

Identifying Railway Hawkers In The Informal Sector: A Study On The Railway Hawkers Of Northeast India

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Abstract: The study is conducted with a view to explore a vulnerable class of micro entrepreneur in informal sector. Railway hawkers are popular in Indian railway routes, a considerable population of the individuals involved in the unorganized trade find a way for their living through vending on a running train. Until now, the railway hawkers of Northeast India has never been investigated academically and no distinctive study has been made specifically targeting this resilient class of traders. The intention of this study is to recognize the chief function routes where these unorganized vendors/railway hawkers work in Northeast India and to get a socio-economic and demographic distribution of the sample population. In an attempt to explore the similar, we position our study to understand the correlation between the different variables under consideration and to indicate the different aspects associated with business such as duration of engagement, category of items, procurement sources, and storage, work hour distribution.

Index Terms: railway hawkers, informal sector, livelihood, marginalized, northeast

1. INTRODUCTION

IN INDIA A MAJOR WORKFORCE OF THE INFORMAL SEGMENT IS ENGAGED IN UNORGANIZED HAWKING DUE TO LACK OF AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE RECOGNIZED SECTOR (NATIONAL STATISTICAL COMMISSION, 2012). THE EVER GROWING COMPETITION, DEARTH OF RESOURCES WITH INCREASED MARKET OPPORTUNITIES AND THE EXPLODING POPULATION HAS LED TO EMERGENCE OF AN INFORMAL ECONOMY WHICH RUNS PARALLEL IN THE ECONOMIC FABRIC OF THE NATION. EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT CAME UP WITH A VARIETY OF STEPS FOR AN COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN THE MOST RECENT DECADE, YET THEY ARE UNABLE TO RESPOND TO THE MARGINALIZED SECTION IN A LARGELY HELPFUL MANNER. FOR AN INSTANCE THE OFFICIAL COUNTS FOR RAILWAY HAWKERS IN THE COUNTRY IS YET TO BE DONE WHEREAS MANY OF THE MAJOR CITIES AND TOWNS ALONG WITH MAJOR RAILWAY ROUTES ACT AS THE WORKING GROUND FOR THESE RAILWAY HAWKERS. EVERY SELF OR HOUSEHOLD OWNED ENTERPRISE WHO ARE INDIGENOUSLY OCCUPIED IN THE MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION AND SALE OF MERCHANDISE AND SERVICES WITH LESS THAN TEN LABOUR ARE TO BE REFERRED UNDER THE INFORMAL SECTOR CATEGORY (NCEUS, 2005). SUBSEQUENTLY, STATING THAT UNORGANIZED WORKERS CONSIST OF THOSE FUNCTIONING IN THE ECONOMY UNDER THE SHADOW UNLIKE REGULAR WAGE EARNERS WHO ARE DEVOID FROM SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS AND EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE IN ANY FORM. A UNIT LEVEL SURVEY BY NATIONAL STATISTICAL SURVEY ORGANIZATION (NSSO) SHOWING THE DECADAL GROWTH FROM CENSUS 2001 TO 2011 SUGGESTS THAT AMIDST THE UNORGANIZED SECTOR CASUALLY EMPLOYED AUGMENTED FROM 426.20 MILLION TO 435.66 MILLION FOR THAT PERIOD, HENCE THE TREND SUGGEST IT IS YET INCREASING (SRIJA & SHIRKE, 2014..

2. NEED OF THE STUDY:

Considering the description stated above it can be drawn that railway hawkers per se belong to the informal sector of the economy. However, there are no published sources which give an account of the number of railway hawkers operating in the economy neither any considerable report showing their contribution in the mainstream economy. The railway hawkers serve the general population while being resourceful in every possible by means of providing essential supplies during a travel time. In that context we may refer to this phenomenon as a moving market, where an eco-system evolves with a community of buyers supporting the business and a community of sellers who serves them to co-exist.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

India has its inherited problem of poverty which is obviously due to the ever expanding population. In the recent decades the nation witnessed rapid growth in the relocation of rural dwellers in the direction of cities in hunt of better opportunities and lucrative employment. They are generally low skilled with negligible to no educational background but their urge to earn brings them out of their dwellings. They usually place themselves in daily wage works and temporal earning ways. They sometimes occupy spaces in pavements, public/private spaces to engage in some business, in essay they are termed as street hawkers/vendors (Bhowmik, 2005). It is to be noted that such informal businesses serve the general population and hence serve the society at large. Roughly in metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Kolkata had roughly 2.5 lakh street hawkers each and cities like Ahmedabad and Patna bears 80,000 street hawkers (Bhowmik, 2003). Female hawkers were seen selling relatively lesser quantity of supplies than those sold by men, consequently earning less (Bhowmik, 2010). The studies from school of structuralism argue that informal sectors economic dynamism becomes distinct in the times of structural adjustment, recession or excessive regulation. In such situations, the entrepreneurial activities of the unorganized sector are considered not so marginalized rather an alternative, ever evolving informal source of jobs and income and a driver of economic growth (ILO, 2002; Rakowski, 1994; World Bank, 1989). There is an assertion regarding such informal alternate sources of jobs and if incomes are not tackled with care than its economic potential

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will be wasted with the inherent weakness dwelling in the shadow such as low returns, stumpy output, and inadequate skills and expertise. They suggest intervention of the state in a progressive manner with an aim to engage higher productivity and proper access to resources such as capital and finance (Meagher, 1995). There have been contradictory views as well regarding the structuralism point of view of looking at the informal sector. It has been argued that in the developing countries informal economic activities even in case of entrepreneurial manner are mostly associated to marginal behaviour and meagre endurance of the economically struggling class (Nigam, Lubell, Fashoyin; 1987; 1991; 1993). Whereas, some are also of the view that the believe on the existence of informal entrepreneurial dynamism is far from real, and these informal entrepreneurs constitute of a population who are unprotected from social security, who are engaged in survival strategies to overcome their daily struggles for living and most the time exploited by variables such as local authorities and regulations along with connivance of the state (Birkbeck, 1979; Lomnitz, 1982). And then there are those who go further to contradict to structuralism claiming that many developing countries, state policies create an environment that encourage the emergence of this informally self-employed class (Leonard, 2000). The arguments indicate that informal sector is viewed as the by-product of the states inability to provide enough opportunities in the mainstream formal sector (Debrah, 2007). Interestingly, as the budding economies is incapable to incorporate this on hand informal work force, consequently the less opportune class find alternate ways of earning and to occupy themselves for avoiding unemployment (Connolly, 1985). Conclusively stated by Weiss (1987) that; informal economic activity usually rises out of the necessities of the marginalized sector of the populace to circumvent inadequacy of the state to provide gainful job opportunities. Although, both marginalism and structuralism has separate set of views regarding the composition and constitution of the informal sector; it has been observed that both agreed upon one basic aspect which arises out of the discussion namely necessity of the economically unsound classes. So, our study explores the composition of the work force engaged in the occupation of railway hawking in the Northeast region of India who are engaged in informal economic activities.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the gender and age distribution in the route
- To explore different variables related to the railway hawking trade
- To identify the categories of items sold by the railway hawkers and their source of procurement

5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is directed to understand the gender age distribution of the railway hawkers in the northeast region of Indian railway route. Alongside we shall try to explore the sources of procurement of the items sold and categorize the items accordingly. It is an attempt to understand the railway hawking from various perspectives.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Considering the probable extent of implication of the outcomes from this study, the geographical area considered is small.

Moreover, the population size is also unknown which poses as a challenge in contemplating the impact of the study. There is hardly any concrete source of literature regarding the railway hawkers in the mainstream academia.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study population consisted of unregistered rail hawkers on the major rail routes of Northeast Frontier Railway who occupy public spaces in stations and running trains. The study population consists of 192(approx.) unregistered hawkers who are engaged in rail hawking. A survey was conducted on the route of Guwahati to Dibrugarh, Guwahati to New Jalpaiguri and Badarpur to Lumding for the purpose of this study. The choice of route was purposively considering the density and concentration of hawkers. The local authorities and station police out post were consulted before conducting the survey.

7.1 Sampling method for quantitative survey

A probability sampling technique was adapted for the survey with a multi stage sampling. First stage was to identify the routes, second was to identify the respondents willing to respond to the survey and thirdly, the most crucial was to select key informants who would provide authentic information regarding the research questions..

7.2 Data collection methods

Data gathering for the study was administered via structured questionnaire. Group discussions were initiated and subsequently, interviews with a small number of informants were held to obtain a distinct depiction concerning the investigation under consideration.

7.3 Data analysis methods

The study engaged IBM SPSS 23(Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for analyzing the collected data. The study used data triangulation, which involve different method of data collection as well as data analysis (Cresswell,2007). The qualitative information gathered from FGDs and Interviews were transcribed into a sheet. Further, quantitative data collected from questionnaire were mostly categorical and nominal in nature that describes the various variables tested in the field. Descriptive analysis such as frequency percentages

and a non- parametric chi square test was carried out considering the data set.

8.0 Findings and Discussion:

Table 1: Gender and Age Distribution within the routes

Gender	Age	Route			Total
		Dibrugarh To Guwahati Route 1	Guwahati To New Jalpaiguri Route 2	Badarpur To Lumding Route 3	
Male	Below 25	12 7.1%	36 21.3%	18 10.7%	66 39.1%
	25-50	13 7.7%	44 26.0%	17 10.1%	74 43.8%
	Above 50	-	26 15.4%	3 1.8%	29 17.2%
	Total of Male	25 14.8%	106 62.7%	38 22.5%	169 100.0%
Female	Below 25	-	4 17.4%	1 4.3%	5 21.7%
	25-50	7 30.4%	3 13.0%	-	10 43.5%
	Above 50	-	6 26.1%	2 8.7%	8 34.8%
	Total of Female	7 30.4%	13 56.5%	3 13.0%	23 100.0%
Overall Total		32 16.7%	119 62.0%	41 21.4%	192 100.0%

Source: Survey June, 2019

Table 2: Place of origin and Household conditions

Place		Household			Total
		Self Owned	Rented	Roadside Shelter/Slum	
Place	Local	146 76.0%	1 .5%	2 1.0%	149 77.6%
	Migrated	-	7 3.6%	17 8.9%	24 12.5%
	Would Not Reveal	7 3.6%	6 3.1%	6 3.1%	19 9.9%
Total		153 79.7%	14 7.3%	25 13.0%	192 100.0%

Table 3: Main occupation and working hours

		Working hours			Total
		less than 4 hours	4-8 hours	above 8 hours	
Main occupation	Yes	55 28.6%	88 45.8%	20 10.4%	163 84.9%
	No	10 5.2%	17 8.9%	2 1.0%	29 15.1%
Total		65 33.9%	105 54.7%	22 11.5%	192 100.0%

Source: Survey, June 2019

The sample size consisted of 192 (100 percent) railwayhawkers operating in the different routes of Northeast in which 16.7 per cent were found to be working on Dibrugarh to Guwahati route where as in the route of Guwahati to New Jalpaiguri 62 percent out of total hawkers operate and 41 percent of the railway hawkers out of the sample population works in Badarpur to Lumding route (see table 1). The selection of route was invariably done on the idea of availability and density of the hawkers. It is prominent in the table that a passenger on the route 1 may experience less number of hawkers compared to the others. While, route 2 had the highest density of hawkers; it is because the frequency of trains running along this route is considerably high. Individuals within the age group of 25-50 were in abundance which can be interpreted as to a capable work force is engaged in this informal trade. The hawkers having a self owned house are mostly from the local areas nearby the major junctions and railway routes.

Whereas, there are considerable number of migrated individuals who chose railway hawking over other informal trade still live in undesirable conditions (See table 2). Few of the hawkers (9.9 per cent) seemed reluctant to disclose about their origin. We may interpret this dataset in a manner that despite of unfavourable living conditions these hawkers choose to trade on trains which may be driven by another factor; that is proximity of their dwellings from the business area.

Source: Survey June, 2019

The subjects with railway hawking as their main occupation have been observed to spend 4-8 hours in the business. Whereas, subjects who didn't consider railway hawking to be their primary occupation spent variedly with 1 percent even engaged for more than 8 hours. However, irrespective of the occupation choice, most of the hawkers were found to be spending in an average 4-8 hours for their business 105(54.7 percent) with 33.9 per cent working less than 4 hours and 11.5 percent working 8 hours and above (see table 3). The given data set provides information regarding the subjects spent years in the business and average monthly income. Amongst the subjects 64.6 per cent engaged in business have an experience below 10 years whereas 31.8 per cent having 10-20 years of experience and merely 3.6 per cent could continue with the business for more than 20 years. It is interesting to observe that the concentration of hawkers is more who have below 10 years of experience despite of less than 4000 rupees income as because it is suspected that the 15.10 per cent (see table 3) who didn't consider railway hawking to be their primary occupation certainly falls under the counts of this table 4. On the other hand hawkers earning above 8000 rupees monthly income and 20 years above experience is low in 1.6 per cent

Table 4: Duration engaged in Railway Hawking and average monthly income

Duration engaged	Average monthly income			Total
	less than 4000	4000-8000	above 8000	
below 10 years	81	36	7	124
	42.2%	18.8%	3.6%	64.6%
10-20 years	21	17	23	61
	10.9%	8.9%	12.0%	31.8%
above 20 years	3	1	3	7
	1.6%	.5%	1.6%	3.6%
Total	105	54	33	192
	54.7%	28.1%	17.2%	100.0%

Source: Survey, June 2019

of the total sample population as because it was indicated by the respondents that after certain age the physical involvement demanded by the trade could not be met by many of the individuals. It can be derived from the data set that, many consider railway hawking to be a temporal form of occupation and hence arrange some alternate sources of earnings

Table 5: Items sold by hawkers

Items	Frequency	Per cent
1. Packed	57	29.7
2. Unpacked	68	35.4
3. Crafts	20	10.4
4. Utility Items	21	10.9
5. Books/Magazines	23	12.0
6. Illegitimate Items	3	1.6
Total	192	100.0

Source: Survey, June 2019

The items sold by the hawkers in the Table 5 have been categorized by authors into group of items on the basis of nature of the items. The packed items consist of packed drinking water, biscuits, chips, cold drinks, nuts etc. Any edible items which are sealed are listed in the packed list and it can be observed that a considerable number of hawkers (29.7 per cent) sell these items. Similarly, the unpacked category consists of items that are not sold with a sealed pack such as boiled eggs, boiled chickpeas, fruits, sweets, vegetables etc. And most of the railway hawkers were observed to be selling these unpacked items. Again, crafts consist of the wooden items, handmade articles, cloths, plastic toys etc. with 10.4 per cent of the hawkers selling these items and mostly in route 2 i.e, Guwahati to New Jalpaiguri (refer table) with 9.4 per cent (see table). A number of hawkers (10.9 per cent) selling utility items usually carry along combs, key chains, locks, tool kit, wrist watch, and torch lights, wallet etc. Books, magazines and news paper are popular amongst daily commuters and a handful of hawkers were observed selling these items. Lastly, some hawkers choose to trade some illegitimate items which consist of chewable tobacco, cigarette, and pan masala with tobacco etc. It can be taken from the table that a railway hawker selling packed item generally buys on daily basis from various sources whereas majority of unpacked items are purchased on weekly basis such as eggs and chick peas. The craft and utility items are bought both quarterly basis and on monthly basis. As the items are non perishable, they are generally stored and taken out for sale until the prevailing stock is exhausted.

Table 6: Items purchase frequency of hawkers

Items	Purchase Frequency In %				Total
	Daily Basis	Weekly Basis	Monthly Basis	Quarterly Basis	
1. Packed	17.2%	3.6%	8.9%	-	29.7%
2. Unpacked	13.5%	16.7%	5.2%	-	35.4%
3. Crafts	-	-	4.7%	5.7%	10.4%
4. Utility Items	-	-	8.3%	2.6%	10.9%
5. Books/Mags	6.3%	2.1%	1.6%	2.1%	12.0%
6. Illegitimate Items	-	-	1.6%	-	1.6%
Total	37.0%	22.4%	30.2%	10.4%	100.0%

Source: Survey, June 2019

The source of procurement for most of the hawkers was found to be from retailers and whole sellers (78 per cent and 77 per cent). The 6.8 per cent of the home bound supplies consists of vegetables, fruits and boiled chickpeas under the unpacked items category 2.1 per cent of crafts were indigenously prepared cloths, toys, under the craft items category. The illegitimate items which are not legal to be sold at open were found to be bought from retailer by the hawkers under consideration. They indicated that it is bought from the nearby retailers as because their goods are prone to be confiscated at any moment during their business by the authorities. Hence, with a limited stock they operate which are usually bought from the retailer.

Table 7: Items and their procurement source

Items	Procure				Total
	Retailer	Whole Seller	Daily Haat	Home Bound	
Packed	39	15	3	-	57
	20.3%	7.8%	1.6%	-	29.7%
Unpacked	24	14	21	9	68
	12.5%	7.3%	10.9%	4.7%	35.4%
Crafts	-	16	-	4	20
	-	8.3%	-	2.1%	10.4%
Utility Items	10	11	-	-	21
	5.2%	5.7%	-	-	10.9%
Books/Mags	2	21	-	-	23
	1.0%	10.9%	-	-	12.0%
Illegitimate Items	3	-	-	-	3
	1.6%	-	-	-	1.6%
Total	78	77	24	13	192
	40.6%	40.1%	12.5%	6.8%	100.0%

Source: Survey, June 2019

Table 8: Sale every hour and work hour distribution

Work hours		Less Than 8 Hours	8-12 Hours	Above 12 Hours	Total
Customers per hour					
Less Than 10 Customers	43	34	2	79	
	22.4%	17.7%	1.0%	41.1%	
10-20 Customers	20	64	12	96	
	10.4%	33.3%	6.3%	50.0%	
Above 20 Customers	2	7	8	17	
	1.0%	3.6%	4.2%	8.9%	
Total	65	105	22	192	
	33.9%	54.7%	11.5%	100.0%	

Source: Survey, June 2019

Sale every hour and work hours has shown a considerable positive correlation (0.432) with higher significance level (0.00). And from the statistics we can understand that a majority of the hawkers who work for 8-12 hours a day can achieve a level of 10-20 clientele per hour. Whereas, 22.4 per cent of the hawkers who work less than 8 hours has indicated to have sales of less than 10 customers per hour. Although, the working hours vary as per routes and trains running on these specific routes. The distribution has been created as per the preliminary survey done earlier this year. It is created to understand the motivation of the hawkers which is to sell to the passengers and carry along throughout the day spending man hours for earning their living.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The railway hawkers comprise a substantial portion of the unorganized sector in Northeast railway routes. Many of these hawkers at several instances made attempts with an organized manner to approach the concerned authorities with their union and political leaders of their constituencies to deal with an aspiration to seek help for recognizing the trade. But eventually, as the government changes they face new challenges and all the effort put on previously goes in vain. From the management perspective, it is evident that the hawkers operating in their respective trades are highly resilient. It is astonishing to find that many migrated also find their way of living out this unorganized means of trade. It is just like and parallel yet undercover class of entrepreneurs who struggle daily on their way to earn a decent living. The motivation behind this trade was found to be the number of customers available on daily basis which is again inevitable. One of the railway hawker was found saying and I quote "As long as there will be passengers demands, we will be there". It is a high time that local governments and policy makers should address these marginalized classes of traders. However, it is also understandable that merely due to the vastness of Indian economy the governments are yet to respond to these sections of the informal trade.

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