Chapter One

INTRODUCTION
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THE PROBLEM

THE SCOPE

This study examines the socio-economic changes brought about by the institution of market in a tribal dominated multiethnic setting of western Assam. Since 1960, following theoretical breakthrough made in economic anthropology, the concept of distribution and exchange has become fundamental in understanding market phenomena. It is argued that market should be studied as intrinsically interacting social phenomena where the exchange process is the focus of attention. Market can be considered as a cohesive entity in the society as a whole and not just in the paradigm of economics.

Polanyi (1964 : 43) noted that the institution of market was fairly common since the late Stone Age. But during that period it played an incidental role. Adam Smith and Herbert Spencer\(^1\) contended that some of the traits found in "market economy" were present even in barter system of economy which confirmed that although it was more compatible with modern

\(^1\) Cit. in Polanyi 1964: 43.
economic system market existed in pre-industrial, pre-urbanized, tribal and primitive society also.

Depending upon compatibility, present day human societies are divided into market economy society and non-market economy society. In the case of the former, economists argue, the society is controlled by the market forces as if the society is for the market. But, unlike an economist, an anthropologist perceives market as an institutionalized channel for exchanging material and non-material items through intrinsic social activities.

There are several connotation of the term market in contemporary literature. Sometimes it is considered as an institutionalized locus of exchange comprising merchants and traders with their shops and booths, their co-rivalry, interaction of the buyers and market conventions. There is another abstract connotation of the term market which implies the interest of the interacting personalities revolving round goods and services which are attached with prices. Still another notion implies the allocation of resources by reference to impersonal criteria which disregard personal and social ends in favour of an immediate maximization principle of profit making. This has been selected particularly for distinction as a criterion separating the types of economic system studied by economist from those studied by anthropologist (Firth 1967 : 5).

When a market organization is found to be the controlling force of the entire economy it ultimately gives rise to a market society. In the market society "....social organization has to adapt to market needs to allow the sustained provision of material goods and money income with which to acquire goods" (Dalton 1961:1) It has been emphasized by several other anthropologists that modern economics is concerned with society in which "Everyone derives his livelihood from selling something to the Market" (Dalton ibid., p.1). But the economist pays little attention to the fact that unlike the market society the non-industrialized society is not controlled by the market forces but by an intrinsically tangled web of socio-cultural elements which encompass the society as a whole. Therefore, the "Institutionalized locus of exchange" is not merely a place of exchanging material goods but also plays other socio-cultural functions in the 'non-market society'. Hence, it is essential to understand "the market in its socio-cultural aspects" (Epstein 1982:10).
Realizing their shortcomings economists are now concentrating their attention on building anthropocentric micro-theories to acquire a better insight of economy. In *Asian Drama* (1968), economist Gunner Myrdal attempts to make a broad institutional approach to understand South-East Asian economy. Besides Myrdal (1968) there are few other economists, e.g., Moore (1955), Keyfitz (1959), Shea (1959), Neale (1959) who tries to understand the economy of the 'underdeveloped' society in a socio-cultural context (Dalton *op.cit.*, p.21). However, some of these works are accomplished with professional bias of an economist. When Myrdal (*op.cit.*, p.1692) states that the masses in South Asia do not calculate rationally in terms of cost, returns and maximum profit he overlooks their own social calculations which are as rational in their village milieu. He also imputes that the masses in South Asian countries are not interested in raising their living standard adding that this is "confirmed by anthropological studies all over the world". However anthropological studies have not contributed to such observations (Mandelbaum 1972:309). Epstein (1967:229) mentions that the economist also tends to neglect interactions and conflicts between the market and other social elements.

In view of the shortcomings, a new generation of anthropologists have often been seeking co-operation from other cognate disciplines to arrive at a general agreement on the issue (Redfield 1956:11). The result has been illuminating. Some outstanding contributors in this regard are scholars like Polanyi *et al* (1957), Polanyi (1964), Firth (1959), Bohanan and Dalton (1962), Alice Dewey (1962), Sinha *et al* (1961), Sinha (1968) and Epstein (1982).

It is estimated that four to five per cent present day global population belong to a few thousand tribal communities and the academic discipline of economic anthropology is more or less exclusively concerned with these people. Through their studies on these people anthropologists have formulated various theories and methods thereby contributing significantly towards the growth and development in the field of ethno-economics.

The present study intends to explore the role, function and impact of market centres in a tribal belt stretching from Boko in Kamrup District to Lakhipur in Goalpara District, situated in the western part of Assam covering approximately an area of 3,500 km². In this vast area
there are as many as 113 rural market centres listed by the State Government. The centres are operating at eighty different places (Map 4).

These market centres are catering to the needs of a number of groups of people inhabiting vast area. Among the tribal groups, mention may be made of the Bodo Kachari, Hajong, Garo, Khasi and Rabha. Although, the main concentration of Garos and Khasis are found in the neighbouring hill state of Meghalaya, these highlanders are also found in the foot hills region between the two states. In Assam, these people practise settled cultivation, but their counterparts across the border in Meghalaya still practise shifting cultivation. In recent years a section among them has taken to horticulture farming. The Bodo Kachari, Rabhas and Hajongs are settled agriculturists, depending mainly on wet rice cultivation.

Besides these tribal agriculturist groups, the market centres are also visited by Assamese Hindu and Muslim peasants. Then there are riverine people, mostly Bengali Muslims (locally known as Bhatiya) who also participate as sellers of agricultural products, cattle, fowls, etc. In certain places of the field-area, Nepali people are also found selling seasonal vegetables and supplying milk to the tea-stalls temporarily set up in the market places. The Assamese peasants participate in the market transaction as buyers and sellers of paddy, rice, cereals, areca nut and betel leaf, vegetables and fruits. They also sell handicraft goods like wooden stools, mats, baskets, fishing implements and earthen pots. Some are found buying and selling cattle, fowl, duck, egg, fish, dry fish and milk. The tribesman living in Assam visit the market centres with similar agricultural products with a few exception. The Garos and Khasis sell their horticultural produce like banana, orange, areca nut, papaya, millet, etc. The Garos also sell cotton and lac along with some forest products, viz., mushroom, bamboo shoot, tree bark (used in making head-strap for carrying-basket), banana flower (consumed as a vegetable), edible ferns and shrubs, honey, small-game and birds. Besides agricultural products, the members of other tribal groups also sell fowl, egg, pork, small fish, crab, fresh water snail, pig, goat, cattle, milk, etc. A part of the earning is spent in purchasing varieties of necessary articles such as rice, other cereals, salt, sugar, cloth, utensils, kerosene, tobacco, soap and other consumer items. For these commodities, they depend on vendors.
from outside who come from various small towns in the region. These traders are mostly Bengali and Bihari. A few are Marwaris and they have near monopoly over the retailing of cloth, grocery, stationery items, hardware and utensils. In the course of market transactions, the buyers and sellers from diverse groups come across one another and through regular interaction learn one another's language. The traders from outside the region learn local language as a matter of business necessity. But it also helps in the growth of bonds of friendship between individuals belonging to different ethnic groups and thus these market centres become an integrative factor and foster intergroup solidarity within the region.

The traders and middlemen operating in the market centres have brought about radical changes in the life of hitherto subsistence-level tribesmen and backward peasants. A market-oriented ethos has emerged in the surrounding villages which constitute hinterland of a certain market centre. The markets are also bringing about other non-tribal changes effecting traditional social values as well as material changes and thereby transforming the hinterland society.

The tribe as a social entity is distinguishable from the peasantry ideally by the absence of market force and market transaction within it. So when market is introduced in a tribal area and enters tribal life, it becomes an important agent of socio-economic transformation. In addition to charting this transformation process and patterns of inter-ethnic relations, this study aims to unravel the type of adaptive strategies evolved by the people to cope with the changed situation.

FOLK MARKETS AS TRANSCULTURATION CENTRES:
THEORETICAL ISSUES

After theoretical development in contemporary economic anthropology, the institution of market is tempting anthropologists to undertake market study. Till recently, the major hinderence in such an undertaking was theoretical dichotomy in economic anthropology. "One view is that economic principles are universally true and therefore serve to explain and
analyse the conduct of men in primitive and peasant societies. The other view is that such principles apply only to complex market economics: that is, to commercialized and industrialized societies, and perhaps only to capitalist societies among these (Cohen 1967:91). In recent years, a new generation of ethno-economists have designed a different and novel approach to understand the role played by the institution of market in the process of socio-economic transformation which is far from the vintage theories of economics and are also applicable to the tribal and folk or peasant cultural context. The new tradition established by these anthropologists is now also followed by some rational economists to build anthropocentric micro-theories to understand the tribal, folk or peasant economic infra-structure.

For the present study, the concepts of the tribal, folk or peasant society require some delineation. The concept of tribal society as self-contained, endogamous, animist, preliterate, egalitarian society confined to relatively isolated place possessing simple technology and practising subsistence economy is more ideal than real in the present times. Highly accelerated socio-economic and political transformation processes have engulfed the tribal communities as well. The Tribal Welfare Committee constituted by the Indian Conference of Social Work in 1952 categorised the Indian tribes into four major divisions (cit. in Vidyarthi, Rai 1985:71), viz.,

(i) Tribal communities: Tribals who are still distinctive in their original pattern of life.

(ii) Semi-tribal communities: Tribals who have settled village life, practise agriculture and are engaged in other allied occupations.

(iii) Acculturated tribal communities: Urban and semi-urban dwellers who are engaged in modern occupations and have adopted traits and culture of the rest of the population.

(iv) Totally assimilated tribal communities: Tribals who are oriented towards the Hindu social order.

Beside the above classifications based on levels of integration, the Indian tribes can also be classified from the point of their economic life. The broad economic classification based on the manner in which they primarily and distinctively make their living are divided with forest-hunting type at one end and peasant and labour type at the other.
The tribes which are recognized by the Central and State Governments are those which have been enlisted in the President's Scheduled Tribes order.

Traditionally the study of peasant society did not find favour with anthropologists. Other social sciences showed more concern in the study of peasant social institutions especially agrarian institutions. In these studies, emphasis was put on land-holding pattern and feudalism which were intimately entwined with economy. However, since 1950s a number of significant studies on peasant life appeared which were undertaken by anthropologists (Epstein 1962, Firth 1946, Lewis 1951, 1960, Redfield 1956).

While studying peasant society, anthropologists have found that their conceptual model of tribal society as a culturally whole societal unit or self-contained society is inadequate. "The peasant culture has an evident history; we are called upon to study that history; and the history is not local : it is a history of the civilization of which the village culture is one local expression" (Redfield 1956:69). Therefore, peasant culture is called 'part culture' -- part of a larger whole, part of a civilization or nation state and as such always maintains interdependency with gentry and townspeople. Kroeber (1976:284) puts it simply: "Peasants are definitely rural -- yet live in relation to market towns; they form a class segment of a larger population which usually contains urban centres, sometimes metropolitan capitals. They constitute part societies with part-cultures. They lack the isolation, the political autonomy and self-sufficiency of tribal population; but their local units retain much of their old identity, integration and attachment to soil and cult." One of the most obvious distinctions between truly primitive societies and peasant or folk societies is that the latter, over hundreds of years, have had constant contact with the centres of intellectual thought and development.

Another prime feature of the peasant society is the presence of market place in their area at an arm's length. The market impinges on the life of the people effectively in diverse spheres. Thus, the people are found engaged in different types of economic activity which demand impersonal relations in contrast to tribal society in which the network of kinship regulates most economic activities. The impact of both impersonal relation and kinship ties are found in peasant society. The peasant agriculturists who live under the shadow of market
often cultivate with prior intention of doing business. "We might say that those agriculturalists who carry on agriculture for reinvestment and business, looking on the land as capital and commodity, are not peasants but farmers" (Redfield *op.cit.*, p. 27).

The intermediary society between the tribal and the town is called folk-society and their culture is called folk-culture. The concept of folk-culture and folk-society was first put forward by Redfield\(^2\) (1930) for the type of society which he encountered in Tepoztlan in Mexico. The folk-society differs from tribal society in many ways. The tribal societies are self-sufficient with respect to their economy, their religion, their philosophy, and their government. Whereas the folk-society depends on city and state for this kind of nourishment. Many of the socio-economic and religious values in folk-society represent diffusion from urban centres (Foster 1973:30). Another distinctive feature of the folk-society is that oral lore plays a vital role in keeping tradition alive.

In Assam, as many as 23 tribal groups distributed in the hills and dales are at the neo-peasant and peasant socio-economic cultural stage. In the two hill districts of the State (Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills) 14 tribal groups are found in semi-settled villages, mostly practising shifting cultivation. They have retained many of their tribal socio-cultural features. In the plains many tribals had earlier been assimilated into the Hindu socio-religious system through proselytization. In the recent decades, this unique pattern of tribal transformation process has been modified by ethnic-political solidarity movements among tribal groups. "In Assam, and for that matter in north-east India as a whole, tribal groups have been trying to come to grips with the problems of defining and externalizing their relationships and establishing new linkages with other neighbouring groups, the regional society, the nation-state and ultimately the outside world as a whole" (Bhagabati 1988:12). Despite the tribal solidarity movements, it appears that the tribal groups in Assam are fast becoming a 'part culture' and a 'part society' by identifying themselves with a culture of a 'larger whole'.

In a folk-society "market means both a state of mind and a place to trade" (Redfield 1956:49). The concept of "a state of mind" centres round a set of activities, attitudes and relationships that belong together to a societal group which may be studied as a more or less

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2. Cit. in Redfield 1956 : 146.
coherent body of things done and thought. The concept of folk market emerges from the above perception of market.

A folk market is not merely a system of distribution of materials in the folk-society, it is also a multi-purpose institution with immense social and cultural value. It has a geographical connotation with an institutionalized locus of exchange where people interact not merely for economic reasons but also for some socio-cultural ones. Such market centres have vital importance in folk-cultural zone and besides above economic activities they have social, cultural, political, recreational and religious functions. Above all, market acts as an agency of transculturation.

The folk market also has an integrative role in the spatial context. It provides the regional population groups avenues for dynamic interaction and establishes varied types of linkages and alliances with one another. In folk market interaction occurs at fairly close and personal levels and bridges the gap between rural and urban. The market also acts as a transculturation centre and becomes instrumental in the process of socio-economic change in the hinterland villages.

The term transculturation first appeared in the 1940s. Fernando Ortiz (1940) had introduced the term "transculturation" to emphasize the reciprocal character of most contact situations. In his Preface to the work, Malinowski is enthusiastic about the new term, but one finds no serious consideration of the reciprocal aspects of culture contact in any of his own publications (cit. in Beals 1953). "'Transculturation' has been used by Latin American writers. ....." (Beals ibid., p. 628). Ortiz (1947) gives the reason for its use in the following manner : ".....the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation" (cit. in Herskovits 1969:475). However, Herskovits (op.cit) opines that : ".....were not the term "acculturation" so firmly fixed in the literature of anthropology, "transculturation" might equally express the same concept."
The concept of transculturation centre does not only apply to a place where market exchange and trading takes place. Rather it has a wider ethno-geographic connotation. It is a centre where contrapositioned rural-urban or folk-industrialized cultural elements interact with each other affecting both groups in contact. In a rural, folk-cultural setting, urban industrial socio-economic elements percolate to folk society through folk market. The elements of modern market economy which are impinging by the folk market on the folk society transforms it to proto-type market society. Folk market, thus, becomes an important agency in rural-urban continua and a centre for transculturation in a rural setting.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Social and economic changes in rural and tribal areas of Assam are brought about by a multiplicity of external forces impinging on the life of the inhabitants. Many of the changes can be traced to Government policies and interventions including development and welfare oriented programmes. In addition, it is also possible to identify a whole range of changes brought about by market place-centred transactions.

When one looks at a typical multi-ethnic and multi-cultural rural area in the plains of Assam, it is seen that in addition to the vital economic function a market centre also has social, cultural, recreational, political and even religious functions. In a heterogenous rural setting a market centre also acts as an agency of inter-ethnic and inter-community integration. The market not merely brings together people belonging to different communities to buy and sell, it also establishes various kinds of communication and linkages between individuals belonging to diverse groups.

In light of the above, the following propositions are formulated:

Proposal 1: The inhabitants of the area are exposed to diverse urban influences and get in touch with visitors from outside the area. This type of market centres which can be designated as folk market also has an intermediate role between the urban and the rural. The
folk market looked at in this fashion can be seen as an important element in the rural-urban continuum.

Proposal 2: In a multi-cultural rural setting, the market is also a place of exchange of goods and commodities—both material and ideational. In addition to transactions in goods and commodities, ideas, points of view and sundry elements of culture pass from people of one community to another. Thus the market is a locus of diverse types of transaction over and above the merely economic.

Proposal 3: Economic transactions as buyers and sellers between individuals belonging to different cultures and communities often pave the way for establishing bonds of familiarity, understanding, and even friendship. Thus market place interaction creates new type of ties and linkages across the bounds of cultures and communities within the region served by a market.

Proposal 4: The folk market in a rural area introduces not merely market economy but also certain urban values in the peasant and tribal societies. Thus a market centre brings about a new orientation in the life of the people and transforms the indigenous society into a market society.

THE UNIVERSE

In Assam rural markets can be classified into the three following types:

1. *Doinik bazaar* (Daily market): These are held everyday at a specified place.

2. *Haat bazaar* (Periodic market): These are usually held once a week and like the *doinik bazaar* all sorts of commodities are sold in these markets. There are some periodic markets held twice and occasionally on three different days in a week.

3. *Poshu haat* (Animal market): Held usually once a week, with transaction confined to buying and selling of animals, especially cattle.
In the field area in Western Assam (between Boko in Kamrup District and Lakhipur in Goalpara District), it has been found that there are altogether 113 rural markets listed by Gauhati Mohkuma Parishad and Goalpara Mohkuma Parishad, respectively (May 1992). In the field area lying within Kamrup District under Gauhati Mohkuma Parishad the total number of markets are 19 and the remaining 94 markets are found in Goalpara District (Appendix E).

Out of the universe of 113 markets, there are 18 (16%) daily markets, 79 (69.9%) periodic markets and 16 (14.1%) animal markets. The animal markets are held once a week. Of the 79 periodic markets, 11 (9.9%) are held twice a week and 1 (0.88%) periodic market is held on three days a week. The remaining 67 (59.29%) markets are held once a week. All these markets are found within the area of six Development Blocks (Map 4), viz., Boko-Bongaon and Chamaria in Kamrup District and Lakhipur, Balijana, Dudhnoi and Matia Development Block in Goalpara District (see, Table 1 and Appendix E for details of 113 markets).

**TABLE 1**

**DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF MARKETS IN THE STUDY AREA**

*(As of May 1992)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL. NO.</th>
<th>MARKET TYPES</th>
<th>LAKHIPUR</th>
<th>BALLIANA</th>
<th>MATIA</th>
<th>DUDHNOI</th>
<th>BOKO-BONGAON</th>
<th>CHAMARIA</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>WEEKLY MARKET</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(59.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>BI-WEEKLY MARKET</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(9.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>THRICE-WEEKLY MARKET</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>DAILY MARKET</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(15.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>ANIMAL MARKET</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(14.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After re-organization of the Panchayati Raj in Assam the rights over the rural markets have been transferred in July 1992 from the Mohkuma Parishads to the newly-constituted Anchalik Panchayats. The jurisdiction of Anchalik Panchayat coincides with the area of the Development Block. In 1992, the four Development Blocks in Goalpara District were re-organized into eight Blocks. Thus Jaleshwar Development Block has been created from Lakhipur Development Block; Kharmuja Development Block has been carved out from Balijana Development Block; Krishnai Development Block has been carved out from Matia Development Block; Dudhnoi Development Block has been re-organized into Rongjuli and Kushdhuwa Development Blocks. In Kamrup District Boko-Bongaon Development Block has been re-organized into Boko and Bongaon Development Block, while Chamaria Development Block remained the same. Bearing the name of each Development Block one Anchalik Panchayat has also been created.

The 11 Anchalik Panchayats outlined above have 141 listed markets (May 1995). Thus it appears that in three years from May 1992 to May 1995 the number of markets have substantially increased. There are 28 new markets. The increase is found in daily markets from 18 to 32 and weekly markets from 67 to 93 (see Appendices E and F). No new animal markets came into existence during these three years.

Another 8 new markets had been listed by these Anchalik Panchayats during this period, but later on these markets were closed for poor turnout of buyers and sellers.

The total of 113 markets existing during 1991-92 have been taken as the universe of this study. Major part of field work was carried out in the sample from the wider universe of 113 market centres.

FIELD WORK

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Considering the expansive nature of the field and the rather wide scope of the topic, I designed and planned to carry out the field investigation in selected setting but within a holistic
framework. Data has been collected from primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data was collected through intensive field-work at market locales and also in the surrounding villages which constitute the hinterland of various markets. However, in the first phase of the investigation, I depended on secondary sources in which names and approximate locations of 113 markets in the field-area have been identified and charted (Appendix A and Map 4).

In the second phase of my work, I selected 34 periodic (mainly weekly) markets out of 79, and 2 animal markets (out of 16) to constitute a representative sample from the universe of 113 markets. The sample is quite representative, especially in the case of periodic markets (43% of the total of 79).

A survey schedule (Appendix B) was used to generate basic information from the sample of 36 markets. The schedule was filled in on market days by interviewing knowledgeable persons, usually members of respective market committees which control market affairs. A map of each market place was also prepared showing locations of stalls, vendors and other arrangements.

On the basis of information from the 36 market centres, 5 haat bazaar periodic market centres were selected for intensive micro-level field-work. Of these one is located at Hahim in Kamrup District while the remaining four (Darrangiri, Amjonga, Damra and Rongsai) lie in Goalpara District (Map 4).

For investigation at the micro-level, I applied conventional methods of data collection, namely, observation, open-ended interview, and case study methods. Most of the interviews were recorded in a small, pocket-size cassette recorder. The size of the recorder was an advantage since people often found it embarrassing to talk when their responses were noted down. For certain kind of information, I prepared schedules which were filled in by interviewing market visitors (Appendix C). Since it is not an easy task to interview people single-handedly within the limited time on a market day, I took help from five students of my college whom I had trained to conduct surveys and interviews.

To assess the impact of the market centres among the people in the hinterland, five villages were selected keeping in view the ethnic affiliation of the inhabitants and distance from
the market centre. For village level enquiry, besides conventional methods, group discussions were also arranged in which different sections of villagers participated. As a moderator I organised brainstorming sessions when a group was made up of heterogenous participants. Such discussion often lasted for hours.

In addition to data generation at field level, secondary material have been collected from different centres and libraries. Library research was carried out at Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh; Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong; Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong; and of course, Gauhati University, Guwahati. Besides, I also visited and gathered information from the office of the Director of Agriculture, Assam; State Marketing Board, Assam; Deputy Commissioners’ Offices, Mohkuma Parishads at Goalpara and Guwahati; and Development Blocks in the field area. I also consulted many scholars, local leaders, politicians, policemen, traders and businessmen and discussed with them various issues pertaining to my study.

I had locational advantage in conducting field study since I reside at Dudhnoi situated almost at the centre of the field area (Map 4 and Fig. 6). I could visit all the market centres situated even in the interior area on my scooter before the commencement hour of a market on a market day.

DURATION

In 1988, my research guide, Professor Annada C. Bhagabati visited the field area in connection with some work. I availed the opportunity to meet Prof. Bhagabati in the field to discuss about the prospect of doctoral research. The idea of this study took shape during this discussion. I collected preliminary information on rural markets from the area and started my library work. I visited various market centres and villages served by the markets. The reconnoitre survey helped me in charting out the problem of investigation and I registered myself as a doctoral research student in the Department of Anthropology, University of Gauhati in 1991.
Being a full-time college teacher at Dudhnoi, I had to plan my work, particularly field-investigations, to coincide with holidays and vacations. Thus my 18 month-long field work was conducted in several spells. This was beneficial since I could bring about required modifications in the study design in the course of field work.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

When I started my work in 1991, the state of Assam was recovering from two violent socio-political movements. The movement of the Bodos for a separate state, called Bodoland, and the movement spearheaded by an underground militant outfit called 'United Liberation Front of Asom' (ULFA) seeking independence of Assam from India. The turbulent conditions led the Union Government to promulgate President's Rule in Assam in 1990. Subsequently, three army operations were launched against the militant outfits. Some of these operations were carried out in my field area. The encounters with the armed forces had made the people somewhat apprehensive about talking freely to a stranger like me. Moreover, I had to often explain the reasons for 'loitering' around the area to the army and police personnel on duty. The unsettled conditions prevailing in the early 1990s led me to think of dropping the entire project which called for free movement and mixing with the people over a large area. But my research guide advised me to endure this and gradually the situation improved. Being a college teacher helped me to gain the confidence of the people and I could build up the required rapport over a period of time.

Another major difficulty in my work was interviewing the traders and the vendors. They were ever so engrossed in their market transactions and always in such a hurry to leave the market site at the end of the day that it was a near-impossible task to talk to them on matters in which I was interested. But I always tried to be patient and was able to convince most of them. They ultimately spared time to converse with me.

Communicating with people belonging to different castes, tribes, linguistic and religious communities was not a major problem. Whenever an informant could not speak or understand
Assamese, Hindi, Bengali or English, (for example, some Khasis and Garos) I used to take help from an interpreter. But most of the market visitors could speak and understand colloquial Assamese spoken in this part of Assam, which is also the lingua-franca among all groups of people. Being an Assamese, language was an advantage in my field work. Many tribal market visitors, particularly the women, were usually shy to talk to me. I could overcome this problem by addressing them using a term for female kin. Fictive kinship is a common method of establishing communication in this part of rural Assam.

ARRANGEMENT OF CHAPTERS

In the present study data from two sources have been collected: primary and secondary. The quantitative data collected with the help of structured schedule (Appendices A, B, C and D) have been separated from the qualitative data and formulated in appropriate tables and charts. The qualitative materials are collected by applying conventional methods of data collection, namely, observation, open-ended interview, group discussion and case study method. These are analysed in appropriate chapters.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter One, the problem, scope, basic assumptions and theoretical issues pertaining to the problem of study and methods of data collection have been discussed. In this chapter the universe have also been outlined. In Chapter Two, brief history of trade and commerce and administrative measures related to rural markets have been delineated. The geo-ethnic setting and brief ethnographic account of each inhabiting group in the field area have been presented in Chapter Three. A profile of folk markets have been drawn in Chapter Four. Chapter Five presents five case studies of the haats, viz., Rongsai, Damra, Amjonga, Darrangiri and Hahim. In Chapter Six, varied types of roles and functions of markets, their continuity and changes have been discussed. Chapter Seven deals with the impact of markets in the hinterland societies. In Chapter Eight the study has been summerised and conclusions have been drawn. In this chapter I have also discussed the relative importance of folk market and forwarded few suggestions for improvement of these markets.