

KASKATA MARKET IN KAMRUP DISTRICT, ASSAM: STRUCTURE, MARKETING CHANNEL AND FLOW PATTERN

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Abstract

The periodic markets still function as important centres for transaction of goods and services in the rural areas of Assam. The internal structure of the markets and the pattern of flow of commodities as well as vendors and consumers reflect the very characteristics of peasant social structure prevalent in complimentary areas of the markets. The present study is an attempt to analyse the spatial configuration and the flow pattern of goods and people of a particular periodic market located in Kamrup district of Assam. The study is based on intensive field survey carried out with the help of a questionnaire designed for the purpose. The morphology of the market including the distribution of shops has been mapped and analysed on the basis of intensive ground survey. This study assumes great importance in formulating strategies for sustainable management of the periodic markets in the context of the growing influence of modern market economy in the rural areas of the State.

Key words: Periodic market, Morphology, Marketing channel, Flow pattern.

Introduction

The periodic markets, locally known as *hat* or *bazar* in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam play vital role in sustaining the production system in the areas around by integrating the elements of space, people and resources. Their role on the rural livelihood as well as agricultural ecosystem as important outlets for the rural produce to urban areas and vice-versa and as mediators of exchange between farmers, itinerant traders and wholesalers has been widely recognized (Smith, 1971). These markets act as a multiplier of economic development and a network for dissemination of information, ideas and innovation to the neighbouring rural areas (Lado, 1988).

As the periodic markets function as focal points in organizing areas, resources and people into a spatial system, the distribution and functional relationship of places and spatial range of central services form the fundamental elements of spatial organization (Jain, 1993). Importantly, several geographical studies have been done on periodic markets of the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam by Bhagabati (1994), Saikia and Bhagabati (2009), Deka and Bhagabati (2009, 2011, 2012) and Barthakur (1990). However, there has been no detailed study on the role of periodic markets on the rural livelihood in Assam so far. Holistic studies on the periodic markets are required to provide relevant information for further research as well as planning for their sustainable development. This paper is an attempt to study the structure, function and flow pattern of people and products to Kaskata periodic market located in Kamrup district, Assam and its role on resource mobilization and livelihood of the people around.

Methodology

During 2007-2008, a random sample survey with a questionnaire was conducted among 100 vendors dealing in agricultural products in the Kaskata *hat*. Same number of customers in every month of the year 2007-08 were also interviewed to know their place of origin, landholding size, products marketed and visiting frequency. Usually, the peak season of this market begins in January and continues up to April, while the slack season spans from June

to July. In these two seasons, all the vendors and customers were interviewed with the same questionnaire in order to know the seasonal variation in the functioning of the market.

The structure of the market was studied by plotting the location and spatial arrangement of the different types of shops along the internal lanes on a sketch map. Information relating to the evolution of the market was obtained from some local elderly people. Data on tax structure, tendering, management, etc. were collected from personnel associated with the market management committee and some vendors sharing different infrastructural facilities in the market. The data thus obtained are summarized and diagrammatically represented for documentation and analysis.

Location and Management of the Market

The Kaskata market is located at Jajikona village of Rangia Sub-division in the district of Kamrup, Assam (Fig 1). It is located just on the right bank of the Checha, a sub-tributary of the Brahmaputra river. This market is located at a distance of about 31 km from Guwahati city. It is a bi-weekly market held on every Tuesday and Saturday. The trade in this market remains overwhelmingly confined to agricultural products and other agriculture related products, and is attended by the local farming community, vendors, daily wage earners and government employees.

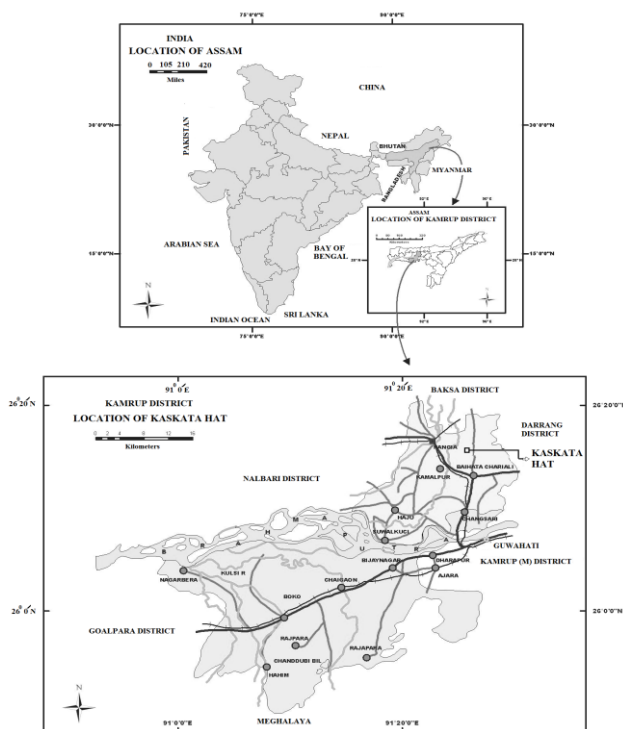


Figure 1. Location of Kaskata Market

The market was initiated by the people of the neighboring villages in the early 1960s. The area presently occupied by the market was a forest land. The growth of the agricultural sector on the one hand and high population density and inaccessibility on the other

instigated the people of the area to organize this periodic market. At the initial stage, this was a weekly *hat* held on every Tuesday. But in 1975, the managing committee of a local school (Lokapriya High School) proposed to hold the market on every Saturday with an additional component, i.e a livestock market. The revenue earned from this new market was used for the development of the school. However, the livestock market did not last for more than three years due to insufficient transaction of livestock. Subsequently, it became a bi-weekly one with Tuesday and Saturday as the market days.

In order to look after the activities of the market, a management committee was constituted with some people of the locality and some traders for a tenure of five years. The responsibility of the committee includes: (i) providing security to the *hat's* properties, (ii) determining the tax structure (iii) managing the problems associated with the *hat*, (iv) allotting sites to the vendors, (v) providing necessary facilities to the vendors and customers. The market is tendered for one year by the local Block Development Office. The person who wins the bid is recognized as *Mahalder*. He is entitled to collect tax on each *hat* day from the vendors. The tax structure varies as per the facilities provided to them and the quantity or type of goods they sell in the market (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Tax structure for stalls as per accommodation

Type of accommodation	Fees to Chowkider (Rs)	Fees to HMC (Rs)	Fees to <i>Mahalder</i> (Rs)
Concrete with tin roof	1.00 per market day	5.00 per market day	3.00 per month
Shed with thatched roof	1.00 per market day	3.00-5.00 per market day	3.00 per month
Open space	0.50-1.00 per market day	1.00-3.00 per market day	2.00-3.00 per month

Source: Field survey, 2009-10

Morphology of the Market

Like other periodic markets in the Brahmaputra valley, Kaskata also reflects some system with respect to the layout and arrangement of shops, especially the items offered for sale. It is observed that similar types of shops are located closely so that consumers can make a choice for their required goods. The spatial shape of the Kaskata market is almost rectangular. The shops generally form linear pattern on both the sides of the internal lanes within the market (**Fig 2**).

As per the field survey conducted in May, 2008, as many as 315 shops operated in the Kaskata *hat* (**Table 2**). These were characterized by the type of accommodation provided by the *bazar* committee and the kind of goods and services (44 in numbers) available in them. Out of the total shops, 12.06 percent were housed under permanent structure (cemented platform with tin roof), 52.38 percent under thatched roof (with *kutchra* platform) and 35.56 percent in open space. The big vendors dealing in rice, pulses, threads, cloths, foot-wears and stationary goods generally occupied the permanent stalls. The local farmers selling their own products such as betel nuts, betel leaves, fruits, leafy vegetables, eggs, papaya, curd, craft etc. used to sit in the marginal spaces of the market under tree shades along the roads or under the sheds of some big shops. The shops of products like clothes, foot wears, threads, stationery goods, bakery products which accounted for 6.34 percent, 2.85 percent, 1.26 percent, 1.90 percent and 0.95 percent respectively of the total shops were found to congregate in the western part of the market.

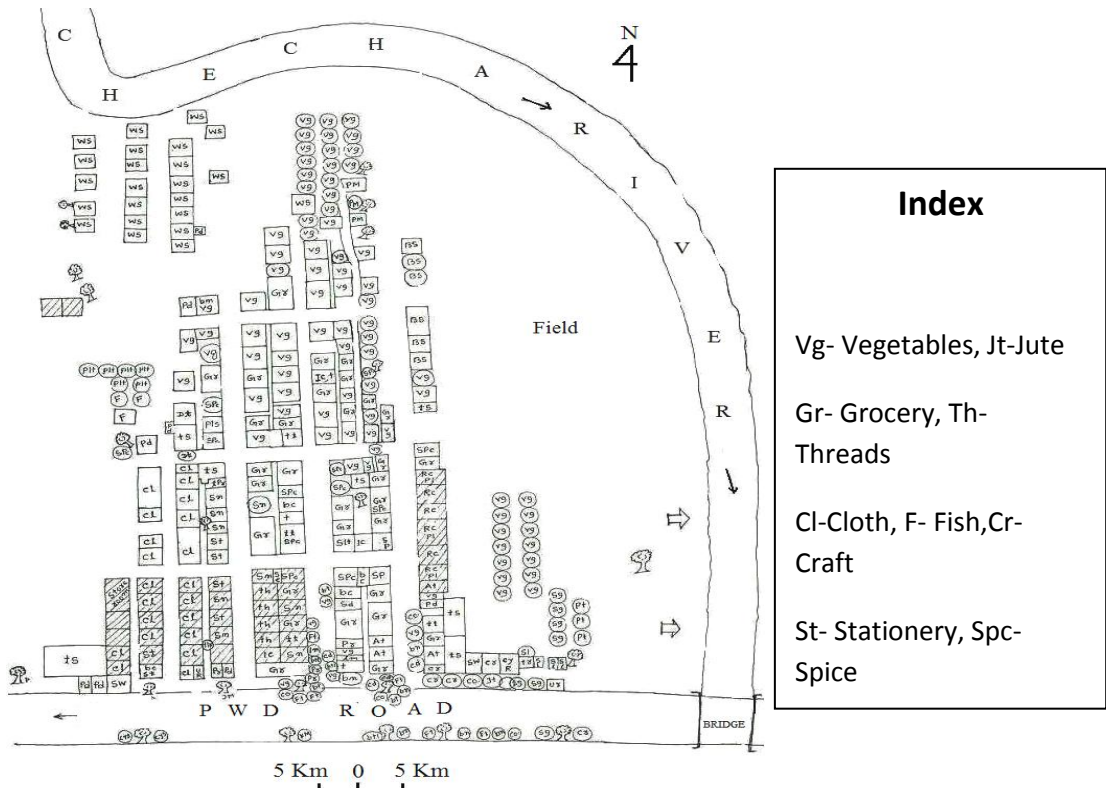


Figure 2. Layout of the Market

The vendors of rice, pulses, mustard etc (1.90 percent) were seen to occupy the eastern side. Other shops dealing in grocery (9.84 percent), spices (3.17 percent), tea and tobacco (1.27 percent), biscuits (0.95 percent) etc were found interspersed in the central part. The meat vendors (0.95 percent) selling particularly pork, the fish sellers (0.95 percent), blacksmiths (1.90 percent), barbers (1.27 percent), repairing of bicycle (0.32 percent), torch light (0.32 percent) and umbrella (0.63 percent), tailoring (0.32 percent), tea stall (1.92 percent) etc. on the other hand occupied some specific sites to avoid sanitation problems associated with such kind of services.

Towards the east of the market, there lies an extensive field used generally for celebrating *Rash* festival every year. In the south-western corner of this field, pottery items are displayed for sale as this site is considered to be the least disturbed for the breakable pottery items. The sugarcane vendors (2.54 percent) also prefer the peripheral sites, since they require larger area.

The vegetable trade forms the largest components covering 26.98 percent of the total number of shops. Interestingly, two types of vegetable traders are there: the producer-trader and the middleman-trader, who procure vegetables from the producers and sell in the market.

It is also noteworthy that people belonging to the Bodo tribe in the villages around traditionally prepare country liquor for domestic consumption and also for selling in the local markets. There were 23 traditional wine selling units run by the Bodo women which

accounted for 7.30 percent of the total shops. Concentrated in the northernmost part of the market, these stalls operate in some thatched cottages.

Table 2: Type and number of shops with accommodation facility

Type	Shop	Facilities			Total
		Concrete	Thatched roof	Open space	
Food related units	Tea stall	0	6	0	6 (1.90)
	Grocery	2	29	0	31 (9.84)
	Pan shop	1	7	0	8 (2.54)
	Fruit, Sugarcane	0	0	14	14 (6.44)
	Sweets	0	2	0	2 (0.63)
	Poultry	0	0	6	6 (1.90)
	Spices	1	5	4	10 (3.17)
	Fish	0	1	2	3 (0.95)
	Coconut	0	0	4	4 (1.27)
	Wine shop	0	23	0	23 (7.30)
	Banana	0	1	6	7 (2.22)
	Vegetables	0	38	47	85 (26.98)
	Bakery products	0	3	0	3 (0.95)
	Betel nut	0	0	6	6 (1.90)
	Curd	0	0	4	4 (1.27)
	Dry fish	0	1	1	2 (0.63)
	Folk Medicine	0	0	1	1 (0.32)
	Limestone	0	1	1	2 (0.63)
	Pork	0	2	1	3 (0.95)
	Parched rice	0	2	2	4 (1.27)
	Rice, pulses	6	2	1	9 (2.85)
	Tea leaf & Tabacco	1	6	0	7 (2.22)
Other units	Cloth/ thread	15	9	0	24 (7.62)
	Stationery	3	3	0	6 (1.90)
	Barber	0	3	1	4 (1.27)
	Craft	0	2	3	5 (1.59)
	Foot wear and plastics	5	5	0	10 (3.17)
	Agricultural tools	1	3	0	4 (1.27)
	Blacksmithing	0	4	2	6 (1.90)
	Cycle repairing/ stand	0	1	1	2 (0.64)
	Incense	1	2	0	3 (0.95)
	Jute	0	0	1	1 (0.32)
	Pottery	0	0	3	3 (0.95)
	Seeds/ seedlings	2	1	0	3 (0.95)
	Tailoring/ umbrella and torch repairing	0	3	1	4 (1.26)
	Total shops accommodated	38 (12.06)	165 (52.38)	112 (35.56)	315 (100.00)

Marketing Channels and Source Areas of Goods

The processes of marketing generally operate involving flow of goods and services from the source of production to the consumers. In the Kaskata market, four distinct marketing channels could be identified in which producers, traders, middlemen and consumers participate in the transaction activities. In the first channel, the producer-farmers from the neighbouring villages usually sell their own products, especially the perishable items like fruits, betel leaf, betel nut, egg, leafy vegetables, curd, etc. In the second, farmers may directly sell the goods in the market or may become the intermediaries by selling the goods that are collected either from the producer-farmers or from the retailers to other vendors. In the third channel, the middlemen collect goods from the farmers and may directly sell the goods to the consumers or to the vendors in the market. In the fourth channel, the middlemen procure goods from the big vendors either from the same market or from some others. Here also, the middlemen may directly sell the goods to consumers or to the vendors of the market. The pattern of flow of selected commodities under different channels is shown in **Table 3**. The locally produced perishable goods are brought directly by the farmers from their own farms. Curd is the most perishable item brought for sale solely by the farmers themselves. The commodities mainly brought by the vendors from their own farms are gourd, leafy vegetables, coconut, banana, betel leaf, betel nut, *kabi*, etc., while a considerable proportion of these items is also brought from other farmers or from the same or other periodic markets. The goods handled by wholeselling shops include potato, onion, and turmeric. The items mainly procured for sale from the same market or from the other markets are tomato, chili, brinjal, etc.

A considerable proportion of products like betel nut, betel leaf, onion, *kabi*, gourd, leafy vegetables, banana and bamboo craft was also procured by the vendors from the same or other periodic markets. The goods procured in large amount from other farmers included sugarcane, tomato, and brinjal.

Kaskata market is located in an agricultural area and the villages around supply a major part of their agricultural products to the market. The wholesalers also contribute substantially by supplying some goods that are not produced locally. Rice is the major agricultural produce of the area and it is mainly supplied by the nearby villages, although a part of it is provided by the wholesalers. **Fig 4** shows the spatial distribution of the sources of selected agricultural commodities supplied to the market.

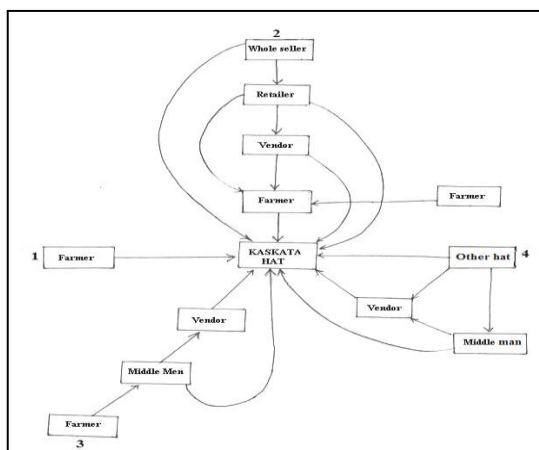


Figure 3. Marketing channels

Table 3: Marketing channels of selected commodities

Channel Commo-dities	Number of vendors in different channels				Total sample
	Producer - Hat	Farmer – Hat	Hat - Hat	Wholeseller– Hat	
Rice	12 (35.29)	6 (17.64)	4 (11.76)	12 (35.29)	34
Betel nut	51 (57.30)	9 (10.11)	29 (32.58)	0 (0.0)	89
Betel leaf	49 (49.49)	17 (17.17)	33 (33.33)	0 (0.0)	99
Potato	13 (6.22)	3 (1.43)	14 (6.70)	179 (85.64)	209
Onion	0 (0.0)	1 (0.56)	43 (24.29)	133 (75.14)	177
Brinjal	28 (32.94)	20 (23.53)	35 (41.18)	2 (2.35)	85
Tomato	13 (27.66)	12 (25.53)	20 (42.55)	2 (4.25)	47
<i>Kabi</i> (Three types)	59 (44.02)	20 (14.92)	49 (36.57)	6 (4.48)	134
Chili	35 (26.12)	23 (17.16)	62 (46.27)	14 (10.45)	134
Gourd	77 (56.20)	18 (13.14)	42 (30.65)	0 (0.0)	137
Leafy vegetables	58 (69.87)	7 (8.43)	17 (20.48)	1 (1.20)	83
Coconut	27 (79.41)	4 (11.76)	3 (8.82)	0 (0.0)	34
Sugarcane	17 (44.73)	18 (47.37)	3 (7.89)	0 (0.0)	38
Banana	79 (64.75)	20 (16.39)	22 (18.03)	1 (0.82)	122
Curd	24 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	24
Turmeric	8 (12.31)	1 (1.54)	4 (6.15)	52 (80)	65
Bamboo craft	46 (63.01)	3 (4.11)	23 (31.51)	1 (1.37)	73

Source: Field survey, 2007-2008

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the percentage to the total vendors interviewed

Kaskata market received 77.14 percent of its total rice supply from the villages located at an average distance of 5 km, while 8.57 percent and 14.28 percent of rice supply came from a range of 5-10 km and 10-15 km respectively. It is important to note that almost all the households around the market have their traditional home gardens, where betel nut, betel leaf and coconut are largely produced. In the case of betel nut, more than 93 percent of the total supply came from the villages within a distance of 5 km, while 1.25 percent and 5 percent of betel nut were supplied from a distance of 5-10 km and 10-15 km respectively. On the other hand, 2.15 percent of the betel leaves was supplied from villages within a distance of 5-10 km and more than 15 km respectively. Potato is a *rabi* crop grown substantially in the villages around the market. It was found that 52 percent of the potato was supplied from the areas at a distance of more than 15 km. Only 12.75 percent, 33.67 percent and 1.02 percent of potato came from the villages located within 5 km, 10 km and 15 km respectively.

The supply of some perishable goods, such as curd, green vegetables, seasonal fruits etc were found to be mostly limited to a short distance from the market. The reason behind is that the vendors and customers of these goods are not prepared to travel a long range. The vegetables, which form a major part of the marketed commodities were supplied from both local and distant areas. However, during the *kharif* season, vegetable supply remains inadequate as the producers get fully engaged in rice cultivation during the period. In summer season, 92.39 percent of the vegetables was supplied from a distance of 5 km, while 6.43 percent, 1.18 percent and 0.34 percent were supplied from within a distance of 5 to 10 km, 10 to 15 km and more than 15 km respectively. Because of the hot and wet condition during summer, the supply of vegetables from outside declines remarkably. In the *rabi* season, vegetables of diverse kind are supplied from the neighbouring areas. It is found that in *rabi* season, out of the total vegetables supplied, 75.48 percent was from within a distance of 5 km, while 9.74 percent, 3.13 percent and 11.65 percent were from a distance of 5 to 10 km, 10 to 15 km and more than 15 km respectively. During this season, a huge quantity of vegetables was supplied from Kharupetia area, which is located at about 53 km

east of this market. The water bodies, such as marshes (*khal*), dead channel, *beels* etc. along with the man-made ponds in the neighbouring villages form the major sources of fish supply to the market. It is also noteworthy that items like agricultural tools, pottery, bamboo craft, spices and dry fish are obtained from certain areas as these are prepared only by some specific communities of the area.

Movement of Vendors and Consumers

The movement of vendors in Kaskata showed a radial pattern. It was found that as high as 88.75 percent of the vendors were involved with trade in as many as 28 periodic markets in addition to it. Compared to the consumers the movement of vendors to other periodic markets had a greater range with 3.63 percent from a distance more than 15 km from the market under study.

The Kaskata market attracts vendors from different places even from a distance of more than 70 km. The flow pattern of vendors to Kaskata *hat* is shown in **Table 2**. It is evident that the basic principle of distance-decay is applicable in the case of vendors' movement. The proportion of vendors from within a range of 5 km was 84.42 percent, which decreased to 5.92 percent between 5 and 10 km, 7.67 percent between 10 and 15 km and 2.0 percent from more than 15 km from the market. Again the nature and degree of flow of vendors, especially those from long distance, is found to vary between winter and summer.

Table 2. Itinerary of vendors from different distances

Type of vendor	Number of vendors from different distance ranges				
	0 - 5 km	5 - 10 km	10 - 15 km	> 15 km	Total
Typical vendor	221 (66.37)	24 (7.21)	78 (23.42)	10 (3)	333 (27.75)
Farmer	422 (90.75)	25 (5.38)	9 (1.94)	9 (1.94)	465 (38.75)
Farmer & Wage labourer	21 (95.45)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.54)	22 (1.83)
Service-holders and other workers	23 (95.83)	1 (4.17)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	24 (2.0)
Wage labourer	81 (96.42)	1 (1.19)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.38)	84 (7.0)
Traders	243 (95.67)	7 (2.76)	2 (0.78)	2 (0.78)	254 (21.17)
Others	18 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	18 (1.5)

Source: Field survey, 2007-08

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the percentage to the total vendors interviewed

Table 2 reveals that the largest number of vendors was basically from the farming communities, which accounted for 38.75 percent of the total vendors. Out of these, 90.75 percent came from within a range of 5 km, 5.35 percent from a distance of 5-10 km and 1.94 percent was from the range of more than 15 km. The next highest number was from the typical vendors, i.e the professional traders (27.75 percent), of which 66.39 percent was from 5 km, 7.2 percent was from 5 to 10 km., 23.42 percent was from 10 to 15 km and 3 percent was from more than 15 km. The proportion of participation of vendors from among the traders is 21.17 percent, of which a large number (95.67 percent) came from a radius of 5 km. The other vendors belong to the categories of farmer-cum-wage labourer (1.83 percent), wage labourer (7 percent), service holder (2 percent) and others (1.5 percent), and more than 95 percent of them came from a radius of 5 km.

Again, the flow pattern of consumers to the periodic markets may be derived from the principle of the central place theory. It supports that rural people use to travel mainly to the nearby periodic markets to meet their needs. However, some customers may visit some markets at a longer distance only to procure some special goods required occasionally. It

was found that 67 percent of the total consumers surveyed in this market visit at least 13 other periodic markets located at different places of the area.

Being located in a typical rural area of the Brahmaputra Valley with no other periodic market in the immediate neighbourhood, Kaskata market attracts a large number of consumers from the rural areas around. The pattern of movement of consumers and vendors to Kaskata is presented in. It is evident that compared to the movement of vendors, the spatial range of consumer's movement is considerably limited. This may be attributed to the fact that the consumers usually travel to the market on foot and the convenient distance for them is not more than five km in the geographical context of the present study area.

It is found that the highest number of consumers (96.42 percent) travel from within a range of 5 km, while 3.42 percent and only 0.33 percent travel from the range of 5-10 km and 10-15 km respectively. In the present context, the participation of both vendors and consumers is found to vary seasonally as significant seasonal change is experienced in the agro-ecosystem and livelihood pattern of the inhabitants within the complementary area of the market. It is interesting to note that besides the itinerant vendors and businessmen, some farmers, wage labourers and petty service holders of the neighbouring areas also sell their home grown products in the periodic market. The vendors and customers also visit some other periodic markets and thus they help in maintaining a balance in the market cycle in an agrarian region.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussions present the morphology and functional behavior of a periodic market with reference to the pattern of flow of goods, sellers and buyers in the context of its rural surrounding. That the market depends almost entirely on the local agricultural and other household products and that it plays an important role in mobilizing the local agricultural resources are clearly evident from the study. It is interesting to note that the livelihoods of most of the people, who are basically small and marginal farmers, are significantly influenced by the market, as it provides them opportunity to sell their products locally. It also reflects the intrinsic relation between the lone periodic market under study and the agro-economic landscape evolved around it in course of time. The market bears the basic characteristics of the periodic markets in Assam in general, especially in its internal structure, products marketed and the marketing behavior of the sellers and buyers.

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