



Research Article

## Socio-Economic Importance of Markets and Small-Scale Industries in Dakshin Dinajpur District, West Bengal

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### Abstract

Dakshin Dinajpur district is an important agriculture-based district of West Bengal. The economy of this district mainly depends on agriculture, rural markets, and small-scale industries. Various local markets play a significant role in the livelihood, trade, and employment of the people. At the same time, cottage industries, wooden mask industries, handloom industries, and food-processing industries contribute to the economic development of the district. This research paper discusses the socio-economic importance, problems, and future possibilities of markets and small-scale industries in Dakshin Dinajpur district.

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**KEYWORDS:** Major Markets, Importance of market, small-scale industries, Development strategies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural markets have played an important role in the rural economy of India since ancient times. Farmers and local producers sell their products in these markets to earn their livelihood. The same situation can be observed in Dakshin Dinajpur district. Markets in areas such as Balurghat, Gangarampur, Kushmandi, and Tapan are important centers of local economic activities.

Besides agriculture, several small-scale and cottage industries have developed in this district. The wooden mask industry of Kushmandi is one of the famous folk-art industries of West Bengal. These industries create employment opportunities and preserve the cultural heritage of the district.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the importance of markets in Dakshin Dinajpur district.
2. To study the present condition of small-scale and cottage industries.
3. To examine the role of markets and industries in employment generation.
4. To identify their contribution to economic development.
5. To discuss the problems and future prospects.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data have been used in this research.

### Primary Data

Interviews with local businessmen and traders, Field visits to markets, Opinions collected from local residents.

### Secondary Data

Various Books, Government reports, Newspapers, Research papers and internet sources.

### Markets of Dakshin Dinajpur District

Markets play a vital role in the economy of Dakshin Dinajpur district. Most people in the district are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. Rural markets serve as the main centers for selling agricultural products. The economy of Dakshin Dinajpur is mainly rural and agriculture-based. Most of the people of the district are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Farmers earn their income by producing and selling crops such as paddy, jute, wheat, potato, and mustard. Along with agriculture, cattle rearing, poultry farming, fish farming, and small-scale cottage industries also play an important role in the district's economy. In recent years, Self Help Groups (SHGs), especially among women, have significantly contributed to economic empowerment and self-reliance.

The weekly market system, popularly known as haat-bazaar, holds great importance in the rural economy of Dakshin Dinajpur. Weekly markets are organized in different parts of the district where farmers and small traders sell agricultural products, vegetables, fish, meat, rice, pulses, and other daily

necessities. These markets are not only centers of trade and commerce but also important places for social interaction and communication among rural people. Villagers gather here not only for buying and selling goods but also for maintaining social relationships and exchanging information.

The agricultural and economic culture of Dakshin Dinajpur are closely interconnected. Agriculture is not only the foundation of the district's economy but also shapes the lifestyle, festivals, traditions, and social relationships of the people. Although modern technology, improved communication systems, and market expansion have brought certain changes, the traditional rural agricultural culture of the district still retains its unique identity and heritage.

The weekly markets of Dakshin Dinajpur serve as one of the most important centers of economic transactions and rural life. Numerous small and large markets are spread throughout the district. Most markets are held once a week, while some are organized twice a week. These markets fulfill the daily needs of local people and keep the rural economy active and vibrant. The West Dinajpur District Gazetteers also mention many important markets of the region. Below, a discussion of some of the most significant markets of Dakshin Dinajpur is presented —

### Major Markets

#### Kamarpara Hut

This is one of the important rural markets of the district. The market is held twice a week, on Thursday and Sunday. The owner of this market was Jatin Majumdar. Various goods are bought and sold here, especially paddy, jute, cows, buffaloes, and goats. Kamarpara Haat is mainly famous for cattle trading and the trade of food grains and commercial crops.

#### Mangalpur Hut

This is the largest market in the Kushmandi area. It is mainly held on Wednesday and Sunday. Jute, chilli, and vegetables are sold here. The market is especially famous in the district for chilli trading.

#### Saheb Kachari Hut

This is one of the oldest markets under Balurghat Police Station. The market is managed by the Balurghat Municipality. Various commodities ranging from vegetables to clothes and earthen utensils are sold here. The market is mainly held every Saturday. It is famous for quality rice varieties such as Atap rice and Kataribhog rice.

#### Daral Hut

This market is an important trading centre under Tapan Police Station. It has a shared ownership system. Along with different commodities, a large number of cows and buffaloes are traded here.

#### Trimohini Hut

Located on the Balurghat–Hili Road, this market is an important haat under the Trimohini Gram Panchayat. At present, it is managed by the Panchayat and B.D.O office.

Besides cattle, paddy, rice, wheat, and jute are traded here. The market is held twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday.

#### **Teor Hut**

This market belongs to the Hili Block and is currently supervised by Binshira Gram Panchayat. It is held twice a week, on Wednesday and Saturday. Along with daily necessities, this market plays an important role in the buying and selling of paddy and rice.

#### **Madarganj Hut**

This is one of the oldest and most traditional markets of the district. Earlier, it was a major market, but after the establishment of Patiram Haat, its importance declined somewhat. It is held once a week, mainly on Wednesday.

#### **Dangarhut**

This market is located in the Kumarganj Block of Dakshin Dinajpur district. It is one of the oldest markets in the district. The market is held twice a week, on Monday and Thursday. Vegetables, livestock, paddy, rice, and jute are traded here. The famous trading item of this market is Shampa Masuri rice.

#### **Pransagar Hut**

This is one of the oldest markets of the district and is situated in Gangarampur Block. It is held every Wednesday. Livestock, clothes, vegetables, fruits, and other essential commodities are traded here.

#### **Patiram Hut**

Located about 13 km away from Balurghat, this market is held twice a week, on Sunday and Thursday. In earlier times, a month-long fair used to be organised here, which later transformed into a market. Besides daily necessities, livestock, paddy, rice, jute, mustard, vegetables, and fruits are traded here.

#### **Bhikahar Hut**

This market is situated under Tapan Police Station and is held every Thursday. It is around 100 years old. Vegetables, fruits, livestock, clothes, wooden furniture, paddy, rice, jute, mustard, and even traditional herbal medicines are available here.

#### **Laskar Hut**

This market also belongs to Tapan Police Station and is held twice a week, on Wednesday and Saturday. Vegetables, birds, animals, and other daily necessities are bought and sold here.

#### **Samjia Hut**

Samjia Haat is a very old market dating back to the undivided Dinajpur district and is nearly 200 years old. It is located in Kumarganj Block. Livestock, vegetables, and other necessary goods are traded here.

#### **Safanagar Hut**

Situated under the Safanagar Gram Panchayat of Kumarganj Police Station, this market is held twice a week, on Saturday and Tuesday. It is more than 100 years old. Vegetables, fruits, poultry, wooden goods, and clothes are available here. Fish trading is one of the important features of this market.

#### **Sarai Huut**

This is an important market of the Dakshin Dinajpur district, located in the Bansihari Block. It is held only on Tuesdays and is around 100 years old. Earlier, it belonged to the Singh family and is currently supervised by Phani Singh. The market is famous for ready-made garments. Traders from different parts of Dakshin Dinajpur come here to buy and sell clothes.

#### **Mohana Hut**

Located in Kumarganj Block, this market is held mainly on Monday and Friday. It is around 100 years old. The former owner was Probodh Singh Roy, and at present it is managed by his son, Prakash Singh Roy. The market is famous for vegetable trading. Vegetables from this market are supplied wholesale to Malda, Berhampore, Raiganj, and Siliguri.

#### **Shibbari Hut**

This market is situated near Bangarh in Gangarampur Block. It is about 100 years old and is held every Sunday. Vegetables, paddy, wheat, jute, mustard, and other daily necessities are traded here. Livestock trading is also common.

#### **Jalghar Hut**

This market is situated on the Balurghat–Tapan road and is held twice a week, on Monday and Friday. Paddy, rice, mustard, vegetables, and other daily necessities are traded here.

### **Socio-Economic Importance of Markets**

#### **Agricultural Marketing Centres**

Dakshin Dinajpur is mainly an agriculture-based district. Farmers sell agricultural products such as rice, jute, potatoes, and vegetables in local markets and weekly rural fairs (haats). Through this system, farmers can receive fair prices easily and reduce dependence on middlemen. Therefore, huts and markets play a very important role as agricultural marketing centers. Agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy, and the main places for buying and selling agricultural goods are haats and markets. Farmers bring rice, wheat, vegetables, fruits, fish, eggs, and other products to the markets for sale. This provides them with opportunities to earn fair prices and improve their economic condition. Huts and markets establish direct contact between farmers and buyers. As a result, the influence of middlemen is reduced, and farmers can sell their products more easily. Traders from different areas also come to these markets to purchase goods and supply them elsewhere, which expands the demand and market for agricultural products.

These markets also play an important role in determining the prices of agricultural products. Prices are fixed according to demand and supply. This helps farmers understand which products are in greater demand and encourages them to increase future production accordingly. In addition, huts and markets create employment opportunities in rural areas. Many people are involved in transportation, storage, wholesale trade, and retail business. Thus, haats and markets make a significant contribution to the development of the rural economy.

#### **Source of Employment**

Huts and markets provide livelihoods for many people, such as shopkeepers, transport workers, hawkers, and labourers. Therefore, they play an important role in reducing rural unemployment.

Huts and markets are an essential part of the rural economy and a major source of employment. Many people earn their living directly or indirectly through these markets. Farmers earn income by selling crops, vegetables, fish, milk, and other products. Traders, shopkeepers, transport workers, porters, hawkers, and artisans also get work opportunities through market activities. Local industries and small businesses develop because of buying and selling in these markets. Rural women can also become self-reliant by selling handmade goods, food items, and handicrafts. In this way, huts and markets are not only centers of trade but also important means of employment and income generation for rural people.

### **Development of Local Industries and Handicrafts**

Handicraft products of Dakshin Dinajpur such as pottery, bamboo and wooden crafts, and embroidered quilts (Nakshi Kantha) are sold in local haats and markets. This helps local artisans earn income and preserve traditional culture. Huts and markets play an important role in promoting local industries and handicrafts. Rural artisans and craftsmen can sell their handmade products such as clay items, bamboo and cane crafts, folk paintings, wooden items, and embroidered textiles in these markets. As a result, their income increases and interest in traditional crafts grows.

Through markets, people from different regions become familiar with local art and culture. The demand for traditional handicrafts rises, encouraging artisans to introduce new designs and improve product quality. Direct interaction with customers also helps craftsmen understand market demand. Thus, huts and markets are important for preserving, promoting, and economically supporting local industries and handicrafts.

### **Increase in Rural Money Circulation**

Regular transactions in huts and markets increase the circulation of money in rural areas. The exchange of money among farmers, traders, and consumers keeps the rural economy active. Farmers, artisans, and small business owners can easily sell their products in markets, which brings cash income into villages and increases economic activities. Agricultural products, vegetables, fish, milk, and handicrafts are bought and sold regularly, allowing producers to earn fair prices. Traders purchase products and sell them in other areas, further increasing economic exchange. Huts and markets also create jobs in transportation, shopkeeping, labor work, and food stalls. As a result, many rural people get earning opportunities and improve their standard of living.

Moreover, huts and markets establish economic links between villages and towns. Rural products reach urban markets, while city goods become available in villages. In this way, the rural economy becomes more active and stronger.

### **Social and Cultural Meeting Centres**

Huts and markets are not only economic centres but also important social gathering places for rural people. Here, people exchange information, build social relationships, and share

cultural influences. In rural society, people from different areas gather in markets. Along with trade and commerce, they exchange ideas, news, and experiences. Markets often become places where relatives and old acquaintances meet after a long time. From a cultural perspective, huts and markets are also significant. Folk songs, folk dances, local theatre, and festivals are promoted through these gatherings. Different communities come together, leading to cultural exchange and stronger social harmony. Thus, huts and markets help develop social unity and cooperation among people of different religions, castes, and social classes.

### **Improvement of Transport and Communication**

Huts and markets contribute greatly to the development of transportation and communication systems. Roads and transport facilities improve around market areas, making communication between villages and towns easier. Agricultural products, handicrafts, and daily necessities need to be transported from one place to another, leading to the development of roads, bridges, and transport services. Regular market activities increase the movement of people and goods, which creates demand for better transportation systems.

As markets grow, new roads, bridges, and transport services are developed, strengthening rural-urban connections. Therefore, huts and markets act as important driving forces behind the improvement of transportation and communication networks.

### **Role in Price Determination**

Local huts and markets play an important role in determining the prices of goods. Prices are generally fixed according to demand and supply. If the demand for a product is high and supply is low, prices increase. On the other hand, if supply is high, prices decrease. Competition among sellers in the market helps maintain fair pricing. Buyers can compare prices from different sellers and purchase goods at reasonable rates.

The prices of agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, fish, and grains are usually determined first in local markets, which later influence larger regional markets. In this way, huts and markets help maintain proper pricing, support business growth, and keep the local economy active. Huts and markets are an essential part of the rural economy of Dakshin Dinajpur. They are directly connected with the livelihood and development of farmers, laborers, traders, and artisans. Therefore, the modernization and improvement of haats and markets will further strengthen the rural economy and improve the overall standard of living of rural people.

### **Small-Scale Industries of Dakshin Dinajpur**

Different types of small-scale and cottage industries have developed in this district. The industries and handicrafts of Dakshin Dinajpur are deeply connected with its folk tradition, rural lifestyle, and social culture. These traditional crafts are not only expressions of beauty but also reflections of the people's lifestyle, beliefs, and heritage. The major industries and handicrafts of the district are discussed below.

### **Handloom Industry**

The handloom industry is one of the oldest traditional industries of Dakshin Dinajpur. It is mainly concentrated in the

Gangarampur block. Areas such as Thangapara, Belbari, Sukdebpur, Jalalpur, Kalitala, Maharajpur, and some parts of Tapan block are well known for this craft. This industry is one of the main sources of livelihood in these regions.

The first handloom centre in the Gangarampur block was established during 1974–75. Gradually, the industry spread throughout the block. Various products such as sarees, dhotis, Punjabi dresses, churidar pieces, towels, and lungis are produced here. Among them, Tangail sarees are especially famous. The weavers sell their products both wholesale and retail. Many people engaged in the textile trade of the district collect their goods from these weaving centres. The sarees are mainly produced in areas such as Bardanga, Chittaranjan Pally, Thengapara, Nildanga, and Dattapara.

### **Biri Industry**

The bidi industry is one of the oldest cottage industries of the district and has existed since the pre-independence period. It is spread across the entire district, though the industry in Hili block is especially prominent. Famous bidi brands of the district include “Mati Bidi,” “Tin Tara Bidi,” and “Nitya Bidi.”

Earlier, raw materials and labor costs were low. However, with the increase in the prices of raw materials, workers’ wages have also increased. As a result, the industry has gradually developed. Besides Hili, bidi industries are also found in Balurghat block (“Babu Bidi”), Tapan block (“Bharat Bidi” and “Shakti Bidi”), and Kumarganj (“Tipu Bidi” and “College Bidi”). A large number of workers depend on this cottage industry for their livelihood.

### **Rice Mill Industry**

The rice mill industry is another important small-scale industry of the district. Since Dakshin Dinajpur is mainly an agricultural district and produces a large amount of paddy, rice milling developed naturally.

Most rice mills are located in Hili and Gangarampur blocks. Before the partition of India, rice mills had already developed in the Hili region and managed to survive even after independence. The rice produced in these mills not only fulfills local demand but is also supplied to neighboring districts. A major portion of rice is exported through the Hili border. At present, there are more than fifty rice mills in areas such as Hili, Tapan, Gangarampur, Balurghat, Rampur, and Banshihari. However, many mills are currently closed due to various problems.

### **Wood Craft Industry**

The wood craft industry, also known as the Daru Shilpa, has long been popular in the district. Wooden products are attractive and have great cultural value. Many rural people depend on this industry for their livelihood. This craft mainly develops from tree trunks and includes the making of wooden masks, which are important symbols of the cultural heritage of both the district and West Bengal. These masks are widely used during festivals and fairs such as Charak Mela, Chamunda Puja, Kali dance performances, Jituya Puja, and Narasingha Bura-Buri rituals. Wooden masks are also used in folk theatre, folk festivals, puppet shows, and traditional performances. Wooden idols and deities have been crafted since ancient times. The

idols of Jagannath, Balaram, and Subhadra used in Rath Yatra are notable examples of this craft.

Despite the availability of products made from plastic, iron, concrete, and steel, the wood craft industry has survived and continues to spread its artistic value. Bamboo products such as baskets, sieves, stools, and fishing traps are also commonly produced. Wooden furniture, doors, windows, and decorative items remain important because they are eco-friendly and durable.

### **Pottery and Clay Doll Industry**

Pottery is another important traditional craft of the district. Earthen pots, pitchers, lamps, and household utensils are made for daily use. Clay idols of gods and goddesses are especially popular during religious festivals. The clay dolls of Dakshin Dinajpur reflect rural life and folk culture. They are used both as children’s toys and decorative items. Many dolls portray folk tales and scenes from village life.

### **Folk Paintings and Alpana**

Folk paintings and Alpana are important parts of the district’s cultural heritage.

#### **Folk Paintings**

Local artists paint rural life, mythology, and folk stories on cloth or paper using simple colors and designs. Folk paintings play an important role during festivals and religious ceremonies. Art forms such as wall paintings, scroll paintings, and clay dolls enhance the beauty of festivals like Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Bengali New Year celebrations, and village fairs. These paintings also inspire people to appreciate their cultural traditions.

#### **Alpana**

Alpana is drawn on floors using rice paste and decorative patterns. It is commonly seen during Lakshmi Puja, Bengali New Year, weddings, and religious rituals. Alpana is considered a symbol of purity and auspiciousness. Floral and geometric designs made with rice powder and colors reflect the artistic sense and traditions of Bengali culture.

#### **Traditional Handicrafts**

Dakshin Dinajpur has a rich tradition of handicrafts that have been passed down through generations. One of the most famous crafts is the Gomira mask art. These colorful wooden masks are used in Gomira dance performances and symbolize folk religion and cultural identity.

Bamboo and cane crafts are also highly popular. Local artisans make baskets, trays, stools, and fishing traps. Pottery, shola craft, folk paintings, and decorative artworks are important parts of rural life and festivals. These handicrafts not only preserve the district’s cultural heritage but also provide employment opportunities for many people. At present, both government and cultural organizations are trying to preserve and promote these traditional crafts.

#### **Characteristics of the Handicrafts**

1. Use of local raw materials such as clay, bamboo, straw, and cloth

2. Strong influence of local culture and tradition in every product
3. Significant contribution to the rural economy

**Examples include:**

1. Decorative items made from shola
2. Jute and straw crafts
3. Handmade ornaments and household decorations

**Nakshi Kantha**

Nakshi Kantha is a famous traditional embroidery art of Dakshin Dinajpur and North Bengal. It is mainly created by rural women using needlework on old cloth. Designs of flowers, birds, trees, rivers, village life, and folk culture are beautifully stitched on the fabric. Nakshi Kantha is not only used as a quilt or blanket but is also regarded as an artistic expression of Bengali culture and emotion. It has special importance during marriages, festivals, and as gifts. Today, this craft has become an important source of livelihood for many women and continues to preserve Bengali folk heritage.

**Characteristics of Nakshi Kantha**

1. Beautiful embroidery done with needle and thread on old cloth
2. Common motifs include flowers, birds, trees, and rural scenes
3. Considered both a useful item and a work of art
4. Mainly practised by rural women as a form of creativity
5. Now recognized as an important handicraft product in markets

**Problems and Decline of Traditional Industries****Decline of the Handloom Industry**

1. Competition from cheap machine-made cloth
2. Increase in the price of yarn and dyes
3. Lack of interest among younger generations
3. Insufficient government support and financial assistance

**Decline of the Bidi Industry**

1. Growing awareness about health hazards of smoking
2. Higher taxes and stricter government regulations
3. Low wages for workers
4. Availability of alternative employment opportunities

**Decline of the Wood Craft Industry**

1. Strict forest conservation laws
2. Shortage of quality timber
3. Competition from plastic and metal products
4. Decline in the number of skilled artisans

**Decline of the Rice Mill Industry**

1. Competition from modern rice mills
2. Electricity problems and rising operational costs
3. Fluctuation in paddy prices

4. Transportation and marketing difficulties
5. General Causes
6. Lack of modern technology
7. Financial crisis and lack of easy loans
8. Poor market access
9. Lack of skill development and training
10. Improper implementation of government schemes

**Measures for Development****Development of the Handloom Industry**

1. Introduction of modern looms
2. Improvement of designs and product variety
3. Government loans and subsidies
4. Online marketing through e-commerce platforms
5. Training centres for young artisans

**Development of the Bidi Industry**

1. Ensuring fair wages and health benefits
2. Training workers in alternative cottage industries
3. Formation of cooperative societies for better marketing

**Development of the Wood Craft Industry**

1. Sustainable forest management
2. Innovative designs and craftsmanship
3. Use of alternative raw materials such as bamboo and plywood
4. Organising handicraft fairs and exhibitions

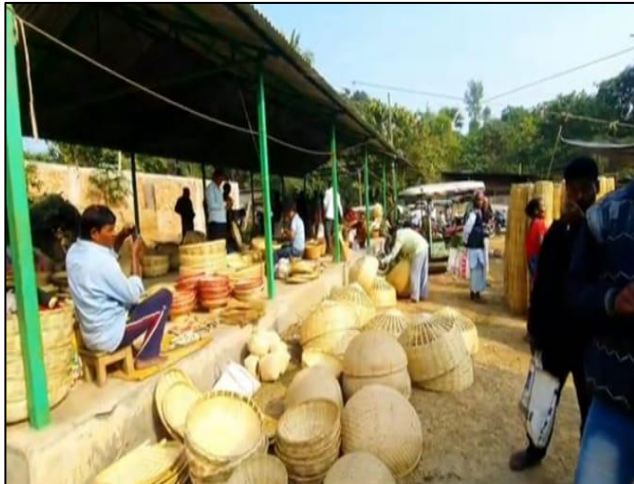
**Development of the Rice Mill Industry**

1. Modernisation of small rice mills
2. Better electricity and infrastructure
3. Government subsidies and financial assistance
4. Improved storage and warehouse systems
5. Strong farm-to-market connections
6. Overall Development Measures
7. Technological advancement
8. Easy loans and financial support
9. Skill development programs
10. Better branding and marketing

Proper implementation of government projects With proper planning, modern technology, and support from both government and private organisations, the traditional industries and handicrafts of Dakshin Dinajpur can be revived and strengthened. This will increase employment opportunities and improve the economy of the district. The industries and handicrafts of Dakshin Dinajpur are valuable parts of the region's culture and heritage. Though modern influences have brought changes, these traditional crafts still survive, and efforts are being made to pass them on to future generations. With proper support, training, and market expansion, these industries can flourish further and continue to preserve the district's rich cultural identity.



**Kamarpara Hut**



**Shibbari Hut**



**Sorai Hut, Buniadpur**



**Paddy Market, Fulbari, South Dinajpur**



**Handloom Industries, Gangaraqmpur, South Dinajpur**

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The markets and small-scale industries of Dakshin Dinajpur district are important parts of its economy. They contribute not only to economic development but also to the social and cultural growth of the district. Proper government support, better transportation, and the use of modern technology can further improve the condition of markets and industries in the district.

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