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Community, Trust and Belonging: Reflections from a Periodic Market in Assam

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This study describes how the concept of trust is built within the market space. The bazaar, also known as *haat* belong to members of the Karbi community who live in an urban village of Guwahati. I had begun my study on the functioning of the market with an unstated assumption that it would be primarily about the buying and selling of commodities every week. What I found was that without the unstated presence of 'trust' and 'belongingness' which binds the different stakeholders, the market would not function. The periodic market functions every week with this trust and belonginess that is the glue that ties community members on the basis of ethnicity. This paper draws upon what one observed and what one gleaned through their narratives. It looks at how the question of trust comes with a certain 'social capital' that helps them to be a part of an active member of the market.

Keywords: Markets, Assam, Trust, Community, Exchange, Social Capital and Ethnicity

Introduction

Trust is a term that one hears in daily conversation. Whether it is between family members, lovers, buyers and sellers, doctors and patients etc., trust is a 'basic fact of social life' that exists between individuals. A foundation of trust is necessary for any market to function. It is an essential element in the growth of the economy. It is the presence of trust among individuals and the organization that build an environment of co-operation and confidence necessary for any business, big or small. Sellers and buyers in any market transaction- global or local and periodic need trust. Understanding of trust therefore becomes important to understand the functioning of a market.

Some psychologists studied trust as a cognitive choice of an individual. On the other hand, sociologists see trust within the matrix of inter-relationships within society. David Lewis and Andrew Weigert notes:

> There is a large quantity of research on trust by experimental psychologists and political scientists, which, however, appears theoretically unintegrated and incomplete from

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> the standpoint of a sociology of trust. These researchers typically conceptualize trust as a psychological event within the individual rather than as an intersubjective or systemic social reality. They also tend to use methodological approaches that reduce trust to its cognitive content through psychometric scaling techniques or to its behavioral expressions in laboratory settings.[1]

Few of the major contributions towards understanding trust in sociology were Niklas Luhman's *Trust and Power* (1979) and Bernard Barber' *The Logic and Limits of Trust* (1983). Both Luhman and Barber presents trust as an "irreducible and multidimensional social reality". As a sociological concept, it is perceived to be a property of collective units or groups rather than only of individuals. It is in this context one tries to look into how the idea of trust is related to the sense of belongingness to a particular community. The choice of whether to trust or not to trust depends on the relationship one shares with one another. This relationship can be understood from different vantage points- of kinship, social, economic or ethnic ties. In Assam, diverse ethnic communities have been present in different periods of history and have played an important role in the social and political changes. While on one hand ethnic communities are becoming conscious of their identities, one cannot ignore the fact that in modern society ethnicity or ethnic identity is dynamic and constantly evolving. The concepts 'ethnic community' or 'ethnic identity' has always been discussed in terms of conflicts. However, there can be no necessary connection between ethnicity and conflict. Different ethnic communities can be frequently seen to be related in peaceful manner where functions are performed for social integration and adaptation among communities. This obviously brings a change in understanding the characteristics in an ethnic group. With the historical awareness and passing down the stories of struggle to the younger generations, the belongingness towards a particular community is inherited and socialized through different cultural forms. It is these cultural forms that are practiced in the everyday lives can drive one for larger political participation and awareness. Thus, building of trust among communities can be seen in different elements.

It is this trust built within these social organizations that becomes a factor to help building up social capital. The development of social capital may vary according to the relationship ties shared. However, one cannot deny the importance of social capital in community lives that influences the daily activities. Social capital is usually believed to bring social solidarity and integration among communities. For example—the presence of social capital among minority groups may counterbalance their economic or social disparities. It is here that a close link exists between trust and social capital. The impact of trust on social capital enables social norms to be established.[2]

In social theory, although the concept of social capital has been a contested one, there is a general consensus that the required conditions of social capital include the existence of community networks, civic engagements, civic identity, reciprocity and trust. Robert Putnam's work *Bowling Alone* describes the three components of social capital: Networks, Reciprocity and Social Trust.[3] However, it is argued that these components become social capital only when it can be mobilized for the pursuit

of advantage.[4] This is discussed in the later sections of the article.

It is with this broad understanding of the relationship of trust, belongingness and social capital that the paper seeks to understand the functioning of a periodic market. This paper draws upon an ethnographic study of a periodic market in Assam that is run by the Karbi community. The market is known as 'Khepinijal Karbi Bazaar' also commonly known as Lokhara Bazaar. The market is a weekly market that runs only on Sundays. The market for the Karbi community is not just a space for weekly exchange of commodities. Instead, the market stands as a symbol of identification of the presence of a Karbi village and a community in a multicultural city. Situated on the busy national highway road of Guwahati, the market becomes a marker of the existence of an ethnic community. It is through this market institution that a linkage is being created between the Karbi and the rest of the population. Although the market is run by the Karbi community, sellers and buyers from different places whether tribal and non-tribal participate here in exchange processes. While on one hand, there is an ethnic consciousness being built through different practices within the market among the Karbi community, relationships are being created beyond a particular ethnic tie through different modes of trust, exchange and networks which helps in forming a social capital that can be mobilized accordingly. However, as a researcher I observed how in both cases the question of "how one identifies to a particular community" comes again and again in building of trust and networks.

Fieldwork of the market was done over the year 2016-18 which is divided into five different phases. Visiting of the market was done every Sunday to see the diverse aspects of it. The vendors remain busy whole day. To have a proper conversation with the vendors, one has to visit early morning around 5am-6am. However, the administration of the market remains available during the market days. This paper rests on the data collected through sustained interaction, observation and conversations with members of the Karbi community and the vendors engaged in running the periodic market. The trust and belonginess that one witnessed emerged not just from stated observations but the small details evident in body language, gestures, silences during the course of fieldwork.

Trust I found is a learned process. It is an emotional bond that develops within the community through myriad everyday practices. It manifests itself in the frequent use of terms and phrases like '*amarei manuh*[5] or '*nijor manuh'* (meaning 'our own people' in Assamese language). The use of these phrases at times creates boundaries where one is either included or excluded from the community. In an ethnically conscious state like Assam, assertion of one's identity and their belongingness to a particular community is a pervasive present. This is what one repeatedly encountered during the field study in a periodic market where the relationship of the market authorities, villagers as well as the vendors is based on the trust that is developed by asserting their community identities. It is in order therefore to begin with a schematic account of the Karbi community. The Karbi community is scattered at different parts of Assam. However, being in the capital city of Assam, they are in continuous interaction and relation with the other communities. As such, understanding of the building of trust and social capital of the Karbi and the other vendors within this

social environment becomes imperative.

The structure of the paper is divided into following sections. The first section was a brief idea of the article focusing on the major concepts and the background of the study. The second section provides a detail understanding of the Karbi community and their historical significance in Assam. The section also gives a glimpse of why the study of this community becomes important. The third section introduces the field of study. This section brings forward a sight of the market and how the vendors' as well as the Karbi community's everyday life revolves around it. The fourth section tries to analyze on the concepts of trust, belongingness and social capital and its prevalence in the economic transaction within the market. This section is based both on the theoretical approaches as well as fieldwork observations and narratives. The fifth section provides the conclusion of the paper while keeping the analysis open for further research.

The Karbi Community

The Karbi community is one of the indigenous communities of Assam. They were formerly known as Mikirs. It was in the 1970s that this term was replaced by 'Karbi', an autonym preferred by the members of the tribe who themselves use this with the name 'Arleng' meaning 'man'. According to Dharamsing Teron, there are hosts of myths related to the origin of the term 'Mikir'. Because of the inadequate secondary sources on the etymology of the term, there is lack of proper explanation of the origin of the term.[6] Bishnu Prasad Rabha who was a well-known poet, writer and a revolutionary cultural figure of Assam called the Karbis 'the discoverer of Assam' and conferred the title *Columbus*. However, Dharamsing Teron was not happy with the title due to the historical facts related with Columbus. Accordingly, the advent of Columbus in America was resulted with cruel colonization and destruction of indigenous culture. For Teron, Karbis did not colonize. In fact, they were 'colonized, divided, disposed and deprived'. However, the title given by Rabha was not an imposition but a kind of recognition to be given to the community with a hope to understand the greater Assamese community.[7]

As mentioned earlier, there are very few records of this community. Due to the lack of written historical records of the Karbi community, various people tried to locate the missing links of the Karbi community through folk tales, short stories and songs. P. C Chaudhuri notes:

> ...the origin, antiquity and ancient history of the Kabris are still in dark. We would make a good beginning if a drive be given for the collection of all kinds of their folktales and stories, for therein maybe found some missing links throwing light on the period of their migration, settlement and their organized socio-economic life and political organization.[8]

In fact, it was only after the Karbis came in contact with the Ahoms[9] that the formers were recorded in Ahom Buranji.[10] Colonial administrators like Charles Lyall and Edward Stack noted that they were the ones belonging to the Tibeto-Burman races residing in the Province of Undivided Assam.[11] According to these two colonial

administrators, the Karbis (earlier known as Mikir) resided in the Mikir hills, presently called as Karbi hills. As stated,

> The Mikirs inhabit in greatest strength the hills called after them, the isolated mountainous blocks which fills the triangle between the Brahmaputra on the north, the Dhansiri valley on the east, and the Kopili and Jamuna valleys on the west and south; this tract is now divided between Nowgong and Sivsagar districts. They are also found in considerable numbers on the Northern skirts of Assam range, in Nowgong, the Khasi and the Jaintia hills and Kamrup and were once numerous, as testified by the local place and river names in North Cachar.[12]

As recorded by Lyall and Stack, 1901 census report notes that there are 87, 046 number of Mikir by race and that of 82,283 speakers of Mikir language. According to them although maximum number of people in the hills spoke Mikir language, those residing in plains were bilingual or more affiliated with Assamese language. This is prevalent even today. Although the Karbi community practices their own language during rituals and festivals, most of the Karbi residing in the plains speak Assamese language in their everyday life.

At present the Karbis are divided politically and geographically between the hills and the plains. A large number of Karbis reside in the Karbi Anglong (earlier known as Karbi or Mikir Hills) district of Assam as well as in the plains of Nogaon (earlier Nowgong), Morigaon, Golaghat, Jorhat and Kamrup districts of Assam. The geographical distribution of the Karbi community was due to migration waves that took place at different time periods due to Ahom control over different regions. The political division of the hills and plains goes back to the colonial days as a part of Simon Commission[1] that recommended all backward areas to be considered as excluded areas. It was during this period of British India, the hills-plains binary coincided with a legal distinction between 'tribal' people that were governed by customary laws[2] while the plains were governed by general laws. Moreover, the British colonial administrators faced the problem of dividing people according to the basis of caste hierarchies. Although, people living in the Northeast were seen to perform Hindu rituals, there was a belief of an egalitarian or a caste free society. Sanjib Baruah notes that this distinction was important for the colonial administrators to identify the region properly for colonial administration. He notes:

> This notion of ethnicity and the fixing of ethnic groups to particular physical spaces made it necessary to distinguish between so- called pure and impure types to account for those that strayed away from the assigned physical spaces, i.e. living in the hills instead of plains or vice versa, or living in the 'wrong' hills; or those that did not conform to the ethnic stereotypes that colonial officials had about them.[15]

Thus, by the late 19th century while trying to magnify the differences among the colonial subjects, they made a huge list of the 'tribes' of India. This became a part of the process of dividing the communities in the context of caste and tribes. The criteria were basically built on the economic or social variables like food habits, religious

practices, hunting and pastoralism etc.[16] Along with it, the British administration created an inner line along the foothills of Assam thus generating a kind of stratification in a loose knit society. This division between caste and tribe initiated for the "emergence of a new and conglomerated identity of the people of different indigenous ethnic communities of Assam—tribal identity".[17] After independence, there was a huge demand for the formation of autonomous councils in the hills to get rid of the social and economic marginality. Thus, two autonomous districts 'Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Autonomous Hill District' was created. However, the formation of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council District failed to bring all the Karbis of Assam together. Moreover, the Karbis living in the Autonomous District Council had been incorporated in the sixth schedule 'Scheduled Tribe List'. However, the rest of the Karbis living in the plains were ignored. Dwippen Bezbaruah notes, 'Autonomous District of Karbi Anglong failed to incorporate the Karbis living in the administratively accepted "Plains Districts" of Assam in its jurisdiction'.[18] Thus, the government of Assam policy to give scheduled tribe status to a particular section of the community divided the Karbis into two halves—Hill Karbis of Karbi Anglong and Haflong and the Plain Karbis residing in rest of the state of Assam. As such, while the Hill Karbis got the status and provisions of Scheduled Tribe, the plains were left behind. Today in order to get their community recognition, the plain Karbi are demanding a separate district in Assam with Scheduled Tribe (Hill) status.[19]

However, this consciousness of one's identity is not only seen in political forms but also in social and cultural contexts. With establishment of schools, prayer halls, markets, this community is trying to create of space of their recognition. One such is the Khepinijal Karbi bazaar, which is a periodic market, situated in the Khepinijal village of Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The main motive of the origin of the market was not only to create an economic space for Karbi exclusively. Instead, the market was formed to give an opportunity to the local youths of Khepinjal village to be independent and self-sufficient.

Life Between Exchange and Community: Introducing the Field

Here, I am not only focusing on the market as an economic space but also bringing out the categories of community, neighborhood functioning within the market. To begin with, I describe the field and location therein. My idea here is to bring out the significance of the Karbi community within the market. Khepinijal market is situated on the Khepinijal village in Lokhra in Kamrup (Metropolitan)[20] district of Assam. The Kamrup (M) district in the city of Guwahati constitutes diverse clutches of villages, although very well connected to the main city. Some of these clutches comprises of communities and people who came to Guwahati even before the capital of the state shifted from Shillong in 1973. Khepinijal is one such village in-habitat by the Karbi community. The Khepinijal village constitutes around 51 households (during the time of fieldwork). Most of them were blood or affinal related. Speaking a bi-lingual language which is a mixture of both Karbi and Assamese[21] and wearing their traditional attires[22], one can easily distinguish the tribal population living there. The village begins where the market functions on a community land bought by the

ancestors of the Karbi after India's independence. In the year 1959, few of the old members of the village bought a 9 bigha land for community activities. The land was used by each family to graze the cattle. Like different other communities in Assam, Karbi is an agricultural and cattle rearing community. Cattle is considered as xompoti (property). It was in the year 2000 that the village committee members decided to open a market in the same land. This was to provide the unemployed youths an opportunity to earn for their livelihood. The market is a weekly market that has been functioning every week on Sundays. Rest of the days, the field remain barren. According to the authorities, the field is used at times for meetings or any events. This however is decided by the market authorities. Although the weekly market is the center of attraction in the village, there are other small shops like pharmacy, stationary etc too.

The lane through which one passes by crossing the market area is named as Karbi Road. With 20 continuous years of functioning, the market is one of the famous periodic market in Guwahati today. As early as 6 am, vendors from different areas belonging to different ethnic communities' throng the market with their commodities. The market is known for vegetables, fruits, ethnic food items like silk worms, crabs, snails as well as hand woven cloths. Men, women and few along with their children come to the market either by trucks, buses, trains or by walking. While few vendors are from the Karbi village, there are also vendors travelling from different rural areas. Those who travel from far away villages begin their journey as early as 3am- 4am. This is basically to reach the market on time as well as to avoid the city traffic. There are also vendors who come by different public transport, which complicates their situation. Thus, in order to make their travel easier, most of the vendors belonging to the same locality rent a private mini truck or van to bring their commodities and reach on time. These vendors belong to the same community living in their neighborhood. Sharing of vans or trucks lower their expenses and also helps them in supporting one another. Especially when 3-4 women travel together in a single van, they are accompanied by one male member. The male members take their turns to accompany these women. Since the market is an informal there are no fixed spaces for the vendors. As per the market committee, anyone can sit anywhere. This leads to some friction as each one competes for spaces that can attract maximum buyers.

The Khepinijal Village constitutes of two large committee: the village committee and the market committee. While the village committee looks after the issues of the village, the market committee belongs to a lower rank thus looking after the market. The Village Committee constitutes of three categories: *Bangth*e, *Deka Bangthe* and *Deuri*. The *Bangthe* is the senior most person of the village, also known as *Gaon Burha* (Village elder) or *Deuta* (father). *Deka Bangthe* constitutes the young men of the village who works under the orders of the Bangthe. Considered to be one of the most active groups of the village committee, the *Deka Bangthe* is closely connected with the youth of the village. *Deuri* is the person who is involved in religious festivals or rituals. The village committee decides how to form the market committee.

The market committee is constituted for a 3-year tenure. That could increase later depending on the quality of services. The village committee is responsible for the formation of market committee. No election is held for to be members of the

market committee. Instead the member of the village committee selects them. The market committee can handle any market related issue without any interference from the village committee. However, any issue or conflict that the market committee cannot handle is taken to the village committee. Thus, both the committees work together for the welfare of the community.

Trust, Belongingness and Community: A Building of Social Capital

Podmo Rongpi, a local Karbi when asked about the significance of the market for him as a resident, smiled. He replied how this market is his identity and savior. It is not just a market from where they get their weekly commodities, but it is also a part of their everyday life. He stated how every Sunday it is a regular ritual to visit the market, meet his community people to discuss about social, economic and political scenario of his society, country etc. While the whole week all are busy with their jobs or other household works, it is on a Sunday, which is kept for their collective gatherings. The market doesn't belong to only particular individual. Instead the market belongs to the whole community. The money that is collected from the market every weekend is used for all the village activities. He noted, "if my daughter is getting married today, I will need money. I can easily approach the market committee for help. The same is the case with other festivals as well. In a city like Guwahati where people are busy with their own life, this kind of community life is not possible to get everywhere".

Markets have been always studied as an economic space. However, besides economic transactions, markets have emerged as an exchange of culture, ethnicity and formation of social relations. With a multi-cultural city like Guwahati, such spaces become a symbol of one's identity, community and belongingness. It is in this context one looks into the everyday practices within the market that creates social and community relationships and in return impacts the economic exchange that takes place in the market. One looks into the communication or interaction that happens between, what in the absence of a better word describes as stakeholders.

1. The market committee and the village committee
2. The market committee and the vendors
3. The vendors and the buyers
4. Within the market committee members

German sociologist Tonnies in the year 1887 introduced the terms *Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society)*. Through both these terms he tried to study the changes in interactions, binding or social solidarity. While Gemeinschaft means all kinds of familiar and comfortable social existence, Gesellschaft means life in the public sphere outside of our comfort zone. Bringing out the distinction between community and society, he states how with the rise of urban culture, public or societal life is indispensable. However, community life exists where people co-exist and are dependent on each other with similar goals. According to Tonnies, community becomes strong when it is based on blood (kinship relation), place (sharing of land) and spirit (worship or deities or calling). Thus, community of one kind or another exists where

"human beings are bound together in an organic fashion by their inclination and common consent".[23] The Karbi community is seen sharing such similar kinship bonds, neighborhood and calling. The Karbi market here is named after a Dehal Puja, a festival popularly celebrated every year in the month of February. It began in the year 2000 on a community land with 10-20 vendors from the Khepinijal village selling commodities grown in their own household. Moreover, monetary contribution for any public occasions is donated from the market earnings. With both the village committee and the market committee working together (as mentioned in the previous section), there is a kind of mutual understanding that is prevalent in the village. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the contradictions that occur within these communities. One of the true organs of mutual understanding is language. Tonnies state:

> Like all other conscious modes of expression language is the involuntary outcome of deep feelings and prevailing thoughts. It is not an artificial means of making oneself understood where there is an inherent absence of understanding, although language *can* be used merely as a system of symbols between those who *do* understand each other, just like any other accepted signs. All these utterances can be manifestations of hostile feelings just as easily as of friendly ones. This means that friendly and hostile moods and passions may underlie the same or very similar conditions.[24]

However, each community is a part of the larger society. With language being one of the mediums of collectivity and belonging, it becomes imperative to understand the assimilation of different language and culture. The plain Karbi residing in areas like Kamrup, Sivsagar, Jorhat etc have been always surrounded by people speaking Assamese language. Moreover, Karbi is a spoken language and uses Roman or Assamese scripts to write.[25] Per se, most of their stories are in oral form rather than written records.

In this context language needs to be understood both in micro and at macro level. At the micro level, language is a way of conversation and sharing of an ethnic identity between same linguistic groups. However, in a multi lingual society like Guwahati, one cannot ignore the power of dominant ideologies, language and culture upon the Karbi. The Karbi being a small minority community in Guwahati adopt the dominant practices and ideologies. One such incident is the celebration of *annaprasanna* in a Hindu way (when a new born baby is given solid food or rice for the first time). According to one respondent, this is a new ritual that Karbi people have started celebrating. For the respondent, the new generation goes to Assamese medium school where they mix up with the Assamese students, thus making them more comfortable in Assamese language and culture. Similarly, Assamese Bihu songs is very popular among Karbi people. The younger generation learns to sing or dance Bihu either by watching television or in schools or through other forms of media. In fact, for some of the respondents, their kids hardly know Karbi language and are more familiar with Assamese language.

Thus, ethnicity or ethnic belongingness becomes an important part of reality.

While there are adversaries between different linguistic groups, which got reflected in political instabilities at different time periods, the periodic market reflects the assimilation and contradictions of different ethnic communities in socio-economic space. Uddipana Goswami cites Young Yun Kim about the flexibility of the ethnic identity, which later accounts for 'the possibility of assimilation and integration on one hand and pluralism or separatism on the other'.[26] According to Goswami, besides this polarization there is another potential which can lead to formation of inter-ethnic identity.[27] According to Kim,

> The emerging 'interethnic identity' is a special kind of mindset that promises greater fitness in our increasingly interfaced world. It represents a continuous struggle of searching for the authenticity in self and others within and across ethnic groups. It is a way of existence that transcends the perimeters of a particular ethnic tradition and one that is capable of embracing and incorporating seemingly divergent ethnic elements into one's own unique worldview. The term interethnic identity is preferred here to highlight the open-ended generic nature of identity transformation rather than particular ethnic identities involved as suggested in related terms such as bilingual, biracial, bicultural, multilingual, multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic identity.[28]

However, this assimilation process becomes restricted when it comes to question of trust, authority and power. The boundary or the marker between the Karbi and the non Karbi in the village becomes flexible when it is about cultural exchange. Nevertheless, position and power create an ethnic distinction. The members of the Karbi market administration are all Karbi men. No women from the Karbi community can be a part of it. In fact, during a conversation with the market president's wife about her interest, she replied that

> I have other things to handle. With cooking and other household activities, sending children to school, looking after the house, how do I get time for all those. Moreover, handling an administration is a complicated job. Let the men handle all that. It will be weird for me to go and sit among all the village men in the office. Moreover, we have Mahila Samiti (women committee) to discuss about women issues.

Along with women, no other community individual has been or can become a part of the administration. The administration believes that this is to protect their identity and indigeneity. Moreover, it also becomes easy and possible to handle the issues of the Karbi community. At this juncture comes the boundary which is reflected in their terminologies like *amarei manuh* (our people). Our people indicate Karbi community here.

This is not only seen among the market committee but is also seen practicing within the market itself. Vendors who come from different parts of Assam, both tribal and non-tribal can sit anywhere to sell their commodities. However, the tribal vendors—the Karbi, Bodo, Mising etc, occupy the central area of the market. Non tribal or specifically Muslim vendors coming from Dhubri district[29] prefers to sit

outside the market field (basically on the periphery or on the roads). Thus, observing the structure of the market, one can denote the marker of territories within the market. Vendors have consciously and unconsciously demarcated their spaces on the basis of the tribal and non-tribal identity. During the fieldwork, one can observe how the tribal vendors (especially Karbi women) sense a feeling of comfort and security in the market. Two aged women stated

> This is our market. We don't need any permission to come here. We don't come every weekend. We come whenever we feel tired at home. Coming here we meet our people, talk to each other and feels good (from the field).

Offering home-made sweet, they asked the interviewer if she belongs to their community. When the interviewer replied that she belongs to Ahom community, they quickly smiled and replied "Bodo, Karbi, Ahom we all are same".[30] Thus, what one can observe here is the shift from 'Karbi verses others' to 'tribal versus non-tribal'. The division automatically brings out the creation of identities at micro level. This helps to understand the larger discourse on Assamese identities at the grassroot level. Here, ethnic communities within the market are not just driven by profit but are collectively engaged in promoting and maintaining their identities and mutual protection. The continuous practice of building trust and belongingness among the Karbi and the other communities explains the social relations existing in the market. Fredrick Barth states how ethnic identity contain elements like primordiality and situationalism. He stressed on the maintenance of boundaries along with cultural contents of ethnic groups.[31] According to Barth, actors categorize themselves accordingly in an organizational sense for purposes of interaction. Here, culture is seen from the point of how social action drives the formation of ethnic groups. Ethnic identity here is not only based on blood relations or a shared history but also through specific ethnic behaviors. Barth notes

> The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts. If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion. Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories; and the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once and for all recruitment but by continual expression and validation, need to be analyzed.[32]

In the context of Assam, the formation of ethnic identity can be looked into from this perspective. This formation of community feeling and trust is also prevalent between different vendors and buyers. Most of the regular buyers usually prefer going to particular vendors rather than exploring the whole market. While some relationships are built with time, others are formed for their ethnicity.

Sitting beside a woman who brought silkworms, one observed how she was confident that she would get enough profit that day. While being interviewed, she was continuously seen waving hands, exchanging smiles and greetings etc. with her

customers. Regular visits, continuous delivery of fresh food items all help in building trust- the glue in any economic exchange. Moreover, during the process of packing the commodities, there is a sharing of verbal conversations between vendors and buyers with concerns about village, marriage, husband, children etc. Here, it is interesting to look at the currency of the term trust in contemporary e-marketing.[33] While e marketing is all about building trust through social media content, the driver of trust in periodic markets varies.

This building up of trust also depends on the emotional bonds that are formed because of some commonality. Luchmann calls it 'system trust' which is different from personal trust. This trust is essential for the constitutive bond of a society. J David Lewis and Andrew Weigert in "Trust as Social Reality" states how Durkheim noted that:

> …institutional trust underwrites inter-personal trust; therefore, we would expect to lose trust in other persons as trust in our common institutions erodes. This again indicates the deeply sociological nature of trust in both its sources and functions in human group life.[34]

Most of the buyers belonging to Karbi community, tends to buy from the tribal vendors with a motive to help them progress. There is a deep-rooted belief that one will buy from a particular section of vendors. This helps strengthen ties and facilitates the running of the market. This is akin to Durkheim's idea of social integration, which is required for the proper functioning of the society. The process of social integration as Durkheim notes is to ensure the degree of attachment to commonly held beliefs and values etc. As such,

> Social integration promotes the perception that people are part of a larger social whole, focusing their interests outside the individual self and counteracting egoism. Hence, social organization where social integration is weak may foster excessive individualism and weakening of sentiments for collective norms and rule.[35]

Additionally, the market is believed to provide a space where the local villagers materially and culturally identify themselves. Even for the vendors and the consumers, the market provides a space where they can use their social capital. The usage of social capital in markets create a condition that favors the vendors. It is through the social capital that a network is formed between vendors and the buyers or other market authorities. This social capital is marked with trust and a mutual understanding. Various theorists have tried to understand social capital from different perspectives. The concept was originally used by Lyda J. Hanifan in the year 1926. For Hanifan, social capital was a tool to raise individual's living standards. It was also a structure that could elevate a person's level of social welfare.[36] Bourdieu in the 1970s tried to understand social capital in relation to class. He defines it as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to a possession of a durable network of

more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition- or in other words- to membership in a group- which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity- owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in various senses of the word'.[37] It is a model of commercial stock used during trading process by individuals to connect with each other. This is marked with trust, market actors and associations who create products and services for their common goal. This however might lead to inequality among different classes. Bourdieu tried to analyze how the privilege class with their power and position attain a kind of social capital.

Robert Putnam argues social capital is dependent on three important pillars:

1. Ethical responsibilities and norms
2. Social principles that reflects the notion of trust in a community
3. Communal networks

Putnam categorized social capital in two distinct forms: bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Bridging social capital implies relation between individuals belonging to different social backgrounds to build network links. Bonding social capital on the other hand is a network of individuals with similar social back grounds.[38]

Bridging of social capital is seen in the market through its commodities being sold in the periodic market. Buyers tend to build a trust on the market and the commodities sold. In spite of the fact that there are multiple departmental stores in every neighborhood, people come to haats (weekly markets). For most of the customers this is because of the availability of fresh home-grown vegetables; they mostly refer as *gaon xaak pasoli* (village grown vegetables). These vegetables have a cultural connection that is reflected in the economic process. With special village grown vegetables, ethnic food items, a communication is made between vendors and buyers. In urban cities, with health-conscious people turn up to these haats to get the local organic vegetables and fruits, fish, or meat. Thus, a kind of network is being built through this economic exchange.

A bonding of social capital is also seen in the market. During field work it was observed that Rabha tribal women sat together with their baskets selling ingredients used for making traditional rice beer. Traditional rice beer is an indispensable part of tribal lives in North East India known as a part of culture and religion. However, this is prepared with different ingredients by different tribes. According to them, they come to that particular market as it is tribal dominated market. One of them noted 'non tribal people in Guwahati does not prepare rice beer at home. It is the tribal communities like us who knows the technique of preparing it. We are here for those customers. Axomiya (Assamese) people (specifically pointing to the non-tribal) will not be able to identify this'.[39] It is through these commodities that women earn their agencies that helps in building up their social capital in the market.

Here one can refer to Arjun Appadurai who writes, commodities are stuff of material culture[40] where material objects are used to demonstrate cultural categories.[41] Most of the objects are made keeping in mind the culture of the particular region. Similar understandings of commodities are also seen in the book 'The World of Goods'

by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood. According to them, goods are not only needed for subsistence but are also important in 'making visible and stable categories of culture'.[42] Accordingly 'it is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators'.[43]

Conclusion

The Karbi market as such is not just platform for economic exchange but a space to identify one's identity, belongingness and its ties. It is through these categories that the authorities of the market, vendors and buyers share a kind of social relations with one another. Thus, economic life as a process involve encounters of actors with special dispositions. The paper provides a framework to understand the socio-economic culture of trust and its impact on a weekly market exchange. The ethnographic study helped to bring out the conscious play of ethnic identity and community at the grassroot level. This paper is a small contribution towards further understanding and research of looking at the visibility and invisibility of ethnic consciousness that are normalized in economic spaces and also the notion of 'embeddedness' by Karl Polanyi that is prevalent in these periodic markets.

Notes

[1] Lewis and Weigert, Trust as Social Reality, 968.

[2] Coleman, Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital, S97.

[3] Kushner and Sterk, The Limits of Social Capital, 1139.

[4]Anthias, Ethnic Ties, 791.

[5] Assamese vocabularies frequently used during interviews or conversations by the market authorities as well the vendors.

[6] Teron, Karbi Studies, Vol 1

[7] Teron, Karbi Studies, Vol 2

[8] Chaudhuri, Studies in History and Culture of the Karbi People, 2.

[9] Ahom community belonging to Tai race came to the Brahmaputra valley during the early thirteenth century and ruled Assam.

[10] Historical records or chronicles by the Ahoms written from time to time about the continuous narrative of their rule.

[11] During the British rule, Assam as a province grew both in size and population. The demographic diversity too increased with boundaries extending areas of the present North-East India. The Bengali dominated Sylhet and Cachar districts, the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Naga Hills and the district of Goalpara were all brought within Assam. Between 1895 and 1898, the north and south Lushai Hills and a portion of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were detached from Bengal and added to Assam. Assam became one of the largest provinces of British India with a population of nearly 5 million and a territory close to 60,000 square miles. It remained a heterogenous entity for few of independence until the breakdown and creation of new states. See Bhaumik, Troubled Periphery, 2009.

[12] Lyall, The Karbis, 2.

[13] Statutory Commission on Constitutional Reform 1929 (also known as Simon

Commission)

[14] Customary laws are age old code of conduct for living followed by different tribal groups in India. They might be at times un-written but are followed by a certain community. They are part of the tribal jurisprudence which are approved and acknowledged by the members of the community. These laws are believed to help in keeping the social cohesion within the community. See Gangte, Gender and Customary Law, 17.

[15] Baruah, Territoriality, Indigeneity and Rights, 16.

[16] Bordoloi, Impact of Colonial Anthropology, 51.

[17] ibid

[18] Bezbaruah, Reinvention of Identity Markers and Ethnic Consolidation, 202.

[19] See 'The Hill Times', Amri Karbi demands Separate State, 2019. https://www.thehillstimes.in/regional/amri-karbi-tribe-demands-separate-district-in-assam-sth-status/ [accessed on 20/05/2020]

[20] Kamrup district is divided into Kamrup (rural) and Kamrup (Metropolitan). Kamrup Metropolitan was created by splitting old Kamrup district on 3rd February 2003. Kamrup (M) is one of the important districts of Assam having the state capital Dispur under its jurisdiction.

[21] Assam is known for its linguistic diversity like Bodo, Karbi, Mising, Garo etc. While mother tongue was used inside households, Assamese language is used to communicate with each other. However, there is a larger discourse on linguistic politics in Assam as seen by different scholars. see Sandhya Barua (1978), Sandhya Goswami (2001), Sanjib Baruah (1986).

[22] Each tribe or community has their own dressing pattern. Although Karbis are scattered in different regions of Assam, the Karbi of Kamrup (M) has lived the longest period mixing with the Hindu Assamese neighbors. As such there is an influence seen in the dressing pattern.

[23] Tonnies, Community and Civil Society.

[24] ibid

[25] Pereira et al., Exploring Differences, 50.

[26] Goswami, Conflict and Reconciliation, 63.

[27] ibid.

[28] Kim, From Ethnic to Inter Ethnic, 292-293.

[29] 290 km from Guwahati, Dhubri is one of the Muslim majority districts of Assam

[30] Belonging to Tibeto-Burman racial group, these communities have similar mongoloid features unlike the Aryan Assamese neighbors.

[31] Levine, Reconstructing Ethnicity,167.

[32] Barth, Ethnic Groups and Identities.

[33] Today, more than ever, it's essential for digital marketers to create trust with potential clients. Only after trust has been built can services or products be sold. And one of the best ways to establish trust between you and potential customers is to create amazing content they can't find anywhere else. See Alex Jasin "Why Trust Is the New Marketing Currency" https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/289622 [accessed on 15/5/2020]

[34] Lewis and Weigert, Trust as Social Reality, 974

[35] Durkheim, Suicide, 209-216.
[36] Galluccio, Trust in the Market, 97.
[37] Bourdieu, The Forms of Capital.
[38] Gallucio, Trust in the Market, 97.
[39] here 'this' mentioned is *Bakhor*, a starter cake used to prepare rice beer. It is prepared by mixing different parts of plants with rice paste. see Ahuja, U., Thakrar, R., Ahuja, S. C., et al. (2001). Alcoholic rice beverages. Asian Agri-History, 5(4), 309–319
[40] Appadurai, The Social Life of Commodities, 5
[41] Howes, Cross-Cultural Consumption
[42] Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods, 67.
[43] ibid.

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