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Politics Shapes & Reshapes Street Hawkers' Class Position: A Study on New Market Area

MF Rabbi ^α, Ornab Azad ^σ, MH Kaiser ^ρ, S Somrat ^ω & RI Ferdous[‡]

Abstract- The paper offers a theoretical discussion on the political manipulation on the street hawkers at New Market area in Bangladesh. By analyzing socio-economic and political demography, then the paper focuses on the changing class position of the street hawkers. The consequences of the manipulation and its effects on the life style of the hawkers are described in this paper. The potential risk, hazards and uncertainty of their future also disclose here. After that, this paper has also discussed about the sustainable improvement recommendation of the street hawkers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dhaka is the most populated city in Bangladesh which has more than 24 million of people. (*World Population Review, 2023*) In Dhaka, street vending is an emerging urban phenomenon that can be seen in both stationary and mobile form in various locations. As a result, they are described as hawkers or vendors who operate without a fixed location for their business (*Bhowmik, 2005*). Those independent contractors in the unorganized sector known as street hawkers do not have a set, ongoing contract in place under which they must sell their products or services (*Shaha, 2011*). In a particular area, New Market in Dhaka, some of the marginalized poor have earned their livings by street vending like selling local garments, food, little furniture, books, cosmetics, vegetables, jewelry etc. The aim of the study to explore the vulnerability of the street hawkers due to political manipulation by using socio-demographic condition of them and consequently shapes and reshapes of their class position from upward to downward mobility. They are the segment of the urban poor who are most at risk and marginalized. Despite this, they play a vital role in meeting the needs of Dhaka's urban residents, offering affordable and long-lasting goods while also creating income and opportunities to involve in job market for a sizable population, serving as a significant source of income. As Bangladesh has a huge population, the employment opportunity specially for the illiterate as well as unskilled people is very underrated. Then street vending is the only one way for those people. They face numerous difficulties like inadequate space, harassment

by police and private shop guardians and eviction from selling locations, a lack of markets, a business' unprofitability, a lack of credit, a lack of freedom, and a lack of social security during operation. Their operations and the cleanliness of their workplace. Additionally, they must borrow money from moneylender for their economic activity and social security, paying off the law enforcement with high interest rates. They have faced extortion by local cadres. They are exploiting day by day and cannot lead their lives in a standard way. Already the increase in commodity prices, inflation has had a negative impact on their lifestyle, after this they are always worried about extortion and harassment that when everything will be looted from them. They stay at a hazardous condition.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The informal sector plays a vital role on the economic development of a country (*World Bank, 2007*). It is estimated that more than 60% of the employed population of the world make their livelihoods in the informal sector of the economy (*International Labor Organization [ILO], 2018*). Informal sector plays an important role in a country like Bangladesh. As the formal sector cannot ensure enough job opportunities, people have to engage themselves in informal employment sector (*Ali, 2013*). According to the Bangladesh Quarterly Labor Force Survey 2015-16, at the national level, 86.2% of the employed population engaged in informal employment/sector (*Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2017*). Street Vendor may be defined as traders who sell goods and services to the public without having a permanent/ fixed premise or solid arrangement required for conducting business (*Bhowmik, 2005; Saha, 2011*). Muzaffar and Huq (*February, 2009*) cited in their study that street food vending is a prevailing and distinctive part of a large informal sector in Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh. They attempt to gain insight into the business of street food vendors. They analyze only the problem areas are related to business operation, business knowledge, extortion, and product and production. Rahman & Junayed (*February, 2017*) evaluated about the unemployment problem & the reason behind why below poverty line people are taking street vending as a profession. Faruque & Haque (*February, 2010*) evaluated the existing socio-economic, demographic and food safety profile of street food vending in the

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selected wards of Dhaka City Corporation in their study. Islam & Khan (2019) examines the socio-economic demographic, risk, threads, insecurities and supports associated with the street vending features of the street vendors in Bangladesh.

But none of the above mentioned papers tried to explore the how Politics shapes & reshapes Street Vendor's Class Position in Bangladesh. In this perspective, the present study focuses on the Politics shapes & reshapes Street Vendor's Class Position in New Market Area of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is mixed (Qualitative & Quantitative) in nature. It has been conducted based on primary data. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire and in depth interview both open ended and close ended questions. Depending on the pre-test survey and discussion, the final questionnaire was made in which Political influence on vending such as extortion, harassment, threat, bribe, political manipulation on vendor's class position (Socio-Economic), demographic characteristics, living conditions, livelihood, fulfillment of basic needs. So social survey method and case study method were used in the study. Researchers collected information from the individuals through social survey method by using interview with 15-20 minutes' duration. The study was

covered by different kinds of Street Vendors (Vegetables, food, local garments, cosmetics, books, jewelry etc.)

At the very beginning of our fieldwork, we divided our research location (Nilkhet street to Science Laboratory Street) zones:

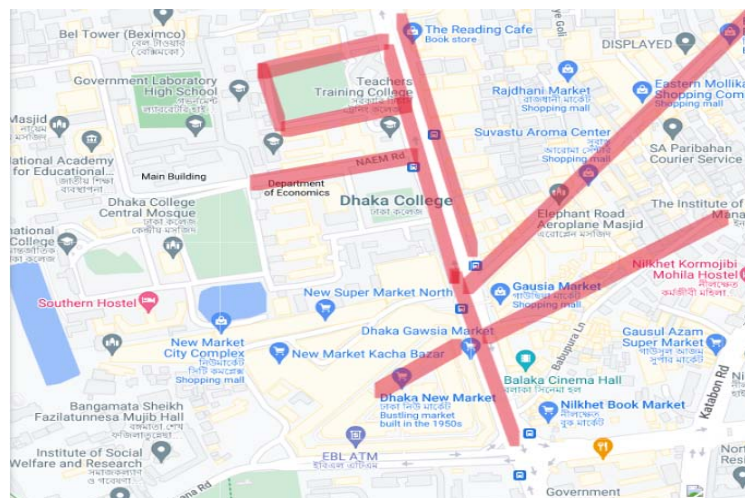
- Nilkhet Book Market Street to Chistiya Market Street
- New Market Street to Dhaka College and its Surroundings (Teacher's Training College Street)
- Hawker's Market Street to Science Laboratory Street

Every 2 days, we collected samples from each zone. Besides, we spent 2 days for collecting initial survey to understand field condition.

For our survey, we employed a random sampling design. Around 6000 street vendors running their business on that area. Data were collected from total numbers of 60 samples and 7 case studies of street vendors during the period of 14-28 October, 2023.

The interviews were written with the permission of the street vendors. No interview was secretly written without their permission. However, considering their business risk, some vendors did not agree to give us interview. Even then, our response rate was 60%.

Data was analyzed through different statistical techniques i.e., frequency distribution and cross tabulation by using SPSS 26 software.



Picture 1: Area Filled with Red Color had been Covered for Our Survey. (Collected from Google Maps)

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study's specific goals are to identify the changing class positions of street hawkers by manipulating local politics and other factors, as well as street hawkers' income levels, access to finance, working hours, working status, level of education, marital status and the impact of social capital. Besides, the effects of changing class positions accelerate their current lifestyles and families in a negative direction. In the same way:

- To determine the socio-economic and demographic makeup of street vendors in New Market area, as well as their range of available goods and services.
- To learn about the potential hazards or issues that may arise in their line of work.

V. MAIN FINDINGS

Street Vending plays a vital piece of economic framework in Poverty line people who are fully dependent on their profession. Street Hawkers can be

found selling on street corners, sidewalks, local markets, and even on a van (Pandey & Jaani, 2020). Around 6000 Hawkers are surrounded in New Market Area. (Dhaka Tribune, 21 April, 2022). They face various problem regrading this Profession. We have tried to find out their problems.

Their biggest problem is the Political pressure and the charged extortion money. Police appoint the linemen and the cashiers. Their job is like a government service. The linemen collect the money from the hawker and give back to the Cashiers, who distributed the money among the political leaders and police. We have also found that a Hawker need to give starting from 200tk to 1000tk according to their shop size every day. The average collection is 300tk from each Street Hawker per day. They also charged extra 25tk to 40tk for Light Bulb every day If their shop located nearby large market. Though Some used their own Batteries but many of them used electricity from a nearby shop.

It is estimated that "About 18lac Taka is collected from 6000 hawkers Daily. So monthly the amount is nearly 5 crores 40 lac and yearly the amount is 65 crores 70 lac. A one-day closure of the shops on footpaths will be a huge loss (for the police). The loss is even more because of the Eid rush."

Political Extortion severely affect hawkers class Position. Due to not having any legal business Licenses and they carry on their profession on Street, so they need to pay the Political influencer, Leader and Police in order to survive. We also interrogated some Street Hawkers and found out that if they failed to give certain amount of extortion money, they had to suffer in the long run. Police tries to accused them in various crime and many Political Leader members tortured them both physically and verbally by saying bad words. Some also takes their Business products for free. They have kept the process in force for their own benefit.

Many Hawker starts their business by taking Loans. Later they lose everything due to inability to repay them. As a result, many people become depressed and turns into various criminal tendencies. Some even do not hesitate to commit suicide. The Hawkers works daily 12 hours on and average. Due to lack of legal recognition, the government has no mechanism to work toward hawker's rights. It also diminishes the government's incentive to work in this area as financial allocation and resource mobilization are difficult. The hawkers work on unsafe environment, harsh weather without taking any safety measure.

We also noticed that most of the hawkers have occupied the public space which is the main reason for traffic jam and slow crowd mobility. There were so many shops and so many people around them that moving from one place to another is quite difficult for pedestrians. Dhaka's Street have continued to fall victim to the encroachment of hawkers and street vendors. Often they damage the street by throwing

wastes on the road and pollute the environment. The absence of legal recognition creates problems such as a lack of rights and proper working conditions. The most critical problem faced by the hawkers is the constant threat of eviction. As their profession is considered illegal So uncertainty and insecurity is the basic problems of the vendors.

We also observed that if a hawker carries out their businesses in front of a Large Market or a Shopping Mall, every year they need to give advance money to the Large Market or Shopping Mall Owner to leased the space. Income is still the same but their livelihood faces many sufferings due to price hike. They earned a little let alone Savings. Though their expenditure rate increases, their income rate is not increased as well. (e.g. A hawker earned 700tk daily. He is still earning the same amount but due to inflation rate and price hike, they cannot meet their basic necessities of day to day life). As a result, their class position has turned middle class to lower middle class as well as lower middle class to lower class.

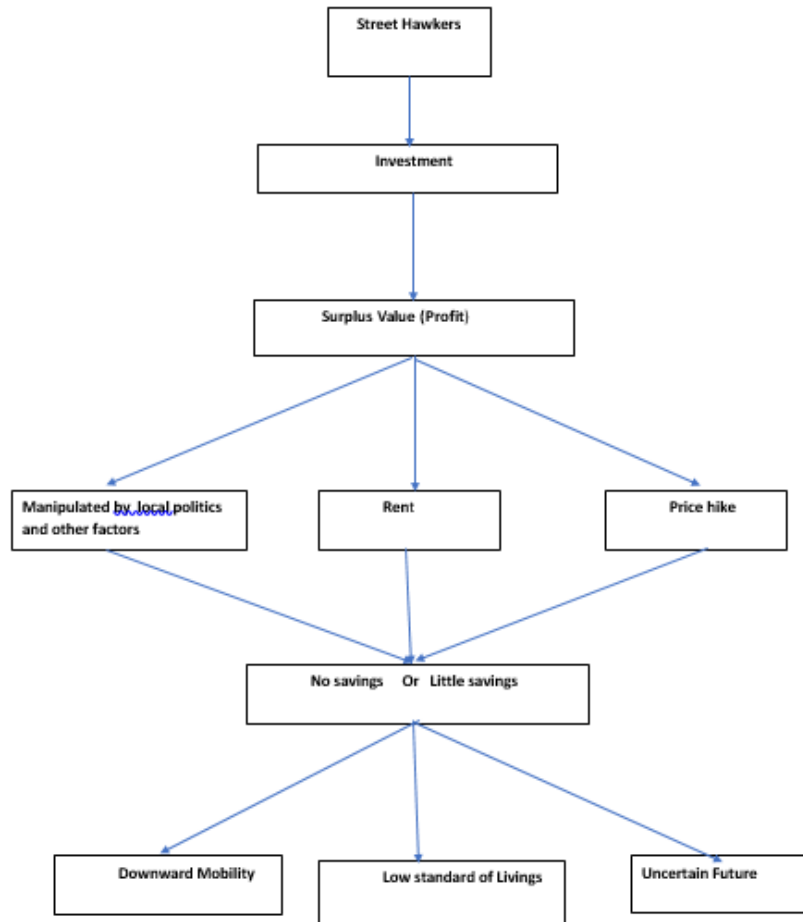


Figure 1: Shows how Hawker's Class Position Changes.

Hawkers invested their money into their own business by taking loans from Banks or NGO's. But due to manipulation and oppression of ruling political parties and police, they earned a little which gone by repaying

loan, rent and they had a little savings for their own that causes Downward mobility, Low standard of livings and Uncertain future. (Figure-1)

Table 1: Range of Monthly Average Income of Street Hawkers

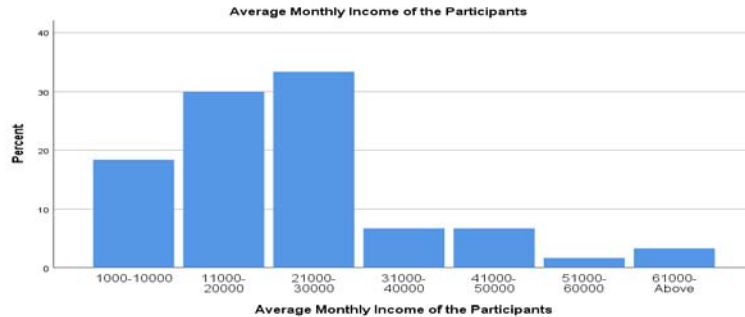
Average Monthly Income of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1000-10000	11	18.3	18.3	18.3
	11000-20000	18	30.0	30.0	48.3
	21000-30000	20	33.3	33.3	81.7
	31000-40000	4	6.7	6.7	88.3
	41000-50000	4	6.7	6.7	95.0
	51000-60000	1	1.7	1.7	96.7
	61000-Above	2	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

It is seen that majority (34%) of the street hawkers' monthly average income is from 1000tk to 20000tk that is not sufficient for them as the inflation rate is very high. They are not fulfilling the minimum standard of their family needs. Due to present price hike problems, these data indicates a standard of living is

significantly from lower to slightly moderate. So, most of the street vendors belong to the poor class in New Market area to meet their basic necessities of day to day life. A few of the hawkers earn the satisfactory income. (Table1)



Graph 1: Average Monthly Income of the Participants

Table 2: Extortion Rate of Different Group in a Single Day

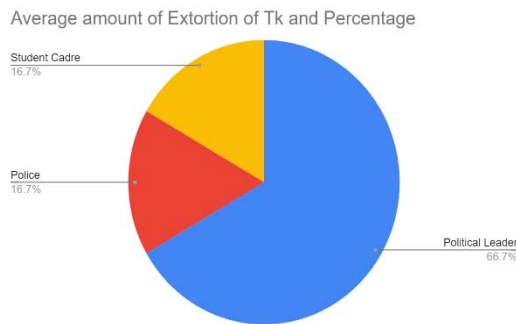
Extortion Rate of Different Group

Name of the Group	Average amount of Extortion of Tk	Percentage
Political Leader	200	66%
Police	50	17%
Student Cadre	50	17%
Total	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

In the table 2, Starting from Tk200, up to Tk 1,000 is collected from each hawker of the city every day. The average collection is Tk300 from each hawker per day. The rate increases one month before Eid. They had to give about 9000tk-10,500tk monthly to the police

and Linemen. So It is very obvious that half of their earnings goes in that. If they failed to pay they has to face harassment from local authorities or from policemen during vending.



Graph 2: Extortion Rate of Different Group

Table 3: Family Size of Street Hawkers

Family Members of the Participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-3	5	8.3	8.3
	4-6	42	70.0	78.3
	7-above	13	21.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

From the table 3, most of the street hawkers have average in 5 family members including himself. It is close to the rational family size in Bangladesh (Census,

2022). In addition, almost all of them are the only earning member of the family. It is clear that majority (73%) of the hawkers have family size (4-6).

Table 4: Marital Status of the Hawkers
Marital Status- Married or Unmarried

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Married	39	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Unmarried	21	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

About 65% of the Hawkers got married. They have a family along with children. The rest (35%) of the hawkers are mostly in childhood period. Their family

cannot survive the cost of the family. That's why, they are involved in vending. (Table 4)

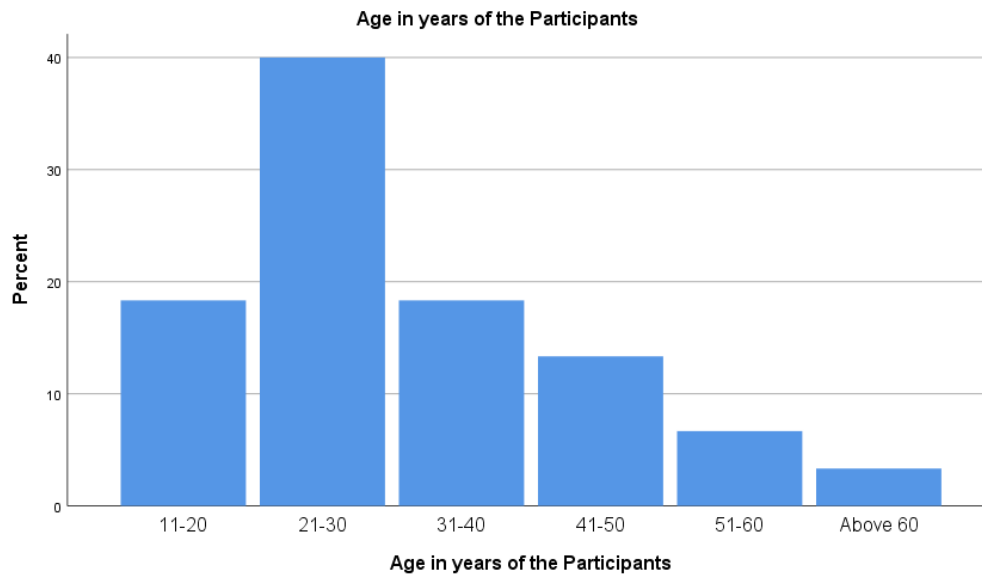
Table 5: Different Ages of Hawkers in Number
Age in years of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	11-20	11	18.3	18.3	18.3
	21-30	24	40.0	40.0	58.3
	31-40	11	18.3	18.3	76.7
	41-50	8	13.3	13.3	90.0
	51-60	4	6.7	6.7	96.7
	Above 60	2	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

From the above table 5, it is clearly seen that the early adulthood people (21-30) are involved in vending. About 19%of the children have also engaged in this profession as a worker or helper of the hawkers

because they have no alternative way to lead their lives. A few aged people (3%) lead their livelihood by selling the cheapest product.



Graph 3: Age in Years of the Participants

Table 6: Educational Status of Street Hawkers

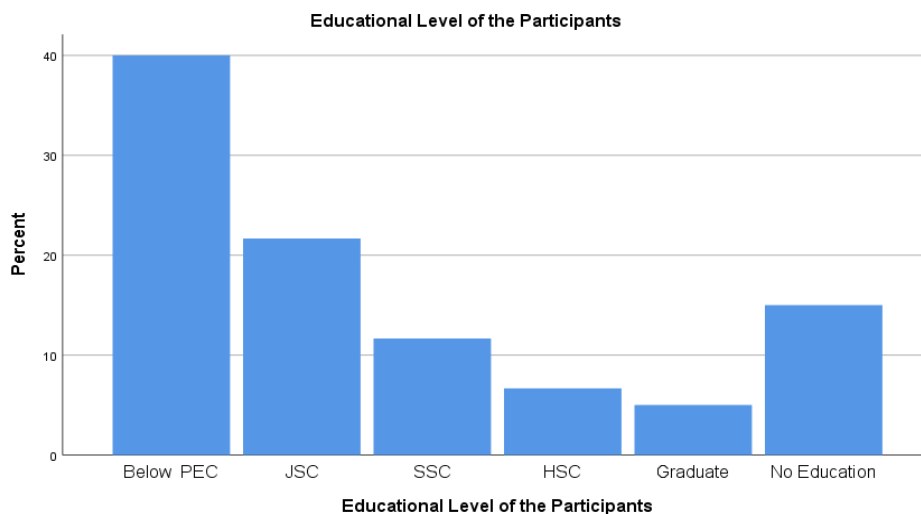
Educational Level of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below PEC	24	40.0	40.0	40.0
	JSC	13	21.7	21.7	61.7
	SSC	7	11.7	11.7	73.3
	HSC	4	6.7	6.7	80.0
	Graduate	3	5.0	5.0	85.0
	No Education	9	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

Most of the hawkers (40%) have not taken the minimum (primary) level of education. They have told that they couldn't get the opportunity to continue their studies because there was no food in their house. In

opposite site, some graduates (5%) are also involved in this profession because of no job opportunity .15% of them are totally illiterate. They have no literacy skills. (Table 6)



Graph 4: Educational Status of Street Hawkers

Table 7: Residential Status of street hawkers

Residential Status

Residential Status in Dhaka	Number of street vendors	Percentage
Permanently	3	5%
Seasonally	57	95%
Total	60	100%

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

It is clearly seen from the table 7 that almost all of the hawkers (95%) stay in Dhaka seasonally. They have family in their home district like Barishal, Chandpur,

Mymensingh, Cumilla, Noakhali, Faridpur, Munsiganj and Madaripur etc. They stay Dhaka only for their little business purposes. (Table 7)

Table 8: Satisfaction level of the hawkers

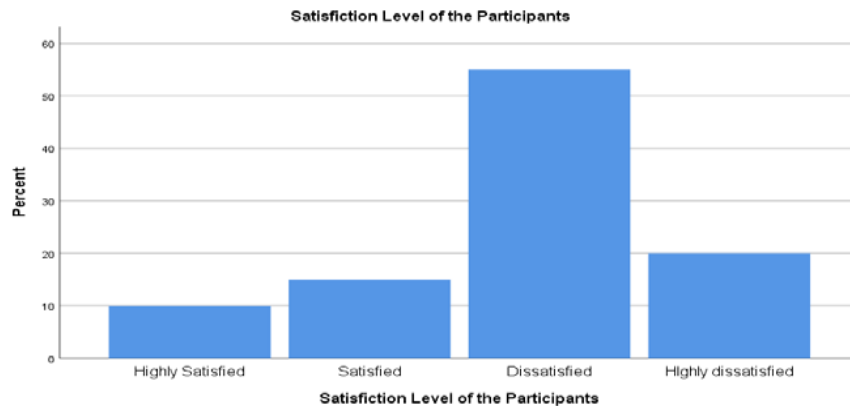
Satisfaction Level of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Highly Satisfied	6	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Satisfied	9	15.0	15.0	25.0
	Dissatisfied	33	55.0	55.0	80.0
	Highly dissatisfied	12	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total		60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

By vending various types of products, the hawkers have lead their life from hand to mouth. After a month, they have no savings for the future. Majority (55%) of them are dissatisfied for this profession. Only a

few of them are satisfied (15%) and highly satisfied (10%).20% of them are very dissatisfied for losing their actual capital. (Table-8)



Graph 5: Satisfaction Level of the Hawkers

VI. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

According to interactionist perspective of social inequality, we create our meaning through social interaction. We create and share meanings for social inequalities and reproduce it. Max Weber explained class, status, party and power - under the discussions of interactionist perspective of social inequality. A class comprised those who have common life chances with respect to the marketplace (life chance means the opportunities for attaining advantages through the possession and control of property and the exchange of goods and services). In our investigation, we noticed that politician extortion strongly affected the class position of hawkers. With the amount of money that hawkers earn daily, it is possible for them to survive, but with the amount of money levied by the police, political leaders, student cadres, it becomes very difficult for them to make ends meet. Since they are doing business there without any license, they cannot raise any objection. As a result, it has to be accepted silently. While meeting the amount of daily levied subscription, and on the other hand, due to the price hike of daily commodities, their class position is going towards downward mobility (If earlier hawkers belonged to the middle class, now they belong to the lower-middle class. If earlier they belonged to the lower-middle class, now they belong to the lower class).

Status (distribution of social honor) refers to differences in prestige that derive from a particular lifestyle, not from purely economic factors. The status dimension, then, consists of groups that display a particular lifestyle and that are aware of differences between themselves and other status groups. Hawkers are not considered to have higher level of status in our society, they are considered to have lower level of status in our society.

Party, refers to one's standing in a collectively or organization whose action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power toward influencing a command action. Example: Hawkers' Union. In the absence of license to do the business in certain streets, even with Hawkers' Unions, hawkers cannot unite and protest against political harassment. Power is at the base of all forms of inequality - class, status and party and is a primary element of all forms of human interaction (Gerth and Mills, 1946). In our field work, we explored that police, political leaders (Powerful Groups) exercise their power on the street vendors (Powerless Group). Sometimes the police exercise their power by taking the hawkers to the police station and filing them (hawkers) a case when they (hawkers) fail to pay the fee. The political leaders also practice their power by taking things from hawkers without any cost. When they (hawkers) are asked for the price then they (political leaders) showing their power by threatening, physically assaulting, using harsh languages to the hawkers.

Based on Emile Durkheim's functionalist approach, solidarity or harmony holds individuals together in social institutions. On the basis of organic solidarity concept in this post-modern society, extremely unequal distribution of power, prestige and resources. Higher degree of inequalities between (Hawkers) and within professional groups (Police, Hawkers). Restorative form of justice: justice for the rich (the poor are blamed to be violent, criminal, drug addicted, etc.) For example, because of being poor, hawkers are blamed to be violent, criminal etc.

According to Karl Marx's class conflict theory, in capitalist system, bourgeois dominates proletariats. In our investigation, we also explored same type of domination in this post-modern society. We explored a trend is being noticed among the hawkers. The trend is that hawkers are renting shops from linemen on the

streets, then hiring employees for working their shops, and then keeping the maximum part of the profits and exploiting the employees to pay a few portion of the profits. In our male-dominating society, there is a few participation of female hawkers. We also experienced the same in our field work. At the places we visited we saw very few female hawkers which did not represent women empowerment. The class interest of hawkers is to do business in a permanent place legally, safe and uninterrupted, the main obstacles of which are the police and political leaders. If there is no hawker then the extortion of police, political leaders will stop forever. That is why there is no permanent solution to the hawker system.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has a few limitations. Due to finance problem and time, constraint and area limitation, all the vendors cannot be considered as the respondents for the study. Some of the other barriers of the study has been unfolded or covert.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study provides a clear understanding that political extortion is shaped and reshaped hawkers' class position. The clan position of hawkers represents downward mobility day by day for the reason of political extortion. The study also describes the socio-economic profile and livelihood in New market area are related to political extortion shapes and reshapes of hawkers' class position. In our study, we have found some reasons that are accountable for hawker's class position into downward mobility excluding political extortion. We have some recommendation to solve the problems of changing class position of hawkers.

We have some Recommendations to solve the problems of changing Class Position of hawkers that are given below –

- Government should carry out a proper survey to find out unlicensed street vendors and get them licensed.
- Street vendors should be moved from the street to an organized market.
- Their business product should be recognized properly.
- Education level should be enhanced.
- Proper administrative monitoring system should be implemented to reduce corruption.
- For proper management of street vending the cooperation between the Municipalities and Police is necessary.
- Government should formulate some comprehensive plan like different training programs, Sanctioning loan with a minimum interest rate etc. to improve the lifestyle of street vendors and introduce credit facilities.

- Systematic sustainable steps should be taken to improve hawker's safety and lifestyle in order to tackle the social and economic problems associated with the vendors.

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APPENDIX

Case Study I

Mr. Baha Ullah, aged 45 years old man, lives in slum area of Kamrangirchor with his family. His family consists member of 6. He along with his parents, wife and 2 children lives together in a rent house in Kamrangirchor. In his past live he used to live in Chandpur, but due to family quarrels with his two elder uncle he with his parents moved to Dhaka about 25 years ago. After arriving to Dhaka, he suffered a lot to manage some work. Soon he manages to become an employee to a Vendors shop. From there he learns Business policy and set up his own Clothing shop on the street of Dhaka. When we ask about his past and present profession comparison, he told us, "7/8 years ago, I earned a little but i was satisfied because i had to pay a little to my syndicate. But due to Political and Police interference, I had to give random amount of money to 3 or 4 groups. That's also hampers my business as well. If one day i earned a little, i had to give 60% to 70% of my whole income to the Lineman." We asked him whether he has been facing any difficulties running this problem he told us "Recently I have been facing some problems. Few bays back the high rank Govt. authority came to my stall and seize my products and also fined me and sent me to the jail. Then I have to pay a good amount to get back my stall and sell things. Again political leaders nowadays coming frequently and demands certain amount of money which often half of my earnings." Apart from that he also regrets about the price hike of Daily commodities which causes causing downward mobility to their economic and social conditions. He is now getting old day by day and emotionally feels weak. He hopes that Government will take necessary steps for them so that they get Licensed.

Case Study II

Mr. Shafin Ahmed, a 25 years old unmarried Cushioned Seller, lives with his Parents in a rent house at Hazaribagh. He leased a four square foot area in front of a renowned Shopping mall in Old Elephant Road area and sells his goods. He told us that he had given 70,000tk to the Shopping Mall Owner to lease the area for 1 year. Besides that he had to give 25tk daily for electricity bulbs at night and fans in Summer days. Though he is free from Line man tolls but he had to give 40 to 50tk daily to Policemen when they came seeking for money. He told that "the number of hawkers had increased in the last six years, and so had the toll

amount. This collection is still controlled by the police, political leaders and linemen. Starting from Tk200, up to Tk1,000 is collected from each hawker of the city every day. The average collection is Tk300 from each hawker per day. The rate increases one month before Eid." We asked him whether it severely affects his business or not. He told us that "My business is progressive in nature. I need to invest a little but due to extortion and impact of politics, my business is now running into some losses. Again I'm the only member of my family so I had to support my Family with my daily income. But due to increasing extortion rate, price hike and frequently demand money becomes headache issues for my business. Few years back, I used to support my family through this income fluently and also make some money for Savings. But nowadays I suffer a lot to manage my family let alone Savings." He also hopes that better days will come for sure in their life.