

Shadowy Industrialists: Emptying the Encounters of Street Vendors in the Delhi Metropolitan Area

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Abstract:

Street vending plays a significant role in India's urban economy, providing employment and livelihoods to millions. However, street vendors in Delhi face several challenges due to a lack of legal recognition, restricted access to public spaces and infrastructure, and social stigma. This qualitative study aims to explore the difficulties experienced by these "invisible entrepreneurs" who exist on the fringes of the formal economy. The paper identifies key challenges such as legal recognition, access to public space, infrastructure, and social stigma, while also investigating the coping strategies used by vendors to navigate these challenges. The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations for policies that can support the livelihoods and well-being of street vendors, contributing to a better understanding of the informal economy's role in urban development. Street vendors are not merely a source of convenience; they are economic powerhouses, acting as micro-entrepreneurs at heart, creating jobs, stimulating local economies, attracting tourists, promoting social inclusion, and preserving cultural heritage. They are the pulse of our cities. Such people create an economic environment & a supportive attitude towards country, society & common man. Their thinking is always positive towards the nation & always keen to upgrade the economic development of country. In this paper vendors of Delhi NCR are specially focused with reference to their lifestyle, social cultural & psychological development. The writer is very much concerned about family status, kids education, relation in society & a positive bonding of the vendors in Delhi NCR.

Keywords: Street vending, Poverty, Employment, Informal employment, Infrastructure, Social stigma, Metropolitan

Introduction:

Street vending is a crucial aspect of India's urban economy, offering employment and livelihood opportunities to millions. In Delhi, street vendors operate across various sectors, including food, clothing, and household goods, making a significant contribution to the informal economy. However, this occupation is often informal, irregular, and lacks legal recognition, leading to challenges in accessing public spaces, infrastructure, and services. Understanding these challenges is essential, given the importance of street vending for the livelihoods of many in Delhi. This research paper aims to unpack the challenges faced by street vendors in the Delhi metropolitan area, focusing on the experiences of these "invisible entrepreneurs" who operate on the margins of the formal economy.

Street vending is an informal sector activity that provides a livelihood for millions of people across the world. Street vendors are small-scale entrepreneurs who sell goods and services on the streets, sidewalks, and other public spaces. The roles of street vendors in society are multifaceted, and they play an essential role in the economy, community, and urban development. Government provides Solution to women street vendors and helping women street vendors. In this Blog, we will discuss the various roles of street vendors in society.

The writer was inspired by a story of street vendor to write this research paper.

The 1961 Bollywood movie Tel Malish Boot Polish, in a classic song "Ek Ana Boot Polish, Do Ana Tel Malish," summed up the hardships faced by the street vendor in trying to eke out a living. In the song, the vendor charged an 'ana' for polishing

shoes and two for a hair massage at his footpath shop in Mumbai. He was proud that he neither stole nor begged but worked hard to earn a living. Yet, the world would not allow him to live in peace.

- **Economic Role**

Street vendors play a vital role in the economy, especially in developing countries. They provide goods and services that are affordable and accessible to low-income consumers who cannot afford to shop in formal retail stores. Street vending is also an essential source of income for many low-skilled workers who are unable to secure formal employment. Street vendors provide a diverse range of goods and services, including food, clothing, electronics, and household items. Street vendors also contribute to the local economy by generating income and creating employment opportunities. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), street vending provides employment for around 100 million people globally. This sector contributes to the growth of the informal economy, which is estimated to account for between 25% and 40% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in developing countries. In some countries, street vending has become a significant source of tax revenue for the government.

- **Social Role**

Street vendors play a crucial role in building and maintaining social relationships in communities. They provide a space for social interactions, allowing people from different social classes and backgrounds to come together. Street vendors often develop close relationships with their customers, and their businesses become community landmarks. Street vending creates a sense of community, providing a space for people to gather and share experiences. Pushcart vendors also provide a social safety net for vulnerable groups, including low-income families and the homeless. They often provide free or subsidized goods and services to these groups, helping them to meet their basic needs. Street vendors are also known to donate to charity and participate in community development projects.

- **Environmental Role**

Street vending can also play a role in promoting environmental sustainability. Street vendors often sell locally sourced, seasonal, and organic products, which are better for the environment than products produced by large corporations. They also help to reduce food waste by selling produce that would otherwise go to waste. Street vendors in India during covid promotes the use of public transportation and reduces the need for private cars, which contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Street vendors can also contribute to urban greening by creating green spaces in areas where there are few or no parks. They can set up stalls and sell plants and flowers, helping to improve the aesthetics of the urban environment.

- **Political Role**

Street vending has become a political issue in many countries, with vendors often facing harassment and eviction by local authorities. Street vendors have formed associations and unions to defend their rights and advocate for their interests. These organizations have become important political actors, lobbying for legal recognition, protection, and the right to operate without harassment. Street vendors have also become an important force in shaping urban policies. In some cases, they have successfully advocated for policies that support the development of street vending, such as the creation of designated vending zones. Street vendors have also advocated for policies that promote their social and economic rights, such as access to credit, training, and social protection.

- **Cultural Role**

Street vending can also play a role in preserving cultural traditions and promoting diversity. Street vendors often sell traditional and ethnic foods and crafts, which help to preserve cultural heritage. They also promote cultural exchange by bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds. Solutions for street vendors also contribute to the cultural vibrancy of cities. They add color, sound, and activity to urban environments, making them more attractive to visitors and residents alike. Street vending can also promote cultural tourism by providing visitors with an authentic local experience.

Street Vendors - Rights and Duties:

WHAT THE LAW SAYS:

The Street Vendors Act, 2014 defines a 'street vendor' as "a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items, or merchandise of everyday use, or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, sidewalk, footpath, pavement, public park, or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built up structure or by moving from place to place, and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous terms which may be local or region specific".

The Act identifies two categories of vendors, stationary and mobile vendors. "Stationery vendors" are defined as street vendors who carry out vending activities regularly at a specific location and mobile vendors as street vendors who carry out vending activities in designated areas by moving from one place to another place vending their goods and services.

CPPR'S COMMENT:

The street sellers provide vital services that must not be overlooked. They serve as an efficient and effective distribution channel between producers and consumers, delivering goods to one's doorstep at significantly lower prices than those in traditional markets. Their presence assures a more comprehensive range of options at reasonable rates and increased convenience for the average person. Given the low capital investment and mobility, street vending is an effective way of catering to seasonal and sporadic demands.

The definition of street vendor is broad but vague. The implementation of street vending law focuses only on the existing vendors who sell their products and services on the city's streets, within the limits of their jurisdiction. However, some mobile vendors sell their products at railway stations and on trains and those who sell products at door steps. Though the more significant definition of street vendor under the Act covers every vendor who vends in private or public places, the definition of mobile vendor narrows down the definition to those who carry out vending activities in designated areas by moving from one place to another place. However, the survey mandated under the Street vending Act 2014, by the local self governments does not cover the above categories as they are outside the municipal jurisdictions.

As part of preparing a draft street vending plan for Alappuzha Municipality and a relocation plan for Kochi Municipal Corporation by CPPR, the team visited both places to understand the existing conditions of Street vending. The field survey to districts of Alappuzha and Cochin in Kerala shows that there are instances where the fishermen sell the daily catch on the road sides of these coastal districts of Kerala. However, the local governments are not identifying them as street vendors. The local authorities cited practical difficulties in providing vending licences to the fishermen for two reasons. First, they do not sell regularly and second, it is not the same fisherman who sells regularly. Thus, they cannot get the rights guaranteed to a street vendor.

Further, some businesses adopt street vending models for their shops, with temporary structures eg. Chaiwallah which is a chain of tea vending spread over different cities in Kerala. While a plain reading of the definition of street vendors includes them, the other criteria to qualify as a street vendor in the Street Vending Act and Rules disqualify them from being regulated under the law. Chaiwallah operates on a franchise model that is not accepted under the street vending law, that previews street vending as an essential primary livelihood option. There is a gap in which law regulates these businesses that adopt street vending characteristics.

Moreover, street vending is commonly seen in urban and semi-urban areas of India. However, there are vendors in rural areas that come under the jurisdiction of panchayats. However, the Act defines local authority as Municipal Corporation, Municipality, or Nagar Panchayat or any Civil authority appointed to provide civic services and regulate street vending. It also includes the "planning authority" which regulates the land use in the city or town." Thus, even when the Act gives a broad definition to street vendors, it seems the Act's provisions and rules and schemes apply only to those vendors who sell on the streets under their municipal jurisdiction. No power is given to the local authority to bring in a region-based definition.

Literature Review:

The body of literature on street vending in India, particularly in Delhi, has grown, emphasizing its importance as a key income source in urban areas and highlighting the daily challenges vendors face, such as limited access to public spaces and administrative systems that do not recognize their legitimacy. Studies, such as those by Lahiri-Dutt and Chen (2015), reveal significant difficulties street vendors face in accessing basic infrastructure and services, such as water and sanitation facilities, while others like Kundu and Basu (2016) discuss issues of harassment and eviction, particularly by civil authorities. The literature also points out challenges faced by vendors in other Indian cities, such as Bangalore and Chennai, further emphasizing the common struggles of these informal workers across urban India.

Hypothetical Structures & Theories:

The scholarly work on street vending and informal employment in India employs various theoretical frameworks to understand the informal economy and the difficulties faced by informal workers. One prominent concept is the "informal sector," which refers to economic activities not regulated or protected by the state. Another is the concept of "livelihoods," referring to the means by which people acquire life's necessities, such as food, shelter, and clothing. Street vending literature also utilizes concepts like familiarity, exclusion, and empowerment to explore vendors' experiences. For instance, Roy and Sarker (2015) argue that while street vending in India is familiar, the lack of legal recognition leads to exclusion and vulnerability for vendors.

Ancient Environment & Evolution of Street Vendors in Delhi:

Street vending has a long history in Delhi, dating back centuries when traders and merchants would visit homes to sell various goods. Over time, this practice evolved into a large informal sector, providing employment and income opportunities for thousands of people. Today, street vendors are a common sight across Delhi, occupying pavements, walkways, and other public spaces, yet operating within a largely unregulated and informal economy.

Different Kinds of Street Vendors:

Delhi hosts a diverse range of street vendors, offering a wide array of goods and services, from food and fresh produce to clothing and accessories. Popular types of vendors include toy sellers, book and stationery vendors, and mobile repair companies. Food vendors, offering snacks like chaat, chole bhature, and momos, are particularly prominent. These vendors cater to various groups, including low-income households, migrant workers, students, and tourists, contributing significantly to the local economy and society. Despite their contributions, street vendors in Delhi face numerous challenges that threaten their ability to sustain their livelihoods.

Challenges Confronted by Street Vendors:

Street vendors in Delhi face several significant challenges, including:

1. **Access to Public Space and Infrastructure:** Most street vendors operate in unauthorized areas, making it difficult to access basic facilities like water, electricity, and waste disposal.
2. **Harassment and Eviction by Authorities:** Vendors often face harassment and eviction by police and municipal authorities, leading to an unstable and uncertain working environment.
3. **Social Stigma and Discrimination:** Street vending is often seen as a low-status occupation, resulting in social stigma and discrimination. This stigma limits vendors' access to credit, social services, and other forms of support.
4. **Competition from Formal Retailers:** Formal retailers, who can offer goods at lower prices due to economies of scale, pose stiff competition, forcing street vendors to lower their prices, which impacts their profit margins.
5. **Lack of Legal Recognition:** Despite the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, many vendors remain unregistered and vulnerable to eviction and harassment.
6. **Lack of Access to Credit:** Due to insufficient documentation and collateral, street vendors often struggle to secure loans from formal financial institutions, limiting their ability to grow their businesses.

7. Health and Safety Risks: Street vending in crowded areas with inadequate sanitation infrastructure poses significant health and safety risks.

8. Gender-Based Violence: Female Street vendors are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and harassment, lacking access to secure vending locations.

Coping Strategies and Resilience of Street Vendors:

Despite these challenges, Delhi's street vendors have developed coping strategies and resilience to sustain their livelihoods. These include:

1. Negotiating with Authorities and Stakeholders: Vendors often form groups or cooperatives to negotiate with authorities and protect their rights.
2. Collective Action and Mobilization: Vendors frequently unite to defend their rights and interests, forming unions, self-help groups, and other organizations.
3. Alternative Livelihood Strategies: To diversify their income and reduce dependency on vending, some vendors engage in seasonal agricultural work or part-time jobs.
4. Resilience Strategies: Vendors demonstrate resilience by adapting to changing circumstances, using innovative strategies like mobile vending, social media marketing, and e-commerce to reach customers and expand their businesses.

Social and Cultural Dimensions of Street Vending:

Social and cultural factors, such as gender, caste, and ethnicity, play a significant role in shaping the experiences of street vendors in Delhi. Women vendors, for example, face additional challenges related to safety and social norms. Vendors also rely on social networks and support systems, forming connections with other vendors and community members to share resources and support. Additionally, street vending is often linked to cultural practices and traditions, with certain foods and snacks associated with specific communities or regions.

Policy and Regulatory Frameworks for Street Vending:

Effective policy and regulatory frameworks are essential for addressing the challenges faced by street vendors and creating a supportive environment for their livelihoods. While existing policies like the Street Vendors Act, 2014, aim to protect vendors' rights, they often fall short in addressing issues such as harassment, access to infrastructure, and competition from formal retailers. Further research and analysis are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies and develop more accommodating laws and regulations.

Conclusion:

Street vendors in Delhi face a complex array of challenges, including access to public spaces, harassment by authorities, social stigma, and competition from formal retailers. Despite these challenges, vendors display remarkable resilience and have developed coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods. The social and cultural dimensions of street vending, such as the roles of caste, ethnicity, and gender, significantly influence vendors' experiences. Current policies and regulations are inadequate and fail to fully support the needs and interests of street vendors. Revising and updating these frameworks is necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for street vending.

The study highlights the need for policies that protect vendors' legal rights, facilitate access to public spaces and infrastructure, and provide opportunities for them to compete with formal retailers. Recommendations include designating specific areas for vending, streamlining the licensing process, and providing social security and financial support to vendors. These measures can improve street vendors' livelihoods and overall well-being. Future research should focus on assessing the impact of these policies and exploring potential collaborations between street vendors and formal retailers.

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