



# Women Vendors and Their Problems in a Periodic Market in The Urban Precinct of Guwahati City of Assam.

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**ABSTRACT**

Women play a vital role in the economy and they are making their presence felt at the periodic markets have mushroomed in our country. In the urban precinct of Guwahati city of Assam there is a dearth of fresh produce and hence people turn to these periodic markets where the produce is fresh and sold at a reasonable price point. The Khepenijal periodic market of Guwahati city is one such congregation of buyers and sellers where we see women vendors share space with their male counterparts. This market is a confluence of diverse cultures as women from various parts of the state come here to trade commodities catering to the urban needs. This study tries to understand the problems of women vendors of the Khepenijal Periodic market.

Summary: In spite of their various problems and issues, they strive to maintain a balance and keep the trading going as it helps them earn their living and support their families.

**KEYWORDS**

women, vendors, periodic market, harassment, khepenijal.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The agricultural produce in rural India is mostly collected, distributed and resold through two major channels; one consists of regulated markets and the other consists of periodic markets. (Saheb, 2011, p72-73). A periodic market is a trading market held on one or more days of each week and on the same days of the week.

From the early times the role of women in Indian economic system is minimal. However, their participation is gradually increasing in the recent decades. (Barua, 1997, p18) They often suffer the indignities of sexual harassment and lack of access to basic conditions in the market. (Bhagabati, 2014, p28). They are losing much of their meagre earning in paying their loans, weekly interest charges, family pressure etc. In this context an attempt has been made to analyse the participation, socioeconomic conditions and the working environment of women vendors.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To study the problems and harassment faced by the women vendors in the market.

**METHODS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION:**

The field methods used to collect data were by non participant observation, interview, survey method besides gathering information from some secondary sources like books, journals, thesis and internet.

**KHEPENIJAL PERIODIC MARKET**

Khepenijal market is situated at a distance of 16 km(s) south of Head Post Office of Guwahati city. Khepenijal market is in Khepenijal Karbi village. The entire market is spread in an area of 9 bighas of open land. It is a weekly market and it is held on every Sundays and almost deserted for the rest of the week. The market is well connected by roads. The market administration is looked after by some of the members of the village council. Here, all transactions take place through the medium of cash currency and mostly by reference to customary weights and measures however traditional measures are also used.

**WOMEN VENDORS**

The women vendors belong to various tribes like Karbi (46%), Bodo (29.1%), Kachari (10.4%), Garo (6.2%) tribes and Bengali Muslim communities (8.3%). 91.7% of the women vendors are Scheduled Tribes; while, 8.3% belongs to religious minority groups i.e. the Bengali Muslim women folk.

**COMMODITIES BROUGHT BY THE WOMEN VENDORS**

These women vendors are found selling many fresh local produce which are chemical free which are not found in the supermarkets or the daily vegetable markets as a result, they attract a large number of buyers. Generally it is seen that the women vendors brought with them various organic vegetables, fresh green leafy vegetables/ herbs/ spices, fruits, In addition to this they brought with them essential and exotic commodities like rice beer sweet cake, snails (fresh water), silkworms, and country liquor to cater to the urban needs.

**4. PRICING OF THE COMMODITIES:**

It is seen that the vendors generally keep their price low for their own home grown produces however the pricing depends on the season, transportation cost, availability etc.

It is also seen that the prices of certain commodities rise sharply during festive seasons due to a high demand. Fluctuations in prices have also been noticed during a single day also, especially for perishable commodities as the market has no storage facility and because of their perishable nature, such commodities are sold at a very low price during the evening hours.

**TRAVEL TO THE MARKET:**

The women vendors who travel from the same place usually hire and share the same vehicle accordingly as a result the fare of the vehicle is shared. The cost of the vehicle varies from place to place from Rs 1200 to Rs 1400 per trip. While the Karbi women folk who come from the Garbhanga hills (of Guwahati city) usually covers a walking distance. They start quite early for the market and leaves the market at 12 o'clock at noon however the market fee of 60 rupees is same for them even though they leave the market early and where other vendors can give their stalls. The women vendors have to come out quite early to reach the market before 8 am, if they got late; they face the problem in unloading the commodities because of the huge crowding by other vendors and customers.

**Table:1 The following table illustrates the distance travelled by the women vendors.**

Sl No	NAME OF THE PLACE	NUMBER OF WOMEN VENDORS	TIME CONSUMPTION	DISTANCE TO KHEPENIJAL BAZAR (LOKHRA)
1	GOALPARA	8 (16.6%)	3-4 Hours.	130Kms
2	CHAYYGAON (KAMRUP)	9 (18.7%)	1 Hour	47 Kms

3	GORCHUK LOKHORA (KAMRUP (M))	5(10.4%)	20 Minutes	5-6 Kms.
4	GARBHONGA HILLS(KAMRUP)	22(45.8%)	3-4 Hours.	12 -13Kms.
5	SINGIMARI (KAMRUP)	4(8.3%)	1Hour.	23Kms.
	TOTAL	48(100 % approx)		

**INCOME OF THE WOMEN VENDORS:**

Generally, any type of trade experiences fluctuations in its path of income.

**Table:2 The women vendors’ weekly income is represented in the following table:**

INCOME PER WEEK(in rupees)	NUMBER OF WOMEN VENDORS	PERCENTAGE %
Below 100	5	10.4%
6100-500	28	58.3%
501-1000	5	10.4%
1001-1500	4	8.3%
1500-2000 and above	6	12.5%
TOTAL	48	100(approx)

About 37 (77.08%) of the women vendors are the sole bread earner of their families. They were to engage in this market trade because their husband income is very low to support the family, some engaged in this trade to repay the loans taken by their husband. Though, some of them are looking after their sick ridden husband(s) and are earning a living for their families. It is important to note that, only six women vendors (12.5%) derive an income from the market that after bearing all the family expenses can save an amount. They own large land in their village to grow sugarcane; paddy as well as other commodities to sell in this market. These women have support of their husbands in this trade. While the other 42 (87.5%) spend their entire income to support the family. For them it has becomes difficult to educate their children with this small income they earn. Their own education level is too low to get a more suitable job in this urban city.

**Table:3 The following table illustrates the educational level of the women vendors of the market:**

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	NUMBER OF WOMEN	PERCENTAGE%
Primary School (Class 1-4)	12	25%
High School (Class 5-10)	2	4.1
Matriculate	1	2.0
Higher Secondary	0	0
Illiterate	33	68.7
TOTAL	48	99.8% (100 approx)

**PROBLEMS FACED BY THE WOMEN VENDORS DUE TO LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES IN THE MARKET**

The market lacks basic infrastructure needs which are important for the women vendors. In the market there is no proper sanitation facility. Only a makeshift toilet is available; which is nothing but a temporary enclosure with no drainage, door and water. The vendors bring their own kerosene lamps and battery operated lights to keep their stalls bright during evenings. There is no clean source of drinking water in the mar-

ket. The stalls are open without any over head shed and the vendors bring their own plastic sheets to use as protection from rain against sun. The vendors mostly bring forest products which are perishable so at the end of the day they sale their products in a very low price. These vendors are regarded as nuisance in these urban centres by some urban elites. Fear of being driven away or their produce being destroyed is a source of harassment that the women vendors feel helpless about.

**HEALTH RELATED PROBLEMS OF THE WOMEN VENDORS:**

The numbers of women vendors in the market are on a rise despite of the harsh working condition. They have to sit long hours under the rain, sun, dust because of which it generate many health issues for them like head ache, back pain, dust related allergies, insomnia, sinus, skin disease etc.

Some of the women vendors do not come out for this market trading activity during their menstrual cycle due to some taboos; however, some are bound to come because they are the sole bread earners of their families on those days because of which it generate some health problems in the long term.

They don't have fixed timing of having their meals so they suffer from various stomach troubles also.

**HARASSMENT FACED BY THE WOMEN VENDORS:**

On their way to the market the women vendors come across various kinds of mental harassment like those who come by public vehicles they were charge extra money for their goods by the bus conductors, trekker fare collectors etc. They were even denied entry to the public vehicle. The police in the check post near Jalukbari (an entry point from Lower Assam), Guwahati sometimes charges money from them if they found brought local liquor or rice beer for trading. The members of the market administration and the local bullies usually purchase the commodities from them at a low price .The women vendors sometimes face mental as well as physical harassment from the eunuchs in the market place who used to buy goods from them according to their own price and they bound to give them out of fear because they irritate them by touching and giving all kind of curses.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

Lack of gainful employment coupled with poverty has pushed people out of their village to the cities to have a better existence in the cities. They do not possess the skills or education to find better paid jobs in the formal sectors so they settle for work in the informal sectors. Most of the women vendors in the market are poor and have less capital to invest in their business. They cannot spend a much time in the market because firstly, of the distance they have to cover to reach home and secondly they have to look after their family as well. The women vendors are found to earn a low income that does not have her husband's supporting income. The vendors come across various types of problems and harassment which could be resolved by various methods like issuing license to the vendors. The market authority should work for the proper infrastructural needs of the market and should protect the women vendors from various kinds of harassment by the local as well as those visiting the market. There requires a proper governing by the market authorities to look after the market activities and some important step need to be taken to prevent the eunuchs from harassing the women vendors.

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