



# Economic Dimensions of Harvest Festivals in Odisha: Community Participation, Gender Roles and Livelihood Impacts

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author PKN conceptualized the study, performed the methodology and the data collection and wrote the original draft of the manuscript. Author AY performed formal analysis, wrote, reviewed and edited the manuscript. Author BKM did data curation and edited the manuscript. Author PD wrote, reviewed and edited the manuscript. Authors VK and SK supervised. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the economic significance of harvest festivals in Odisha, with a focus on community participation, gender dynamics, and their impact on rural livelihoods. Using a mixed-method approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from 120 respondents in

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the Sundargarh district, specifically Bisra and Nuagaon taluks. The research examines how these festivals contribute to income generation, employment, and tourism. Findings reveal that harvest festivals serve as vital economic stimuli by promoting local markets, cultural performances, and artisanal goods. Income sources during festivals included handicrafts, traditional food items, handloom products, and cultural activities, contributing up to 35% of household annual income. Expenditure patterns showed the highest spending on food and clothing, indicating the socio-cultural importance of celebration. Gendered participation was evident: women were predominantly involved in cooking, decoration, and ritual practices, while men led ceremonies and agricultural tasks. Community involvement was multifaceted, ranging from collective dining to organizing cultural programs and supporting the resource-poor. The festivals also play a crucial role in social cohesion and cultural preservation, strengthening intergenerational and community bonds. Despite traditional gender roles, women's contributions were central to the festival economy. The study concludes that harvest festivals are not only platforms of cultural expression but also engines of rural economic resilience. Policy support and structured promotion of such festivals could enhance their potential as sustainable development tools, fostering cultural tourism and inclusive rural growth.

**Keywords:** Harvest festivals; Odisha; gender roles; community well-being; cultural heritage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is one of the world's most diverse country, with a wide range of cultures, religions, festivals, castes, classes, and creeds. India is the home of numerous religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and many more, all of which rely on various cultures to bring about world peace. Festivals are recognized for their ability to celebrate and raise awareness of their own history, customs, and culture. Harvest festivals are a time for communities to unite, show appreciation, and celebrate the results of their labor. Odisha is a festival-rich state having a vibrant cultural heritage. In Odisha, there is a proverb that says "Bara Masare Tera Parva," which means that there are thirteen festivals for the people to celebrate in a year (Sahoo, 2022).

Harvest festivals honor farming practices like planting and harvesting crops or honoring the natural world and its creatures. Agricultural festivals are comprehensive festive activities based on 'local special agricultural products or culture', held regularly or irregularly in a specific area, and held various activities with a specific theme, while integrating tourism, culture, economic and trade activities (Qi & Yang, 2008).

The archeological artifacts narrate the history of Akhand Bharat is known for the ceremonial festivals, ritual festivals, birth and death festivals, harvest festivals, seasonal festivals right from the thousands of years. The religious conglomeration with the festivals further enriches the glory of Indian rituals and vast traditions. They are designed to help us stay connected

while we share precious moments and feelings with our loved ones (Kumar, 2023).

### 1.1 Harvest Festivals of India

In South India, Pongal marks a significant harvest festival, celebrated primarily in Tamil Nadu. The festival spans four days, with each day holding unique rituals and customs. Pongal is dedicated to the Sun God, Surya, and involves the boiling of freshly harvested rice with milk and jaggery in earthen pots, symbolizing abundance and prosperity. In North India, Baisakhi stands out as a joyous occasion celebrated predominantly by the Sikh community. It celebrates the foundation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699 and the Sikh New Year. Baisakhi also coincides with the harvest season, and festivities include vibrant processions, traditional dances like Bhangra and Gidda, and the sharing of delicious sweets and savories.

Makar Sankranti, celebrated in Western India, particularly in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, heralds the arrival of longer days and the end of winter. The festival is marked by kite flying, bonfires, and the consumption of traditional sweets made from sesame seeds and jaggery. People also take ritual baths in rivers, believing it purifies their sins and bestows prosperity. Onam, celebrated in Kerala, is one of the most significant harvest festivals in the region, marked by colorful floral decorations, traditional dance performances like Kathakali, boat races, and elaborate feasts known as Onam Sadya. The festival commemorates the

return of King Mahabali, a beloved mythical ruler, and is a time for families to come together and celebrate the richness of Kerala's culture and heritage.

These harvest festivals not only celebrate the agricultural abundance but also serve as reminders of the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the divine. They provide a glimpse into the diverse cultural tapestry of India, where each region adds its unique flavors and traditions to the celebration of life and abundance. t as unpaid workers. That women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fisheries, etc. is a fact long taken for granted but also long ignored (Das 2015)

## 1.2 Harvest Festivals in Odisha

Odisha's rich histories, as well as its cultural and geographical diversity, contribute to the state's broad and diverse tourism appeal (Mohanty 2023). There are over 13 festivals celebrates in 12 months with considerable enthusiasm. Odisha's festivals are planned such that they relate to spirituality, science, history, and mythology (Ojha, 2021). Majority of the Indians being agriculturists, Odisha consisting of both tribals and non-tribals are involved in agricultural activities and enjoy each and every festival with great pomp and gaiety (Singh, 2012). Men, women, children and every member of the family are involved in the festivals with high level of excitement. Rice is seeded during Akhyatrutiya in May–June, completed planting is marked by Raja Sankranti in mid-June, rice is in its reproductive phase during Garbhansasankranti in October, and rice harvesting occurs at Nuakhai and Laxmipuja in May–June and October, respectively. The tribal people commemorate Makarsankranti, around the middle of January, as Chaita Parab because this is when rice is brought to the granary and threshed (Das, 2012). With the help of bamboo pots called as kula in which they take seeds and perform rituals in their respective fields. Rituals are performed by the Gram Pandit called as pahan (a priest or someone who performs religious rituals).

Pousha Punei: Held on the full moon day of the month of Pousha, this agricultural celebration in Western Odisha honors the fresh crop. The landowners' and the previous shareholders' contract expire on this day, and new agreements

for the upcoming year are finalized side by side.

Mana Basa Gurubara: This is a major festival when Goddess Laxmi is adored, and it is observed every Thursday in the month of March. Mature paddy is gathered from the fields by farmers, and housewives use it to weave menta, or ropes. The farm ladies begin mopping their threshing floor and house on Wednesday using water, cow dung, and clay to maintain cleanliness. Women will paint floors in a unique style called "alpina" with the help of rice powder and water (Satprakashananda,1986). They store the freshly harvested paddy in Manas, which are bamboo measuring units, early in the morning on a wooden khatuli, a little bed that is embellished with fresh linen and flowers. They offer Goddess Laxmi with Prasad three times a day. Only family members consume the delicious desserts, sweets, kheer, fruits, etc. that make up the prasad. (Sabita et al., 2018).

While there are several celebrations in Odisha, Makar Sankranti is one of the most important ones. Even though almost every state in India celebrates this harvest festival, Odisha's celebration is unique for two reasons: first, it coincides with the state's traditional new year, and second, it has astronomical significance for those who think that the motion of celestial bodies affects life. In Odisha, Makar Sankranti celebrations mark the start of Makar Mela and the creation of a variety of delicious, mouthwatering foods. The uncooked, freshly harvested rice, banana, jaggery, coconut, rasgullas, sesame, Chhena puddings, and Khai/Liaa are all used in the making of the traditional Makar Chaula cuisines. For the believers, this traditional dish holds great significance, and it is undoubtedly made on this particular day (Sahu, 2015).

With reference to the Sambalpuri culture of Odisha another agricultural festival called Nuakhai is celebrated for welcoming of first harvesting of the season to home. In accordance with the Hindu calendar, Nuakhai falls on the day following the Ganesh Chaturthi holiday, Panchami tithi, which is the fifth day of the Suklapaksha (lunar fortnight) of the month of Bhadrapada or Bhaadra (August–September). 'Nua' means new and "khai" means to eat, this day involves dining together and acknowledging the new harvest crops. The new cereal is not consumed until Nuakhai rites are carried out in front of the presiding deity. The deity is offered

prasad made from freshly harvested rice as part of the agrarian custom. The home is prepared to welcome the deity to enjoy the first fresh harvest of the new season, having been properly cleaned and groomed down to the last detail. Farmers credit the good harvest to the blessings of the deities, viewing it as a sign of submission (Meher, 2020).

Harvest festivals in India are not only occasions for celebration and religious fervor but also play a vital role in sustaining rural livelihoods, promoting cultural heritage, and fostering social cohesion. The State also celebrates major ethnic and tribal festivals such as Nuakhai, Parab, and Mondei, which offer unique insights into the diverse cultural tapestry of Odisha.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Selection of Study Area

Odisha was selected purposively because of its geographical diversity, ranging from coastal plains to highland terrains, impacts agricultural practices and harvest festivities. The study was conducted in Sundargarh district of Odisha during 2023-24. This district was selected purposively because it has distinct, rich, variegated traditions- its various strands being fair, festival, deities and their rituals performing arts like dance, music, dramatic performance, food and beverage, ornaments, artifact and crafts, different rituals and sacrifices and in fact, an entire gamut of things associated with lives of castes of the area. A total of 120 respondents were included in the sample by randomly selected. An ex post facto research design was used in the study.

#### Research Questions:

1. What are the economic contributions of harvest festivals to local communities in Odisha?
2. How do gender roles vary in festival-related economic and cultural activities?
3. What are the expenditure patterns during harvest festivals?

#### Research Objectives:

- To assess the economic significance of harvest festivals in the Sundargarh district of Odisha.
- To analyze the gender-based roles and participation in harvest-related activities.
- To identify income-generating activities associated with these festivals.

### 2.2 Sources of Data

Primary data collected through pretested schedule from the respondents by personal interview method and focused group discussions (FGD) during Feb to April 2024. Secondary data gathered from various published sources. i.e., Census of India (2011), Ministry of Tourism, government of India, Block office of Bisra and Nuagaon, Sundargarh, Odisha.

### 2.3 Sample Selection Process

The procedure for collecting the sample includes local residents and tourists who had visited during the festivals primarily from the neighboring districts. Out of the total 120 respondents, 87 were locally residing people comprising 72.5% from festival-hosting villages across Sundargarh and 33 were tourists involving 27.5% from the districts of Sambalpur, Jharsuguda and Balangir.

### 2.4 Analytical Tools

The following statistical methods and procedures were used to score, quantify, evaluate, categorize, and tabulate the collected data.

**Frequency:** Frequency is the number of times a variable is repeated. This measure was used to know the distribution pattern of respondent's variable wise and to categorize the respondents based on their opinion on each activity.

**Percentage:** Percentage is the number, amount and rate etc., expressed as it is part of a total which is 100. For calculating percentage, the frequency of particular set was divided by the total number of observations multiplied by 100.

**Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ):** The ratio of the total number of observations to the sum of all the observations is known as the mean. The dependent and independent variables were divided into low, medium, and high categories using this metric. The mean was employed as a metric to categorize the participants into distinct groups.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{n}$$

Where,

$\bar{X}$  = Mean of the observations

$\sum X$  = Sum of all the observations  $n$  = Total number of observations.

**Standard Deviation:** It is defined as the square root of the square root of the deviations from the mean of the collection of observations. The dependent and independent variables were divided into low, medium, and high categories using this metric.

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where,

$\bar{x}$  = Mean

n = Number of observations

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Perception on Contribution to Income Generation

Nearly half of the respondents (45%) believed that harvest festivals significantly contribute to income generation by providing opportunities for selling goods and services. A substantial portion

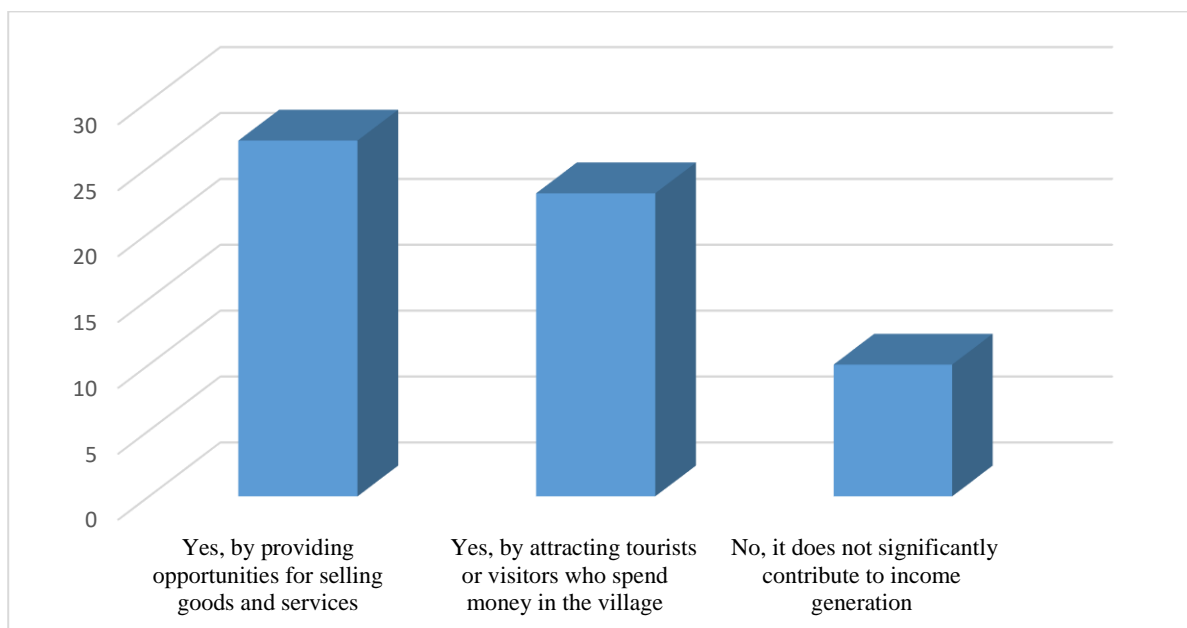
of respondents (38.33%) felt that harvest festivals contribute to income generation by attracting tourists or visitors who spend money in the village. A smaller segment of respondents (16.67%) believed that harvest festivals did not significantly contribute to income generation. Similar results were found in Ossowska (2023).

#### 3.2 Economic Benefits Perceived by Respondents

Food and Beverages had the highest expenditure, accounting for 53% of the total expenditure. Clothing was the second highest expenditure category, making up 17% of the total, reflecting cultural norms and the importance of dressing well for the occasion. At 3%, entertainment was the category with the lowest spending. This imply that, in relation to other categories, entertainment was less important during the harvest festival and expenditure on food, eateries were highest among all. Similar results were found in Chhabra (2003).

**Table 1. Perception on contribution to income generation**

S. No.	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes, by providing opportunities for selling goods and services	54	45.00
2.	Yes, by attracting tourists or visitors who spend money in the village	46	38.33
3.	No, it does not significantly contribute to income generation	20	16.67
Total		120	100.00



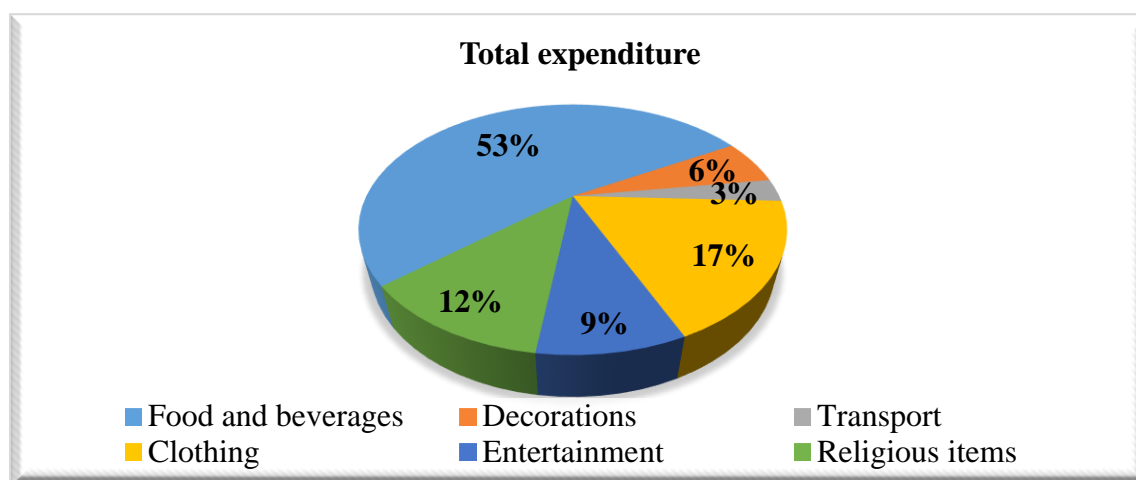
**Fig. 1. Perception towards income generation**

**Table 2. Income from festival related activities**

Category	Average income (₹)	Share in annual income (%)	Remarks
Income from Handicrafts	3800	10	Tribal jewellery, woodcrafts, Talapatra(leafarts)
Income from handloom products	2500	7	Sarees, Shawls, gamuccha (locally woven items)
Income from Traditional food items	4200	11	Mandia ladoos, pithas,mahua flower(dried), rice cakes
Income from Cultural performances	1500	4	By youth/ women groups; folk dance and song
Total festive income	12000	35	Relative to household's average annual income (₹35,000-40,000)

**Table 3. The total expenditure in rupees on various items including food and beverages, decorations, transport, clothing, entertainment, and religious items**

S. No.	Items	No. of respondents	Total expenditure (Rs)	Average expenditure per respondents (Rs)
1.	Food and beverages	120	108000	18000
2.	Decorations	120	12000	2000
3.	Transport	120	6000	1000
4.	Clothing	120	36000	6000
5.	Entertainment	120	18000	3000
6.	Religious items	120	24000	4000
	Total	120	204000	34000



**Fig. 2. Economic benefits perceived by respondents**

### 3.3 Various Economic Activities Associated

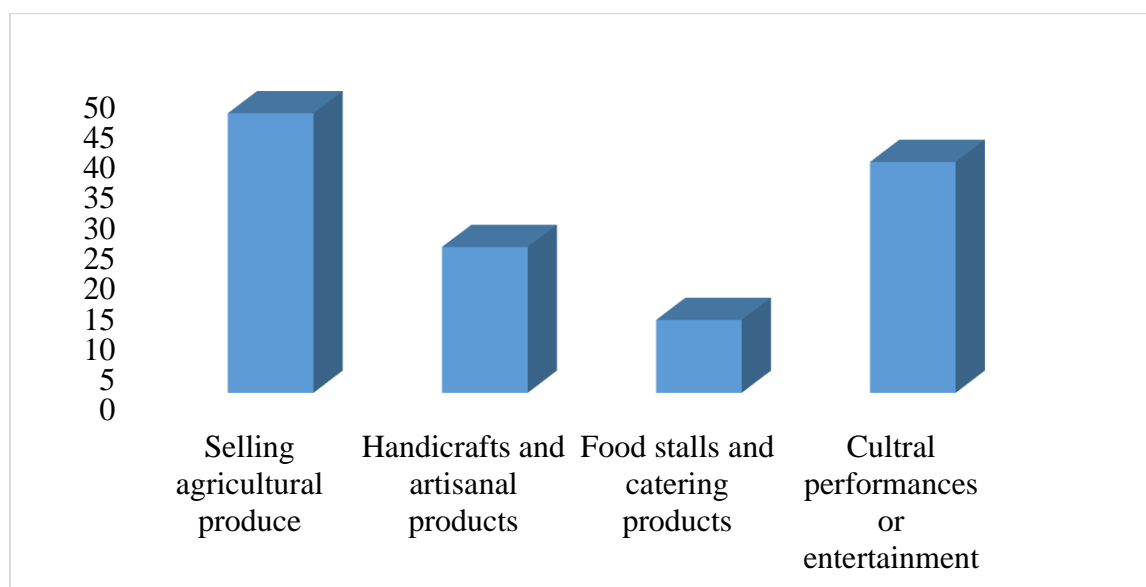
The following Table 4 represents the economic activities undertaken during harvest festivals.

The largest proportion of respondents (38.33%) were involved in selling agricultural produce during the harvest festival. Cultural

performances and entertainment also played a substantial economic role, with 31.67% of respondents participating in these activities. A significant portion of the economic activity (20%) involved the sale of handicrafts and artisanal products. Food stalls and catering services, though representing a smaller proportion (10%), were still an important part of the festival's economic activities. Similar results were obtained in Janse (2019).

**Table 4. Economic activities**

S. No.	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Selling agricultural produce	46	38.33
2.	Handicrafts and artisanal products	24	20
3.	Food stalls and catering services	12	10
4.	Cultural performances & entertainment	38	31.66
Total		120	100

**Fig. 3. Economic activities****Table 5. Role of community in village**

S. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Involve resource poor people	4	3.33
2.	Collect charity from different households	44	36.67
3.	Involvement of children in cultural performances	14	11.67
4.	Conducting feasts, parties	32	26.67
5.	Common dining	26	21.67
Total		120	100.00

### 3.4 Community Involvement During Harvest Festivals

The data presents various aspects of community involvement during harvest festivals, reflecting the diverse ways in which community members participate and contribute.

The most common form of community involvement was the collection of charity from different households, with 36.67% of respondents highlighting this activity. Organizing feasts and parties was another significant aspect, noted by 26.67% of respondents. Common dining, where community members ate

together, is mentioned by 21.67% of respondents. The involvement of children in cultural performances is highlighted by 11.67% of respondents. The involvement of resource-poor people is noted by 3.33% of respondents.

### 3.5 Participation of Respondents in Village Harvest Festivals

The data in Table 6 provides information about the participation of respondents in harvest festivals, broken down by gender.

The data shows a higher frequency and percentage of male participation (60%) in

harvest festivals. Although lower than male participation, females still represented a substantial portion (40%) of the participants. This revealed the disparities as well as the interest towards attending in festivals. Similar results were found in Chang (2014) and Bano (2022). 263 participants (61%), while 165 (39%) were male. Married people with children also prefer rural participation. Agritourists, who have the potential to become loyal, focus above all on buying fresh and high-value products Ceylan, R (2024).

So, there is significant association between gender and participation in harvest festivals. This implies likelihood of participating in harvest festivals was different for males and females. Participation of males revealed their active involvement in physical and logistical aspects of setting up and running the festival. Further they have fewer domestic responsibilities compared to women. Women's participation was influenced family and domestic spheres. They have traditional roles in culinary activities, art, crafts and hospitality.

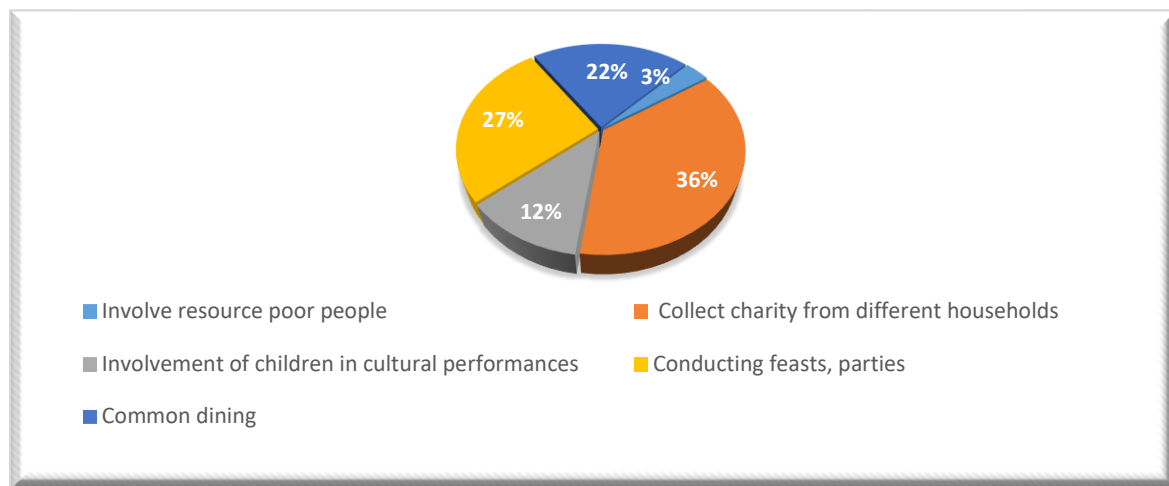


Fig. 4. Role of community in village

Table 6. Participation of respondents in harvest festivals

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	72	60
Female	48	40
Total	120	100

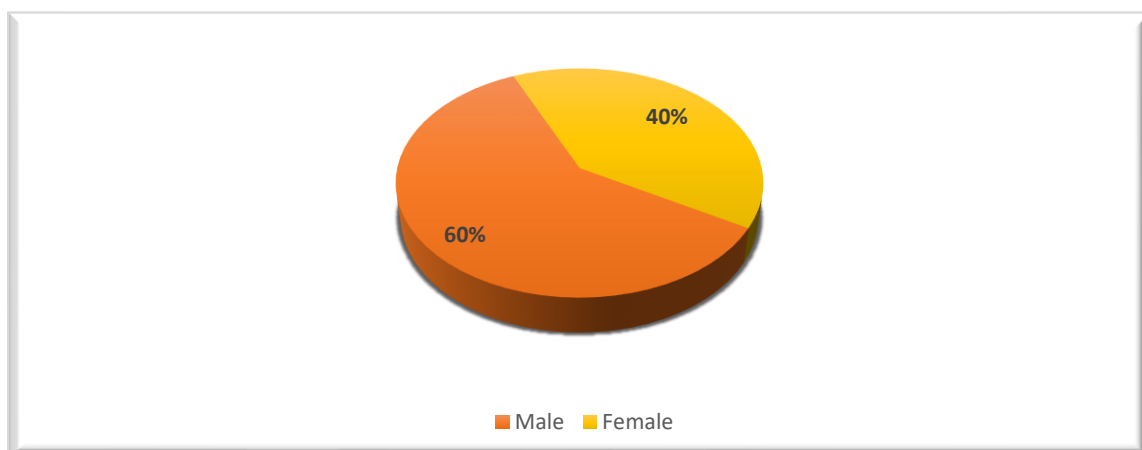
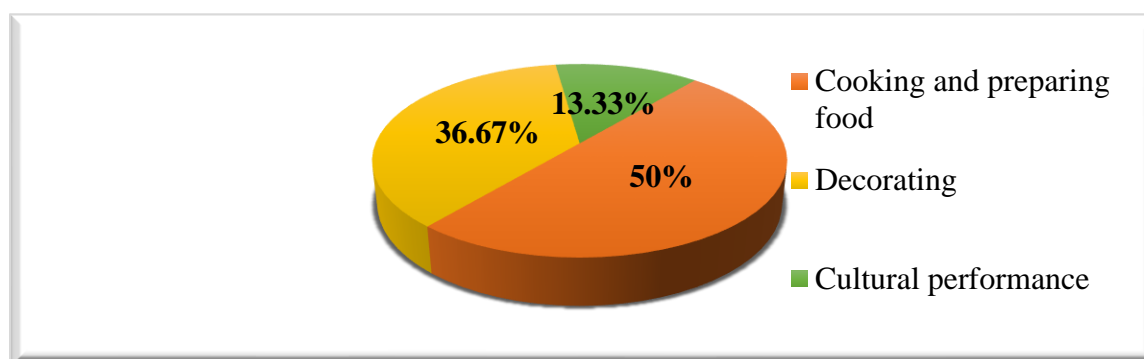


Fig. 5. Participation of respondents in harvest festivals



**Table 7. Role of women during harvest festivals**

S. No.	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1	Cooking and preparation	60	50%
2	Decorating	44	36.67%
3	Cultural performance	16	13.33%
	Total	120	100

**Fig. 6. Participation of women in harvest festival****Table 8. Participation of Male**

S. No.	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Leading ceremonies	32	26.67
2.	Agricultural activities	48	40.00
3.	Organizing events	40	33.33
	Total	120	100

### 3.6 Role of Women During Harvest Festivals

The data in the Table 7 represents the roles of women during harvest festivals, indicating their involvement in various activities.

It is highlighting the role of women in cooking and preparing food with half (50%) of the respondents primarily engaged in cooking and preparing food during harvest festivals. Approximately 37% of the respondents indicating that women contribute substantially to the aesthetic and festive environment of the celebration. A smaller proportion of respondents (13.33%) indicate that women participate in cultural performances. Similar results were found in Alshammari et al. (2019) and Thomas (2022).

### 3.7 Role of Males in Harvest Festivals

The Table 8 provides men's involvement in various activities during harvest festivals.

The majority of males, 40%, were primarily involved in agricultural activities. A substantial

portion, 33.33%, of males were involved in organizing events. This suggested that beyond the physical labor, males were also crucial in the logistical and planning aspects of the harvest.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Harvest festivals serve as powerful economic and cultural engines within communities. They provide farmers with direct market access, boosting local economies while supporting regional businesses. These celebrations simultaneously preserve cultural heritage and create economic diversification opportunities through tourism and cultural activities.

During these festivals, spending focuses primarily on essentials like food, clothing, and decorations, demonstrating how religious traditions adapt to practical needs while maintaining customs. There are notable gender differences in participation, with men 60% more likely to participate than women, reflecting traditional gender roles within the community.

These gender distinctions extend to specific responsibilities: women predominantly handle

food preparation and cooking alongside decorative duties, aligning with traditional expectations regarding household management. Men, meanwhile, typically engage in agricultural activities and physically demanding harvest-related tasks, highlighting their contribution of manual labor during festival periods.

Beyond economic and practical impacts, harvest festivals play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion. They facilitate neighborly harmony, promote peace, preserve cultural heritage, and strengthen community bonds. These celebrations represent a holistic approach to community life that balances economic opportunity, cultural preservation, and social unity.

## DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

## CONSENT

As per international standards or university standards, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

All data collection procedures are based on the ethical guidelines.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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