, thereby influencing the growth of street vending activities. The area has witnessed a notable rise in the number of vendors. Inadequate education and absence of skills required for well-remunerated positions in the formal sector further motivate individuals to adopt street vending as a means of earning a livelihood.

Objective

1. To study the agricultural marketing practices in the select periodic market

Methodology

The investigation adopts a descriptive research approach and is based on the use of both primary field-based evidence and secondary documentary sources. Four weekly rural markets located within the Tezpur subdivision were purposively selected for the study. The selection was guided by criteria such as geographical setting, scale of market operations, nature and organization of trading activities, proximity to urban centres, and the prevailing socio-economic and demographic characteristics, with the aim of ensuring a comprehensive representation of the area.

A total of 60 respondents comprising 30 cultivators and 30 market vendors were included in the study using a non-random, convenience sampling technique. Since the selected markets exhibited comparable features in terms of size, structure, and mode of functioning, respondents were evenly allocated across the markets to ensure balanced representation. Primary data were gathered through face-to-face interviews using a pre-designed structured questionnaire administered at the market sites. Secondary information was sourced from academicThe study was conducted in the Behora weekly market, located in the Golaghat district of Assam. Behora is a small area situated near the border of Karbi Anglong, making its market a significant hub for inter-district trade and cultural exchange. The market operates once a week, on a specific day (e.g., every Sunday), attracting a large number of vendors and customers from nearby villages and towns in both Golaghat and Karbi Anglong. This unique geographical and cultural positioning makes it a compelling subject for socio-economic research.

Analysis and findings

Participants in the market

The composition of sellers in the weekly market is heterogeneous, encompassing a wide spectrum of economic actors, from small cultivators to established commercial vendors.

Primary Producer-Vendors

This group consists mainly of cultivators from Behora, and adjoining localities who bring agricultural surpluses such as vegetables, fruits, and condiments grown on their own land. Owing to direct participation in sales, their operational expenses remain relatively low; however, their incomes are highly susceptible to market price volatility and seasonal demand variations.

Retail Traders and Intermediary Sellers

These vendors procure merchandise in large quantities from wholesale centres located in Golaghat town, Jorhat, and

neighbouring states such as Nagaland, and subsequently distribute the goods in smaller units to local consumers. Items commonly sold by this category include ready-made garments, metalware, plastic household goods, and packaged consumer products.

Traditional Artisans and Handicraft Vendors

This segment includes skilled craftspeople engaged in the production and sale of indigenous handicrafts such as bamboo and cane articles, handwoven fabrics including *Gamusas* and *Mekhela Chadar*, as well as earthenware and other forms of traditional pottery. These sellers contribute significantly to the preservation of local craftsmanship and cultural heritage.

Resident Households

Local inhabitants constitute the principal group of buyers, visiting the market primarily to purchase essential food items, domestic necessities, and apparel for regular household consumption.

Owners of Small Eateries and Catering Units

This category comprises operators of roadside food outlets, small restaurants, and catering services who rely on the weekly market for the procurement of fresh vegetables, fish, meat, and other perishable inputs required for their businesses.

Shoppers from Adjacent Villages and Tea Garden Areas

People residing in surrounding villages and tea estate settlements regularly frequent the market, as it serves as a central and accessible point for meeting their shopping needs in the absence of nearby permanent retail infrastructure.

Demographic Profile of the vendors

The demographic profile of vendors reveals that the market is predominantly male-dominated, with men constituting 70.8 per cent of the respondents, while females account for 29.2 per cent. Most vendors fall within the economically active age group of 36–50 years (45.8 per cent), followed by those aged 18–35 years (33.3 per cent), indicating significant participation of middle-aged and young adults. In terms of educational attainment, a majority have received primary or secondary education, whereas a smaller proportion has attained higher secondary education or remains illiterate. Regarding business experience, half of the vendors have been engaged in trading for 5–15 years, reflecting moderate stability and continuity in market participation.

The distribution of vendors by type of goods traded indicates that the largest share of participants is engaged in the sale of fresh vegetables and fruits, accounting for 37.5 per cent of the total vendors, with average daily earnings ranging between ₹1,200 and ₹2,500. This is followed by fish and meat sellers, who constitute 16.7 per cent and earn comparatively higher daily incomes of ₹1,500 to ₹3,000. Vendors dealing in spices and pulses, handicrafts and utensils, and readymade garments each represent 12.5 per cent of the total, with moderate income levels. Livestock trading, though seasonal and involving fewer vendors, contributes variable income depending on market conditions and demand.

The product composition of the market shows a diverse range of goods catering to daily and seasonal needs. Fresh

vegetables dominate the market, accounting for 30 per cent of total stalls, with prices remaining relatively affordable and peaking during the winter season due to higher local production. Fish and meat form another significant segment at 20 per cent, supplied consistently throughout the year from nearby ponds and rivers. Fresh fruits and clothing each occupy 15 per cent of stalls, with fruits peaking in summer and textiles witnessing higher demand during festival periods. Spices, grains, and handicrafts constitute smaller shares but contribute to market diversity, drawing supplies from both local producers and external wholesale centers.

The analysis of customer motivations for visiting Behora Haat and Haat indicates that access to fresh agricultural produce is the most influential factor, reported by an overwhelming majority of respondents (93.3 per cent). Competitive pricing also plays a crucial role, motivating 83.3 per cent of customers to frequent these markets. Beyond economic considerations, social interaction emerges as an important aspect, with nearly three-fourths of the respondents acknowledging the market as a space for community engagement. The availability of locally produced and indigenous goods further attracts a significant proportion of visitors. Additionally, long-standing habits and traditional practices continue to encourage regular participation, highlighting the cultural embeddedness of these

The present study highlights the continued relevance of periodic rural markets as vital institutions within the agricultural marketing system and rural livelihood structure of Assam. The analysis of Behora Weekly Market in Golaghat district reveals that such markets function not merely as sites of economic exchange but also as important spaces for social interaction, cultural continuity, and regional integration. By enabling direct participation of farmers, artisans, and small traders, the market reduces dependence on intermediaries and facilitates more equitable access to consumers.

The findings indicate that the market accommodates a diverse group of participants, including primary producer-vendors, retail traders, intermediary sellers, and traditional artisans, supported by a largely rural consumer base. The demographic profile of vendors reflects male dominance and the prevalence of economically active age groups with moderate levels of education and trading experience, suggesting stability and continuity in market participation. The predominance of fresh vegetables and fruits, followed by fish, meat, spices, garments, and handicrafts, underscores the market's role in meeting both daily consumption needs and seasonal demands. Income patterns further demonstrate that perishable goods generate relatively higher earnings, while non-food items and handicrafts provide supplementary livelihood opportunities.

The product composition and sourcing patterns reveal strong linkages between local agricultural production, neighbouring districts, and wider commercial networks, indicating the integrative function of the market. Customer motivation analysis confirms that access to fresh produce and competitive pricing remain the primary attractions, while social interaction, availability of indigenous products, and traditional practices reinforce regular market participation.

Overall, the study concludes that Behora Weekly Market plays a crucial role in sustaining small-scale agriculture, supporting rural employment, and preserving local culture.

Strengthening infrastructure, improving market management, and reducing the dominance of intermediaries could further enhance the efficiency and inclusiveness of such periodic markets, thereby contributing to sustainable rural development in Assam

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