

URBAN STREET VENDORS IN KOZHICKODE CITY – A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the socio-economic features of the Street Vendors in Kozhikkodecitybased on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered by the researcher as well as secondary sources. Eventhough, there are some general studies on the life of Street Vendors in metro cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi , no specific studies focussing on the socio-economic aspect of the Street vendors in Kozhikkode is available other than the usual administrative reports of Government. The status of the urban street vendors are explored including issues , challenges and the changes in life brought out after the enactment of the Street Vendors' (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014, as a vibrant socio-economic phenomenon which sustained centuries in Kerala. The study shows that though street vending is recognised as a legitimate activity a targeted and dedicated effort in terms of the implementation of provisions of the Act is highly necessary to bring them to the forefront. Some suggestions as to what needs to be taken care, in future, in order to improve their status are also provided.

INTRODUCTION:

Street vending is an important source of self employment scheme and livelihood activity for a good number of Urban Poor . They are being proud of this occupation rather than engaging in begging or depending on Government for support or involving in antisocial activities like theft, robbery, extortion etc.. It is one of the oldest informal sector occupations and is featured by minimumstart up capital, low skills, flexible time of operation and a limited time for commencement, as well as closure . Informal sector, a term coined by Keith Hart, a British Anthropologist, in 1972, is characterised by low income, lack of fringe benefits on legal frameworks and jobs not coveredby legal contracts.Shopping and marketing in the traditional scenario, including barter period, was always been informal. Display of goods and social interactions are the hall mark of our earlier markets as compared to the cooled and sterilised concept of supermarkets. From ancient times, street vending has been an integral part of our trade and commerce. In all civilisations, one reads accounts of travelling

merchants who not only sold their goods in foot paths but also went from door to door in the nearby villages. Street vending had a long historical presence in Kerala which trace back to the trade relations of foreigners like the Portuguese, East India Company, Venice, Jews and other Countries

The Government used the terms street vending which includes sellers and service providers, stationary as well as mobile, and incorporates all other local and region specific terms used to denote them. Basically there is a classification as goods and services. Among them there are mobile and non mobile (static) vendors. Mobile vendors will sell their goods on cart or on head load. Non mobile vendor sell at stationary locations on a regular basis or non regular basis. Seasonal vendors form the fourth category. Food and non food items form part of goods. Street Vending emerged as an informal sector activity due to the lack of ability to accept the job seekers by the formal sector. The Dualistic Theorists believed that the informal sector would expand due to industrial development and will be absorbed by the formal sector. But later it proved to be false. The major reasons for the existence of street vending are three fold, one as a notable self employment scheme leading to earn a livelihood and secondly the service it extends to the urban community, as part of supply chain. Street vending helps to subsidise the existence of other sections of the urban poor by providing them goods including food at affordable price and at convenient time and locations. The third one is that they help many small scale industries to flourish by marketing the products they manufacture, especially of poor women who work at home in small production units. Most of these items are often designed to meet the needs and tastes of the poor consumers. It was estimated that 2 to 2.5 per cent of the urban population makes a livelihood out of street vending. The efforts of SEWA, MANUSHU, STREETNET and WIEGO, NGOs for the welfare of street vendors, in India are cherished here.

The Act says that a street Vendor is a person whomakes a livelihood through street vending and offers goods or service for sale to the public without having a permanent built up structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (cart or head load). A sustainable source of livelihood activity is very important for all the people to survive and for an economy to grow. The term, livelihood achieved significance during 1980s by the works of Robert Chambers. During 1990s sustainable livelihood approach was developed as a poverty reduction method and strategy. It is composed of activities that generate a means of household survival. Livelihood strategies are the way in which people adopt different activities in different socio-economic settings for survival. Street Vending is considered as a sustained livelihood activity which even contributes to GDP also. Under this activity, vendors market or provide services as well as goods. Service providers range from cobbling to pressing of clothes.

Goods include food and non food items for daily use to the public at large. More than 100 types of sellers and service providers are operating like vendors of vegetables street , fruits, fish, processed food, toys, locks, vessels, garments and so on . Processed or cooked food served through kiosks ('thattukada') is a major concern in cities especially during evening or late nights, due to the increased number of floating population and eating out culture of the people. They follow a word of mouth publicity for promotion . They operate amidst hygienic issues, environmental concerns and pressure of food licensing authority. However, street vendor population is showing an upward graph due to new economic policies, liberalisation, privatisation, outsourcing, demonetization, recession issues and shrinking of formal sector.

Poor working conditions and social protection measures expose them to a variety of health issues social, economic concerns and hence are vulnerable. As living amidst uncertainty and unstable economic conditions, stress related illnesses like tension, blood pressure, acidity and migraine haunt them. Due to continuous sitting and standing there are pains in hip, neck, leg and even dislocation of uterus as well as hernia among them. Lack of comfort stations have adverse effect on urinary track and uterus of street vendors especially women. The proportion of male vendors is higher compared to women. However, women participation is increasing. Security issues is a concern of mobile women vendors. As in other sectors, there is related disparity in earnings as well. Gender concerns still stand unaddressed in the unorganised sectors like street vending. As per studies, Street vendor population comes second in the category of unorganised informal sector workers giving first place to Domestic Servants. Their market is volatile, flexible and beyond forecasts. The average lowest earning range of street vendor per day is Rs.300/- to 500. On an average their business investment is below Rs.5000 and designated as Marginal Vendors (MV). There are Main Stream Vendors (MSV) who earn more than 1000 to 2000 per day. Their average investment is 5000 to one lakh. Street Vendors work 10 to 12 hours per day in gruelling conditions without rest and with late meals.

Though street vendors are considered as people who provide essential goods of daily use at affordable price and quantity at convenient time and locations, commuters, drivers, vehicle owners and residents associations consider them as a nuisance and eyesore, irrespective of the fact that Indian Road Congress (IRC) Code provides street vending provisions while engineering roads and providing road furniture. Municipal Authorities and Police consider this as a criminal activity which can be booked under various statutes like Police Act, Municipal Act, Motor Vehicle Act, CrPC and IPC. They face multitude of problems like eviction, confiscation of goods, excessive fines, harassment by Police, zoning by enforcement officers and threats of musclemen. Fortunately the issue of bribe is not a notable concern in this study according to the respondents, but recently there are some corruptive attempts seen to include vendors in the official registered list. A good number of in- migrant vendors

from different parts of the Country were also part of the community but they were not covered in this study.

Historically, Kozhikkode holds a notable position through the visit of the Portuguese traveller, Vasco da Gama, the first European who reached India through the Arabian sea at Kapad beach near Kozhikkode in 1498. English people also reached during 1615 and subsequently the Dutch. The foreign as well as local trade relations are there in even international trade relations and market structure. The first naval force in India was started in Kozhikkode by Kunjali Marakkar, the chief of navy under the regime of Samoothiri, Maharaja of Kozhikkode. Kozhikkode was also known as Calicut under Malabar region. Bepur is another attraction which is the famous huge wooden ship building yard in Kozhikkode and such ships are even exported to Gulf Countries. The famous 'Wayanadchuram' a traditional road way to Karnataka starts from Kozhikkode. District area extends to 2344 Sq km and a population of 30,86,293 with 71 km coastal line. Kozhikkode Municipal Corporation is the only one Municipal Corporation in Kozhikkode district which was formed on 1st November 1962, one of the noted urban centres. The population comes to 699,224 distributed in 75 wards with 3,17,972 female and balance male. Total literacy was 95.42 percent. Based on these parameters the 2036 street vendors enumerated by the municipal corporation were selected for the study. It is not an inclusive one as those not having ID cards, migrated vendors from other states and who lack police clearance certificates necessary for inclusion in the official list are excluded. This is an indication of the absence of an official inclusive database, which is a prerequisite for planning initiatives. All government welfare programs start from a good verifiable inclusive database. According to the studies done by NGOs and networks of street vendors, the approximate vendor population in the city is 25,000. In addition to the people doing vending on road sides, pathways, shoulders, public spaces, near residential complexes and within local markets. It includes those vending in two famous natural markets, 'Mittayi Theruvu Bazar' and 'Mananchira market'.

There are welfare oriented studies related to cities having high vendor population like Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Imphal. However, no study had been undertaken by the government, private sector or NGOs in Kerala. Lack of scholarly and academic studies related to the socio-economic aspects of street vending as a livelihood activity had failed to recognise their role in economy, supply chain and employment generation, which prevented development and growth in this area. A baseline survey was conducted by State Urban Livelihood Mission (SULM), Kerala, during 2016. However, it covered aspects from an enumeration point of view only. They have done a peripheral view rather than a closer view at the socio-economic scenario of street vendors in Kerala. So a gap exists for those who frame policy and plan. This study hopes to cover this gap.

OBJECTIVES

General objective was to find out the socio-economic status of street vendors in Kozhikkode city and specifically to identify the nature as a livelihood activity to summarise the characteristic issues and challenges faced by them, the implications, the causative factors and to suggest measures to overcome these in the current scenario.

Methodology:

The study followed an explorative cum descriptive method. As per official records, there were 2036 urban Street Vendors who make out a livelihood in and around Kozhikkode Corporation jurisdiction. This is the universe. From among them a representative sample of 100 vendors are selected for study using stratified systematic random sampling method, in addition to discussion with key informants and trade union leaders. Study population belongs to the age group of 21 to 60. Interview was conducted with them and focus group discussion was held at different markets and locations. Descriptive analysis was held using statistical applications and methods.

FINDINGS

a. Social Factors

- As per the study, among the people engaged in street vending, we found diverse social, cultural and economic patterns. Caste system has no relevance. Urbanisation and migration effects are there. Though migrated from rural villages earlier, now they were part of an urban social group or community.
- 98 per cent of the vendors make a livelihood out of street vending. The remaining 2 per cent, depends on other family members too, to sustain their family. Some consider this as a refugee occupation as last resort, others view as an attractive employment. Another view is that they are the 'rejects' of the formal sector.
- There are people belonging to Hindu, Christian and Muslim Religions. In Kozhikkode Muslims (56%) dominate next to Hindus (30%) Community. Other 14% per cent belongs to Christian religion. Out of this, 99 per cent of the people have ration cards and adhar cards. ID is a prerequisite for enrolment in Municipal list of street vendors.
- Education level, which is a determinant of the quality of life, is poor among the street vendors. Even illiterates (2%) are among them, however they manage vending. Highest education (56%) found out was Higher secondary level. Most of them have education up to High School. 41 percent of the respondents are literates with primary education. One percent is having graduation or technical

qualification. Low skill, both technical and soft, is a major concern among them. 2 per cent have skilled engagements.

- Almost all of them have family in city itself or nearby places in the outskirts of the city. Exceptionally there are single individuals staying in rented or own accommodation or living in groups. Usually vendors take three meals a day, even though lunch may be late. Food was either purchased from nearby cheap restaurants or food kiosks or brought from home.
- They were socially organised in two types of living units. Majority are members of nuclear families where female members cook in family kitchens. Another group consisting of single individuals who had independent arrangements for food. However, they have strong ties with their family and siblings of social relations.
- Average model family size was 4 which attribute to prevalence of nuclear families. Small family size has correlation with low earning capacity.
- 99 percent families were found to be predominantly Malayalam speaking. The remaining people speak Tamil.
- All of them stay in own house or in rented accommodation. No pavement dwellers were identified. 65per cent of them have dwelling house quality issues. Special scheme for vendors is yet to emerge.
- Despite social and economic conditions, institution of marriage with associated rituals and conventions was prevalent. Arranged marriage is the common practice. 98 per cent of the people above the marriage age had undergone the institution of marriage. Social, cultural and recreational involvement is found among them in varying degrees. Observation of religious customs and rituals were widely present
- 51 per cent have health concerns. However the majority take institutionalised care from Government hospitals or registered private medical practitioners. Allopathy treatment is widely accepted by them instead of Ayurveda, Homoeo or Sidha. Issues of continuous sitting and standing is very common. They have a struggled living condition.
- Among them, no child labour was observed. In some cases family members including children are also helping their parents in street vending from home or at site. Women are also aiding in trade activities. Historically street vending is a familial occupation.
- Female participation in street vending is 30percent against 70 percent male and most of them have age above 45. They face gender concerns like lack of toilet facility, security at late evenings and lack of facilities like crèches for care of children or grand children. Lack of onsite common storage facility is also a hurdle for them. Obsolete street furniture adds to the grievance.
- 70 per cent of them use public transport for commuting to work place with or without goods. 22 per cent use own vehicles like two wheeler and autorickshaws. 4 per cent have bicycles while the other 4 per cent walk to adjacent work stations from home. 10 per cent of the vendors cover more than 20

KM every day on one side. 12per cent are living adjacent to their work place, They use different means like cycle, two wheeler, auto or bus.

- Their children were studying in government schools. No job security available as there are lot of educated unemployed..Lack of interest in higher education of children of street vendors is a hindrance for higher education and subsequent human capital formation. Street vending never require any formal education credentials. So it is better to earn than going for higher studies. Occupational mobility is not highly visible among children of street vendors. All students have no proper digital education facility.
- 62 percent of the vendors read news paper every day and watch TV . 30 percent have the habit of listening FM radio even at site. 57 per cent are conversant with the social media in full swing. 22 per cent know about social media but not fully conversant. 21 per cent is heard about it but unable to access social media without the help of others. Though computer is available at their home , they do not have the skill to use it.
- They too face challenges related to work place like issues related to utilisation of resources like public space, declaration of non hawking zones, shifting of vending locations and . police clearance for licensing. Lack of toilets, public storage facility and street lights were noted concerns.

b. Economic Condition

- Within street vendors wide variation exist in income levels as well as access to earning opportunities or livelihood activities and expectation of future. In Kozhikkode, for 97 per cent of the respondents, street vending is the major livelihood activity
- Street Vendors have a significant role as decentralised distributor of goods. Their economic activity contributes to assessment of GDP. Considering this the Government of India announced Rs. 50000 cr for capital loan assistance to registered vendors in the economic stimuli package duringthe 4th phase of COVID -19 lock Down.The average monthly income varies from 7500 onwards. For the A category vendors average daily income is Rs.300. B category have an income between 300 to 600 per day. C category have average daily income above 600. Usually C category is doing Main Stream Vending (MSV) activities with higher investments. Multiple members may also get involved in income generation activities. However in 60 per cent cases average monthly income is above Rs. 10000. But they faced absolute poverty during the COVID-19 imposed lockdown period(during first wave). Survival was also in threat and they have to borrow from different sources which increased their debt also.
- Their major expenditure is on food, clothing, medicine, transportation, recreation house hold including rent and education of children. Percentage expenditure depends on life style and family . Only two third have savings habit. Usually they save self or through family or spouse, daily

collection agents, chitty, LIC and rarely on post office and banks. They have investment plan to start formal shops, small scale production unit, buy auto-riksha and even land.

- They did not follow the formal accounting or book keeping practices of formal traders. Daily turn over and profit is considered in general, which depends on the location, volume and terms of trade. Exact income is unable to find out. Goods were availed on daily credit from wholesalers, by some of them.
- They did not pay any floor rent or taxes to any authority other than the entry VAT. Income tax payers were not identified among this study population. They were not within the ambit of formal labour laws and regulations which control time, days and holidays related to operation, weights and measures as well as EPF and ESI.
- Institutionalised or bank linked savings and loans are not so common. Thrift and credit operation of cooperative societies and private agencies are well working among them. 99 per cent have thrift collection and loan. Loan liability is less than one lakh in 40 per cent cases. Total debts is below one lakh among 63 per cent. Debt trap is not a serious concern among them.
- Indigenous money lenders are operating among them. Their interest rates are too high for the loans availed. However, they are providing loan without any guarantee or surety..While none of them reported to have given any loan to others. It is one form of financial exploitation.
- Processed food kiosk vendors ('thattukada') get more income daily compared to non processed and food items. Sales volume, location, timing etc are the factors which decide the earnings. For processed food items the margin or profit percentage is 25 to 35 percent, while for non food items it is 15 to 25 percent.
- Unlike women in higher income groups, 27 percent women in these families actively contribute to supplement household income. They are secondary earners due to the pressure of domestic work and child rearing. Women headed families have to function as principal earners. However women above the age of 45, when children reaches working age, form a sizable segment of street vendors. 30 per cent of them are women vendors engaged in vending as primary livelihood activity. Female work participation is increasing day by day. First Generation occupational migration is observed among vendors.
- The quality of life of children born to street vendors depends on the earning capacity of parents. Parents provide not only for physical survival but also for additional needs of their children. Expenditure patten depend on earnings. More money is spent for education of children and buying accessories like computer, mobile, cycle and bike.
- Social Security concern has three components, namely special, physical and social. First one is related to public space usage while second relates to protection from atrocities and finally security during sickness, old age, inability etc. . When it operates in the form of medical benefit, maternity etc

it is Promotional . Old age care schemes comes under extended social security. Only 7 per cent have opted for extended social security measures. 99 per cent are interested to contribute to social security schemes if available. Even after the launch of Government sponsored health insurance scheme like RSBY which is open for vendors they have no clear cut idea regarding enrolment. Even though Kerala is considered as the healthiest and cleanest state, occupational hazards and diseases were identified during the study. Special schemes for vendors also need to be introduced. Introduction of 'e-shram' portal for informal sector workers by government of India is a pioneering step in this direction through which 26 crore people enrolled.

- In general old age problems haunt 7 per cent of the total vendors. No old age pension scheme is available to street vendors. Some of them get widow pension and destitute pension. . 12 per cent of Kerala population belongs to the age group of above 60 due to lowest fertility rates. Exclusive old age homes are not so common. However, street vending provides an engagement to the elderly and destitute.
- Self help Group (SHG) formation and enrolment has not been so common among vendors. Some of them are members of Kudumbashree SHGs, but no vendor related SHG. Organised NGO intervention also seems lacking. They have no proper awareness regarding the legal aspects especially the Street Vendors Act.
- Trade unions have emerged under the three major political parties namely Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India(Marxist) and BJP. 43 per cent of the vendors have taken membership in these unions. So far no regular subscription is charged from members.
- Bribe from police or municipal authority is not a major concern in the study area. Threat is common. Confiscation and eviction is not a common phenomenon. It was reported that there were some incidents of harassment earlier. But no social recognition seems bestowed on them even after the implementation of the Act.
- They were fast hit by natural calamities and extreme climatic changes. Their lives came to a stand still during the lock down period due to COVID-19 . Most of them deprived of their livelihood as the government banned all types of trading and people began to remain indoors. Government of India came forward with capital assistance in the form of loans only to registered vendors during the fourth phase of lock down, but by that time they had resumed sales.
- They face marketing challenges like food adulteration, use of pesticides in vegetables carbides in fruits and formalin in fish, identified by the consumers. Malpractices in weights and measures, sale of perished goods, colour fading of clothes, changing selected goods while packing etc are some of the concerns raised by consumers. A better situation is expected in terms of consumer management relations and while liaising with stakeholders including Municipal officials and nearby formal traders.

SUGGESTIONS

Street Vendor population is one of the unserved or unreached category, in Kerala, especially in Kozhikkodeas far as welfare schemes are concerned, irrespective of their contribution to the State's Gross Domestic Production. For any welfare activity to begin with, need an inclusive data base of the target population, which is a major road block. As it is lacking, efforts may be taken to enumerate them inclusively. Other state vendors may be given the status of 'Guest Street Vendor'.

- ❖ Social inclusion is necessary to accept them as general fabric of urban culture, social life and economic activity by giving due recognition.
- ❖ Modern methods like Vendors' Charter and Social Audit are to be made statutory to assess impact of the actions of civic local bodies for transparency and compliance .
- ❖ Introduction, formation and strengthening of Self Help Groups(SHG) or Community Based Organisations (CBO) of Street Vendors for empowerment effects including training, capacity building and awareness generation.
- ❖ Financial Inclusion is highly essential for the social, economic, political and cultural development and empowerment.
- ❖ Inclusive planning, decision making and governance from grass root level to higher levels including Master Plan Development of the State.
- ❖ Time bound actions to be taken by Government to implement the provisions of the Street Vendors' Act one by one in a strict sense. Awareness generation may be encouraged to sensitise them regarding the provisions of the Act.
- ❖ Vending right should be recognised as a fundamental right than an illegal endeavour. Participatory governance and decision making should be encouraged at LSGI/ULB level.
- ❖ Inclusive decision making and planning is necessary at LSGI level. A balanced approach on resource utilisation especially public space and legal awareness generation need to be strengthened.
- ❖ . Public debates , discussions , advocacy programmes and consultations with stakeholders should be held to reduce eviction, confiscation of goods, harassment ,arbitrary declaration of places as non hawking zones and make them integral part of our culture, economy and society.
- ❖ Informal education centres and skill training institutes(technical and soft) need to be started to impart education and training.
- ❖ Social security measures need to be introduced for them, in addition to educational assistance to their children.
- ❖ Ultimately Street Vending should evolve as a Right Based Livelihood Activity or Occupation.

WAY FORWARD

‘Once a street vendor always a street vendor’ is a common saying and because of this they are heavily reliant on urban population and this makes it more difficult for them to resort to past or prior occupation other than street vending.

In a democratic society with the involvement of stakeholders, structures as well as functions can be changed especially with the backing of SV Act. For that what we need is a political will. This will give rise to policies and plan for the development, welfare and empowerment of Street Vendors

This study throws light at a dark area. Study further, any point or area that remain unaddressed. It is up to the Government to take a closer look at these points and conduct more studies by involving more academicians at these areas of concern, so that the sector at large benefits.

Street vending should be given due recognition as a fundamental right rather than an illegal activity. Extended social security and welfare schemes should be included in the Vendor’s Charter, as an entitlement. Efforts may be strengthened to bring them to the mainstream of the society. A local strategy is intended to be developed from the findings of the study for the integration of vendors into the mainstream.

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