



A Socio-economic Study of Byrnihat Market in Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya

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Abstract

The tribes constitute 8.2% of total population of India. Though they are called by different names in different parts of the country, they have in common, many socio-economic and cultural features. In the graded socio-economic unequal structure of Indian society, the tribes are at the lowest rung and being poor, lead a substandard and subsistence living. The tribal market is highly imperfect one, because there are no organized markets in tribal areas. In view of little monetization, the tribal producers have to barter a portion of their agricultural or forest produce. The weekly markets had enabled rural people to buy or sell household goods, articles, implements etc. In fact on a large scale fairs are held in religious town, where agricultural implements and livestock. For the proper understanding of tribal market, one needs sufficient feed-up and data base. While there are studies on the monetized, competitive and modern market by several scholars, the tribal market study has remained a neglected area of research. Only a few studies have been undertaken by anthropologists, sociologists, economic historians. They have mainly focused on the growth of population, improvement of road, communication etc. They have discussed the other essential characteristics of the tribal market viz. tribe-caste ratio, ethnicity and socio-cultural and religious values. But none of the tribal market study has so far touched the pertinent problems of the tribes, viz. intervention and marginalization, which have been continuously threatening the tribes and putting them in greater hardships.

The sociological view of market carries two elements to signify the social character of market situation: one is the individual actor is decisively influenced by social ties, and higher dependence on social ties is necessary in order to accomplish a given economic goal. Contrary to the anthropological-sociological view of market, the contemporary market situation seems to be collaborating with the capitalist world system which will finally submerge into a unified world

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market scheme. Therefore, the various dimensions of market economy put forth the fact that the world market is socially constructed as well as re-constructed. The present study mainly highlighted two important issues firstly, to Study socio-economic condition of the vendors in Byrnihat weekly market and secondly to examine the business pattern of vendors in Byrnihat weekly market.

Keywords: *Social-Economics, Byrnihat Market, Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya, Tribal Market, Tribal Business Pattern.*

Conceptual Framework

George Dalton in his study pinpoints about the economic organization of primitive communities. According to him the formal and western economic theory cannot be universally applied to the study of the primitive communities, because the western economy has been dominated by rationality (Dalton, 1961). Some western scholars like Franz Boas, Richard Thurnwald and Malinowski defined primitive economics. Their study mainly based on economic motivation as mutual parts of social process that maintain unity in the existence of social order and develop amicable reciprocity. Boas's ethnographic studies of the Eskimos (1888), Kwakiutl Indians (1897), and the North-western tribes of Canada (1898) had an influential impact upon the serious scholars who enquired into the primitive nature of 'marketless' economy. He highlighted that the simple people of that age were not interested in profit but they were certainly conscious of cultural and environmental factors which contributed to their unity. The people were free to exercise their choice within communal frame and their natural behaviour did not go against their social solidarity (Boas, 1940).

Malinowski had intensively collected data among the most primitive and traditional aborigines in Trobrianders. He highlighted social context of economic activity in his study of *Kula trade* network which was inter-tribal character. Malinowski stated that the whole tribal life was permeated by a constant give and take policy which was free from any compulsive element. The people of that society were exchanging the goods that moved in a circular direction not only to meet in economic needs but also ritual obligations. Every movement of the Kula articles, every detail of the transactions is fixed and regulated by a set of traditional rules and conventions and some acts of Kula are escorted by an elaborate magical ritual and public ceremonies (Malinowski, 1972).

American anthropologist Margaret Mead discuss about the primitive society and the theme of her analysis is that non-industrial people were capable of a rational approach in every respect of their socio-cultural life. To call the people as savage and senseless is not proper because such people were well equipped with rationality and logicity. They were maintaining the social solidarity through exchange and reciprocity of food and property. The society was non-competitive and peaceful (Mead, 1935). Till today Sociologists and Anthropologists have

mainly focused their work on tribal studies are confined on topics like barter system, ethnicity, socio-cultural and religious values etc. BYRNI is a rural weekly market in Meghalaya where most of the sellers are tribal and sell their local products. In most of the cases, people assemble in an assigned place and on an appointed time and exchange their commodities with each other. The concept of rural marketing in India economy has always played an influential role in the lives of people. In India, leaving out a few metropolitan cities all the district and industrial townships are connected with rural markets. The rural market in Indian economy generates almost more than half of the country income. Rural marketing is an evolving concept, and as a part of any economy has untapped potential, marketers have realized the opportunity recently. Improvement in infrastructure and reach promise bright future for those intending to go rural. Rural consumers are keen on branded goods nowadays, so the market size for products and services seems to have burgeoned. The weekly were important centres of trade in the past. They ranked next to wholesale trade centres. The rural populace used to purchase their day-to-day requirements of articles from the weekly market. These markets are generally distributing centres.

Location Setting of Byrnihat Market

Ri-Bhoi District was carved out of the existing East Khasi Hills District vide Notification No. HPL.139/89/109 dated 04.06.1992 and is located in the North Eastern part of Meghalaya having a common border with Assam in the East, the North and the west. The district derives its name from the name of one of the sub-tribes of the Khasi, "*the Bhoi*", and the indigenous and predominant Khasi sub-tribe inhabiting the district. The district has two towns, Nongpoh and Umroi Census Town and three C. & R.D. Blocks viz. Umling, Jirang and Umsning C. & R.D. Blocks. According to census 2011 Ri-Bhoi district has 635 number of villages out of which 579 are inhabited and remaining 56 are uninhabited. Byrnihat is a medium size village under the Umling development block of Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya.

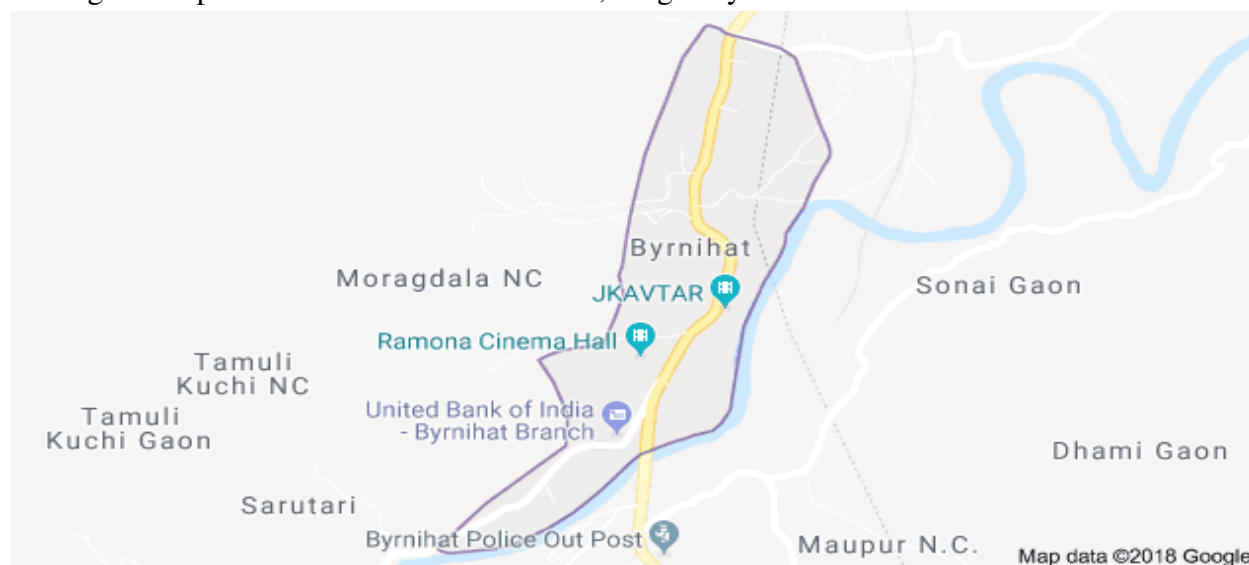


Fig. 1: Byrnihat Village
(Source: Google Maps)

The total population of the tribal dominated village as per census 2011 is 298 followed by 146 males and 152 are females. Byrnihat market is a weekly market. It is located in this village. Byrnihat market is a rural market. Weekly market is a gathering of consumers or people for a certain period for the purpose of buying and selling, i.e., exchanging goods and services, and even ideas, tangible and intangible, are exchanged. A weekly concourse of people has two important implications: one is of time and space and the other is combination of individuals, units of consciousness, to make any market. It is usually trade in commodities of local uses like vegetables, cereals, meat, cosmetics, agricultural tools and implements, etc. Byrnihat market is a weekly market, every Friday sellers come to the market and entire day they sale their products.

The most important reason behind the spot selection is that Byrnihat market unlike other tribal market, is having its special geographical location and outside contacts. Byrnihat is a tribal dominated area and they have been living in the area since time antiquity and they have their unique lifestyle and socio-cultural ethos. In this area for a long time, tribes are non-conformist with the dominant outside values as they adhere to their culture, religion, custom and other happenings.



Now the emergence of modern competitive market economy badly affected the socio-economic conditions of tribal people in this area. The tribal “marketless” economy with barter and reciprocity are increasingly challenged by the modern competitive market economy.

Methods and Data

Both primary and secondary data was used for the study. Secondary data collected from books, journals etc. available relating to the study. Primary data was collected from the vendors at Byrnihat weekly Market. Interview schedule, observation and informal group discussion are the tools of data collection. Total sample was 40. The sample was selected by accidental sampling method. Informal discussions were conducted after the market hours matching the market situation because the vendors remain busy in their work.

Profile of the Vendors

The market plays a key role in the social life of the people. It is the place where men and women from different walks of life gather and sometimes for economic reasons. The market can be used very effectively for exchanging social ideas and also for economic stability of the people. The exchange of ideas may be used for learning improved scientific methods of

production and distribution as well as proper use of resources and markets. The rural market serves a variety of social functions for which it can be thought of as a social institution. The market serves as meeting place for the people of both, near and distant villages. It provides plentiful opportunity for gossiping, enjoyment and discussion on any topic. Normally the elder people discuss social, political and religious matters of their villages in the tea stalls and convey messages to the other in villagers coming to the market. The markets social organization comprises various units like shopkeepers, customers, suppliers and visitors. There are various types of vendors found in Byrnihat weekly market like vegetable vendors, fruit vendors, clothes vendors, traditional medicine vendors (tribal herbal medicine) etc. In the following analysis the collected from a sample of 40 vendors are being presented.

Sex Categories of Vendors: Data shows that majority 62.5% of the respondents are male and 37.5% respondents are female.

Age Group: The above table shows that 40% of the respondents are from 20-30 years age group and 25% are from 31-40 years, 22.5% are from 41-50 years, 7.5% are from 51-60 years and only 5% are from 71-80 years age group.

Marital Status of Vendors: Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents 60% are married and 40% are unmarried.

Level of Education: In terms of education it is found that 42.5% of the respondent's education up to primary level, 37.5% of the respondent education up to high school level and 20% of the respondents is illiterate.

Religion: In terms of religion data indicate that more than half 55% of the respondents are Christian, 20% are Hindu and 25% of the respondents are Muslims.

Main Earner: From the Table 1, it found that more than half 75% of the respondents are sole earner of the family while 25% of the respondent depend on other family members like brother, sister, and father.

Monthly Income: In terms of monthly income of the respondent family it is reveal that 15% of the respondent's family income Rs. 2000-4000, 25% of the respondent family income from Rs. 4000-6000, 5% respondent's family income of Rs. 6000-8000 and 22.5% have income of Rs. 8000-10,000. Whereas 32.5% of the respondent's family income above Rs. 10,000 per month.

Place of Origin: Data show that 80% of the vendors are local people in the village and 20% of the respondents are migrated from neighboring villages.

Table 1: Profile of the Vendors

Social Profile															
Respondents	Sex Category		Age Group (Years)					Marital Status		Education		Religion			
	M	F	20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	71-80	Married	Un-married	Illiterate 8 (20%) Level of education		Christian	Hindu	Muslim	
										Primary	High School				
	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)	16 (40%)	10 (25%)	9 (22.5%)	3 (7.5%)	2 (5%)	24 (60%)	16 (40%)	17 (42.5%)	15 (37.5%)	22 (55%)	8 (20%)	10 (25%)	
Total		40 (100%)		40(100%)					40(100%)		40(100%)		40(100%)		
Economic Profile															
Respondents	Main Earner		Monthly income					Place of Origin		Mode of transport			Pattern of business		
	Self	Family	Rs. 2000-4000	Rs 4000 - 6000	Rs. 6000-8000	Rs. 8000 - 10,000	Rs. 10,000-12,000	Local inhabitants	Migrated from neighboring village	Bicycle	Two wheeler motor	On foot	Local Origin	Buy From Others	
	30 (75%)	10 (25%)	6 (15%)	10 (25%)	2 (5%)	9 (22.5%)	13 (32.5%)	32 (80%)	8 (20%)	5 (12.5%)	30 (75%)	5 (12.5%)	28 (70%)	12 (30%)	
Total		40 (100%)		40 (100%)					40 (100%)		40 (100%)			40 (100%)	

Mode of Transport: In terms of transportation of the vendors data reveal that 75% of the vendors use two wheelers, 12.5% each of the respondents use bicycle or on feet.

Pattern of Business: The Byrnihat weekly market deals with a variety of goods and services of diverse origins. . It is also the centre of goods of local origin and goods brought from outside. All the commodities of various local and non-local origins are found through different channels from producers to consumers. In the process of marketing of fruits, vegetables and commercial crop in a market system, the produce undergoes a change in respect of time, place, form and ownership adding up their values at respective stages. Therefore, the chains of intermediaries constitute the channels of marketing system. They are petty traders, commission agents and middlemen. Now the impact of change is quite openly noticeable because the traditional nature of tribal economy, reciprocity, barter/exchange and redistribution are mostly absent. Data reflect that 70% of the respondents are sale their local origin and 30% of the Vendors bring the commodities from others like, market agent, middle man etc. to sale in the market.

Types of Commodities

The Byrnihat market is famous for vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, knife, herbal medicine and other local origin. The types of commodities of the market are shown in Table 2. The commodity structure of the market gives a reflection of the geographical environment of the region around the market area. The amount of rainfall, temperature, soil conditions influences the growth of different types of products. It also observed that the nearness to urban centres, available infrastructural facilities like road, market sheds, storage, etc facilitates the availability of different products in the market. The traders of Assam cater to the needs of the customers of the region by supplying the variety of items including necessities of daily life, like, dry fish, electronic goods etc. These traders are in this business for a long period. They have learned this business skill from their ancestors. Though they are not well educated, but their experience in the business made them competent and profit motivated.

Conclusion

Byrnihat market in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya play an important role in catering the needs of not only the indigenous people but also the people coming from neighboring state of Assam. It is also the centre of goods of local origin and goods brought from outside. The market functionaries play a vital role in maintaining the effective functioning of market centers. Market agents and middlemen are in the business for a long period although there is no proper documentation that supports the role and functions of these intermediaries, however empirical findings from the present study reflect that they play important role in the market of Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya.

Table 2: Types of Commodities

Commodity Structure of Local Origin		Commodity brought from outside	
Commodities	Items	Commodities	Items
Seasonal Fruits and Vegetables	Banana, Pears, Coconut, Pineapple, Mango, Papaya, Plum, Lemon, Cabbage, Drum stick, Cucumber, Pumpkin, Brinjal, onion, Tomato, Radish, Carrot, chillies, Tapioca etc.	Fruits and Vegetables	Grapes, Water melon, Plum, Mango, Cherry, Potato, radish, Brinjal, Bitter gourd, cucumber, carrot, cauliflower, cabbage, Tomato etc.
Food Grains	Rice, Black Gram, Sunflower	Grocery and FMCG	Edible oils, Salt, Spices, Atta, Sugar, Dal, Match Box, Bidi, Cigarette, Molasses, Pickles,
Spices	Chillies – Both Green and Red, Ginger, Turmeric, Black Pepper and Garlic	Stationeries	Mirror, Comb, Hair belt, nail cutter, Scissor etc.
Bamboo and cane products	Small bamboo, Conical carrying basket, Mat, Chair and Table	Raw Fish and Dry Fish	A variety of Raw fish and Dry Fish brought from outside
Commercial/Plantation Crops	Betel nut, Betel leaves, Cashew nut, Cotton, Jute	Manufactured Goods	Electronic items like Battery, charger, torch light, Plastic Plastic items like Mug, Bucket, Chair, tool, Fishing nets,
Livestock	Hen, Pigeon, Duck, Goat, Pig, Cow and Buffalo	Services	Barbers, Medicine Sellers, Shoe repair, Cycle repair etc.

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