

Hawker Business

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Abstract

Some select features of Hawker business in India are presented, described and discussed in this paper. There are hundreds of thousands of hawkers in India. These businesspersons work very hard and the major focus of this enduring self-enterprise is to earn daily livelihood. There are strict rules guiding hawker business both at the all India level and in individual states. Even as hawker business does not carry much social respect and economic prosperity in hierarchy-ridden Indian society, their service is appreciated by the customers. Distinction between hawker and vendor is also briefly discussed in this article.

Keywords: Hawker, vendor, socioeconomic conditions, daily routine, informal economy.

Who Is a Hawker?

In this article I propose to discuss the features of Hawker business. *Hawker* is defined as “a person who offers goods for sale by shouting his or her wares in the street or going from door to door; peddler” (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hawker?s=ts>). Another meaning of this word is somewhat unrelated to the above definition: “a person who hunts with hawks, falcons, etc.” *Hawk* is described as “any of numerous birds of prey of the family Accipitridae, having a short, hooked beak, broad wings, and curved talons, often seen circling or swooping at low altitudes” (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hawk?s=t>)

The word *vendor* has some related meaning to the word *hawker*. Both vendor and hawker are businesspersons, who may use street as their main route and major place for selling goods. *Dictionary.com* gives the following as related words: merchant, peddler, hawker, dealer, traveler, businessperson, pitcher, huckster. Vendors are often more like established stationary storekeepers who may sell value added resellers and even manufacturer of goods. Hawkers on the other hand move from place to place every day and sell goods like food, handicrafts, plastic buckets, and other less expensive items which are carried by him/her in their cart, or bikes or even on their shoulders. There are millions of street vendors in India. Street vendors are a common feature of Indian cities and Indian businesses.

Strict Laws

There have been laws regulating/restricting street vendor business throughout the British rule and in Independent India. Unfortunately, such rules and regulations, according to the National Association of Street Vendors of India

“Control and Punishment: Most acts are aimed at controlling and punishing the street vendors. The acts are archaic and fail to meet the challenges posed by the new situation particularly relating to migration, unemployment, saturation of formal sector and so on.” (<http://nasvinet.org/newsite/statistics-the-street-vendors-2/>) The website gives “examples [to] illustrate how control and punishment becomes all important while the objective was to regulate the vendors.”

Socio-economic Conditions of Hawkers

Although vendors are viewed as poverty-stricken group of businesspersons, hawkers seem to be in still lower condition when it comes to livelihood. Many hawkers either walk through the streets with the produce they sell on their shoulders or use bicycles to carry their produce. Even as they walk through or ride through streets, calling out loudly the goods they carry to sell. More often than not, the goods they carry may be flowers, vegetables, plastic items, or milk. Ice cream hawkers are also found on the streets. They go from one street to another and stand near a house and call out the names of the goods loudly and expect buyers, usually the customers, will come out of the house and buy the goods. Physical pain is very strong, and their body weakness is manifest, and yet they work hard to earn their livelihood.

Daily Routine Business

Most of the hawkers buy goods from merchants from the daily market of the town or from the well-established merchants. They sell the product with some increased price. Their goal is to earn adequate money for their daily living and daily needs. When asked, we found that there is no fixed additional increase to the price. Their daily life is routine, and the price of the goods they sell depends on the customers' needs. These days, customers do not seem to bargain the price of the goods being sold. The price is usually not negotiated. However, the hawker does show willingness to reduce the price, when demand for the goods is low on that day. When asked, hawkers told us that their goal is to go home with empty baskets or buckets -- they are happy if they could sell all the materials bought from the merchants the same day. Of course, they are also very happy if the goods could be sold fully just by going around a few streets, or a few localities. This saves time and pain.

Part of Informal Economy

Hawkers as businesspersons may be considered as part of informal economy in India. In reality, informal economy is more closely linked to the people's lives than formal economy. Often, we find informal economy leaders such hawkers meet the domestic daily needs of vegetables, some specific items such as flowers for pujas and wearing as part of hairstyle, or wearing flowers around the neck, plastic items, stainless steel small-sized items for domestic use, and so on. Newly established "colonies" away from the departmental stores and bazaars are served effectively by the hawkers. Women may even order new items such as washing soap, etc. through the hawkers. People staying away from the departmental stores and Malls usually go on "excursion" to the Malls with their children and enjoy eating in fast food restaurants there. They do buy all sorts of items including grocery there, and yet urgent as well as routinely consumed items in the homes of "colonies" are often sold by the hawkers.

Unorganized Labour

There are millions of hawkers in India, and it means unorganized labour is very large and hawkers are a significant part of unorganized and self-employed labour and businesspersons.

Hawker's loud utterance or loud calling announcing the goods being sold is usually a sort of music tone. Those who are not familiar with the calling will not understand what the hawker is announcing or selling. But those who live in the colonies and in the streets distinguish one hawker from another and are able to rush to gate/front door asking the hawker to stop by. Indeed, a hawker is a friend and is a hardworking entrepreneur.

References

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hawker?s=ts>

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