

# Unveiling Gendered Economies: The Role of Women in Nellie Periodic Market of Morigaon District, Assam

Tinku Nath<sup>1</sup> & N. Deka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Dhing College

Email: [tinkunath09@gmail.com](mailto:tinkunath09@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Gauhati University

## ABSTRACT

*The periodic markets have been playing the most important role in the rural areas of the Brahmaputra valley. These are the only affordable markets for the peasant societies that hold on a specific day of the week and at a specific location in rural areas depending on the convenience of the locals. These periodic markets are typically flooded by males, who used to purchase and sell things. Women's participation in periodic markets as vendors and customers, although very less in the earlier times, has been gradually increasing. They currently hold a significant position in many periodic markets. In Nellie periodic market, the women vendors who come from the hilly areas sell their home grown produces. Because of the lack of employment and entrepreneurship which leads to economic vulnerability among the women, has forced them to be vendors in various periodic markets in order to establish their own identity. It has been observed that women not only visit to the markets for selling goods but also to acquire various daily home necessities. The participation of women in periodic markets has broken many elements of conservative society and also gives them exposure to the outside environment. The Nellie periodic market is a well-known periodic market in Morigaon district, Assam. This periodic market continues to be an important marketing centre for the indigenous women vendors. The current study aims to look into the role of women in the Nellie periodic market, their socio-economic background, and the problems they encounter. The study is mainly based on primary data and information collected through personal field investigations, respondent surveys and FGDs with the help of well well-designed questionnaire.*

**Keywords:** Periodic markets, conservative society, economic vulnerability, women's participation, Nellie periodic market.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The periodic markets of Assam, known locally as *hat* or *bazar*, are the traditional rural marketing systems that are essential for maintaining the socio-economic structure of the state. These markets, conducted weekly at designated places, provide a budget-friendly place for the exchange of goods and services,

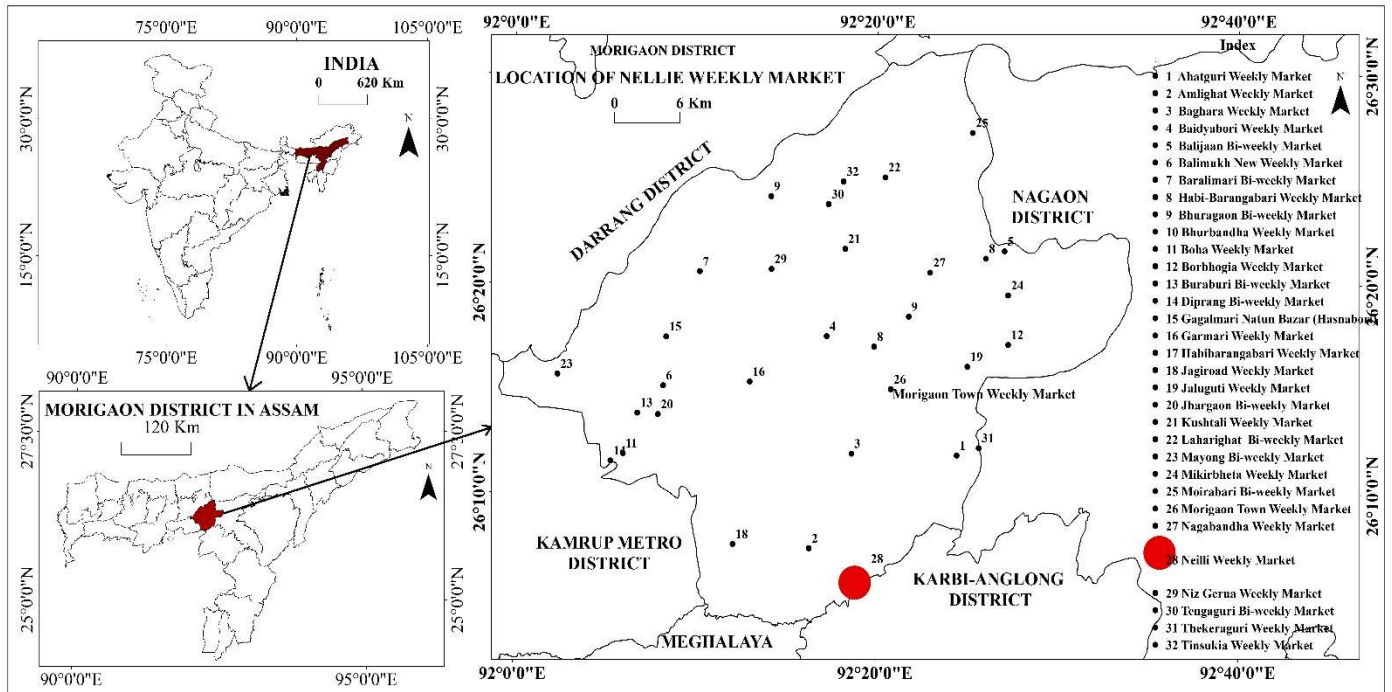
particularly including locally sourced agricultural items, livestock, forest resources, and home essentials. These markets operate as essential middlemen, enabling the transfer of commodities from rural producers to consumers, while also functioning as significant social gathering venues (Deka and Bhagabati, 2019; Nath *et al.*, 2024). These markets serve not just as commercial centres but also as venues for community engagement. Historically, women had limited involvement in these markets, both as sellers and buyers. Recent trends, however, imply a significant change in this pattern. Women from both rural villages and nearby towns are increasingly participating as active participants in these markets (Rezvani *et al.*, 2012). Their increasing participation signifies wider societal transformations, including enhanced mobility, financial independence, and a reconfiguration of conventional gender roles. Kithuka (2019) emphasizes that periodic markets function not just as trading places but also as platforms for the exchange of local news, the establishment of social networks, and the preservation of cultural connections—activities in which women are increasingly involved. Despite their increasing participation, women vendors persistently encounter many obstacles in periodic markets. These factors include insufficient infrastructure, poor sanitation, instability, rivalry from male merchants, and restricted access to financial resources. Social stigma and domestic obligations also limit their capacity to fully exploit market possibilities.

Several geographers have carried out studies examining different facets of the periodic market, particularly in Assam. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of comprehensive study about women's participation in the periodic market within the rural regions of Morigaon district. This paper aims to examine the significance of periodic markets in rural areas, the involvement of women in these markets, the participation of female vendors, the purchasing behaviours of female customers, and the challenges encountered by women vendors in the Nellie periodic market in Morigaon district, Assam.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Study area

The Nellie periodic market, or *bazar*, is a significant market situated in the Nellie, south-west of Morigaon district. The market is located at 26°05'49" N latitude and 92°18'53" E longitude, with a total area of about 0.86 hectares. The market is located around 63 kilometres from Guwahati city and 25 km from Morigaon town. The market occurs weekly on Monday. Consequently, the local people refer to the market as Soomboria *bazar* (Monday weekly market). The market is situated around 500 meters from the 37th National Highway. While agriculture and agricultural products remain predominant in the market, a variety of industrial goods are also extensively accessible. Consequently, the market is frequently visited by a substantial number of individuals involved in agricultural activities, vendors, labourers, and government employees, among others.



**Fig 1: Location of Nellie periodic market**

(Source: Author)

## 2.2. Research design and approach

This research adopted a case study approach, focusing on Nellie periodic market as an example of rural periodic marketplaces in Assam. The study was exploratory, concentrating on comprehending the informal economy from a gendered perspective. A qualitative interpretative framework was used to examine the contributions of women to, and their experiences within, market dynamics, social hierarchies, and local economic systems.

## 2.3. Data collection methods

The research is primarily based on primary sources and fieldwork collected from the market during 2021–2022 through market observation, respondent surveys and FGDs, and interactions with female vendors and customers.

### 2.3.1. Market observation

Market observation is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of women's participation, including the sorts of commodities they provide, their spatial distribution within the market, and the visiting patterns of vendors and customers.

### 2.3.2. Respondent survey

The surveys were carried out to get details about the items and services, the origins of vendors and customers, and their visitation patterns to the market. Collecting data on busy market days was challenging, especially because of the significant inflow of consumers. To maintain impartiality and rigor, purposive sampling methods were used to randomly choose 50 vendors for the questionnaire. A group of 50 market consumers was obtained using a systematic purposive sample procedure to examine their visiting patterns.

### **2.3.3. Focused group discussions**

Through FGDs with female vendors and customers visiting the market were done to understand their experiences, challenges, and aspirations within these informal trading spaces. FGDs also carried out to uncover gender-specific barriers like lack of sanitation facilities, limited decision-making power, or social stigma, and also highlight opportunities for empowerment, skill development, and improved livelihoods.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Importance of periodic market in rural areas**

In a rural society where the majority of people are involved in agricultural activities and live in villages, it is not always possible for them to go to the markets in the urban areas to purchase daily necessities. In this case, a rural weekly market is a very important trading institution. The periodic market plays a very important role in sustaining the local economy and in fostering the relationship between the economy and society. The needs of the people are fulfilled locally, and sellers earn their livelihood by catering to these demands. In this regard, Nellie periodic market has made a unique contribution. At the market, most of the people from the neighbouring villages come to sell their homegrown produce and buy their daily necessities. One of the notable features of this market is that most of the tribal women from the nearby villages also come here to sell and buy goods.

### **3.2. Women vendors' in the market**

Women's participation in periodic markets as vendors was much less in the earlier times. But breaking the rule of conservative tradition, it has been gradually increasing in recent times in every weekly market in Assam. Presently they occupy a significant position in many periodic markets. According to the female vendor questionnaire survey, 39 percent of the vendors offer their items at other periodic marketplaces. Therefore, periodicity is an advantage for these vendors because their economic role is diverse (Bromley et al. 1975). Trading is the primary source of income for vendors that visit the market on a regular basis. They are generally itinerant sellers who move to different markets on a weekly basis. On the other hand, 83 percent of vendors attend the Nellie periodic market on a regular basis, while the remaining 17 percent visit the market only occasionally. They bring their homegrown and other produce to the weekly market.

### **3.3. Visiting behaviour of women customers' in the market**

Vendors and customers are the most visible direct participants, especially during the weekly market. Following a review of various research articles, it was determined that commodity market prices, trader taxes, availability, profitability, proximity to the market, ease of access, the economic condition of the region, and so on are identified as critical factors for vendors and consumers visiting patterns in the periodic market. Consumers are widely acknowledged as the primary players, and their behavioural patterns, as well as their demands, play a decisive role in the present state of periodic markets, as well as their future survival (Saxena, 2004, and Tamaskar, 1993). In the Nellie periodic market, there are two types of female customers: frequent (or regular) and occasional customers. Customers who pay regular visits include daily wage labourers, widows

of BPL families, and rural agricultural tribal communities, whereas artisan and service class consumers are included in the category of occasional customers. Consumers in the first category are the most prevalent in the Nellie periodic market and account for the majority of transactions. They come to the *hat* on foot and by bicycle, e-rickshaw, tempo, etc. They are also producer vendors; they go to the market to sell their home-grown products, and once all of the items have been sold, they buy the daily necessities for their home, such as salt, lime, mustard oil, groceries, incense, manufactured goods, cloth, etc., and return home.

### 3.4. Gender variation

In contrast to their male counterparts, female participation in the Nellie market frequently faces obstacles due to societal and cultural norms, domestic duties, and restricted access to essential resources like land or capital. In the realm of bulk agricultural products, large-scale trading, and high-value goods, men often assume a more prominent position, whereas women are usually engaged in the management of smaller-scale, lower-margin items like fruits, vegetables, and processed foods. Although both men and women make substantial contributions to the market economy, women's involvement is sometimes more restricted to small-scale or family-related activities.

Furthermore, it is observed that men typically have greater access to broad commercial networks, while women's participation in the market tends to be limited to local and village-level trade. Individuals often exhibit enhanced mobility, allowing them to cover greater distances for trade and engage in a wider array of business opportunities beyond the local market. Women, conversely, are frequently perceived as guardians of conventional, domestic, and localized market activities.

Nonetheless, in spite of these differences, women have established a notable presence in local markets, demonstrating their expertise in local goods, agricultural knowledge, and food processing abilities. Such expertise has allowed for the beginning of a consistent and dependable income stream, all while fostering the economic sustainability of the community. Their capacity to juggle multiple responsibilities while engaging in market activities highlights their strength and flexibility, establishing them as vital contributors to the economy in rural markets such as Nellie.

**Table: Participation of vendors' and customers' at Nellie periodic market**

Vendor		Customer	
Male	Female	Male	Female
60 %	40%	55%	45%

(Source: Author)





**Fig 2: Participation of female vendors and customers at the Nellie periodic market**

(Source: Author)

### **3.5. Problems faced by women vendors in Nellie periodic market**

- a.** Infrastructural facilities in the market are not sufficient. Although modern infrastructure has been built for the vendors, it is not enough. Most of the female vendors still sit in the open air. There are no suitable sanitary facilities at the market.
- b.** The absence of adequate safe drinking water facilities in the market. The female vendors must make their own arrangements, and they typically bring it from home.
- c.** In the market, there are also issues with women's health. They spend a lot of time sitting in the rain, sun, and dust, which causes various health problems for them such as sinus problems, back discomfort, allergies to the dust, sleeplessness, and skin problems.
- d.** Lack of parking space for the vehicles they bring is another issue that female vendors frequently face.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The above discussion emphasizes the vital and dynamic contributions of women in weekly or periodic markets, illustrating their strength and commitment to achieving economic autonomy. In the face of numerous challenges, including inadequate facilities, safety issues, and societal stigma, women are actively engaging in substantial numbers. This participation marks a notable departure from conventional norms that have historically restricted their roles to the domestic sphere. Their involvement in these markets not only bolsters the local economy but also represents their pursuit of self-identity and empowerment within a traditional societal structure. To foster and maintain this favourable trend, it is crucial for market management committee to tackle infrastructural shortcomings such as adequate sanitation, allocated vendor areas, security protocols and to establish policies that protect women from exploitation and discrimination. Creating a secure, inclusive, and systematically structured market environment will enhance women's engagement and fortify their position in the socio-economic framework.

## Acknowledgements

The authors extend their sincere gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback, which significantly enhanced the quality and clarity of this manuscript.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References

- [1]. Baruah. (2015). Women Vendors and Their Problems in a Periodic Market in The Urban Precinct of Guwahati City of Assam, *Paripex - Indian Journal of Research*, V4(5),204206.
- [2]. Bromley, R.J., Symanski, R. and Good, C.M. (1975). The Rationale of Periodic Markets, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Vol. 65 (4),530-537.
- [3]. Deka, N., & Bhagabati, A. K. (2019). Market fundamentalism, periodic markets and peasant societies of the Brahmaputra valley: Reflections on the Baihata Chariali hat of Kamrup District, Assam. *North Eastern Geographer*, 40(1&2), 29–40.
- [4]. Ikechukwu, E.E. and Innocent W.I. (2019). Roles of Periodic Markets in Fostering Rural Development in Emohua Localarea Rivers State, *Nigeria, International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research*, 06 (01),4545-4551.
- [5]. Kithuka, D. M. (2019). An Analysis of the Role of Periodic Markets in Rural Development in Mukaa Sub-County; Makueni County (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- [6]. Nath, T., Bhuyan, M. J., Deka, N., & Bhagabati, A. K. (2024). Exploring the geographical dimensions of an urban periodic market in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, India: insights into its structure and functioning. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 1-23.
- [7]. Owusu, G and Lund, R (2007). Markets and women's trade: exploring their role in district development in Ghana, *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 58,113–124.

- [8]. Patel, A. K., & Singh, V. (2019). Issues and Challenges of the Weekly Market in Chhattisgarh: A Special Reference to Nagri block of Dhamtari District. *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(2), 683-686.
- [9]. Rezvani, M. R., Ghadiri Maasoum, M., Motiee Langroudi, S. H., & Azmi, A. (2012). Explanation of Women Motivation from Activity in Local periodic Markets in Guilan Province. *Geography and Environmental Planning*, 22(4), 35-52.
- [10]. Saxena, H.M. (2004): *Marketing Geography*, Rawat Publication, New Delhi, 217-218.
- [11]. Tamaskar, B.G. (1992). *Fundamentals of Periodic Market-Places and Networks*, Inter India Publications, New Delhi, 60-61.

### ***Cite this Article***

Tinku Nath & N Deka, “Unveiling Gendered Economies: The Role of Women in Nellie Periodic Market of Morigaon District, Assam”, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Arts, Science and Technology (IJMRAS)*, ISSN: 2584-0231, Volume 3, Issue 3, pp. 23-30, March 2025.

**Journal URL:** <https://ijmrast.com/>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.61778/ijmrast.v3i3.126>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).