



**GENDER AND LABOUR DEBATES: WOMEN WORKERS IN THE
UNORGANISED SECTOR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO SWEET MEAT STREET IN KOZHIKODE
DISTRICT OF KERALA**

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Abstract

The unorganised women workers are working in the environment of below the minimum accepted standards without adequate facilities and having very lower income that did not meet their daily needs of life. There are a lot of people working in different sectors in SM Street in Kozhikode, a large majority of them working in an unorganized sector. The more women workers were employed mainly in the field of textile shops as sales women and comparatively more opportunities are there. The study focused on the women workers of the unorganised sector in SM Street, Kozhikode and the data were collected from 50 respondents and also from various books, reports, journals and websites. This is revealed that the working hours of women workers are not fixed. They get daily wages for their work, which is comparatively less than the pay prescribed by the government. Gender division of labour is an existing reality in the unorganised sector. Concepts of labour that developed in different arrangements of societies carried a male dominated frame work. Placing work as a typical male phenomena and each point developed a male-centered class consciousness. Labour and its related identities got represented only in this class frame which placed workers under certain categorical representations. The division of labour in the society has historical linkages in different forms. Lack of toilet facilities and drinking water facility lead to severe health issues of women workers in the unorganised sector in SM Street. Both the central and state governments have formulated certain specific schemes to support unorganized workers but which fail in meeting the real needs and requirements of the unorganized labour force. Trade unions are insensitive to deal the issues of women workers in the unorganised sector. AMTU is a great initiative to address the problems of women labourers in SM Street.

Key words: *Unorganised Sector, Women Workers, Gender Division of Labour, AMTU*



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Introduction

In Kerala, women's achievement in the field of education, health and financial self-sufficiency is more or less in parallel with the statistics from developed countries. Kerala is the only state in India where women outnumber men with a higher sex ratio since 1951. There is a modern trend in Kerala where more and more women are ready to work outside their homes and enter all kinds of economic activities. The dynamics of the linkages between gender and labour is studied here by looking at the unorganized sector of Kerala with special reference to the Sweet Meat Market in Kozhikode, Kerala. Women workers are suffering many issues at their work places and majority is not comfortable



with their work environment. Gender discrimination in the work places is considered as a serious issue. SM Street popularly known as “Mittayi Theruvu” is the main market in Kozhikode. SM Street is the busiest trading area in Kozhikode and are women engaged in various jobs such as cleaning, sweeping and retail sales. The women labourers in the unorganised sector, face discriminations in different ways. This study specifically focuses to understand the women labourers in the unorganised sector with special reference to SM Street in Kozhikode, Kerala. A major intention is to understand their work conditions, problems and identify their socio- economic profiles. Significance of this study to focus the unorganised women workers of Kerala and understand about their problems in socio-economic perspectives which are never identified or studied. Also analyses the participation of women and empowerment of women workers through economic independency in the unorganised sector. This study also focuses on the dynamics of the linkages between gender and labour in the unorganised sector.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the nature of unorganised sector in the context of women labourers and understand the relationship between gender and labour in our society.
- To understand the history of women workers in the unorganised sector in SM Street.
- To comprehend the socio-economic status of women workers in SM Street.
- To examine the current problems of women workers in unorganised sector.
- To suggest measures for overcoming the problems of women workers in unorganised sector on the basis of the findings of the study.

Research Questions

- Define the concept of unorganized sector?
- What are the problems facing by women labourers in the unorganised sector in SM Street?
- How can women’s labour be explained within the notions of gendered division of labour? How it is reflect in the unorganised sector in SM Street?
- What kind of a gender and labour linkage is visible in the emerging context?

Hypothesis

- Gender division of labour is the existing reality not only the households but also the working sector.
- Lack of basic facilities in the working environment lead to the cause of severe health issues of women workers in the unorganised sector.

Methodology

The study is concentrated in the women workers of unorganised sector in SM Street, Kozhikode, state of Kerala. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects have been taken into consideration for the study. The respondents are the women labourers of the textile shops, tailoring shops and small scale shops etc. in the SM Street. The secondary data is obtained from: Newspapers and periodicals, Economic Review 2016&2017, research articles, books, reports and literature available in website.

Present study was conducted among the workers especially women who works in the unorganized sectors in SM Street, Kozhikode. A qualitative method of interview was used to collect the data. A total of 50 persons were interviewed mainly women workers from the unorganized working sector. A few male co-workers and owners of the shops were also interviewed for understanding the differences and difficulty level of women in the working space. Women who



were interviewed are mostly from nearest parts of Kozhikode town itself. There are women who works continuously for 20-25 years. Most of them works in textiles, tailoring shops, small scale shops, etc.

Observation And Results

Women workers in the unorganised sector in SM Street, Kozhikode have facing issues in their working environment. They also have the same productivity and efficiency as men, even when they faced discrimination in wages, poor working conditions and insecurity.

Table IV.1 Issues of Women Labourers & their Responses in the Unorganised Sector in SM Street

| Opinion | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | No Opinion |
|----------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| Working Condition | 20% | 60% | 20% |
| About Wages | 20% | 70% | 10% |
| Basic Needs | 10% | 84% | 6% |
| Facilities at Workplace | 10% | 80% | 10% |
| Working Hours | 10% | 90% | 0 |
| Break Time Including Lunch | 10% | 80% | 10% |
| About Leave | 20% | 70% | 10% |

Source: Primary Source

Inference: It is clear from the study that more than 75% of the women workers in the unorganised sector in SM Street are highly dissatisfied with their working conditions. It is very clear in this study that women labourers are facing problems like seasonal work load, low wages compared to men, less break time, continuous working hours and there is no toilet facility or drinking facility in the work place. So the women consider it has their livelihood and still continue with the job to support their families.

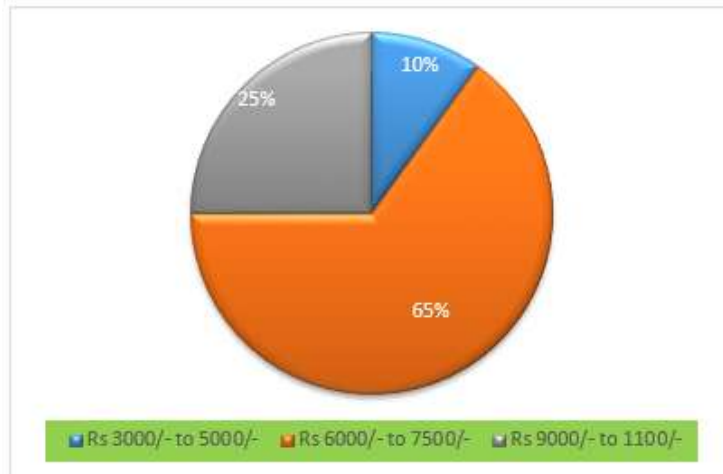
Table IV.2: Comparison in Working Conditions of Women Workers with Men Workers in SM Street

| Category | Working Hours | Lunch Break & other breaks | Toilet Facility |
|----------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Women | 10 Hours | 1% | 1% |
| Men | 8 Hours | 92% | 95% |

Inference: Comparing the working conditions of men and women labourers, there is a huge disparity about working hours, break times and toilet facilities between male and female workers. Men are working for 8hours while women have to work 10 hours and sometime more than 10 hours. Rarely women are getting lunch breaks, but male co-workers are getting not only lunch breaks but also other breaks such as tea breaks. There are no proper toilet facilities for workers in most of the shops, it's deeply affected to women labourers.



Fig IV.1 Salary Scale of Women Labourers in SM Street



Source: Primary Study

Inference: According to above mentioned data 65% of women workers earned only Rs 6000/- to 7500/- monthly. 25% workers have wages above 9000/- to 1100/-. 10% of them have only 3000/- to 5000/- rupees for their monthly salary.

Major Findings Of The Study

- This study defines that the informal sector is commonly referred to as the ‘unorganised sector’ and the workers working there are referred to as ‘unorganized workers’.
- Working conditions are not good, women workers doing more than 8 hours work. There is identified gender discrimination in many ways including the working hours.
- There is no proper toilet facility for unorganised sector women labourers in Mittai Theruvu.
- There is no fixed salary scale for unorganised sector works. The owner can decide the salary based on the efficiency and experience of the labourers. Male workers are getting comparatively high salary than women but they are working together and doing the same job.
- They are not getting any kind of allowance or PF and they don’t have an effective organized platform to negotiate with the owners and discuss their issues.
- AMTU (Asanghaditha Mekhala Thozhilali Union, first women trade union in Kerala) is a good initiative to organize women workers in the unorganised sectors.
- Women do not have enough space to eat and rest in their workplace there is no proper drinking water facility in the work place.
- Urinary infection and period related difficulties are reported as a serious health issues among women labourers.
- Women workers are not much aware about Institutions, Acts and Policies favouring women in the workplace.
- Women workers generally afraid about workplace sexual harassment, mental pressure, and safety issues.
- Both the central and state governments have formulated certain specific schemes to support unorganized workers but which fail in meeting the real needs and requirements of the unorganized labour force.

Suggestions

In the light of the study findings, a number of recommendations are suggested to improve the social welfare and quality of life of the women labourers in the unorganized sector.



- Government should consider the need for toilet facility in the work place as the basic need of the women workers, and strict implementation of law regarding the serious issue.
- Women workers should be educated and make them aware about their rights and legislative provisions.
- It is very much essential to create awareness among women workers about the institutional support available to them to protect their rights.
- A comprehensive law is needed to protect the rights of women workers. There should be proper regulation of unorganized sector industries, which ensure job security, healthy work environment and at least minimum wages, maternity and child care benefits
- Necessary amendments are required to be made in labour laws.
- Any kind of exploitation including sexual harassment of women workers is to be prevented and strict action needs to be taken against the accused person/s.

Scope of Future Study

Women workers in the unorganised sector are the vulnerable sector of Indian labour market. Very less studies are conducted in this area for the welfare and policy implementation for the wellbeing of the women workers in the informal sector. There is certain scope for the future studies in this area. Social security of women workers, legislation, empowerment, struggles and movements, working women rights of women labourers in the unorganised sector are some of the important areas for future research.

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