

# A STUDY ON HAATS AND ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HAATS UPON THE BODO COMMUNITY OF DOTMA.

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## Abstract

Haats hold the distinction of being the oldest marketing form in India and continue to hold significant importance in the rural economy. The local markets that are conducted once or twice a week or held at regular basis are called *Haat* also known as *weekly markets*. They are open-markets that serve as a trade place for local people. Its primary purpose is to encourage and enhance trade between rural areas. These markets are held at fixed locations and at given times. They offer business prospects but also partake for the broadening of village settlements.

Studies have been done on haats all over India and scholars have tried to show the utility of the haats on the market system and the influence of the haat on the local residents of the area. Similarly, scholars have written research papers on the haat systems of Assam but there are no studies done on the haat of Dotma. Dotma is a small town in the district of Kokrajhar, Assam. The local weekly haat is organised at Dotma Bazaar in Dotma. The bazaar is held by mixed races of people like Koch Rajbongshis, Muslims, Bodos, Marwaris and Bengalis. The majority of the prominent shops and grocery stores were owned by Muslims and Bengali individuals. The Bodo community used to run small tea stalls, vegetable shops during the colonial era. The Dotma Haat is a prominent chapter in the lives of the indigenous people of the Bodo community of Dotma. Therefore, the study has been done on the socio-cultural significance of the haats on the Bodo community of Dotma.

**KEYWORDS:** HAAT, DOTMA, BODO, MARKET, BAZAAR.

## INTRODUCTION

The local markets that are conducted once or twice a week or held at regular basis are called *Haat* also known as *weekly markets*. They are open-markets that serve as a trade place for local people. Its primary purpose is to encourage and enhance trade between rural areas. These markets are held at fixed locations and at given times. It offers business prospects and also helps in the broadening of rural settlements. Haats hold the distinction of being the oldest marketing form in India and continue to hold significant importance in the rural economy. The local people sell commodities that they produce in their farms and households. Besides facilitating the purchase of everyday items, these marketplaces allow individuals to sell surplus agricultural produce and related goods. The haats possess the potential to rapidly expand India's rural market, earning it

the reputation as one of the swiftest growing markets globally.<sup>1</sup> Rural marketing agencies and business targeting rural audiences find Haats to be an excellent marketing channel in India due to their ability to provide a wide variety of goods and services to rural customers. Haats are very effective and important avenues for reaching out to rural markets. According to S Venkatesh, Director of Rural Welfare Promotions, a rural marketing agency, there are 45000 haats in India.<sup>2</sup>

Haat markets attract a large gathering of individuals, providing a platform for entrepreneurs to showcase their businesses. These markets facilitate the exchange of commodities by catering to both consumers interested in purchasing second hand goods and consumers interested in *barter* system of transaction.

The concept of weekly haats has been believed to exist since the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, even during the Harappan and Mohenjo-Daro civilization.<sup>3</sup> These haats were highly developed and served as marketplace before the idea of modern markets emerged. Socially, these markets acted as meeting places for people of all ages and genders, eventually becoming platforms for business transactions among merchants and traders. Economically they facilitated the exchange of farmers produce for essential goods such as clothing, tools, tobacco and livestock for ceremonial purposes, and other societal necessities. Artisanal goods have an essential role in preserving and passing on cultural heritage to future generations. Unlike modern markets, haats lacked permanent structures and instead utilized natural shaded areas like tress or makeshift shelters made of cloth, plastic, or a waterproof sheet. Haats fostered warmer and more interconnected relationships among participants, contributing to a sense of community. Open spaces in public areas hold significance as they can accommodate social interactions and haats are typically located along roads to be accessible by villagers.<sup>4</sup>

In Bodo language it is known as *hatai* or *hatai bazar*. In Assamese language it is referred as *haat/bojar*. They are the source of livelihood for the local people. People from nearby villages and towns come here to buy and sell basic daily life goods for their sustenance. The products they sell ranges from food and clothing, arts and craft, and utensils and ornaments.

According to BC Allen in the Assam District Gazetteers VOL 3 Goalpara, during 1905 the main centres of trade in the Goalpara district were Gauripur, Dhubri, Bilasipara and Bagribari. Most of these subdivisions fall under the present day Kokrajhar district. The other indigenous centres of trade were Gossaigaon, Chapaguri, Bhowraguri and South Salmara. From the duars of western Bengal many merchants came to sell oil, grain, spices, salt, cloths, lamps and stationery. All the villagers from nearby villages and town came to sell the produce of their farms. Barter trade system was prevalent in the eastern duars. The trade was done by waters and they used country boats to do the task. The river routes play a very prominent role in the internal trade of the district. They exchanged dry fish with unhusked rice. The rate in which they exchanged items was fixed in a panchayat they held. Dry fish fetched twelve to twenty times the weight in paddy that means five or six seers of paddy were given for each pot of dry fish. The products that were rare

<sup>1</sup> Kirti, *Haats In Rural Marketing To Reach The Burgeoning Rural Consumer Segment*, Feb 25,2022, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Moti Deogam, *Haat: An Instrument of cultural, social, economic and political socialisation*, pp.1333.

about the haats were the betel nuts (goi), Jute (patw), unhusked rice, mustard seeds (*besor*), piglets, chickens, goats, fresh water fish that were sold in large quantities.<sup>5</sup>

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. *Role of haats in the development of Rural Markets*, by Vikram Singh Waraich and Astha Bajaj, talked about the immense thrust that the local haats can offer to the rural marketing and their readymade distribution network. Haats have become increasingly significant in India's rural market, serving as an innovative marketing strategy that contributes to the development of rural areas. The availability of a wide range of products and the opportunity for customers to physically interact with them creates a favourable purchasing experience.

2. *Haats and Melas Facilitating rural reach and accessibility*, by Dhananjay Singh, he mentioned the use of haats and melas to overcome the barriers of reach and volume to facilitate rural reach and accessibility. The conventional multi-level distribution channel offers wide coverage and enables bulk distribution, but it falls short in effectively and efficiently reaching rural markets located deep within the interior regions. He tries to explore and analyse the significant role played by Haats and Melas in the rural context, specifically their crucial role in facilitating access to rural markets and improving distribution channels.

3. *Reaching out to the Rural Consumers through Haats: A study in Karnataka*, by Dr. Satyanarayan S and Dr. B. H. Suresh, talked about how the *haats* help the rural economy by reaching out to rural consumers. Rural marketing in India has the potential to bring positive changes to society in multiple ways. A significant portion of Indian consumers, two-thirds reside in rural areas and contribute partly in the national income, it is crucial to comprehend the mindset, needs, aspirations, and behaviour of the rural population so that it helps to achieve success in marketing endeavours.

4. *Market Formation in Assam: Nature of Trade in and around the Brahmaputra Valley, C.1826-1905*, by Nabanita Sharma, she mentioned that the European traders entered Assam and the region thrived on the indigenous place of exchange. Contemporary marketplaces were closely linked to traditional haats, fairs, and chowkis, serving as a conduit for the colonial administration's commercial economy. The colonial regime frequently utilized traditional market areas to advance their commercial objectives. The overall trade within the region was complemented by these haats and fairs. They functioned as key points in the commercial networks of the area.

5. *Traditional Haat as A Tool for Economic Empowerment of Rural Women and Role of Mass Media- A Case Study of Abu Market of Ganesguri Dispur, Assam*, by Ms. Rose Mahanta, she mentioned that haats are prominent communication routes that provide support to manage livelihood of rural people. The government and welfare agencies utilize mass media as a means for development. The role of mass media in empowering rural women is significantly large in India. The empowering of rural women can help them gain access to

<sup>5</sup> B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers Vol. 3 Goalpara*, pp.101, 102.

resources and opportunities. The media plays a significant role in enabling rural women, particularly in terms of promoting and selling their agricultural products, allowing them to enhance their empowerment.

6. *Market Mechanism and Functionaries of local Haats: An Empirical study in the Garo hills district of Meghalaya*, by Mridul Barman and Abhiyan Bhattacharjee, he mentioned the effective functioning of the market centres and in the development of the local haats in the Garo hills region of Meghalaya due to the role of the market functionaries. Market intermediaries like market agents and middlemen are crucial for ensuring the smooth operation of marketplaces. Despite the lack of comprehensive documentation on their specific roles and functions, these market functionaries have been actively involved in the industry for an extended period of time.

7. *Exploring Haat Bazaars: A step towards understanding Rural Markets in Southern Rajasthan*, by Parijat Jha, she mentioned that the haats play a vital role in the exchanging of knowledge and views. Haats also help to participate in various social, political, cultural, and even religious gatherings. Rural areas have witnessed the establishment of permanent shops and markets, whereas historically, temporary markets known as Haats served as a means for people to obtain goods that were not readily available to them. The dynamics and effectively handling of the outcomes arising from the increased diversity and availability of similar goods in permanent rural markets fulfilled by Haats are truly commendable.

8. *Resurrection and being of a Haat: A case study of Rural Markets of the Eastern Plateau Region*, by Aditi Sarkar Roy, Pabitra Banik, Rana Dattagupta, they mentioned that the haats were used as places of exchange of necessities since ages ago. The Haats fulfil essential requirements of farmers and consumers by offering economic and social support. They facilitate the sale of agricultural goods and provide necessary resources for farming that is directly influencing productivity.

9. *Success Driver of Urban Haats Selling Craft Products*, by Rajesh Gupta, Piyush Kumar Sinha, Vandana Sood, talked about haats as a medium of bringing artisans and customers at a single place to optimise their respective values. The location of the haats, stall allotment system, advertisements, product promotion, and monitoring are crucial factors in ensuring the satisfaction of artisans in these marketplaces. The administration of these haats plays a significant middle role in achieving these outcomes.

10. *RRA of haats: Revisiting Rural India's Periodic Markets*, by Pravant Surya Kar, he mentioned how the tool RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) is used to study traditional rural haats. The rural market researchers have recently become interested in this tool due to its evolution over time. The tool was predominantly utilized by non-profit organizations to assess the needs of beneficiaries and uncover hidden obstacles in social projects.

11. *Haat: An Instrument of Cultural, Social, Economic and Political Socialisation*, by Moti Deogam, she mentioned that haats have been essential factors for the improvement and transformation in the villages. Haats are unstructured venues that serve as platforms for selling products and displaying the unique work of local artisans and craftsmen, which may be limited to certain locations. He aims to explore the traditional means by which indigenous communities in India have historically fostered cultural, social, economic, and political connections through these gatherings.

12. *Assam District Gazetteers Vol. 3 Goalpara*, by B. C. Allen, he mentioned about the markets and fairs held in the Goalpara district.

13. *Haats in Rural Marketing to Reach the Burgeoning Rural Consumer Segment*, by Kirti, she indicated that haats possess the potential to rapidly expand India's rural market. The haats poses the ability to expand the market and grow profit if properly utilized. This ability needs to be thoroughly researched and understood to make Indian rural markets grow swiftly.

14. *Traditional Haat System in Rathwa Tribe*, by Vinay N. Patel, he mentioned the significance of haats in the everyday routine of the Rathwa community in Gujarat. Haats have an essential place in the tribal society of Gujarat, people living in remote forests and mountains come together to meet their relatives and engage in various social activities. The haats hold great importance in the tribal community. These gatherings give them a chance to reconnect with their loved ones and also serve as a platform for fulfilling communal responsibilities and carrying out essential social work.

15. *Institutions of Rural Haats and Marts- Key to Socio Economic Empowerment: Evidence From Jharkhand*, by Digvijay Kumar, Ashutosh Kumar, K.J.S. Satyasai, they suggest that haats serve a way to raise awareness about rural socio-economic development and contribute to the overall improvement of the people's socio-economic system. Increasing investments in infrastructures like rural haats and marts along with improved coordination between public, private, and non-governmental organizations, can have a significant effect on primary producers and artisans. They help in enhancing the impact on their livelihoods and overall well-being.

16. *A Journey across Border Haats: Major Findings of the Study and Key Recommendations*, by Arnab Ganguly, Robert Shuvro Guda, Bijaya Roy, they talked about the positive effects of Border haats on the lives, income and livelihoods of people, especially women residing in the border regions of India and Bangladesh. Raising awareness and fostering agreement among local community members regarding the implementation of Border Haats help in broadening the idea of Haats between the local women.

17. *Reimagining Border Haats at India's Northeast and Bangladesh*, by Jigme Wangdi, he highlighted how Border haats can enhance the potential for enhancing the relationship between India and Bangladesh and contribute to revitalizing regional cooperation in South Asia.

18. *The Understanding of India Bangladesh Border Haats And Its Benefits*, by Vaibhav Verma, he discussed the fundamental comprehension of Border haats, their historical background and inception, the positive effects of haats on the lives of people residing in distant border regions, and the influence of Border haats on local communities and the bilateral relations between the two countries.

19. *Haat: The Nerve Centre of Tribal Life*, by Priyadarshini Patnaik, according to her, the Tribal Researchers believe that the local haats hold significant importance in the village economy and should be officially

documented by relevant authorities. These haats provide valuable insights into the socio-economic aspects of the people living in the area.

20. *Dilli Haat- Market Place Showcasing Indian Culture*, by Deepshikha Chatterjee, she discussed the concept of haats being inclusive marketplaces. These haats act as platforms that are intended to enable artisans from rural areas and small towns to sell their handmade crafts and products directly to customers, showcasing their exceptional skills.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the influence of haats in the daily life of the indigenous people of the Bodo community of the Dotma bazaar.
2. To study the socio-cultural significance of haats on Bodo community.

## METHODOLOGY

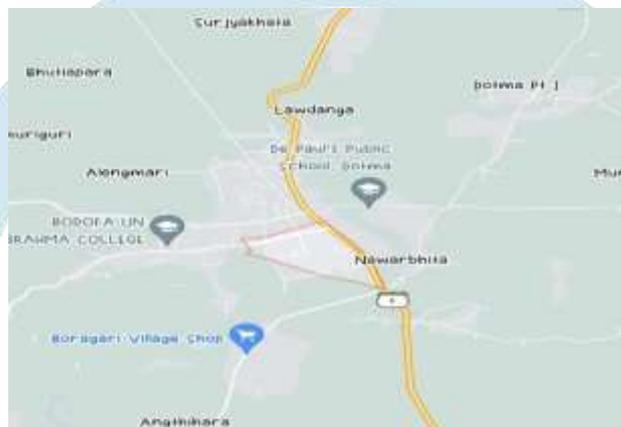
The present study will be based on field visit, interviews, questionnaires and observation. Semi-structured form of questionnaire is prepared for the conducting of the field interview. The study is done on the Dotma Haat and the Indigenous Bodo community residing there. The data is collected through interview with the shopkeepers personally. All the data is analysed properly and organised in graphs given below. The relevant data will be gathered from the various sources from the Central Library, Bodoland University and the Kokrajhar District Library etc. The official data will be gathered from various official records at the archives. The secondary data will be gathered from the internet i.e., journals and articles.

## STUDY AREA

Dotma is a small town situated in the Kokrajhar district in the state of Assam. It is located to the west of Kokrajhar and the postal pin code is 783347. The area of Dotma is approximately 88.8sq.km. The latitude and longitude of Dotma bazaar is 26.4685628N, 90.1509561E. According to the local people the word Dotma is of Bhutanese origin. Dotma used to be ruled under the Bhutan king before the colonial era. The word Dotma is derived from the Bhutanese word “*Dot*” meaning plot of land and “*Ma*” meaning vast and wide area. The British annexed Bhutan in 1864 and during that time “*Sinchula agreement*” was signed. Under this agreement the region was divided into eastern and western duars. The eastern duars consisted of areas that falls between the Sankosh river and the Manas river i.e., to the east of Sankosh river and west of Manas river. The Longa River flows through the outskirts of this small town.

The commissioner of Coochbeher controlled the criminal and civil jurisdiction of Goalpara district, Dotma falls under Goalpara. Later the Dhubri was made the headquarter of the District. The British turned it into a commercial hub and a narrow-gauge railway was setup in Dotma upto Kachugaon. Carrying of timber logs was thus, more facile and also the means of commute were made more convenient. The population of Dotma rose significantly after the independence of India. In 1955 the Developmental Board was established and a total of 172 villages were included under the Dotma area. The habitants of Dotma are mostly Koch Rajbongshis, Muslims, Bodos, Marwaris and Bengali individuals. The majority tribe were the Bodos.

Originally the religion of the Bodos was *Bathou*, preached by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. Later with the arrival of the British other religions like Hinduism and Christianity came forward and spread far and wide in the region. The main livelihood of Dotma people is agriculture. There are several nearby villages surrounding the small town of Dotma, to the north-Borshijhora pt I, Borshijhora part II, Goabari, Habrubari, Bauti, Gothaibari, Lawdanga and Gomobil, to the East-Dangarkuti and Nawarbhita, to the West- Turibari, Alengmari and Umanagar, to the South- Dakshin Musalmanpara, Maurigaon, Boragari and Angtihara.



Map showing Dotma town.

Source: Google Maps.

#### HAAT AT DOTMA BAZAAR

From time immemorial haats have always been a great source of livelihood for the local people of Dotma subdivision. According to the elderly residents of Dotma, the bazaar was relocated from a different place called *Chariyali* to the present day Dotma bazaar.<sup>6</sup> The exact year when the location of the bazaar was shifted from *Chariyali* to present day is not known. The latitude and longitude of Dotma Bazaar is 26.4685628N, 90.1509561E. Some of the landmarks near Dotma bazaar are Thulungapuri, ABSU office and Girls higher secondary. During that time, the bazaar would take place once a week on Wednesdays and it was enough to meet the needs of the local people, but in the present scenario due to the population growth and the arrival of traders from other villages the bazaar is now held twice a week including Sundays. On both the bazaar days the people from different villages came and sell their products in the market and also bought their necessities. Interestingly Bodo women were not permitted to attend the market.<sup>7</sup> It was advised by the senior citizens that it was rude behaviour for a woman to go to the market. In the present-day women are allowed to attend the market and normally most of the Bodo women are vegetable vendors and tea stall owners. The bazaar is held by mixed races of people like Koch Rajbongshis, Muslims, Bodos, Marwaris and Bengalis. The majority of the prominent shops and grocery stores were owned by Muslims and Bengali individuals. The Bodo community used to run small tea stalls, vegetable shops during the colonial era.

The proper functioning of the Dotma Bazaar is overseen by a committee known as the Dotma Bazaar Committee. A group of influential people decide when to hold meetings and public gatherings. It is in these

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Kumari Binapani Brahma, Age 92, Occupation: Shopkeeper, Dist: Kokrajhar on May 31, 2023.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Parbati Narzary, Age 56, Occupation: Retired local primary teacher, Dist: Kokrajhar on May 10, 2023.

meetings that the future steps of the committee are decided. It oversees the smooth functioning of the market by trying to find solutions for the problem of the shopkeepers. During early days the market structure was not made of concrete compared to the present-day market. The committee used to make shelters for them to hold their shop and protect from sun and rain. They used to make the shelter out of bamboo and dry rice straw wherever necessary. The committee also collect tax daily from the shopkeepers known as *Kajina*. This *Kajina* is collected based on the size of the shops and normally ranges from 10-20 rupees. And an additional tax of 10 rupees is collected daily for the sweepers known as *Tola*, to maintain the cleanliness of the bazaar area to attract more customers.<sup>8</sup> These taxes are used in the development of the bazaar and repair of wear and tear due to natural phenomenon or unforeseen incidents. A monthly tender tax is also collected by the Assam Government and 10 rupees is collected from every shopkeeper once a month. The collection of taxes is done by a person who is kept in charge of the collection and payment of the taxes to the committee on time. A lot of people apply for the post of the tax collector and whoever secures the tender from the government gets the job. The tax collector hires wage workers for the collection of the taxes on a daily basis.

This bazaar is crucial for the people as they primarily rely on agriculture. The local people here are mainly agriculture's they live their lives by selling what they produce in their farms. They live a simple lifestyle and their life is dependent on the market for survival. On market days, people from various villages come to the bazaar to sell and purchase essential items. The market serves not only as an economic hub but also as a social gathering point, where people engage in trade and commerce. This system fosters connections and unity among the people of Dotma.

#### DEMOGRAPHY OF DOTMA

**Koch Rajbongshis:** The ethnic group of Koch Rajbongshi is referred to as Rajbongshi in present-day Assam, Rajbongshi in West Bengal, Koch in parts of Meghalaya, and Rajbongshi in Nepal. There is presence of Koch Rajbongshis in various countries in South Asia and they are recognized as an international tribe. Agriculture and farming are their primary means of livelihood. They consider themselves the original inhabitants of the land and are born into the tribal community. The Koch Rajbongshis in Assam identify themselves as a tribal group and fight for their inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe category. The Ministry of Home Affairs established a committee, 29th February 2016 to recommend the procedures for granting Scheduled Tribe status to six communities, including Koch Rajbongshi, Moran, Matak, Tai Ahom, Chutia, and Adivasi (Tea Tribes) of Assam. The community is thankful to Narendra Modi's efforts to transform Assam into a tribal state.

**Bodo:** The Bodos were member of the Mongoloid and derived long time back from the part of Assam Burmese, one of the branches hailing from the Tibeto Burman. Most of their population concentrated at the northern part of the great Brahmaputra River. At present the Bodos reside in the North Eastern part of the districts of Assam such as Chirang, Udalguri, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Baksa, Darrang, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh etc. They are regarded as the largest tribal population in Assam. Their religions are *Bathou*, Hinduism and

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Kumari Binapani Brahma

Christianity. They are identified by different names in various regions such as Kachari, Dimasa, Tiwa, Sonowal Kachari, Rabha, Mishng, Tipera and Mech.

**Muslims:** The emergence of Islam happened together with the Turko-Muslim invasion of medieval India, during which these rulers assumed control over large parts of present-day Pakistan and India. In thirteen centuries, Muslim traders, mystics, preachers, and invaders have played a role in shaping and influencing the Indian subcontinent, leading to a spread of Muslim customs within the population of India. Islam had a significant impact on Indian history, influencing religion, art, philosophy, culture, society, and politics. India has the second-largest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia, comprising 13.4% in the native population. Muslims are divided into Shia and Sunni sects in India and typically practice strict endogamy.

**Marwaris:** The Marwaris from Eastern Rajasthan were classified as an ethnic group. There are currently 7,800,000 Marwaris in India. The term referred to traders from Rajputana and constituted various subgroups such as Agarwals, Maheswaris, Oswals, and Seraogis. The characteristics stereotyped with them include their involvement in commerce, extensive networks of relatives and cousins along major trade routes, and their presence in urban centres. The Marwaris have made significant contributions to the economic development of Assam and have greatly enriched the state's culture and heritage as a business community.

**Bengalis:** Bengalis are the habitants in the northeastern section of the Asian subcontinent, with a population of over 174 million. The majority of Muslim Bengalis are from Sunni. States in northeastern India have significant communities of Bengali-speaking people, which sum up to ten million or more than that. Among the Bengali speaking population, over 60 percent population abide by Muslim beliefs. Hinduism is the predominant religion in West Bengal, but more than 20 percent of the population practices Islam. The 106 million population of majority of Bengalis, live in Bangladesh, while the remaining 68 million reside in the Indian state of West Bengal.

Source: Google Maps and [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com).



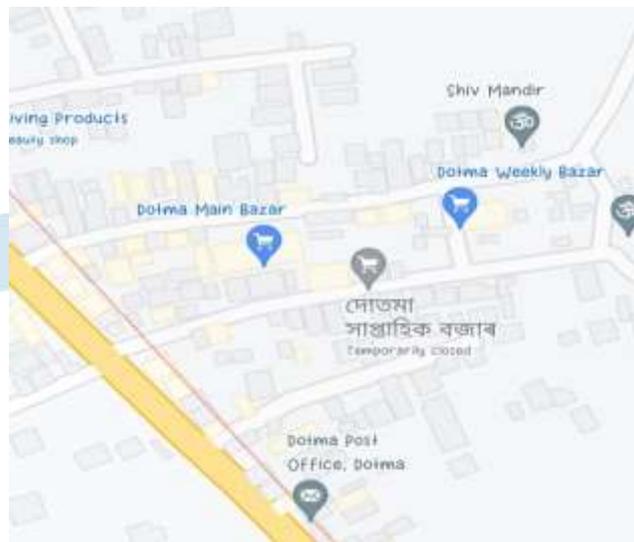
(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)

Map (1): Map showing Dotma in India.

Map (2): Map showing Kokrajhar district in Assam.

Map (3): Map showing Kokrajhar district.

Map (4): Map showing Dotma bazaar.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DOTMA HAAT ON THE BODOS

### BODO COMMUNITY

The Bodos were member of the Mongoloid and derived long time back from the part of Assam Burmese, one of the branches hailing from the Tibeto Burman. Most of their population concentrated at the northern part of the great Brahmaputra River. The title Bodo is a Tibetan word “*Bod*” meaning homeland and “*Kachar*” meaning near the river. “As per the leaders associated with the movement of the Bodos during 1990, they coined that the word “Boro” indicated the Linguistic connection of Boro populace and the word “Bodo” is denoted to all the Bodo racial groups living in different sections of the Brahmaputra valley”.<sup>9</sup>

The Bodo community, along with neighbouring communities such as Kachari, Dimasa, Tiwa, Sonowal Kachari, Rabha, Mishing and Tipera share the same verbal roots. The Bodos are known by different names in various regions of North East India. They are recognised as Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal and they are termed Dimasa in the North Cachar Hills.<sup>10</sup> There are inner divisions among the Bodos based on clans, totalling eighteen clans, which are not limited to intermarriage. Some of these Clans include Basumatari, Doimari, Sibiguri, Narjari, Gayari, Mushahari and Brahma. The Bodos in Assam consists of individuals in religions like Christian, Hindus and various tribal religions.

In the present scenario Bodo is an indigenous local residents of North East India, residing in the districts of Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, Darrang, Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur, Goalpara, Dibrugarh, etc, of Assam. They constitute the largest tribal population in Assam. The ornaments and artistic dress of the Bodos are

<sup>9</sup>Phanindra Kalita, *Early History of the Bodos: A Root Cause of Bodo Struggle for Ethnic Identity Formation*, p. 159.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 160.

treated as very exceptional for their gorgeous style and multilayered hue. The ornaments and dresses hold a special place in their Traditional art and culture. It signifies their uniqueness and their artistic skill set. Their skill set in weaving is deep rooted in their tradition and the majority garments are hand woven.

The indigenous Bodo people's main occupation is agriculture. In preparation of the food items traditional techniques are used and the ingredients are compiled from their agricultural field. They cultivate food crops like rice, *besor* (mustard seeds), *goi* (betel nut), *patw* (jute) and vegetables for their sell and consumption. Rice is their staple food and they even use rice in the preparation of *Jou* or *Jumai* (rice beer). They raise animals such as chicken, duck, goat, cow, buffalo and pig to sell in the market and for consumption. Dairy animals like cow, buffalo and goat are raised for extracting milk to sell in the bazaar. They sell them in plastic bags and plastic bottles in the bazaar. The cows and buffaloes help them additionally in the ploughing of their fields because the native populace used the traditional way of agriculture. They raised silkworms to produce *indi kundung* (eri silk) and sold them in the market or directly to the small textile handicraft industries who made clothes out of them. They also consume silkworms and have many delicacies made with them.

One of the main festivals of the Bodos is *Bwisagu* also called the Bodo New Year, during this festival the entire Bodo community rejoice by singing, dancing, eating, drinking and celebrating the start of a new year. As per the *Bodo Calendar* followed by them since generations, *Bwisagu* is considered the start of a new year.

Originally *Bathou* was their main religion, preached by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. Later the advent of the East India Company brought many other religions like Hinduism and Christianity which spreaded all over Assam.

## TYPES OF PRODUCTS SOLD

As per the data collected from 70 shopkeepers it is apparent that a wide variety of products are sold in the market by the Bodos ranging from groceries, meat, fish, garments, vegetables, dried fish, bamboo craft, etc. The majority grocery stores are owned by Marwaris, Bengalis and Muslims. The Bodos sell their groceries (rice) in their vegetable stalls. The majority Bodo women can be seen selling vegetables in the market. It is apparent that most common kind of shops placed in the market is vegetable shops.

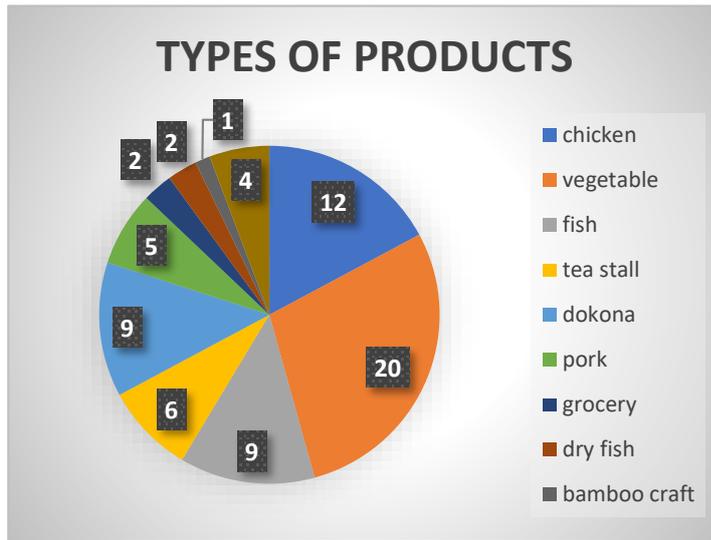
The Bodos sell different kinds of animals in the market either for cattle rearing or for meat in the market respectively. They sell animals like chicken, duck, goat, cow, buffalo and pig in the bazaar for cattle rearing and also for meat. The Dotma Bazaar has a separate cemented house constructed to the south of the bazaar for meat sellers.

Varieties of Bodo attire like Dokhona, Gamsa, Aronai, Silk garments are sold in the market mostly by the Bodo women. Bamboo handicrafts are an old tradition of our Bodo people and people sell their crafts in the market to get more audience for their business.

The products that are unique about the market are *besor* (mustard seeds), *goi* (betel nut), large bulk of dried *patw* (jute leaves), *Narzi* (a very important delicacy for the Bodo people), *pitha's* are sold in tea

stalls. The Bodos sell cocoons of the silkworms or silk produced from the silkworm accordingly. They also sell the silkworms for consumption.

Fig 1: PIE CHART SHOWING PRODUCTS SOLD

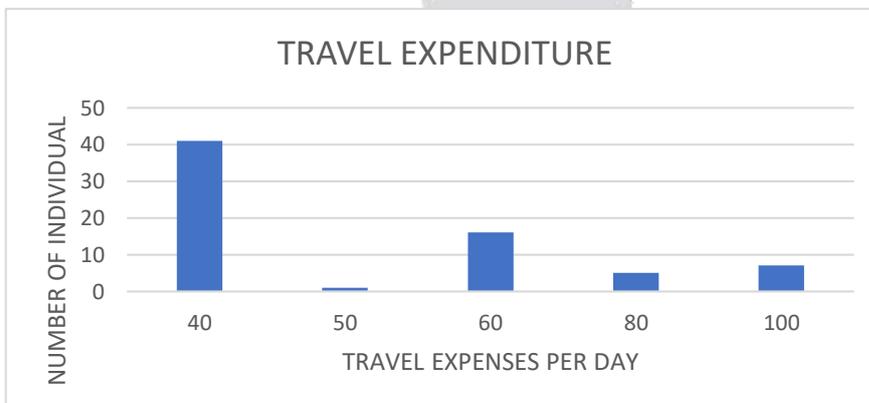


### TRAVEL EXPENDITURE OF THE SHOPKEEPERS

The Bodo people mostly travel by line bus that constitutes of winger car, bus, battery car and auto-rickshaw. The people that come to sell in the market have to come by one of the transports mentioned or by private transport or by foot. The transport expenditure mostly depends on the distance and the bulk it has to carry. The people take auto and battery car for short distance travels and line bus and winger car for long distance travels respectively. From the data collected from 70 shopkeepers, it is apparent that cost of short distance travels ranges from 10-50 rupees and long-distance travels from 60-100 rupees.

The study done on the Dotma bazaar shows that majority general population of shopkeepers are from nearby villages and their travel expenditure is 20-30 rupees per trip. The people from the distant villages spend a normal transit expenditure of 80-100 rupees.

Fig 2: BAR GRAPH OF TRAVEL EXPENDITURE



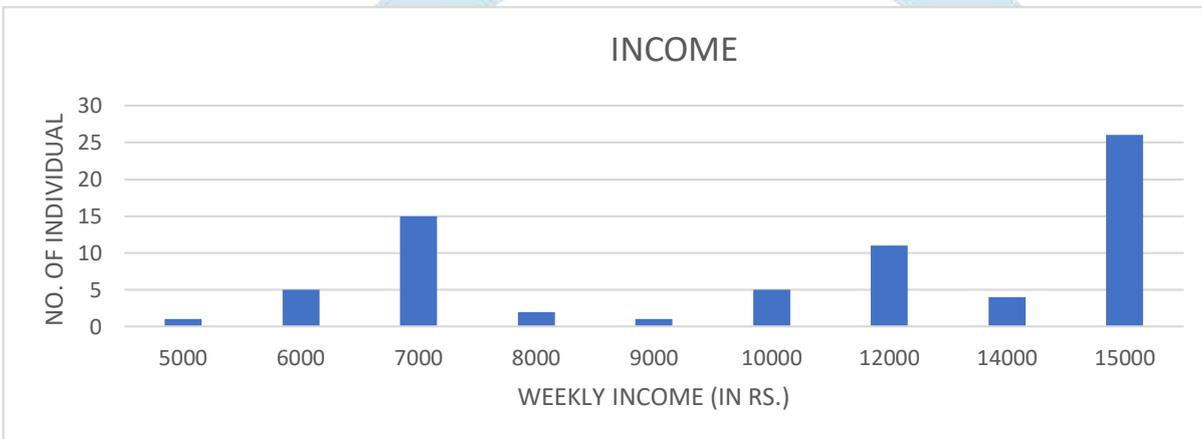
### INCOME

The income of the Bodo people from the Haats differ based on the items they sell and the size of their shop. According to the data collected from 70 shopkeepers it is evident that the people selling animals in the market fetch around 15000-20000 per week. The study revealed that the people who sell meat of chicken,

pork and goat fetch an average amount of 15000 rupees per week. The people selling fish can fetch an average amount of 12000 per week. Most of the people selling meat and fish are males.

Vegetable shops can fetch around 6000-8000 rupees per week. There are also people selling Dokhona, Gamsa, Aronai, who fetch an average amount of 15000 per week. The Tea stalls are the most consistent type of shops and they can fetch an average income of 10000 rupees per week.

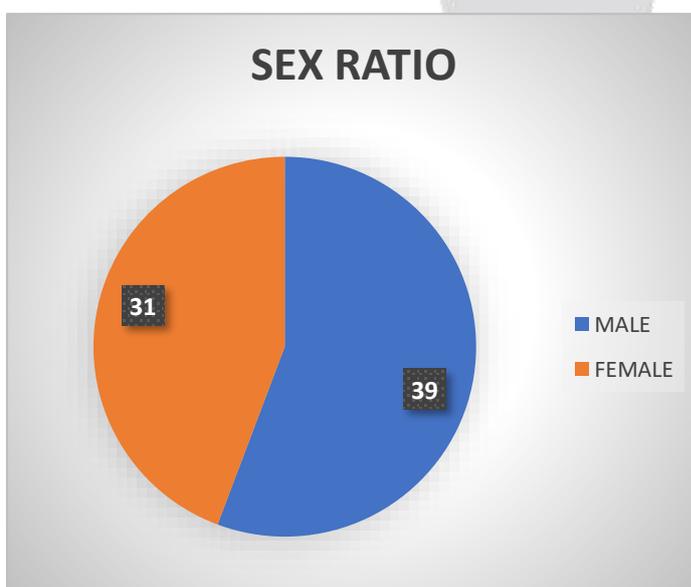
Fig 3: BAR GRAPH OF INCOME PER MONTH



#### SEX RATIO OF SHOPKEEPERS

The size of the Haat is small and most of its residents are involved in agriculture, daily wage labour and business. From the data collected it is apparent that out of 70 shopkeepers there are 39 male and 31 female. The sex ratio of the Dotma Bazaar is 794 out of 1000 males. Majority of the vegetable shops and tea stalls are owned by women of Dotma. They constitute 80 percent of the vegetable and tea stalls. Most of the meat and animal shops are owned by the male population. There are mostly males taking charge of the shops because maximum of the female population remain busy with their house work and children's and the males have to take care the shops.

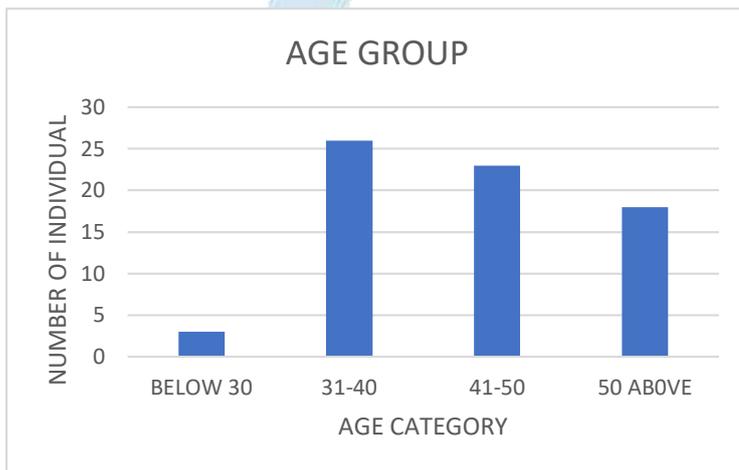
Fig 4: PIE CHART OF SEX RATIO



## AGE GROUP OF THE SHOPKEEPERS

The age structure of a population refers to diverse age groups distributed inside a population. It is a crucial factor for understanding various demographic aspects like fertility rates, mortality rates, and migration patterns. Analysing the age structure of a village allows us to gather valuable information about the general well-being and economic status of its population. According to the data collected from 70 shopkeepers it is seen that most of the population taking care of shops are middle aged persons between the ages of 30-50. Some of the population are below the age of 30, this category of shopkeepers are less because most people of this age group are indulged in studying.

Fig 5: BAR GRAPH OF AGE CATEGORY



## SIGNIFICANCE OF DOTMA HAAT ON THE BODO COMMUNITY

The survival of the local people is dependent on the Dotma haat. According to the elderly individuals of Dotma, the Dotma bazaar is known as the “*Golden Bazaar*” because of the significant profits it yields for the shopkeepers and the capitalists.<sup>11</sup> It is also eminent that the Dotma bazaar sustains the life of the common folk by delivering the common essential of day-to-day life at a single place. It saves the inconvenience of the individuals by cutting the transport cost and time by almost half. The significance of the Dotma haat is deep rooted in the traditions and lifestyle of the Bodo community.

**Availability of commodities:** The functionality of the open based market system is prominent for the Dotma bazaar since the time of our forefathers. Because of this system many people are tempted to buy fresh commodities or sell their produces in bulk for a significant profit. The Bodos being a majority are always dependent on the bazaar. Several Bodos are indulged in other work and labour, not all of the population do agriculture. Some are more indulged in chicken farm or pig farm. Hence, a section of the Bodos is dependent on the bazaar to purchase their food commodities and vice versa. The Bodo people buy their groceries, meat, fish, utensils, ornaments, art, handicrafts, etc., from the market. So, for the sustainable living of all the people the functioning and availability of the bazaar is important. Several commodities that are unique about the market are: large bulk of dried patw (jute leaves), *Narzi* (a very important delicacy for the Bodo people), Bamboo handicrafts that are an old tradition of our Bodo people, mustard seeds in large quantities, chickens,

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Kautali Brahma, age :55, occupation: Tea stall owner, Dist: Kokrajhar on May 10, 2023

ducklings, piglets, calves sold for rearing of animals, *Laodumpitha*, *Hasungpitha* and *Anasipitha* sold in tea stalls are a traditional snack, made by experienced elderly folks. During festive seasons there is large demand for pork, chicken, duck, goat meat and fish in the market. The favourite of the Bodos is pork meat and the most in demand. It's the festive time when there is a scarcity of meat in the whole village due to the high demand. Moving to town markets for basic needs is more expensive due to transportation costs and time consumption.

As per the Rural Marketing Association of India, 53 percent of stalls in rural haats trade for agricultural produce, followed by manufactured goods, primarily fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) with 19 percent, processed food with 6 % handicrafts and forest products with 5% each, services with 4%, meat and poultry with 3% and others with 5%. Auto and Agri industries have entered these areas by conducting regular efforts to exploit rural haats.<sup>12</sup>

**Opportunity of job and income:** Because the market system is an ongoing process, for the day-to-day struggles everybody needs a helper. It may be due to their wife being busy with the housework and looking after the child. So, this generates opportunity for several individuals to work as helper for the shopkeeper and this helps him to generate income. Earning of daily wage helps a number of people to sustain themselves. Wage working has been prominent from the early times and it has produced income for the common folk, which ultimately led to the improvement of the overall lifestyle of the people.

**Generation of daily wage:** As Bodo community comprises of the majority of the population of Dotma Bazaar, they are attracted by the market for number of their necessities. All the people comprising of the Bodo, Bengali, Muslim, Rajbongshis and Marwari share a deep rooted connection with the market. They can't survive without the process of transactions that occur in the market. The wage they earn in the market is their bread and butter.

**Fresh produce from the farms:** The main occupation of the Bodos is agriculture; they produce lots of fresh food crops in their farms which they later sell in the bazaar. The crops are free from urea and chemical pesticides and no any kind of injections are used on them. Rural customers are attracted by the fresh fruits, vegetables, betel nut, fish etc. So, they tend to go to the market to buy fresh produce from the farms. These generate income for the Bodo people and ultimately lead to the improvements of the Haat. On Wednesdays and Sundays, people from all over the region gather at one place buying and selling their necessities and generating profit from them. This greatly helps in the functioning of the market for the improvement of the system of Haats.

**Bargaining advantage:** The market is a place which provides the local people with a fixed place to buy and sell their produce so that they don't have to go anywhere else. The people sell their commodities in bulk and there is an open bargaining system. The bargaining being open for all the products attract customers from the nearby villages and towns. Open bargaining system help the customers get the same products at a cheaper price than the daily markets. The availability of items with cheaper price helps the wage earners to

<sup>12</sup> Kirti, *Haats In Rural Marketing To Reach The Burgeoning Rural Consumer Segment*, Feb 25,2022, p. 2.

sustain themselves with the limited wage they earn per day. The capitalists look forward to buy from the local markets due to the cheaper price they get in comparison to the towns and also benefit from the bargaining advantage. They gain a significant profit from the open bargaining system. The Bodo community comprises of most of the shopkeepers who sell their produce in the market and attracting the capitalists from the big towns helps them to sell more products and earn more profit.

**Rural Branding:** Haats offer greater potential for brand promotion rather than brand building. Haats provide an ideal platform for showcasing products and even distributing samples, benefitting from the presence of a large captive audience and playing a crucial role in the local economy. With residents arriving at Haats with the intention to purchase, organising promotional events and interactive activities becomes an effective way to captivate their attention. As a result, haats are regarded as valuable marketing channels for rural marketing agencies in India and businesses aiming to reach rural audiences. Some examples of rural branding of big companies are Colgate provided complimentary samples and toothbrushes at local markets to raise awareness about oral health, emphasizing their product as an alternative to traditional remedies like neem twigs, charcoal, and salt. Dabur also promoted its hair oil as a replacement for mustard oil and organised health camps at these markets to educate customers about their products. In the same way Sonata also showcased their watches at the markets to install the importance of time among rural communities. Just like that many rural customers advertise and do brand promotions for the awareness of their local brand and business. Examples of local brand promotions are homemade pickles, cakes, bakery, sweets, hand woven dolls, paintings, home grown fresh fruits etc.

**Cutting travel expenses and time:** Moving to town markets for basic needs is more expensive due to transportation costs and time consumption. So, the setup of the Dotma haat in the village itself makes it the greatest life saver for the village community. It cuts the travel time by 80% which makes the commute faster. To carry the heavy weight products like furniture, the transit cost is cut by 50%. Some people buy in bulk so haats help to cater for the villagers by cutting the travel cost by half. It aids the villagers by saving time and money and the freshness of the produce is preserved by not having to transport it from one place to another.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Dotma bazaar caters for the needs of the local population, be it financially or socially. The Population of Dotma comprising of Bodo, Muslims, Bengalis, Rajbongshis, Marwaris earn their bread and butter through the bazaar. Just like the other population the Bodo community is dependent on the haat bazaar. The *hatai* bazaar holds a great significance in the existence of the Bodo common folk culturally, socially and economically. The cultural significance of Dotma bazaar has deep roots in the age-old traditions of the Bodo community. The bazaar committee is taking many small steps to improve the functioning and utility of the bazaar. However, Haats, despite being considered outdated, still hold significance as modern markets are built upon their traditional mechanisms. The government can introduce public welfare schemes and policies in these Haat bazaars. Additionally, the government can develop village Haats based on suggestions provided by the local communities, as they are the ones who understand the requirements of their respective Haats. The study revealed that Haat serves as a valuable and cost-effective means of communication and access to

various services in rural areas where government outreach is limited. It plays a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of information, providing organic food products and handicrafts, and serving as a community gathering place. The significance of Haat remains relevant in shaping the social, political, and economic aspects of village life. Despite the absence of mobile networks, news can still be transmitted effectively through simple communication channels at these village haats. It is important for the government to regulate the bazaar committee and provide financial assistance to support the functioning of Haats. However, it is essential to preserve the traditional essence of the village Haat and avoid excessive modernization. The Dotma bazaar's ability to attract more customers has to be utilized to popularize the haat bazaar and this will ultimately help in the development of the market systems.

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#### INFORMANTS

1. Interview with Kumari Binapani Brahma, Age 92, Occupation: Dokhona Shopkeeper, Dist: Kokrajhar on May 31, 2023.
2. Interview with Parbati Narzary, Age 56 and Occupation: Retired local primary Hindi teacher, Dist: Kokrajhar on May 10, 2023.
3. Interview with Kautali Brahma, age: 55, occupation: Tea stall owner, Dist: Kokrajhar on May 10, 2023.

MODEL QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. How many haats do you cover in a week?
2. What products do you sell?
3. How much do you earn per week?
4. What are your cost, profit and travel expenditure?
5. Other than being dependent on the haat system do you have any other source of income?
6. Do you take any helper?
7. Is the income enough in sustaining the expenses of your day-to-day life? (children, education, expenditure)
8. Who introduced you to the haat system?

Additional Information from the shopkeepers:

Interviewee no:

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Place/Address:

No. of family members:

Haats covered in a week:

Travel expense:

Cost and Sell profit:

Average income in a week:

