

URBAN INFORMAL ECONOMY AND THE MARGINALITY OF WOMEN VENDORS : A CASE STUDY OF STRUGGLE FOR SPACE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore urban poverty, informal economy and marginality of a particular segment of the society. It explains how women vendors are socially and culturally marginalised despite living in the city for a long period of time. The paper further explores the nature of their political marginality as they are often excluded from urban policy and planning. Street Vending representing a significant share of urban informal economy in the developing world is the most excluded segment. Millions of people worldwide make a living selling goods on the streets. In India almost 92 per cent of the work force is in the unorganized sector and one-third of which are women and their dependents. For the urban poor, street vending is one of the means of earning a livelihood as it requires low financial input and the skills involved are also low. This study traces story of marginality of women street vendors in public spaces of Varanasi and narrates how over the years the city has, variously pushed the unmanaged and unregistered street vendors to trade without properly incorporating them into urban plans. It suggests that there is an ongoing struggle for access to the space, and draws attention to the role of the national and local state, as well as local political struggles. The history of street vending in Varanasi based on empirical studies provides useful material for understanding marginality and exclusion and the need for inclusivity in the informal economy.

The study uses a social exclusion perspective to examine the situation of women vendors because despite being inclusive in the urban informal economy by contributing significantly to the urban informal economy, they are the poorest and most marginalized lot.

Keywords: *Urban Informal Sector, Women Vendors, Marginality, Exclusion and Inclusion .*

INFORMAL ECONOMY AND THE URBAN POOR

The urban poor who are marginals¹ are mostly involved in informal sectors of the economy as they are often excluded from the formal sectors. The most

generally accepted definition of the informal economy is income-earning activities “unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated” (Castells and Portes 1989:12)

Urban informal sector in the developing world is represented by a significant share of Street

Vendors. For the urban poor especially women, street vending is one of the means of earning a livelihood. They are rarely included in a country's labour statistics because they are far more likely to be working in the informal rather than the formal sector (and thus are not 'counted' among the employed or economically active). Faced with a paucity of statistics on street vendors in general and women vendors in particular, it is difficult to quantify with any precision the extent of female participation.

MARGINALIZED AND UNDER-VALUED ALONG GENDER LINES

The most ridiculous and disastrous distortion results from the use of the words working women and non-working women. Men and women both work. The difference lies in the kind of work they do, where it is done, how it is done, for what kind of remunerations or rewards and so on. The material requirements for survival demands everyone cooperation. According to anthropologists (Reed, 1976) women were the main producers of food, clothing, crafts and many different tools through most of human history. In fact, this continues to be the same in all the societies of the world where production is mainly for subsistence and not for sale. However, references to women's economic activities are extremely sparse in Indian history and even for the Middle Ages as is evident from the writings of eminent historians like Irfan Habib and Bipan Chandra (Poonacha, 1999).

Before we understand how the process of economic development has led to the subordination of women, we must understand the existing gender bias within the subject matter of economics. First, because a great deal of women's work remain invisible, its exact nature, scope and intensity are either not measured at all or is partially and erratically measured. Second the nature of women's work is characterized as duties and as it remains outside the purview of market economy and forms most important component of home economy, it is not treated as work. This leads to misleading notions of working and non-working women. (Ibid)

It is therefore wrong to distort the reality of women's contribution to the economic life of the community by words such as working women and non-working women. The difference is partly due to the kind of work women do and partly because patriarchal societies reward men's work through tangible material gains while women are forced to perform work purely altruistic reasons. (Ibid)

EXCLUSION DEFINED IN TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

The study of the informal sector also draws attention to the marginal condition of women workers. A large number of women workers are employed in the informal sector and they constitute a significant proportion of all women workers (Menefee Singh and Kelles-Viitanen, 1987). Estimates of women in the informal sector, however, are not very reliable as many women workers are engaged in home-based activities, that tend to be omitted from official records and statistics. Within the informal sector, it has been argued, women workers tend to be concentrated in low paid jobs (Bromley and Gerry, 1979). A study of the informal sector raises many issues such as that of earnings differentials and skill differentials between men and women in the informal sector.

This type of informality, highly associated with cases of migration, displacements and poverty has renovated the theoretical debate on informality and brought into consideration new particularities, that rather than focusing on the structural links with the formal sector of some informal activities, emphasize on analysing a particular socioeconomic condition which evidences a continued oppression that leads a considerable group of urban inhabitants to live as marginals. Informality, under these latter considerations goes beyond economical aspects.

Its characteristics are an expression and a condition of power structures. The phenomenon for example, appears to be predominant amongst poor, less educated and young population; the almost absolute dominance of women in the

category of domestic servants, on the other hand, raises gender aspects.

INDIAN ECONOMIC CONTEXT

India has shown a sharp increase in the number of street vendors during the past few years especially after 1991 when the policies relating to structural adjustment and liberalization were introduced. It is now estimated that 2.5% of the urban population is engaged in this occupation. The total number of street vendors in the country is estimated at around 12 million. Its number is likely to increase further. Studies on street vendors are very few and focused mainly on some cities. In 2000, the National Alliance of Vendors in India (NASVI) organized a study in cities which included Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Patna, Ahmedabad and Imphal. This could be taken as one of the more comprehensive studies on street vending. Two more studies were conducted on street vendors in Mumbai, besides the one by NASVI. In 1998 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) commissioned TISS and Youth for Voluntary Action & Unity (YUVA) to conduct a census of hawkers on municipal lands. In 2001 SNDT Women's University in collaboration with International Labour Organisation conducted a study on Street vendors .

Though the Indian Constitution guarantees equality of opportunity related to work, equal rights for livelihood, equal pay for equal work etc, the condition of women in the unorganized sector is deplorable. Women are over-represented in the informal sector worldwide. In all countries where data is available, informal traders – mainly street vendors - represent a very high proportion (73-99%) of employment in trade and a significant share (50-90%) of trade gross domestic product (GDP).

WOMEN AS VENDORS: WHEN , WHY AND HOW MARGINAL?

Now the question arises as to why do so many women who work in the informal sector remain poor

and are on the ,margins despite their contributions to the economy? Many observers argue that women are less able than men to compete in labor, capital, and product markets because they have relatively low levels of education and skills or are less likely to own property or have market know-how. Other observers argue that women's time and mobility are constrained by social and cultural norms that assign the responsibility for social reproduction to women and discourage investment in women's education and training. This is over and above the fact that the informal economy continues to expand as a result of globalization.

WHY STREET VENDING

Street Vending is chosen as the object of study for several reasons: Firstly, its visibility and its location in the public area make it a lightning rod in terms of pressures against informal economic activity. Its presence , provokes in this case the immediate paradox between the economic reality of the country and the modern India that state and culture leaders would like to project. Beyond that it cause (or is accused of causing) problems with urban transit, urban planning, urban infra-structure, complaints from neighbours, and commercial business, public health threats and a myriad of other potential problems that make a focal point for pressures for its removal. In addition vendors themselves compete over market zones, making them a prime source of complaints against the presence of other street markets . Thus , street vendors are in constant state of potential or actual conflict over space in a way that puts them at the forefront of the debate over informality in modern urban settings.

Secondly, street vending has been always been banned/ evicted as an anti –encroachment drive, as part of an ambitious project of the State.

Above all, street vending is a phenomena/issue that is well known and well documented by the media and government agencies but which has not been analyzed in the way the present study proposes.

THE INTERVIEWS

Although I interviewed twenty one (21) women vendors but for this study I would attempt to analyse seven interviews carried out with women street vendors in Varanasi. I did all of them myself one and half years ago. The women I talked to were encouraged to talk freely about whatever problems and other issues of their lives. The interviews I felt would give me insights into the contents I wanted to explore. The text is organized trying to follow the sequence women themselves speak out their stories. I decided to use the women's own words, even, for example, their exact statement in their local dialect, in order not to detract from the richness of their testimony.

This limited number of interviews does not allow drawing conclusions or even making generalisations, and therefore I cannot claim this testimony to be representative of all women's experience of Varanasi in street selling. My aim is rather to examine and explore urban poverty, informal economy and marginality of this particular segment of the society based on specific experiences. It explains how women vendors are socially, economically, culturally and politically marginalized despite living in the city for a long period of time. The paper further explores the nature of their political marginality as they are often excluded from urban policy and planning.

STUDY SITE AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on women street sellers in the Lanka region near Banaras Hindu University in the city of Varanasi, and on the basis of interview with women vendors as well as the local permanent shop keepers, customers,. The study was undertaken between the period May 2010-January 2011. It was undertaken in two parts. First, a pre-study in which the area was selected and surveyed. The reason for choosing the Lanka region was proximity, familiarity as well as regular availability of respondents(unless eviction has taken place).

The total of 21 women were interviewed. The purposive sampling method was used for interview because it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of women vendors. The reasons being, firstly they are not registered, secondly they do not have fixed place and are daily pushed away by the police / local (state authorities) authorities, the local permanent shop owners. As a result they are always mobile along with their belongings. In the morning they can be seen clubbed together in rows on both sides of the road but as the time advances they are found distantly scattered on the road, depending upon the availability of the space. In the morning if they can be counted or interviewed at one place, it is difficult to locate them at the same place. Some of these women come from adjoining villages (5to 6 km) with small quantity of fresh green vegetables, and as soon as the items are sold they move off from the place or return to their villages. However, most of them come from the near by place like Naria, Nagwa, Bhagwanpur located within the radius of ½ km from their work place i.e Lanka region of Varanasi . Individual women sellers as well as women with husband were seen to be engaged in such type of micro enterprise. Many a times the husbands were found sitting at the place and wives absent for a while. The reason behind was that either they had gone to perform their daily domestic work or for some other work. One is thus at the crossroads of ascertaining the exact number of these women vendors.

Keeping in view the above constraints, I have tried to note the total number available at the time of the survey done for the purpose of the study. Hence the accuracy of the total number cannot be ascertained.

The Lanka region near Banaras Hindu University has a large number of permanent shops, approximately 350-400 in number, including medicine shops, cloth stores, sweet shops, betel shops, book shops, provision stores, shoe stores, photo studio and stationery shops. The number of make shift shops on the other hands, ranged between 185-250, out of which approximately 165-180 were run by men and 80-85 run by women. Even though women sellers comprised one-third of the total number, most of

them were found concentrated in the less prosperous market places, and tended to sell the cheap items. These women, including the young women with their children and the old widowed, deserted, separated women were most often found selling fresh greens, carrots, limes, cheap vegetables, fruits or items which were cheap, highly perishable and yield a somewhat lower profit rate. They sold vegetables on mat or cloth spread on the ground, rather than from makeshift stalls because they could not afford stalls or trolleys. But there was category of those which sold high profit items such as fruits, sweets, meat and that was managed by men, it seemed to be a male preserve.

WOMEN VENDORS

Case Study 1. State has No Answer

Nirmala is a young SC widow of 30 who sells vegetable. Her husband died eight years ago after a long illness leaving four daughter to raise. She lives in a kuchacha pucca house along with her two younger daughters and the other two got married recently, After her husband's death, Nirmala repaired the trolley used by her husband, for selling vegetables, Knowing she had to work to support her family she revived her husband's business with the help of some money saved when her husband was alive. Nirmala rises at 5.00 a.m. and goes to the market around 5-6 a.m. leaving her two daughters at the work place to keep watch of the trolley in her absence She goes by city bus to procure fresh vegetables from Sundarpur (Whole sale market of vegetables in the near by area) which is 3 to 4 kms from her house and pays Rs. 15 to 20 depending upon the weight, She buys vegetables worth Rs. 500-600 thrice a week. Nirmala has been doing this since last 8 years. After bringing the goods she herself fixes the price very cautiously since it is a competitive market. She spends 12 to 14 hours everyday on her business. She goes home between 12 to 1 only for an hour to cook food and perform other domestic duties. She comes back with the food at the workplace, eats the meal with her daughters. She goes home between 12 to 1 only for an hour to cook food and perform other domestic

duties, She comes back with the food at the workplace, eats the meal with her daughters. She wants to devote more and more time on her business to earn more so that she is able to support her family in a better way. Everyday she earns a profit ranging from Rs. 40 to 60, which at times exceeds to Rs. 100. It is very difficult to ascertain exact amount of profit but she is able to support herself avoid depending on any outside agency. As her income is unsteady and very small so saving is done on irregular basis. It was only at the time of her daughters marriage she borrowed an amount Rs. 10000/- from the money lender, for which an interest of Rs. 1000/- was to be paid. Though she is educated up to primary level, but she does not send her daughters to school, because of the help provided by her daughter in her work. Nirmala enjoys autonomy over her money since she is a widow and is the sole decision maker in her family. Hers is an example of female-headed household, earning to support and sustain her family. When her husband was alive she looked after the household and helped him in the business partially. She had never been to the market before his death but gradually necessity and time taught her every thing. She observes, "How long is life without money possible? An alternative has to be searched for sustaining one's family". Though she tries to manage her work properly she feel perturbed when they are evicted during the Encroachment Drive' by the municipality. She says, The poor are left with only two alternatives. Either to shut down their business temporarily or roam on the streets to sell and earn something. Who will feed their children/" She complains, "For poor people there is no one to listen to their woes, Since the vendors of a region are not united, this problem of eviction by the government cannot be tackled" Further she feels " If the government labels us as encroachers why not provide us with space" she adds, Every day one rupee is collected from us buy the municipality, where does that money go? The state has no answer.

Case Study 2. A Search for a Place of her Own

Munni Devi is a young deserted yadav woman in her early 30s, who sells tea. She lives with her widow mother and her only daughter who is sixteen years

old whom she wants to get married. She says 'A young unmarried girl is a responsibility for the parents. The family honour is dependent on the girl's proper upbringing'. Munni Devi's work starts from 4 in the morning and ends at around 10-11 in the night. Her tea stall / trolley is located near the Banaras Hindu University. She daily caters to the tea needs of the passersby. Reminiscing she says that earlier due to less number of shops there was less competition, hence the earning was better comparatively. Her mother supports her in the marketing process as she goes to the wholesale market which is 5-6kms from her work place to procure raw materials like tea and milk from the nearby Dudh Ki Satti' (Whole sale milk market which is held daily). Items like sugar and kerosene oil are also easily fetched, Every day she needs 8to10 liters of milk, 1-2kg sugar, 250gms tea, 1-1.5liter kerosene oil to prepare approximately more than 100 cups of tea. Munni Devi gives most of her working hours to her business. Like other women she expects her daughter to perform the daily domestic chores. She is only worried about her young daughter's security and marriage as the dowry transactions at marriage are on the increase. She is often worried about the saving for dowry as well as for sustenance of household. Since the mother and the daughter have been running this enterprise, money is under their control. Munni Devi feels no threat from the police authorities, because she offers tea to them when they come to her shop. But she feels shocked and shattered during the anti-Encroachment Drive. Due to lack of any union or collectives, such efforts are never protested. **She is case of spatial exclusion who gets dislocated during the encroachment drive.** For a short while she feels that the lives of pavement sellers come to stand still'. They have to run here and there with their goods to save their livelihood. She feels that they must be provided with some space or some other alternative measures. Poor people are the worst hit in any such drive' In spite of these constraints, Munni Devi has not lost hope and is continuing with her business to support herself and her family.

Case Study 3: Struggle for Social and Economic Space/ Resistance Means Torture

Dularo Devi's story gives an insight into struggles and efforts of women's sellers. Dularo Devi is a 62 year old physically challenged SC woman who sells vegetable. She has four sons and one daughter. Despite being old she is impelled to work to support her family of three members – herself, her deaf and lame husband, and her son. She catches a bus early in the morning, goes to the whole sale market to bring her vegetables. After every two to three days she buys items worth Rs. 200 to 300, for which she has to pay the transportation charge which varies from Rs. 15 to 20 depending on the weight of the goods purchased.

She faces great difficulty in managing home without the support of other family members. All the sons after marriage live with their families and keep no contact with her. She herself cooks food in the morning. Some times when she reaches home late she is so tired that she sleep without food. According to her "selling vegetables, is my compulsion. How will my family be supported? If my husband were fit and fine I would not have taken such strains". According to her, "I was earlier in better position than what I am today". The family had a good piece of land and their own house. Her sons taking the advantage of their father's incapability sold the land and a portion of the house. A small portion remains in which she lives. She also narrated the story of one of her sons who cheated her and forced her to withdraw the amount she had saved in the bank and forcibly took that amount. Although she takes pains to run her house she often feels helpless. "Now I have nothing to look forward to. Now I have left all on God and fate".

Like other women vendors she also faces problems with local shop keepers and police who always force

Dularo Devi opined, "*Maati Dhone Ke liye bhi to Kuchch Chahiye.* I must do for myself so that even after my death they do not have any grudge or complaint against me".

her to move far away from the places where she wishes to place her trolley. However, she denies being subject to extortion. She reported that when

Shanti says, He must know that both of us are complementary to each other. *Grithasthi Gadi Ke Do Pahiye Pe Chalti Hai Ek Pahiye Ke Bina Sambhav Nahin Hai?* I am lucky to have such a husband.

the policemen come to her she herself gives them whatever item is available with her without charging any money for it. "If you resist you will be penalized by way of torture", she rationalizes. **A clear case of harassment by the police which frequently occurs due to lack of any organized and legitimate solidarity.** She also has a similar story to share about eviction. After the situation is stabilized the sellers return to their respective areas. It is quite a regular feature. Dularo Devi adds: "Our earning is affected and we are under stress. There should be some arrangement for people like us. In the absence of any unity amongst the sellers, collective protest can not be launched against this anti-poor drive.

CASE STUDY4: ASPIRING HIGH/ BREAKING SILENCE BY RESISTING

Lakshmi is a young and confident married SC woman in her early twenties who sells eggs. Her husband owns a tea-stall. Prior to this venture her husband used to run an auto rickshaw, but frequent repair works needed money. As a result they suffered losses. So both of them decided to take up some new work. Unlike others Lakshmi gets eggs from one agent. One box of eggs contains 210 eggs worth Rs. 750 to 800.

She comes to her workplace around 4 in the morning along with her husband and her son, the only child. They return home by 10 in the evening. After coming to the workplace she is not bothered about household work as the family stays together at the shop itself. Sometimes she brings food from home for herself and her family or sometimes she buys from

the market. Apart from eggs, she has to buy supplementary items like green chilies, onions, oil for preparing omelettes, as well kerosene oil for the stove. According to her, "I am able to earn Rs. 300 per day. Unlike other women sellers interviewed Lakshmi complains about the inhuman and uncharitable attitude of the local police. She says that previously she used to face the police atrocities very frequently like frequent visits to her stall and forcing her to serve cooked items as well pack some for their homes. Unlike the other women street sellers she thought of resisting and so she contacted one of the local politicians to tackle the situation and after that she faces no such unruly demands. At the same time she feels concerned that there is no union to raise these issues. The sellers have internalized this as the order of the day, as a daily practice. They are mercilessly beaten by the authorities, whereas in dealing with women the authorities are relatively more cautious".

Having her aspirations high Lakshmi does not want her child to grow up with the same future. She wishes to make her son a doctor. She is looking for a private tutor to coach her child who is just 5 years old. She feels that although people discourage her "I am ready to bear any hardship for making my child a doctor".

Her's is an example of a nuclear family. She says very confidently that she takes decisions in almost all matters. So far control over money is concerned, she keeps it with her and her husband does not pose any problem. She argues: Why should there be divide between husband and wife's rights and duties? Both are equal. Both of them should respect each other. I do not see any problem in my relationship". Like other women she also recognizes the problems of space, lack of union and severe police harassment, and suggests that "these issues should be resolved by the state, recognizing the valuable service we provide to the society". The state acts as a mute and silent spectator.

What compels these poor young/ old /single/ and widow women to go for such work? Economic compulsion is the single most important reason pushing women to informal sector. When asked what

forced them to come out of their homes, most of these women said that they made the decision to go to work because they wanted to support/ sustain their families. The fact that the majority of the respondents came from the families which have an income of even less than rupees 50 per day, itself speaks about the reason why they have entered into the informal sector. As already mentioned above, it involves easy entry, is less capital intensive, and most compatible to women's situations or needs, particularly more flexible for the poor, especially women. The husband or sons of these women were casual labourers, who had no regular source of income or even if one or two who had a regular tea stall, or sold vegetables, they earned very little and contributed even less to the family upkeep. Laxmi said, "Money is needed to meet some needs other than daily needs, i.e. for education of children, health and so on". For a few purpose of earning was to meet the ceremonial expenses after death.

WHY THIS PROFESSION?

From bargaining in the wholesale markets at 4.00 a.m. to purchase goods to walking on the roads in the middle class colonies, or sitting on the pavements or road side for 10 to 14 hours a day, street vending is not only labour intensive, it involves hard physical work. Despite this it is a family profession, less capital and skill intensive, easy and flexible working hours, more output oriented and enterprising.

In our sample we found that the majority of the vendors buy from wholesale market and sell in retail trade market, whereas a marginal number appeared to be 'producers', who reported bringing their produce from their village to the market place for sale.

SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND PRODUCTIVE WORK/ PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERE

The double burden that is carried by women, who work outside the home, is a situation that crosses all boundaries. Distinctions between productive work and house work, income earning work and reproductive work, the work place and the home, are only now emerging as issues, in a number of societies. The women are torn between roles at home and work. The time spent at home by women appears to be an open and elastic stretch in which domestic chores capture a great deal of women's time, but domestic chores and the chores carried out in order to get paid work are combined in a never ending line, one task following the next one, all duties done in a parallel or alternating fashion. The domestic unpaid tasks are intermeshed. Although other members of the family may eventually join in this work, women always appear to be the main responsible. On being asked, "Do they feel constrained in moving out to work, their reply was, "Yes there are problems which they face quite often". Since many of them have nuclear families, their family members basically depend on them for everything – food, shelter, and so on.

A few woman reported, that though both of them are engaged in the same economic activity, still performing domestic chores is women's domain and not men's. The only help they expect and get is that, in their absence their sons and husbands look after the business. Besides, a few reported that marketing is done by their husbands and sons while the sale part is handled by them. As usual the labour is gendered her too. On the other hand many women who are widows and single or separated go to the market for procuring raw-materials, engage in fixing prices, and selling as well and accordingly they wake up.

To sum up, while women are expected to contribute financially to the family and also be responsible for the stability of the family and the children, and yet they are marginalized within their families.

STREET : THE SOCIALISING SPACE

It was increasingly recognised that employment was not just about income, but also about social networks, and a sense of self-worth and that the unemployed were 'excluded' from participation in the normal activities of society. Waged work or self employment is expected to provide women with access to material and social resources, which they can then transform into other valued outcomes, including outcomes representing improved status (Kabeer, 2000b) and (Salway *et al.*, 2005]

Through street selling they get to know people, customers and other vendors and they learn to handle competitiveness, jealousy and other stresses. They also value most solidarity and emotional support from the people around them. At times the space and time spent selling on the street is also connected to the domestic space for women.

Most of the respondents reported, "Normally the decisions are taken jointly, but cases where I disagree, he goes ahead with his decision. He does not wait for me. It is actually inherent in our traditions that what a man decides, woman has to accept

However to leave paid work could mean for women a restriction of their socializing space, besides their autonomy to manage their own in one.

For a few women despite their stay in the city for as long as 20 or even 30 years many women have not been able to widen their social horizon or extend their social participation. Questions of day to day survival have kept them tied to their work place and domestic duties. They have very little time energy or resources to participate in other urban, social or cultural activities. They too wish for such a participation but odds against them are too many.

WOMEN'S INCOME

Through income earning activities women play an increasingly important role in the household

subsistence economy. Women's ability to raise an income and improve the overall standard of living of their family (including better food, clothing, health and education) is to them, the most important benefit of taking up economic activities. While the actual use of income earned varies according to the individual context, there is a clear trend of where women's priorities lie.

Women's income is used in the first instance, for meeting basic household consumption needs. Women are traditionally in charge of deciding the family day to day purchases of necessary household items. From the study it appears, that while most of the household / family income is used for basic household purchase, the women also hold the desire to save money for the marriage of daughters, if any for education of sons. However, it is only when the minimum household needs have been met that women think about buying things for themselves or investing in productive assets.

DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND CONTROL OVER RESOURCES

Despite their contributions and vital role in the household, women remain marginalized in the decision making process at the household level². But the kind of internalization of such marginalization has aggravated her exclusion in the family in a subtle manner which does not seem to be visible.

In most cases while women are consulted the male head of the household has the final decision making power even on domestic issues. Women are only considered free to decide on minor issues, such as food purchases or purchase of minor items. They do not even question. It is obvious that these women seem to have internalized their dependency, though they hold that decision making is a joint process. In cases where the male head is absent (due to death or desertion) the female head of household either individually or in consultation with the sons, parents, holds a high degree of financial decision-making capacity, particularly, if she is contributing highly to household income.

Such women appeared more independent, empowered with greater access and control over resources, as they were the heads of the family. Here too, however, control over income and decision making at the household level is further determined by age and kins ranking, limiting the influence of the younger family members particularly of the daughter-in-law.

However, women's income earning activities, have in some cases, enhanced their intra-familial relations. Such cases are more likely to be exceptions.

NEGOTIATING SPACE WITHIN FAMILY

Women are challenging their stereotyped roles when they enter the public sphere and as a consequence they are creating space for themselves. They are breaking down barriers denying them access to the public sphere. Women in the street vending challenge cultural values and beliefs that reinforce the stereotypes (as wives, mothers and home makers in a confined space) Thus, the street as a physical and symbolic space becomes the arena upon which women defy the values which reinforce their subordination.

It appears from the study that the decision making power and control over resources of single women, old widows, young widows with no senior family member, separated and deserted woman, is substantially better than those women, who are assisting or doing joint business with their husbands. One of respondent stated, 'My husband used to come drunk and beat me for money regularly. I shared this with my friends at the street. They advised me not to give money and they all joined together and came to my house to teach my husband a lesson. From that day such incident never occurred.'

One of them told how in times of crisis she was helped by other women vendors.

The street then is for women vendors the setting in which their social relationships get extended, while their family relations may also be transformed. It is the place where the learning is acquired by them

It is also apparent that apart from women's contribution of the household income which has eased the financial burden on other family members, the street or the road, their work place which has also served as a social space for them has lessened conflict and violence and dependency. They have gained self prestige and respect.

STAKEHOLDERS AND EXCLUSION : STATE / POLICE / MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY / FAMILY

Sabzi wali, Andewali, Mungphali wali, Chanewali, Chatwali, Phalwali, all are part of our traditional public culture. They serve as providers of services, but perceptions regarding them, as a strata, are of ambivalent nature. Our planners remain silent on their role. These poor women are targeted doubly, for being poor as well as for being women. They are victimized, harassed, marginalized, perceived as problem creators, trouble makers, nuisance value, encroachers and so on, by the state, police, municipal authorities, and other community members. Roadside sellers have often been treated as illegal occupants of road by the authorities. Their presence is viewed as unnecessary and as those who obstruct efficient movement of pedestrians and general traffic. As a result they are pushed away from one area to another. In fact they become the targets of the pressure groups comprising of the municipality, police, politicians, vehicle owners, consumers, shop owners and so on. As a result, this leads to exploitation and extortions. These vendors are exposed to conflicts among themselves, with urban authorities and with formal traders.

They work in hostile environment without basic infrastructure and services, but full of harassment, including beating and confiscation of goods by urban authorities. They face both market and investment

problems. Overcrowding, dwindling sales due to poor location and low purchasing power among customers are some of the market problems. Investment problems include: lack of capital, secure site of operation, corruption, heavy taxation and confiscation of goods by urban authorities among others. Although traders pay dues to urban authorities, the authorities are not able to adequately deliver required services. The structure like meant for the support of the society, on the contrary aggravates their process of exclusion pushing them to margins and their resistance and the struggle for inclusion continues. In fact they work in a sort of state of war, in which repression, authoritarianism and the abusive treatment they receive from the police are their every day reality.

MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY

The most frightening experience for these women vendors is, however, the regular eviction carried out by the district or municipal administration. They fear the very sight of the eviction team, which is known locally by different names. For instance, in Varanasi the vehicle in which an eviction party comes, is known as 'Hullagadi'. Eviction takes a heavy toll on their business since they have to restart the cycle of building up their business. They are treated as encroachers of Government roads and lands. But why will we not sit, when we are paying to the Nagar Nigam? Where is the Government? Why is the Government not providing any alternative arrangements for us?, asked Sitara Devi. The policemen in support of the administration start throwing our items in the drain hurl lathis, assault the male vendors physically. Often after everything settles down they once again occupy their space. But they are mentally shaken, and emotionally disturbed. "Is it a crime to be a poor person", Durgawati questioned, "The authorities are discriminatory and partial also in their attitude. They first attack the poor people. They do not even touch the things of the permanent shop keepers, which are kept outside the shop on the pavements.

Laxmi, a young and bold woman egg seller commented "Due to these police walas I have problems. Every day I have to treat one police man with omelettes of two eggs. Some of them even ask to pack a few eggs for their home without paying a paise for it".

POLICE

Although these poor women have been selling their seasonal fruits, vegetables etc, for the last 15-20 years, yet they do not have secured a place to sit and vend. Every now and then they are pushed or harassed by the police. The respondents also reported that during the course of vending they often have to appease the police and other authorities to be able to continue their struggle for survival. Except a few, majority have internalized these extortions as regular features and do not perceive it as 'problem'.

LOCAL PERMANENT SHOP KEEPERS

Apart from the police and the municipality, most of these women are harassed by the local permanent shop keepers who abuse them for overcrowding in front of their stores, which hampers customer's visit. One of them vehemently protested and said that "Why do they not force out the male sellers. They consider us vulnerable, so they fight with us?" It came from the discussion with them that in the absence of organized union and apathetic attitude of the State they face such tortures, pressures threats, suffer these hardships and discrimination from different levels silently and on individual basis. The demand for space and formation of union or collective networks are offered as suggestion for change³.

From the above empirical observations it can be summed up that for poor difficulties in entering the

formal labour market are greater for women than men, increasing their marginality. Thus it may be inferred that women are more likely than men to join the informal sector. Women's entrance into the informal sector would be determined by men's ability to provide family support. The participation of women in the informal sector, particularly women heads of household, increases within the context of economic and social crises, which means a rise in unemployment and an income decline in lower income households which has been shared by women in their discussions.

Another point that the illegality of women's activities in the informal sector introduces the State acting through police repression, through urban planning eviction drive and operating through its patriarchal and class bias. From discussion with them, the entire situation/status of their marginality, from struggling for physical space to sell their goods to sustain their family, to resist the patriarchal structure, to State's inability to provide any support structure to their social space for human rights based approach was learnt. It was learnt how they are fighting their own battle, without any support from the community and the state machinery. It appears from above observation that women vendors' exclusion and terms of inclusion into the urban informal sector are mediated by caste, religion, age, and household structure. Thus, keeping this in mind there is a great need for State's intervention to evolve a proper inclusive strategy to deal with the exclusionary process of this particular segment of the society who, despite providing service to the society is the most vulnerable lot.

The need is to develop alternative approaches which do not take for granted that women are condemned to be found in power less positions, merely as victims, instead they should be treated as agents of developments. Further, there is need develop a holistic approach towards this issue, if any change has to be brought.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

There is need for registration of vendors to monitor their activities, and maintain their actual record so that it is easier to frame any policy or law for their benefit.

The town planners should reserve dividers as vending space for new and unregistered vendors which constructed in between the roads keeping in mind significance of vending which is an important urban activity.

Mobile vending should be permitted in all areas, if any difficulty then restriction on mobility should be fixed on time basis.

There should be organized on collective basis to fight against any harassment.

There should be facilities of civic amenities like proper clean toilets, drinking water, provision of covered shelter in times of excessive heat and rain.

Above all, if the urban authorities still feel that genuine obstruction of a street, side walk is being hampered by vending then there should be a mechanism of prior notice to them before any eviction or confiscation is done.

Street vending as a group belong to the unorganized sector of the economy. As such they do not have access to government assisted social security. Like the example of some states, where social security schemes like Old Age Pension and other benefits are being provided through the Welfare Boards but this would be only possible unless they are registered.

Stationery vendors should be at least allowed space whether open or covered on license basis.

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¹ “Marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use... (It constitutes) perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (Young, 1990, p. 53). Regarding the informal sector, the concept would refer to that type of activities that constitute merely survival strategies of some groups of workers, mainly though not exclusively nor totally corresponding to the category of ‘street vendors’.

² A sound understanding of social differences and social inequality are key to finding answers to the questions outlined in the previous sections. Simple answers are unlikely, as Kabeer (2003: 193) points out: Gender relations, like all social relations, are multi-stranded: they embody ideas, values and identities; they allocate labour between different tasks, activities and domains; they determine the distribution of resources; and they assign authority, agency and decision-making power. This means that gender inequalities are multi-dimensional and cannot be reduced simply to the question of material or ideological constraint. It also suggests that these relationships are not always internally cohesive. They may contain contradictions and imbalances, particularly when there have been changes in the wider socio-economic environment

³ In Imphal, Manipur, women sellers have organised for their right to occupy their traditional space in the markets. And are able to resist the governments encroachment, especially efforts to move them to make space for a modern market building. There have been struggle by some vegetable vendors in Ahmedabad and Bombay, to allowed to sell in their traditional spots in the main markets and for licenses.