

# The Socio-Economic Study of Barabazar - A Traditional Market, Kolkata, West Bengal

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## ABSTRACT

Kolkata Metropolitan is one of the largest agglomerations in India. The major and powerful wholesale trading activities are located in the heart of Kolkata in Barabazar. Barabazar expanded from a yarn and textile market into one of the largest wholesale markets in Asia. It is a lively wholesale market with sections for spices, textiles, electric and electronic goods, ornaments and other kinds of goods. Here people can get customer for everything. People from neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan as well as Bangladesh even come here for their business. On-street parking of good traffic, loading and unloading operations severely affects operational efficiency of traffic and transportation. One fifth of the volume of good vehicles entering and exiting city are destined to Barabazar area. Kolkata Logistic Hub has been proposed in the outskirts of the city to get rid of this problem. This study is an attempt to depict a brief representative picture of the whole of Barabazar market

**Keywords:** Wholesale market, agglomeration, Kolkata Logistic Hub, Barabazar market

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The great Bazar or Barabazar has not grown up overnight. Job Charnock, an agent of East India Company, the British Trading Center in Bengal set up an important yarn factory at Sutanuti on August 24, 1690<sup>[1]</sup>. It was a long process through which this yarn market has become one of the largest wholesale market in Asia. When the British formed their headquarter, the new Fort William in Gobindapur, the British displaced Sheths, Basaks, Sheels and Dattas were compensated by the British with mere lands in Sutanuti<sup>[1]</sup>. These native traders

started their business in Sutanuti hat. This bi-weekly hat grew into Barabazar, a permanent residential wholesale cum retail market. Kolkata being capital of British India grew in importance and the invent of railways in the early 1860's opened the flood gates of the journey of the up-country merchants particularly the Marwari, Gujarati and Khatri etc. to Kolkata<sup>[2]</sup>. They nested in Barabazar in a large number. The Marwaris and other North Indian businessmen ousted the Sheths and Basaks and the other cloth merchants and established their dominance over Barabazar market by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>[3]</sup>.

## 2. Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study of Barabazar market are:

1. to represent morphology of the markets and marketing structure.
2. to study about the various components i.e. the sellers, hawkers and buyers.
3. to understand the work environment of the sellers and hawkers.
4. to observe and evaluate the economic and social activities of sellers, hawkers and buyers.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

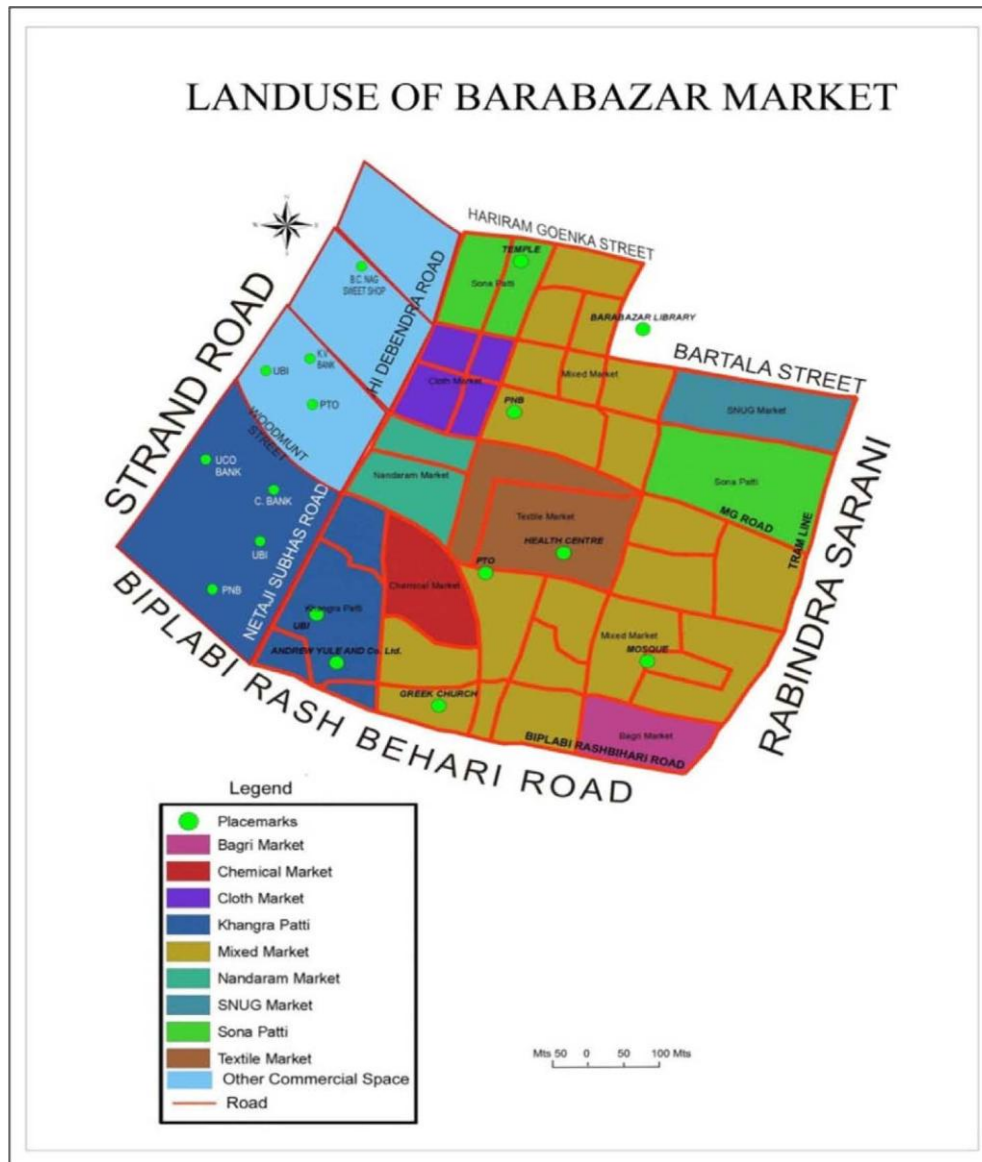
The present study includes collection of primary data from Barabazar market about the sellers, hawkers and buyers by random sampling method with detailed questionnaire. The sample design included 375 sellers, 750 buyers and 223 hawkers from Barabazar market. The field data were finally converted into master table and

cartographic and statistical interpretations were finally made.

#### 4. Morphology

From the analysis of the landuse map prepared for the market occupied area, it appears that about 17.31% is by Khangrapatti, 25.55% under mixed area,

10.07% by Sonapatti, 14.64% under commercial space, 2.11% by Bagri market, 2.47% under chemical commodities, 2.51% under cloth market, 1.72% by Satya Narayan Underground A.C. market and 5.30% by Textile market. Barabazar also comprises of 15.43% of the total roads as shown in Map No. 1.1



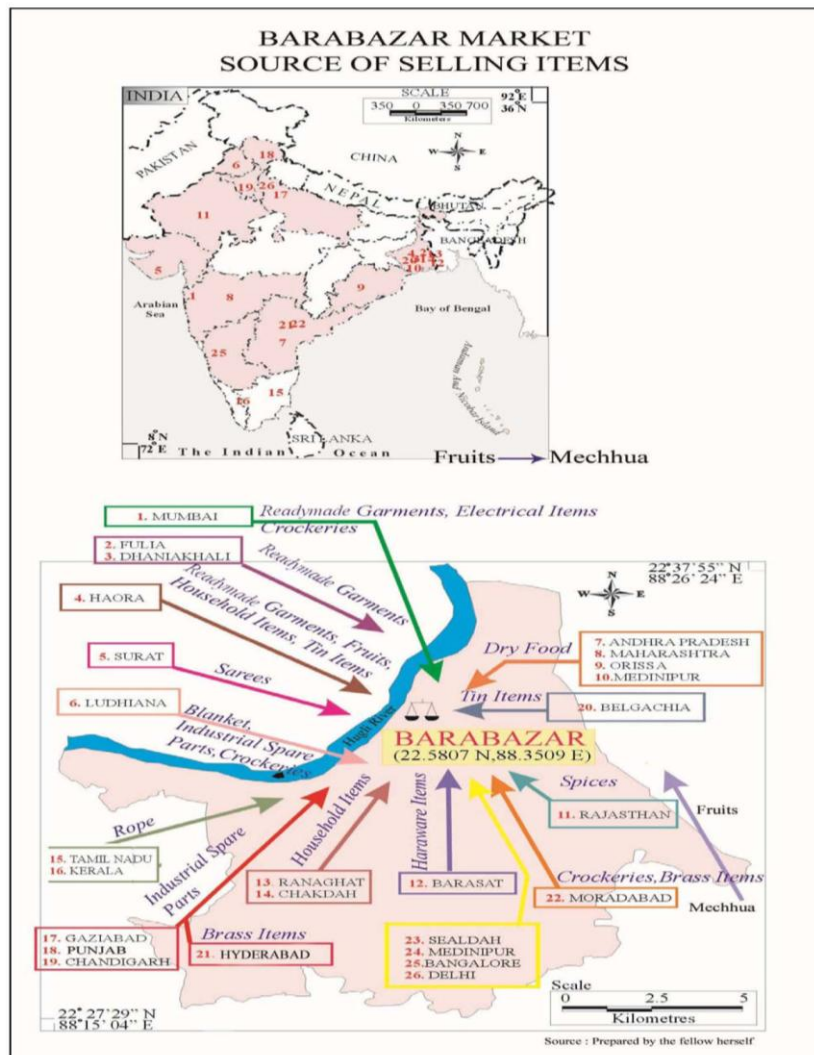
Source : Landuse prepared by the fellow herself

Map 1.1 : Landuse of Barabazar Market.

This market consists of highly specialized sub-markets like Khangrapatti, Sonapatti, Masalapatti, Lohapatti, Pagyapatti etc <sup>[2]</sup>. The sub-markets are also subdivided into Katra, Chowk or Kothi <sup>[1]</sup>. Each Katra is known for a particular item. This market is also covered with various

other types of shops like vegetables, sweet shops, furnitures, spare parts, electrical goods, plastic items etc. It can be said that anything and everything necessary for society are available in this traditional market.

## 5. Hinterland



Map 1.2 : Source of selling items of Barabazar Market.

The different varieties of goods that come to this market are from various states of India and also from other districts of W.B. as shown in Map No. 1.2. The outflow of the goods of this market generally goes to various other traditional markets of Kolkata like Hatibagan Market, Gariahat Market, New Market etc. This market draws its purchasers not only from within Kolkata but also from other districts of W.B. and other states of India, particularly Eastern and North Eastern Indian states <sup>[4]</sup>.

## 6. Nature of shops

The shops of this market do not practise any fixed price policy and the prices mainly vary with the market

fluctuations. The bargaining process is also in practice to some extent. This market has many shops run by employees and there are also shops which are run by their family members. Employees are also hired during the festive period. The peak season of sale is during festive occasions and ceremonial functions. The daily income of the sellers are 12% with daily income of less than Rs. 10,000, 12% in the range of Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 20,000, 26% between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 40,000 and 50% even greater than Rs. 40,000. This is because Barabazar is a very big wholesale cum retail market and have a huge variety and sale all throughout India. The data collected during survey give a fair idea about the income of the sellers

although they usually conceal their actual income.

## 7. Demography of sellers

### BARABAZAR MARKET-SELLERS

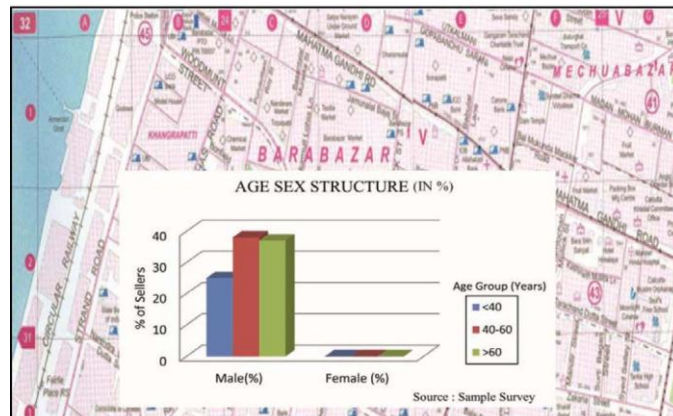


Figure 1.3 : Age Sex Structure of Barabazar Sellers.

### BARABAZAR MARKET-SELLERS

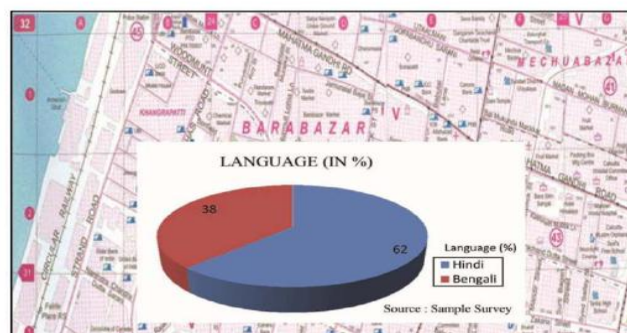


Figure 1.4 : Language of Barabazar Sellers.

The Barabazar market predominates mostly by Bengali and Marwari communities (75%) whereas 25% consists of Muslims and other communities. The Hinduism is the prime religion (as shown in Table 1.5 and Figure 1.5).

### BARABAZAR MARKET-SELLERS

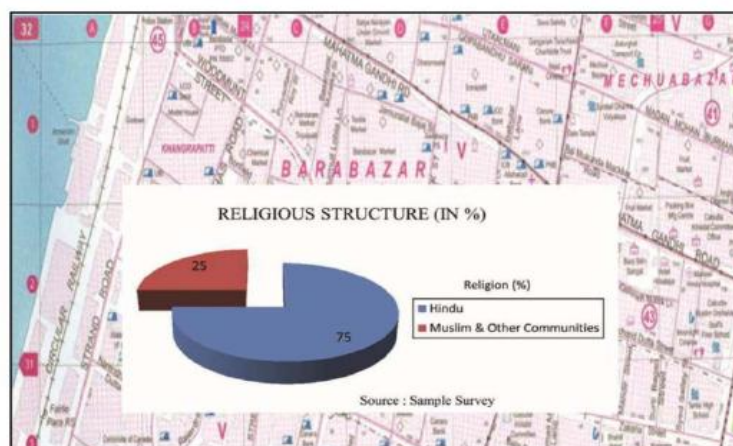


Figure 1.5 : Religious Structure of Barabazar Sellers.

From the thorough demographic study of the sellers of this market, age-sex structure, language, religion, caste structure, education, marital status of sellers are stated as shown in Figures no. 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6. The age-sex structure represents that 25% of the owners are male and belong to the age-

group of less than 40 years, 38% of sellers are in group of 40-60 years and the rest 37% of the shop owners belong to the age group of above 60 years. The wholesale characteristics of the market represent the existence of experienced male sellers.

### BARABAZAR MARKET-SELLERS

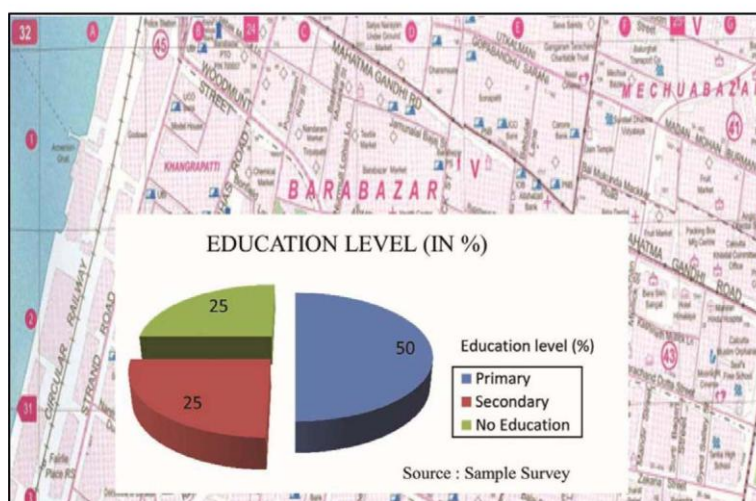


Figure 1.6 : Education Level of Barabazar Sellers.

The sellers of this market generally speak in Hindi covering 62% of the shop owners. The language of rest 38% of the sellers are Bengali. The sellers are capable to communicate well with every linguistic group of customers. This market predominates mostly by Bengali and Marwari communities (75%) whereas 25% consists of Muslims and other communities. The observed caste structure of the sellers of the market belongs to upper caste group (40%) and lower caste group (60%). From the inception of the market, the so called lower castes with business background families namely Seths, Basaks, Sheels, Sahas etc. started the trade here.

From the interpretation of the data collection regarding formal education level, it appears that 50% of the sellers are educated upto the primary level, 25% of the sellers up to the secondary level and whereas 25% of the sellers have received no education. In this traditional market, sellers are originally from business background

family and so they have given lesser emphasis on education. The sellers are compelled to have a minimum education just to carry out their business activities.

### 8. Nature of hawkers

Barabazar market is also occupied by hawkers selling variety of items and serves the needs of the lawyers. The hawkers of this market show that 30% of the hawkers are in the age-group of less than 40 years, 60% of the hawkers belong to the age-group of 40-60 years and 10% of the hawkers belong to the age-group of above 60 years. This market is composed of fixed and mobile hawkers. They mainly speak in Bengali and Hindi and there are also hawkers with some other languages who are well conversant in Bengali and Hindi. The hawkers of this market are bilingual. The fixed hawkers cover the upper portion of the site with plastic and other materials. The mobile hawkers move from place to place in search of customers. The future generations

of the hawkers are reluctant to come to the profession of hawking and are eager to have education. They belong to low-income and low-expenditure group as hawking is basically a low income generating business.

### 9. Inflow of buyers

The buyers of this market generally come from surroundings of Kolkata which account for about 40% and the rest 60% of buyers comes from different districts and states of India. Due to the wholesale nature of the market and the presence of ample variety of goods from various states, this market attracts buyers from all corners. A perception study<sup>[5]</sup> of the shoppers of this market reveal that 20% of buyers are engaged in buying for themselves and 80% of buyers are engaged in the process of marketing for carrying on business.

### 10. Problems and challenges

The sellers face a lot of problems in respect of slow traffic flow, congested footpaths, accident prone roads etc. Traffic in this area are including the approaching road to Howrah Bridge has been a long standing problem for the pedestrians who pass through this area. Vehicles like lorry, taxi, van and three wheeler goods carriers crowd the main road and slow moving vehicles clog the side streets. People also face a great fear from the risky and hazardous unsafe buildings. The faulty electric wiring in this market area is prone to fire hazards.

### 11. CONCLUSION

Goods from various parts of the country enter Barabazar. Transportation system is the most important of all the aspects. There has been West Bengal

Government plans which will take necessary steps and remove all constraints thereof. Ware housing and cold storage facilities should be improved. Truck terminal facilities should be extended. Barabazar experienced devastating fire. Kolkata Metropolitan Development proposed the upgradation of the exiting Howrah Truck terminal situated along the Kona Expressway to Kolkata Logistic Hub. This upgraded facility will consist of a truck parking facility clubbed with wholesale and retail trading near Kolkata Logistic Hub. This transfer of wholesale functions relate to transportation system, socio-economic set up, local environment and local economy both quantitatively and qualitatively.

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