

ANALYSIS OF A WEEKLY
MARKET

LOCATION AND FREQUENCY

THE WEEKLY MARKET, analysed in this article, is located at Shanthigrama. This is a village with a population of about 4,000 people. It is a *hubli*, that is, a revenue unit in Hassan district of Mysore State. The village has a group panchayat which governs its affairs. It is provided with water supply, electricity, schools, a hospital and a post office. As the village is situated on the border of Bangalore-Mangalore Road (a state highway), it is well linked with other places. It is a local centre for the nearby villages for various transactions.

The weekly market of the village meets on every Sunday and is regulated by the village panchayat which collects an octroi on the wares intended for sale at the market. The panchayat makes use of this tax to provide the market with certain facilities, like, water and shopping space.

In Kannada, the weekly market is called *santhe* and is in existence for centuries. In early times, it was mostly based on barter. Under this system, goods of equivalent value were exchanged between buyers and sellers. In modern times, the cash exchange has assumed a great importance in the market. In spite of economic and social changes the market is still vital. It has a capacity to adapt itself to changed conditions.

The meeting ground of the market at Shanthigrama is a rectangular open-space (of

about two acres) sparsely covered with a few trees. On Sunday mornings cartloads of goods from nearby villages draw up at the ground. Men and women, too, arrive with their baskets of vegetables, fruits, etc. Those who enter the market ground for selling, pay the octroi and get receipts. Most of the goods (like cereals, pulses and vegetables) are brought in from the surrounding rural areas for retail sale. However, some other consumer articles like soap, spices, etc. are brought in from Hassan Town, which is at a distance of eight miles.

DESIGN

The market is divided into some small sections called *hasaras*. A *hasara* is a row of sellers arranged by custom and precedent. Sellers may not violate the traditional arrangement of *hasaras*. However, there is no absolute exclusion of one *hasara* from another. Each *hasara* is usually a crescent-shaped row. The different sections are described below:

Vegetables, fruits and coconuts are sold in the first row. Lime, salt, locally grown spices, puffed rice (a delicacy), butter, etc. are sold in the second row. Agricultural implements, locks and barrels and other metal wares are laid out for sale in the third row. Grains, spices like clove and black pepper (brought from Hassan Town), cloth, readymade clothes, plastic articles, etc., are sold in tents set up for the purpose in the fourth row. Jaggery, betel

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leaves, fish, and chickens are sold in the fifth row. The meatshops are situated in the eastern wing while the western wing is used by tinkers, cobblers and others.

The sellers squat in the *hasaras* behind their goods. Vegetables are displayed in big rattan baskets or on a small mat. Lime and salt are displayed in opened up gunny bags. The metallic articles are laid out in iron trays, or on the bare ground. Cloth, grains, spices, etc., are spread out in the tents usually on a wooden platform or a mat.

Between each *hasura* there is a small path for people to move about. They may also cross from one row over to another by wedging between the sellers.

INTERACTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

In the weekly market, the sellers and buyers are not professional men in a rigid sense. They are often peasants who sell or buy things when they can. Vegetables and fruits are usually grown in the backyards of their houses or on small plots. Whenever there is an abundance of growth the farmers like to sell it. Likewise, animal products are sold by peasants who are primarily engaged in agriculture. It is difficult to estimate quantitatively the number of such persons, because the sellers are not regular in attending the market. However, at the core of the market, there are a few professional men dealing in cloth, pulses and cereals.

A professional seller makes an investment and seeks a gain through sale. On the contrary, the peasants usually do not invest any money on growing their vegetables; they sell only to supplement their income.

Likewise, the buyers are a flexible category. Some of them may turn into sellers themselves. It is a system of playing each other's

role in an economic situation. Thus, the buyer-seller relationship is rather fluid.

It may be noted that one does not see rigid caste distinctions in the market. However, there are some exceptions. For instance, the Jains sell puffed rice, weaverfolk cloth, and *shetties* (the merchant-castemen) spices.

SEASONAL VARIATIONS

A number of people from nearby villages participate in business. The number may range between 1,000 and 1,500. Since participation is neither regular nor uniform, it is difficult to arrive at a precise number. During the sowing season in early monsoon, many are engaged in their routine work and therefore, fewer people attend the market. Again, in the harvest season at the end of winter, fewer numbers attend it. It is in summer that the attendance is at its peak. For, summer is the season of comparative leisure for most of the villagers. In summer, the fairs and festivities come thick and fast. If the market day precedes a festival, people rush to buy articles needed for the occasion. When the business is intense the prices may also go up.

The seasons have a bearing on prices also. For instance, following the monsoon, many people grow vegetables like cabbage, radish, string beans, tomato, cucumber, green chillies, and other vegetables. These are sold at relatively low rates, due to an abundant supply. To illustrate: a kilogram of cabbage costs 60 to 70 paise. A kilogram of string beans costs 40 to 50 paise. Soon after the harvest, the cereals are sold at low rates again for the same reason. In contrast with this, in summer the vegetables and cereals go up in price for two reasons: (a) a reduced supply and (b) the rush for buying on account of festivities. To illustrate, a ripe coconut costs about 75 paise. The price of vegetables increases by 25% to 50% over the previous rates.

CURVE OF BUSINESS

In the mornings the business is rather dull. If there is sunshine, the sellers squat in a relaxed mood behind the articles. Some of them chew or smoke tobacco and gossip. Some others eat their snacks. As the hours move up, the business becomes brisk. We may see people tumbling into one another. We may see the quick movement of hands, the shuffling feet, and hear many voices rolled into an indistinct volume of noise.

As the evening approaches, business is slackened. For, evening is the closing time. The buyers like to return home before it is dark. The prices come down a bit, for sellers would not like to carry back their unsold wares. At dusk, most of the participants walk homeward, leaving behind them a littered ground—a visible evidence of day's commerce.

A PLACE FOR SOCIAL CONTACTS

The weekly market is a place where conflict and reconciliation take place. New friendships are made and the old ones are

broken. It is a volatile ground for social meeting. Indeed, people do not come merely for immediate commerce. Often a big deal like bringing about a marriage may be made. A local leader may enlist support for a cause at the market, where people are easily accessible. Thus, it is a means of social communication, for friends and foes alike.

CONCLUSION

Although the market meets once in a week, it provides considerable services to the rural people through its facilities for an exchange of goods. Beyond this, it also serves as a means of social communication. Thus, it brings out the essential relationship between commerce and social interactions in a rural community. Relatively speaking, it is not a stable ground for either commercial or social relationships. This is in contrast with the usual stability of transactions (economic or social) in primary groups in the rural areas. Indeed, its relative instability emphasizes its dynamism—the ability to move with the times.