

Socio-Economic Status of Male Bhaja Seller in Bettiah City, (Bihar) India

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Background: Street vendors are a crucial component of the informal economy in urban areas, representing a substantial share of the overall informal sector workforce. These vendors play a key role in providing affordable goods and services to urban populations, often filling gaps left by formal retail sectors.
Received: 2024/03/23	Objectives: This research is focused specifically on bhaja sellers in Bettiah City to determine their socioeconomic status. Bhaja sellers occupy a significant niche within the broader community of street vendors, contributing not just economically but also culturally to the urban fabric.
Accepted: 2024/09/24	Methodology: The study draws on primary data obtained through direct interviews with bhaja sellers, offering insight into their lives and work.
pp: 23-32	Results: The research reveals that bhaja selling is a male-dominated occupation, with all observed participants being men. These vendors, much like others in the street vending sector, face considerable challenges in their work.
Keywords: Bhaja Seller; Socio-Economic; Street Vending; Bettiah; Bihar.	Conclusion: The majority of respondents expressed that bhaja selling, while a necessary means of livelihood, is a demanding and strenuous occupation, akin to the broader challenges faced by street vendors in maintaining their daily operations amidst various socioeconomic pressures.



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1. INTRODUCTION

India has a variety of street vending activities. Bhaja selling is a popular street vending activity in India. This study focusses on those who sell Bhaja. Bhaja-sellers, like other street vendors, sell their product from one location to another. As a result, we divide Bhaja sellers into three categories based on their working style: mobile sellers, stationary sellers, and multipoint sellers. Bhaja sellers meticulously arrange all Bhaja ingredients on their Thella. Bhaja-sellers use a variety of ingredients to make the bhaja, including Bhuja (Lai), grams, mustard oil,

pickle, green chilli, onion, boiled potato, tomato, namkeen, and others. This is referred to as 'Bhaja' in the local dialect, but it is also known as 'Jhalmudi', "Bhel," and other names throughout the country.

However, street vending is a worldwide phenomenon and the most visible example of informal segmentation in any industry within India. As a result, a lot of people engage in street vending because it is characterised by low-income levels, ease of entry, unskilled knowledge, and self-employment. Millions of people make a living by selling a variety of goods and services on the streets of developing nations like India. The perspective of

street vendors on the socio-political landscape is not only captivating, but it also demonstrates how various forces regulate their social life and livelihood on the street. Therefore, it indicates that not only uneducated people are engaged in these types of occupations; sometimes some educated people or individuals also choose this occupation.

According to the National Policy of Urban Street vendors, 2004 by Govt. of India, Street vendors defined as "A street vendor is broadly defined as a person who offers goods for sale to the public without having a permanent built-up structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (or head load). Street vendors may be stationary by occupying space on the pavements or other public/private areas, or may be mobile in the sense that they move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts or in cycles or baskets on their heads, or may sell their wares in moving trains, bus etc. In this policy document, the term urban vendor is inclusive of both traders and service providers, stationary as well as mobile vendors and incorporates all other local/region specific terms used to describe them, such as hawker, pheriwalla, rehri-patriwalla, footpath dukandars, sidewalk traders etc."

Conceptually, street vendors are one of the important components of the urban informal economy, representing a significant portion of employment in this sector. Despite their importance, they face numerous challenges and discrimination from local government and urban policies. As a visible aspect of the informal economy, street vendors provide easy access to a variety of goods and services, yet they are often characterized by low incomes. Millions worldwide rely on street vending for their livelihoods, contributing to job creation and income generation for the poor. These vendors typically remain mobile, carrying their goods in pushcarts or baskets, although they can become stationary when occupying public spaces. Many street vendors struggle to secure formal employment due to socio-economic factors, often starting their businesses with minimal investment. They deliver essential products for daily consumption, such as fruits, vegetables, and milk, making their presence crucial, especially in regions like Bihar and Bettiah, where formal job opportunities are limited.

Street and Road side vending is an economic activity and it consists of a large percentage of rural and urban dwellers in developing countries. There has been continuous growth of road side vendors not only in India but also in the entire world. These roadside vendors are characterized by low-income group. Street vending is one of the important income and employment source and it provide good and service to poor at affordable price and convenient to urban poor population in town and cities.

The current investigation specifically focuses on the socio-economic status of Bhaja sellers, who constitute

an essential segment of street vendors. While numerous studies have explored the circumstances of street vendors nationwide, this study distinguishes itself through its examination of relevant literature.

Street vending plays a crucial role in the urban economy, particularly in developing countries. It provides affordable goods and services to urban populations, especially the lower-income segments, and offers employment opportunities to those who might otherwise struggle to find work in the formal sector. For instance, Cross and Morales (2013) highlight the importance of street vending in cities like Mexico City and Bangkok, where it serves as a significant source of income for many families and contributes to the local economy by offering a variety of goods and services at affordable prices.

Furthermore, Bhowmik (2010) discusses how street vending acts as a buffer in times of economic crises, absorbing labor displaced from formal sectors. In cities like Mumbai, street vendors are estimated to contribute significantly to the local economy, with their aggregate turnover running into millions of dollars annually (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012).

For instance, Nidan's (2010) research on street vendors in Patna revealed that many individuals opt for vending due to a lack of alternative employment opportunities, easy entry, and minimal investment. The study noted a predominant involvement of males (78%), with females encountering challenges such as inadequate facilities and harassment. Prakasham (2013) emphasized the need for legal literacy among vendors to mitigate harassment from municipal and police personnel in Chandigarh. Street vending is not just an economic activity but also a cultural phenomenon. It reflects the cultural diversity and vibrancy of urban spaces. Turner and Schoenberger (2012) note that street vendors often sell culturally specific goods, contributing to the cultural richness of cities. In Hanoi, Vietnam, for example, street food vendors are not only a critical component of the local economy but also a key part of the city's cultural heritage. The socio-cultural importance of street vending is also evident in the way it provides social cohesion and community support. Many street vendors operate within tightly knit networks, providing mutual aid and support (Brown, 2006). This social aspect is crucial for vendors who often face precarious working conditions and insecurity.

Roever and Skinner's (2016) research compiled evidence on urban policies and government practices related to street vending in Ahmedabad, Peru, and Lima, highlighting the adverse impacts of workplace insecurity, harassment, and merchandise confiscation on vendors. Koley and Chakraborty's (2018) study on street vendors near Tatanagar Rail station in Jamshedpur underscored spatial and daily marketing concerns, revealing disparities in living conditions between male and female vendors.

Recchi (2020) conducted a global study on informal street vending practices, developing a theory that explained the sector's dynamics. Dhas (2020) found that while Madurai's street vendors had low education and economic status, they prioritized educating their children. The study recommended interventions for improvement, involving collaboration between vendors, family members, local organizations, NGOs, and the government. Imam (2021) highlighted the unskilled and uneducated background of street vendors in Bodh Gaya, emphasizing the fluctuating income tied to local events. Parmar and Patel's (2022) examination of Vadodara's street vendors uncovered insecure work conditions, including heavy workloads and low earnings. Regulating street vending poses a complex challenge for urban authorities. Many cities struggle to balance the needs and rights of street vendors with urban planning and public space management. In some contexts, street vending is illegal, leading to conflicts between vendors and authorities. For example, in Lagos, Nigeria, street vending is often subject to sporadic crackdowns despite its legality under certain conditions (Bromley, 2000; Shahzada et al, 2024). Several scholars have argued for more inclusive and supportive regulatory frameworks. Roever and Skinner (2016) suggest that integrating street vendors into urban plans can benefit both vendors and the wider community. They advocate for policies that provide secure vending locations, legal recognition, and protection from harassment, which can enhance vendors' livelihoods and the overall urban environment. Despite the wealth of literature on street vendors, there is a notable absence of research on bhaja sellers. Consequently, the present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the socio-economic conditions of bhaja sellers in Bettiah City, offering insights and recommendations to address the challenges they face.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes primary data gathered directly from Bhaja sellers in Bettiah city through semi-structured interviews. A semi structured questionnaire was employed to assess the socio-economic status and the various challenges faced by these sellers. Due to time and budget limitations, as well as the study's focus on a relatively small geographic area, data was collected from a targeted group of 36 Bhaja sellers using purposive sampling. Since most of the bhaja sellers were mobile vendors, we interviewed anyone observed in the study area. This research is descriptive in nature, aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of the conditions faced by Bhaja sellers. To enhance the depth of the study, the researchers not only interviewed sellers on the streets but also conducted field visits to Banuchhappar, a locality where a significant number of Bhaja sellers reside. These visits allowed the

researchers to directly observe their housing and living conditions, adding valuable context to the data collected through interviews (Plate 1 to 3).

2.1. Limitations of Data Collection

- Respondents were hesitant to disclose information regarding income and assets.

2.2. Significance of the study

This study seeks to explore and shed light on the socio-economic conditions of Bhaja sellers in Bettiah City. The findings will offer a clearer understanding of their work environment, challenges, and overall livelihood, which can inform policymakers in the development of effective and efficient policies aimed at improving the well-being of these street vendors. Additionally, the study serves as a valuable resource for future researchers interested in examining the lives of Bhaja sellers. By providing insights into the subsistence strategies of these street vendors, the study also offers critical information that can guide policy formulation and support for this marginalized group.

2.3. Study Area

Bettiah Nagar Parishad, established as a municipality in 1869, serves as the administrative headquarters of the West Champaran District and is located 225 kilometres northwest of Patna. Bettiah holds historical significance as the seat of the 17th-century Bettiah Raj family and was one of the key centres of British administration during their rule in India. The city has a rich cultural heritage and played a pivotal role in India's national movement, notably as the starting point of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement in 1917. The area governed by the Municipal Council spans approximately 8.01 square kilometres, with a population of 132,896 according to the 2011 census, compared to 116,670 in the 2001 census. This results in a population density of 165 persons per hectare in 2011, up from 145 persons per hectare in 2001. In 2022, Bettiah was upgraded to a Nagar Nigam, comprising a total of 46 wards spread over an area of 11.2 square kilometres.

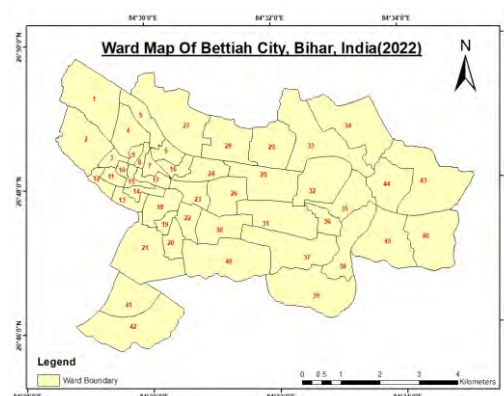


Fig 1. Study area

(Source: Authors, 2025)

3. RESULTS

Table 1. Educational Qualification details of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Educational Qualifications	Percentage
1	Illiterate	69.50
2	Primary	30.50

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Education is a crucial socio-economic indicator that reflects an individual's knowledge and behaviour. In this study, respondents were categorized into four educational levels: illiterate, primary, secondary, and graduate. Among the 36 Bhaja sellers surveyed, 25 are illiterate, while 11 have completed primary schooling. None of the respondents have attained secondary education or a college degree. The analysis reveals that a significant majority of the respondents, 69.50%, are illiterate, while 30.50% have only primary education. This data suggests that street vending, such as Bhaja selling, is predominantly undertaken by individuals with little to no formal education, likely due to their inability to secure employment in the formal sector.

Table 2. Classification of Bhaja-Sellers on the basis of age group

S. No.	Age Group	Percentage
1	18-24	19.50
2	25-34	19.50
3	35-44	22.20
4	45-54	25.00
5	55-64	11.00
6	Above 65	2.80

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

The age distribution of respondents was examined as part of the socioeconomic analysis, with participants categorized into six age groups. The findings show that 19.5% of the respondents were in the 18-24 age group, another 19.5% were in the 25-34 group, and 22.5% fell within the 35-44 age range. The largest proportion, 25%, belonged to the 45-54 age group, followed by 11% in the 55-64 category, and the remaining 2.8% were aged 65 and above. Among the 36 respondents, 4 were aged 55-64, and 1 was over 65, indicating that older individuals are also engaged in Bhaja-selling. Since street vending is a form of self-employment, it offers job opportunities over a longer period. The observation that 39% of vendors were aged 15 to 34 years highlights the significant involvement of younger generations in Bhaja-selling.

Table 3. Classification of Bhaja-Sellers on the basis of Religion

S. No.	Religion	Percentage
1	Hindu	97.30
2	Muslim	2.70

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Religion is a crucial and influential social factor in society. The Bhaja-selling occupation among respondents is divided into four religious groups: Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian. The study found that an overwhelming majority, 97.3%, of respondents are Hindu, while the remaining are Muslim. None of the respondents identified as Sikh or Christian. Of the 36 total respondents, 35 are Hindu, and only one is Muslim. This indicates that Bhaja-selling in Bettiah city is predominantly a Hindu occupation.

Table 4. Classification of Bhaja-Sellers on the basis of category

S. No.	Caste	Percentage
1	General	2.78
2	OBC	69.44
3	SC	27.78

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

It was observed that 69.44 percent of the respondents belonged to the OBC category, 27.78 percent were under SC category, 2.78 percent of the respondents were from the general category. The caste analysis indicates that street vending is not confined to socially weaker communities, and it has, in fact, given employment opportunities for socially upper communities also.

Table 5. Marital status of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Marital status	Percentage
1	Single	13.90
2	Married	77.80
3	Widowed	8.30

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

The classification of the respondents by marital status pattern revealed that 78 percent of the respondents were married and 14 percent of them were unmarried. It is a significant factor that 8 percent of vendors were found to be widowed and no one is separated.

Table 6. Nature of family of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Nature of family	Percentage
1.	Nuclear	50
2	Joint	40
3	Extended	10

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

The concept of a joint and nuclear family system is an important factor that reflects a society's social character. We observe that the Bhaja sellers practice both the nuclear family system and the joint family system, which includes the extended family system. The survey revealed that 40 percent of the respondents were practicing the

joint family system, 10 percent were extended family, and 50 percent were in the nuclear family.

Table 7. Family size classification of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Family size	Percentage
1	3-5	38.88
2	6-10	58.33
3	Above 10	2.77

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Bhaja-seller groups family sizes into three categories: 3-5, 6-10, and above 10. Out of 36 respondents, 14 fall into the 3-5 family size category, 21 fall into the 6-10 family size category, and one falls into the family size category above 10. On a percentage basis, 38.88% of respondents belong to the family size group 3-5, 58.33% to the family size group 6-10, and 2.77% to the family size group above 10.

Table 8. Native place of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Native place	Percentage
1	Local	8.40
2	Nearby Bettiah	5.50
3	Other district	86.10

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

There is a general assumption that locals are involved in street vending. Contrary to this perception, the survey results revealed that 86.10 percent of the Bhaja-sellers are migrants. Another 13.90 percent of the Bhaja-sellers are local or from nearby Bettiah city.

Table 9. Migration of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	District	Percentage
1	Sitamarhi	30.56
2	East Champaran	41.67
3	West Champaran	13.89
4	Sheohar	2.78
5	Nalanda	2.78
6	Muzaffarpur	8.32

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

According to table 6, 86.10% of Bhaja sellers are migrants from other districts of Bihar, while 13.90% are locals from Bettiah and surrounding areas like Banuchhappar, East Kargahiya, and Baswariya. The majority of Bhaja sellers (72.23%) come from two districts: East Champaran and Sitamarhi. This is because these two districts are the closest to Bettiah. Other Bhaja sellers hail from Muzaffarpur, Sheohar, and Nalanda districts.

Table 10. Identity Card Type of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Identity Card Type	Percentage
1	Adhar card	100
2	Voter ID	100
3	Ration card	97.30

4	ATM Card use	38.90
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Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Identity, in any form, is vital for a businessman. This is especially important for Bhaja sellers in urban areas. We attempted to determine whether they possessed any legal or related identity cards, such as a ration card, an Adhar card, a voter identity card, a Pan card, or an ATM card. The table shows the distribution of respondents based on their possession of various identity items. The majority of Bhaja sellers have ration cards, Adhar cards, and voter identification cards. Approximately 100% of respondents stated that they possessed these identification cards. In contrast, none of the Bhaja sellers owns a PAN card. Only 38.90 percent of respondents had an ATM card.

Table 11. Category of sale of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Category of sale	Percentage
1	Stationary	27.80
2	Mobile	63.80
3	Multi-point sale	8.20

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Street vendors execute their business by selling in a single location, moving from one point to another, or moving continuously through the streets. We found that 27.80 percent of Bhaja sellers engaged in stationary sales, 63.80 percent in mobile (moving) sell, and the remaining 8.20 percent in multi-point sells.

Table 12. Health issue of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Health Issue	Percentage
1	Private hospital	5.60
2	Govt. hospital	41.60
3	Local doctor	52.80

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

For Bhaja sellers, health issues are an important socioeconomic factor. According to the above field survey data, Bhaja-sellers prefer only government hospitals and local doctors for medical issues. A total of 94 percent of Bhaja sellers either go to the government hospital (41 percent) or a local doctor (53 percent) for treatment of their family members. Only 6% of Bhaja sellers seek treatment in a private hospital, which is a small proportion of the total. The majority of Bhaja-sellers choose to receive treatment at a government hospital or from a local doctor due to their low income and inability to afford the high costs of private hospitals.

Table 13. Previous Occupation of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Previous Occupation	Percentage
1	Agricultural work	22.20
3	Initial	33.30

4	Labour	44.50
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Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

An analysis of the previous occupations of the Bhaja-sellers revealed that 22 percent of the respondents were previously involved in agricultural work, 33 percent began Bhaja-selling work as their first job, and the remaining 45 percent were daily wage workers in industrial work, welding work, on construction sites, etc. The majority of respondents had previously worked as labourers, indicating that Bhaja-selling was a more convenient, suitable, and popular daily wage job because it allowed for more flexible working hours and was easier to work than other daily wage jobs.

Table 14. No of earning members of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	No. of Earning member	Percentage
1	1	36.10
2	2	33.30
3	3	27.80
4	Above 3	2.80

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Table 14 presents the number of members of the Bhaja-sellers family who are currently employed. This aspect of the study is significant from an economic standpoint. According to the findings of the study, 69 percent of people who sold Bhaja had at least one or two members of their family who were employed. The percentage of respondents who had three members who earned money was 28 percent, while only three percent of Bhaja sellers had more than three members who earned money.

Table 15. Type of Bhaja Thella of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Bhaja Thella	Percentage
1	Own	100
2	Rented	0

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Table 15 shows the field survey data of Bhaja sellers based on Bhaja Thella. We discovered that 100% of respondents owned their own Bhaja Thellas (Plate 4). No Bhaja sellers had rented Thella. Bhaja street vending, according to the study, requires little investment. One of the respondents clearly stated that a Bhaja Thella costs between 10,000 and 12,000 rupees. This is a minimum and affordable investment.

Table 16. Type of house of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Types of Houses	Percentage
1	Kachha	61.10
2	Pucca	5.50
3	Semi- Pucca	33.40

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Table 16 above categorizes Bhaja-sellers according to house types. This is also a critical component of the socioeconomic research on Bhaja-sellers. According to the study, the majority of respondents lived in semi-pucca and kachha types of homes. Few responders owned a pucca house. Ninety-four percent of the respondents had semi-Pucca and kachha houses. Six percent of the rest had pucca houses. This demonstrates that a significant portion of the respondents are impoverished, living in semi-private homes in Kachha, and have extremely low standards of living.

Table 17. Indebtedness of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Indebtedness	Percentage
1	Yes	27.80
2	No	72.20

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Street vendors often get into debt traps as a result of their high levels of debt. They require credit for both their economic and noneconomic activities. They borrow money from a variety of sources to meet their financial needs because they have limited access to bank credit. However, in the case of Bhaja-selling street vending, opposite trends emerged. According to the current study, 28% of Bhaja-sellers were indebted, while the majority of respondents (72%) were not indebted (Table 17). During the Covid pandemic, the condition of Bhaja sellers deteriorated dramatically. Government lockdown guidelines forced them to leave their street vending jobs and return to their hometowns. Without work, they had to make do with terrible living conditions. They relied on high-interest loans from moneylenders to make ends meet.

Table 18. Working hours of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Working Hours	Percentage
1	8 – 10 Hours	44.50
2	Above 10 Hours	55.50

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

On average, the Bhaja-sellers work varying numbers of hours each day. Almost 45 percent of the vendors work eight to ten hours per day. Because buying and assembling the products are considered preparatory tasks, the vendors do not account for the hours they spend on them. The majority of the vendors worked longer hours, and they did so at strange times like early in the morning and late at night. If we were to count these hours, the actual working time would double. However, 55.50 percent of the vendors estimated and calculated that they worked 10 hours a day on vending.

Table 19. Opinion of Bhaja-Sellers about Bhaja – selling

S. No.	Opinion about Bhaja-Selling	Percentage
1	Good and moderate	5.50

2	Difficult	94.50
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Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

A lower proportion of respondents thought the Bhaja-selling work was good and moderate (Table 19). Nearly 95 percent of the vendors said the Bhaja-selling work was difficult. The majority of respondents believed that street vending work, specifically Bhaja-selling, was challenging due to the year-round nature of the work. They had to work during the hot summer, the monsoon, and the cold winter seasons. According to the previous study, the majority of respondents were mobile sellers, so this type of street vending is more difficult than others.

Table 20. Basic Amenities used by Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Amenities	Percentage
1	Mobile	100
2	TV	8.30
3	Gas	100
4	Two-Wheeler	5.50

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Amenities reflect the quality of life of each person. Table 20 lists the amenities possessed by Bhaja-sellers. All surveyed Bhaja-sellers were found to possess mobile phones and Gas cylinders. However, only a minority possessed smartphones. Only a small number of respondents own basic amenities such as televisions and motorcycles. None of the respondents had a refrigerator. This study indicates that they had a significantly low standard of living. They were unable to afford entertainment sources such as television.

Table 21. The UPI payment option provided by Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	UPI Payment	Percentage
1	Yes	36.11
2	No	63.89

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Table 21 illustrates the availability of UPI payment facilities among bhajan-sellers. The data reveals that 36 percent of the respondents have access to UPI, enabling them to accept digital payments, while the remaining 64 percent do not have this facility. A deeper analysis indicates that access to UPI is closely linked to smartphone ownership. All bhajan-sellers who had smartphones were able to use UPI, highlighting the role of technology in facilitating modern payment methods. This finding suggests that digital inclusion among street vendors is largely dependent on access to affordable technology, which can significantly impact their ability to participate in the digital economy.

Table 22. Habits of Bhaja-Sellers

S. No.	Habits	Percentage
1	Smoking	19.50

2	Tobacco	100
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Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

The prevalence of specific personal habits, such as smoking, drinking, and gambling, can significantly influence the financial well-being of bhajan-seller families, as shown in Table 22. The study found that 20% of bhajan-sellers engaged in smoking, while none reported drinking or gambling. However, several vendors mentioned that they use both cigarettes and other forms of tobacco, indicating a widespread reliance on tobacco products among these vendors.

The habitual use of tobacco, particularly smoking, poses serious health risks and can exacerbate the financial strain on bhajan-seller families. The costs associated with purchasing tobacco products, coupled with potential medical expenses arising from health complications related to smoking, can further deplete the already limited resources of these households. Additionally, while the absence of drinking and gambling habits among the surveyed bhaja sellers is a positive finding, the pervasive use of tobacco remains a concern. This behaviour not only affects their personal health but also has broader implications for their economic stability, potentially reducing their ability to invest in other essential areas such as education, nutrition, and savings.

Table 23. Bhaja Sellers' Investment Sources

S. No.	Source of investment	Percentage
1	Friend and relative	11
2	Own saving	66.70
3	Parents	22.30

Source: Calculation based on primary survey by the researchers

Additionally, 22 percent of the respondents borrowed money from their parents, highlighting the role of family support in launching these small enterprises. This familial financial assistance underscores the close-knit nature of these communities, where family resources are often pooled to help members establish a means of livelihood. The remaining 11 percent of respondents turned to friends and relatives for loans, further reflecting the reliance on social networks within the community for financial backing.

Interestingly, none of the respondents reported needing to borrow from moneylenders or banks, which is noteworthy considering the challenges often faced by small entrepreneurs in accessing formal credit. The ability to gather the necessary 15,000 to 18,000 rupees from personal and social resources suggests that while bhaja selling requires some initial capital, the barriers to entry are relatively low compared to other occupations. This financial approach allows bhaja sellers to begin their work without the burden of

significant debt, enabling them to maintain greater control over their earnings and business operations.

The current study is primarily based on field data collected through a primary survey of street vendors, specifically bhaja sellers, in Bettiah City, located in the West Champaran District of North-West Bihar. The key findings of the study are summarized as follows:

Gender Distribution: The study revealed that 100% of the bhaja selling workforce is male, with no female involvement. This indicates a significant gender disparity in the bhaja selling business, with men dominating the field.

Age Distribution: A majority of the street vendors (58%) fall within the productive age range of 31 to 60 years. Additionally, 12% of the vendors are over the age of 60, indicating that the enterprise also engages older individuals. The relatively small proportion of vendors (6%) aged 15 to 30 suggests moderate youth involvement, implying that the younger generation finds bhaja selling somewhat appealing.

Education Levels: The study found that a large majority (70%) of the participants lacked literacy skills, and only 30% had completed primary education. This demonstrates that education is not a significant factor in determining engagement in bhaja selling work. Most vendors undertake this labor primarily to support and manage their families.

Marital Status: The survey found that 14% of the respondents were unmarried, while 78% were married. Notably, 8% of the vendors were widowed, and none reported being separated. This data provides insight into the social and familial contexts of the vendors.

Social Background: While street vending is traditionally associated with socially weaker communities, the study found that it also provides employment opportunities for individuals from socially upper communities.

Geographic Origin: A significant majority (86%) of the bhaja sellers came from other districts, with only 14% originating from Bettiah and its surrounding areas like Banuchhapar, East Kargahiya, and Baswariya. This finding challenges the assumption that most bhaja sellers are local residents.

Documentation: The vast majority of bhaja sellers possess essential identification documents such as ration cards, Aadhaar cards, and voter identity cards, which are crucial for accessing various services and benefits.

Education and Aspirations for Children: Despite being mostly illiterate and economically disadvantaged, many bhaja sellers are investing in their children's education. They remain hopeful that their children will secure jobs in the formal sector, indicating a strong desire for upward social mobility.

Housing Situation: The study found that 72% of street vendors live in rented homes after relocating from other districts, while only 28% own their homes. None of the respondents reported living on the streets, suggesting some level of housing stability.

Personal Habits: Among the street vendors, 20% smoke regularly, and all respondents reported consuming tobacco products. However, none of them engage in drinking or gambling, highlighting a focus on certain personal habits over others.

Sales Strategies: The survey identified three primary sales strategies among the vendors: 28% engage in single-point sales, 64% in mobile (moving) sales, and 8% in multi-point sales. This diversity in sales approaches reflects the varying methods vendors use to reach their customers.

Work Hours: The study found that 45% of the vendors work long hours, with shifts exceeding eight hours daily. The remaining 55% work more than eight hours each day, indicating the demanding nature of bhaja selling.

Perceptions of the Occupation: The majority of respondents view bhajan-selling as a challenging occupation, similar to other forms of street vending. However, 6% of the bhaja sellers described their work as both good and moderate, indicating a range of perceptions about the job's difficulty and rewards.

4. DISCUSSION

The government has initiated several programs aimed at supporting street vendors, including the Pradhan Mantri Street Vendors Atmanirbhar Nidhi (PMSVANidhi), which provides a loan of Rs. 10,000 as working capital to help vendors restart their businesses after the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the government could further enhance support by establishing a dedicated ministry under the Ministry of Labour to specifically focus on the welfare of street vendors.

Additionally, steps should be taken to strengthen self-help groups (SHGs) among street vendors. Educational programs should be implemented not only for the vendors themselves but also for their children, ensuring that the next generation has access to better opportunities. To help street vendors fully benefit from government initiatives, it is essential to launch awareness campaigns that inform them about the available programs and how to access them.

Local authorities also play a critical role in improving the conditions for street vendors. They should ensure the safety of vendors by providing essential amenities like toilet facilities and safe drinking water. Regular health checks and improvements in hygiene conditions should be conducted to maintain the well-being of these communities. For bhaja sellers, in particular, there is a need to build shelters and improve their living conditions within the community.

Financial assistance should be extended through subsidies, and legal status must be granted to street vendors to protect their rights. Street vendors should be recognized as a special component within urban development plans and included in the area's master plan. Establishing a social security fund for street vendors is crucial, ensuring they receive humanitarian aid during crises such as pandemics, disasters, and other emergencies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study seeks to explore the evolution, functional performance, challenges, and needs of bhaja sellers at a micro level, with the aim of developing effective strategies to protect their livelihoods and enhance their well-being. By focusing on this specific group, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their unique circumstances within the broader context of street vending.

Primary data for this study were gathered through in-depth interviews with the bhajan-sellers themselves, offering firsthand insights into their daily experiences and struggles. The findings reveal that bhaja selling is an occupation exclusively dominated by male vendors, with no female participation observed in this profession. This gender-specific trend underscores the cultural and social dynamics at play within this line of work.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents expressed that bhaja selling is more challenging than other forms of street vending. The difficulties faced by these vendors include not only the physical demands of their work but also the social and economic pressures that come with maintaining their livelihood in a competitive and often unpredictable market environment. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions that address the specific issues faced by bhajan-sellers, ensuring that they receive the necessary support to sustain and improve their economic status.

By understanding the intricacies of bhaja selling, this study aims to contribute to the formulation of policies and programs that can better support these vendors, ultimately leading to improved living conditions and greater economic security for those engaged in this occupation.

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