

Women and Trade Unions in the Informal Sector

Jagriti Gangopadhyay¹

Abstract

This paper re-visits the notions of work and empowerment under the overarching framework of gender, in the city of Mumbai. By examining the gender dimension of informal work, the current work not only extends the sociological literature on labor, but also teases out the challenges, constraints and opportunities of women, and as well as highlights the socio-political context of work. The study will draw from qualitative research conducted on women hawkers and street vendors in different areas of Mumbai. This study is particularly topical in the context of India, where almost 94 % of total women workers (NSS Report No. 539, 2009-2010) work in the informal sector. Preliminary results indicate that, most women in Mumbai perceive their economic participation as a result of poverty and not necessarily empowering their lives. Trapped under the devaluation of their own work, this paper will attempt to understand the role of trade unions in the lives of these women.

Introduction

¹ PHD Student at IIT Gandhinagar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

According to the ILO, work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. The ILO has developed an agenda for the community of work. It provides support through integrated Decent Work Country Programmes developed in coordination with its constituents. Putting the Decent Work Agenda into practice is achieved through the implementation of the ILO's four strategic objectives, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective:

- Creating Jobs –an economy that generates opportunities for investment, entrepreneurship, skills development, job creation and sustainable livelihoods.
- Guaranteeing rights at work – to obtain recognition and respect for the rights of workers. All workers, and in particular disadvantaged or poor workers, need representation, participation, and laws that work for their interests.
- Extending social protection – to promote both inclusion and productivity by ensuring that women and men enjoy working conditions that are safe, allow adequate free time and rest, take into account family and social values, provide for adequate compensation in case of lost or reduced income and permit access to adequate healthcare.(ilo.org/social protection)
- Promoting social dialogue – Involving strong and independent workers' and employees' organizations is central to increasing productivity, avoiding disputes at work, and building cohesive societies. (ilo.org/social dialogue)

Decent Work reflects priorities on the social, economic and political agenda of countries and the international system. In a relatively short time this concept has forged an international consensus among governments, employers, workers and civil society that productive employment and decent work are key elements in achieving a fair globalization, reducing poverty and achieving equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development. (ilo.org/decent work)

Based on the concept of “decent work”, the first question that arises is that can the objectives laid down under the purview of decent work, be achieved. Do workers work in such working conditions, in which their dignity is maintained? Needs of the workers, which range from salary to leaves to improvement of working conditions, are they met with? Organizations like trade unions, which are formed in both the formal and the informal sector, what kind of issues do they fight for? Are organizations like trade unions, encouraged or are they seen as obstacles to growth? In case of an organization without trade union, how are the workers to address their needs, or do they continue to comply with the existing working conditions?

These questions form the basis of my dissertation, which focuses on the role of women in trade unions. The main aim of my dissertation is to understand that do trade unions give equal importance to the needs of women, in the formal and the informal sector. Gender is an important concept, under the conditions of decent work. As per the ILO standards all workers have the right to decent work, not only those working in the formal economy, but also the self-employed, casual and informal economy workers, as well as those, predominantly women (ilo.org/gender conventions). The vision of the ILO is that decent work can be achieved only when men and women both can exercise their rights as workers. However in most cases it is seen that women are not allowed to exercise their rights or are deprived from their privileges. One solution is that

women can report their problems to their respective unions, and then fight for their issues. Unions are considered as a platform where workers can discuss and represent their demands. Today, only 20 per cent of the world's population has adequate social security coverage, and more than half lack any coverage at all. They face dangers in the workplace and poor or non-existent pension and health insurance coverage ([ilo.org/social protection](http://ilo.org/social-protection)). Thus unions are created to ensure that workers can represent themselves adequately. One of the main conditions of decent work is that workers get their full benefits of social protection, which include improved working conditions, increment in salary and regularization of working hours. When these conditions are not fulfilled, it is the unions that help the workers to fight for their demands. However the question remains that are women issues given equal importance by unions. Women have specific issues like child care facilities, maternity leaves, issues related to sexual harassment. These issues may be specific to women, but they are important issues and need great concern of the organization. But if both the organization and the unions do not focus on these issues, then women are being deprived of their rights. Then in that case women do not come under the purview of "decent work" as per ILO standards. Hence it is important to analyze how the issues of women are dealt by unions within the formal and the informal sector, because unions become the main crux that joins the workers to the organization.

Trade unions are a part of our society and an analysis of the trade unions are necessary to understand their contribution towards society. In a scenario where individual needs have become the most important concern, how can collective bargaining make an impact and bring about changes by giving due recognition to the aspect of gender is the main focus of my paper. It is argued that India is moving towards a state of higher development and the main aim of every

government is to enhance development of the country. Thus it is important to analyze the role of women in trade unions to understand if women issues are being neglected, then is development really taking place.

Objectives of the study

The main aim of undertaking this research was to analyze if women truly are working on an equal platform with men. With respect to this assumption, the role of women was analyzed with respect to trade unions in order to understand that how do women address their issues, in case of problems with respect to their working conditions, sexual harassments and any other women related issue. A comparative study between the formal and the informal sector was important because it is generally believed that women in the formal sector have privileges over women in the informal sector. It is easier for women in the formal sector to address their needs, particularly in terms of their salary, bonuses, leaves and many more benefits as compared to women in the informal sector. It was also assumed that women in the formal sector can easily participate in union activities and also devote time to union meetings. Since they are working on an equal platform with men, hence they have more say in when to conduct meetings and their convenience is also taken into account.

However all these assumptions can be questioned through the works of Nilanjana Banerjee, Swasti Mitter, Earnest Noronha, Sujata Patel and Sharit Bhowmik. Banerjee argues that women even if they are more skilled they are willing to accept lower payments, in order to continue to work. Patel argues that although women do all sorts of physical work in the rural areas, yet they are not employed at the factory levels. Noronha's works also highlight that woman teleworkers

prefer to work from home so that they can perform their dual role of doing household activities and attending calls at the same time. Bhowmik on the other hand argues that in the informal sector women do not want to discuss their personal issues, because the larger issue of eviction is always in the background.

Thus the objectives of the study are to analyze how much importance do trade unions in the informal sector give to issues of women. How do trade unions deal with women issues? What are the issues of women? In case of issues of sexual harassments, how frequently do women report such cases and what actions or steps are undertaken by the union? Keeping these objectives at the background, the works of above mentioned authors and other authors were analyzed in order to find out which of the assumptions hold true.

Methodology

Hawkers and street vendors were interviewed from Apna Bazaar, Powai and *Khau Gali*, Ghatkopar. The occupations of the hawkers ranged from *dosa* sellers to vegetable and fruit vendors to flower sellers to juice sellers. The sample size was 20, out of which 10 were men and 10 women from the respective areas.

Methods used for data collection

The study was primarily qualitative in its orientation. The fieldwork was conducted with the help of a questionnaire and the interviews were conducted personally. Participant Observation was also used with respect to the informal sector. The interviews conducted were semi-structured

interviews and the questionnaire contained both open ended and closed ended questions. Semi structured interviews helped the women particularly in opening about the problems faced by them on an everyday basis. Questions pertaining to sexual harassment and women issues were asked to trade union representatives at the informal sector as well. The questionnaire had thirty questions. The major focus of the questions pertained to everyday struggles, issues of sexual harassment, the existence of unions, representation of workers in the unions, the male female ratio in the unions and what were the issues taken up by the unions and their representatives. The main focus of the study was to find out what kind of importance were given to women issues, who would take them up and the opinion of women in the unions.

Need for the study

Women are competing with men in every field. Yet the question that is they getting equal opportunities or not continues to exist.. Trade unions are formed so that workers can discuss their issues on a common platform and can negotiate with their employers for the fulfillment of their demands. Trade unions help workers to fight for their rights. Thus it became necessary to understand if there is equal representation of both the genders in these unions? What are the issues that are focused upon by the trade unions? In case of a sensitive issue like sexual harassment how do the members of the union react to it? What are the conditions under which men and women come to work in the informal sector? In the informal sector, women raise an equal voice on the issue of eviction, is that the reason why their personal needs are not highlighted by themselves in the union meetings? Will a separate women cell, help solve this problem? Women are expected to perform the dual role of looking after her family as well as work for a living, is that a constraint for the lack of women representatives in unions? Although

women safety is a prime concern, yet women work for late hours, is this issue being ignored? Why don't women themselves fight for these issues in the union meetings? What are the reasons and constraints that prevent women from raising these issues?

Findings

Table 1: The Table below shows the names of the different areas and their sample size. The numbers denote the number of people interviewed.

Area	Men	Women
<i>ApnaBaazar, Powai</i>	5	5
<i>Khau Gali, Ghatkopar</i>	5	5

Table 2: List of hawkers and street vendors interviewed

Category	Gender	Location	Items Sold	Affiliation to Trade	Conditions under which they entered the Sector

				Unions	
Hawker	Male	Powai	Flowers	Azad Hawker Union	Came from village in search of jobs, but joined the informal sector with his brother to sell flowers
Hawker	Male	Powai	Flowers	Azad Hawker Union	Sells flowers with his brother
Hawker	Male	Powai	Vegetables	Azad Hawker Union	Family business
<i>Ferriwala</i>	Male	Powai	Fruits, Coconuts, Corn	Azad Hawker Union	Had come from Uttar Pradesh looking for a job in the formal sector, but became a <i>ferriwalas</i> instead
<i>Ferriwala</i>	Male	Powai	Handkerchiefs	Azad Hawker Union	Had come from Harayanalooking for a job in the formal sector, but

					became a <i>ferriwalas</i> instead
Hawker	Female	Powai	Fish And Earrings	Azad Hawker Union	Husband has taken a loan and she is allowed to sell her products till the loan is not paid off
Hawker	Female	Powai	Vegetables And Bindi	Azad Hawker Union	Needs money for the operation of her father in law
Hawker	Female	Powai	Fruits And Bangles	Azad Hawker Union	Widow with two children
Hawker	Female	Powai	Corn And Clips	Azad Hawker Union	Alcoholic husband, who spends money on gambling
Hawker	Female	Powai	Vegetables And Earrings	Azad Hawker Union	Was subject to domestic violence, now lives with parents

Hawker	Male	Ghatkopar	<i>Panipuri</i>	No Union Membership	Family business
Hawker	Male	Ghatkopar	<i>Dabeli</i>	No Union Membership	Family business
Hawker	Male	Ghatkopar	Watermelon Juice	No Union Membership	Family business
Hawker	Male	Ghatkopar	Paanwala	No Union Membership	Family business
Hawker	Male	Ghatkopar	<i>Gini dosa</i>	No Union Membership	Family business
Hawker	Female	Ghatkopar	<i>Papad</i>	No Union Membership	Husband was ill so she was sitting on that day
Hawker	Female	Ghatkopar	Vegetables	No Union Membership	Widow
Hawker	Female	Ghatkopar	Soft Toys	No Union Membership	Widow

Hawker	Female	Ghatkopar	Key Rings, Bangles, Clips	No Union Membership	Alcoholic husband
Hawker	Female	Ghatkopar	Pickles	No union membership	Alcoholic husband

In the informal sector five men and five women interviewed and they are hawkers and feriwalas. They have their stalls in the Powai Market. The men sold flowers, fruits, handkerchiefs and vegetables and the women sold corn, fruits and vegetables and fish in the morning and they sold clips and earrings in the evenings. The reason being that the mainly the housewives came to buy vegetables and fish in the morning, but in the evening often young girls would come and buy clips and earrings from them. Thus according to the needs of the markets they would change their products. Three of the men are married and one of them stays with their family in Chandan Nagar. The other two are from Mednipur and have their wives in their villages. Here they share rooms in Hari Om Nagar. The other two were feriwalas from Uttar Pradesh and Harayana. They all agreed that there was the existence of a trade union in the market and they were all members. But initially when I went alone to interview the hawkers, they were very reluctant and did not come up with much information. In fact they did not even tell me the name of the union properly. The name varied from “Hawkers Union,” to “Powai Union” to “Azad Hind Union.” It was only after I met the union representative that I came to know that Powai Market had a registered union

by the name of “Azad Hawkers Union.” They met twice a week and had equal representation of men and women. In fact the union had a women’s wing as well. Their main demand and struggle revolves around ensuring security for hawkers, street vendors and feriwalas. Their union representative told me that hawking is one of the oldest occupations in India and by virtue of Article 19(1) (g) every citizen has a right to carry on any lawful trade or business. It is this right vested in the citizens that the hawkers exercise while engaging themselves in the trade. Marking of hawking zone is necessary because it constitute a serious obstruction to the public and creates traffic problems. State and the Municipality got the right to designate and allocate the places from where street trading can be done. Hawker doesn't have the right to earmark the place to trade. In *Bombay Hawker Union vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, the Court held that The Non-Hawking Zones maybe fixed by the Municipal Commissioner in his discretion, in consultation with the Bombay Municipal Corporation. In areas other than the Non-Hawking Zones, licenses should be granted to the hawkers to do their business on payment of the prescribed fee. That will be without prejudice to the right of the Commissioner to extend the limits of the Non-Hawking Zones in the interests of public health, sanitation, safety, public convenience and the like. Further the Court observed that, Hawking licenses should not be refused in the Hawking Zones except for good reasons. The discretion not to grant a hawking license in the Hawking Zone should be exercised by the Commissioner reasonably and in public interest.

The main arguments of the hawkers were that every week the Bombay Municipal Corporation comes to collect “hafta” from the hawkers and street vendors. The feriwalas who are not able to pay they just keep their stalls on the streets and hide somewhere. Quite often their stalls are ransacked and even broken, thus destroying their source of income. Moreover the hafta ranges

from Rs 200 to Rs 300 and if it is not paid then the shops are vandalized. Thus the workers are fighting for licenses so that their source of income can be secured. The hawkers' main grievance was that even after paying hafta they do not have any security and their miseries do not end. The people from the corporation they do not even spare the women, while doing lathicharge.

According to the women hawkers, hawking was their main source of income. Two of them were married and their husbands are also hawkers in different areas, and the other three depend on hawking for their own source of income. They argued that they have to work in very harsh conditions like they have to face the smoke of heavy traffic every day and also the dirt and filth of the roads of Mumbai. They pay money to the corporation, for their security and their need for better working conditions are never looked into. Cases of sexual harassment are huge in the informal sector for the women. A women cell exists, but meetings are rarely conducted. This cell exists for the last five years. Yet meetings are not conducted, and there is not much awareness about this cell either. The women hawkers, who came out and sold various goods, all had some reason or the other to be a hawker. For Renu, it was because her husband had taken a loan to start a new business and till that loan was paid off, she could do her *dhandra*. But once the loan was paid off, she would have to go back and sit at home. Santosh another women hawker needs money for her father in laws operation and has thus taken to hawking.

Even the male hawkers and also the female hawkers, particularly Renu and Santosh, since they were aware that they had to come back once their purpose was served, they believed that the place of women was in the house. Ram argued that when the women have able husbands who can work for their living, then what was the need for women to work?

Anis Fatima Sheikh, popularly known as Salma for her fellow hawkers has her own story to tell. She is the general secretary of Azad Hawkers Union and is executive committee member of National Association of Street Vendors of India. She started selling vegetables from the age of seven even as she continued to study till Class 12 as a private student, and one day she took up the cause of the street vendors after she was harassed by government officials. One evening when she was going back home, two BMC officials came to collect hafta. Since she did not have the required amount they threw away her vegetables and pushed her on the ground, through which she hurt her head. “I then started to gather legal information about the rights of hawkers (street vendors) and laborers. I then helped other hawkers fight for their rights,” said Salma. She has also been to jail several times and also has been beaten up by police officials. She has been a part of several international conferences in Kenya, Rio de Janeiro to speak on women issues and street vending. She is the second among her three sisters and two brothers and had to drop out of school to support her family. Although now along with fighting for the rights of the hawkers, she is also completing her studies.

Radha Kanwal, another woman representative of Azad Hawkers Union had a similar narrative. She is a widow and is 62 years old. She has been hawking for the last ten years, from Bandra to Dadar to Powai as well. She sells vegetables and has two children. Her husband was in the army and when he retired he took to drinking and she was also subject to domestic violence. Gradually their savings started getting exhausted and it came on her to support her family. It was then that she took up hawking as a profession and used the money to pay the school fees of her children. She has faced sexual harassment in several occasions from her customers. “One day during the monsoon, one regular customer asked her to come to his place which was just next door. She

could go once the rain stopped.” This incident led to her change of location from Bandra to Dadar. Another customer would always ask her to keep the change and in return he asked her to sell vegetables only to him. However she argued that “this *dhandha* was my life. It has saved me when I had nothing, hence I cannot give it up for any reason.”

The case study of Ghatkopar is different from that of Powai’s. The street where the hawkers were interviewed was the “*Khau Gali*” in the Vallabhbaug Lane. Protests have been going on in this area since 2006, and a certain section of hawkers were evicted in 2009. These hawkers were evicted by the Ghatkopar Residents Association, as they were considered to be a nuisance by the Association. However hawkers continue to sit in Vallabhbaug Lane and carry on with their daily *dhandha*. But the interesting part to be noted in this case is that there is a disparity which exists among these hawkers.

The *Khau Gali* of Ghatkopar is also known as the Gujarati *Khau Gali*, and hawkers sell eateries, which cater to the needs of the Gujaratis. The eateries range from, *dabeli*, *panipuri*, ice cream sandwich, *papad*, vegetables, juices and most importantly various varieties of *dosas*. But the most revenue generating item of the *Khau Gali* is the *Gini dosa*. Saturdays and Sundays are the most crowded days and the hawkers face maximum crowd on these two days. The main stalls are owned by the men and stalls of *papad* and vegetables are owned by the women. Most of the hawkers are sitting there for the last ten to fifteen years, particularly the women, who sell *papad* and vegetables.

The general view of the hawkers of the *Khau Gali* is that the monopoly of the lane is owned by the hawkers who sell *dosas*. Customers come from various areas to have *dosas* and hence the

dosa hawkers have a monopoly market in the lane. None of them have license in the lane but they cannot fight for license because of the monopoly of the *dosa* hawkers. The system is that when the jeeps and cars of the police and the BMC come, the hawkers who make and sell the *dosa*, they pay around Rs1200 to them and retain their business. The hawkers who sell vegetables, *papad* give Rs100 or Rs50, as and when they can. The juicewalas, *panipuri*walas and the *dabeli*walas pay around Rs500, so that they are not picked up by the police.

The customers paint a satisfactory picture of the *Khau Gali*. Customers come from Khar, Dadar, Bandra, Matunga and Ghatkopar itself. The customers do not consider the hawkers to be a nuisance and in fact they feel that the government should intervene and legalize this entire hawking area so that these people can do their business on a regular basis. The road is a one way road and since there are no sitting arrangements, hence customers place their orders and eat in their cars which are parked in the lanes. This causes heavy traffic and congestion in the lane and also heavy traffic in Ghatkopar East. Moreover on the weekends these hawkers, particularly the *dosa* sellers, continue their business till four in the morning and on weekdays they continue till eleven in the night. Yet the customers do not think that these hawkers are a nuisance.

Even though it is not a legal zone and there is a fear of being evicted every day, yet there is no union among these hawkers. They also know that they will not be united and there is an existing disparity among them. In the interest of the *dosa* sellers and the policemen, the other hawkers know that they will never be able to fight for license. The hafta of 1200 collected every week by the police officials from the *dosa* sellers is nothing compared to the business they do in that area. On Sundays the area is so crowded that the hawkers even refuse customers, in case they are not able to manage the crowd. Hence for them Rs1200 is not much of an amount. The other hawkers

do not unite or complain because they know that they get their customers because these *dosa* hawkers are the main crowd pullers. Hence the other hawkers do not want to go against them. They know that there is injustice, in fact they are allowed to sit till nine and after that police officials come to remove them from the footpaths, while the *dosa* hawkers continue with their *dhandra* till eleven in the night. But again they are also thankful to the *dosa* sellers, because they are the ones who pull the crowds and manage to have a huge queue. Often people are tired of waiting in the queues and it is then they shift to the *dabeli* or *panipuri* stalls. Customers even start purchasing *papad* and vegetables in times of long queues. This phenomenon is very common, and happens more over the weekends. Thus the business of the other hawkers is hugely dependent on the *dosa* sellers.

The residents of Ghatkopar paint a different picture. They feel that the lane of Ghatkopar is a classic example of how hawkers and BMC officials rule the picture and turn the streets into permanent food joints. In the last few months, several new stalls have sprung up in the area, particularly over storm water drains. With the onset of the monsoons, this can prove a hazard as the stalls block the path for rain water to flow and may cause floods in the area. Four years ago, during the widening of M. G. Road, just seven stalls were temporarily granted alternative space. Today, however, around 20 stalls occupy at least 50 meters of the road. The residents feel helpless because the hawkers have the support of the local politicians and because of the self-interest of the BMC officials the residents know that their voices will go unheard. A Gujarati locality, Vallabhbaug Lane is also known as '*Khau Gali*', as a variety of food is available there right till midnight. Each evening, cars line up on both sides, causing traffic congestion, and the diners dirty the area. The stall owners also place chairs on the roads after 9 pm and nobody

questions them about it. Residents say they have made several complaints to the ward office and the local corporator. The corporator argues that the people of Ghatkopar also eat and hence there is no unity among the people of Ghatkopar, and they also park there. The local corporator argues that the stalls are not on the main drains and hence residents will not be affected.

The authorities demolished illegal structures of two popular juice centers in the area that operate beyond the permissible time limits. The residents mentioned that in 2009 two structures were knocked down. The demolition drive was the result of a signature campaign that residents of the area had begun. They further argued that it is a nightmare to travel in the area or even drive as these eateries serve people on the roads. Falguni Dave, the one who initiated the signature campaign, added that the residents were fed up of the nuisance that the hawkers made as they worked beyond the permissible time limits. “It was only after a long discussion that the signature campaign began,” she added. Dave further elaborated that residents in the area would not rest till they ensured that all the eateries were shut and would patrol the area and force closures till all of them had stopped.

In Ghatkopar, as compared to Powai, the men had established family businesses. They had taken it over from their ancestors, and hence they were the main hawkers in *Khau Gali*. Komal sells *papad* only when her husband is ill. Shanti sells her homemade pickles and has to hide the money from her husband. Otherwise whatever money is there it is taken by her husband for his alcohol.

From the case studies mentioned in this section, a few key issues emerge. As argued by Patel, the women perform a large number of physically exhausting chores like carrying heavy piles of wood, then heavy containers of water. At that point of time, the fact that women will not be able

to perform tasks requiring physical strength did not emerge. Women in the informal sector also have to work under the direct sun or have to face heavy traffic, pollution or the monsoons. Yet they continue to enter the informal sector and work for their living. The need for income becomes so strong that such conditions are hardly criteria for stopping women from working in the informal sector. Women also have to perform their dual role of being a wife a mother and a bread earner at the same time, as argued by Noronha. This dual role acts a major constraint for women to participate in any union activity. Women become hawkers only when they did not have their men to support them men as pointed out by Chhachhi.

As argued by Hensman, it is so important for women to keep their jobs for their independence, contribution to family or even to satisfy her own needs that women are willing to overlook a number of issues at the workplace. In the informal sector however where women face sexual harassment on a high scale, yet there are more women hawkers than women workers at the factories. The informal sector allows the women to fight for their rights on an equal platform with men. If physical strength is required for the formal sectors and the belief is that women will not be able to fulfil that, then this criterion holds true for informal sector as well. As argued by Bhowmik (2003) street vendors across several Indian cities have generally been regarded as nuisance value, their presence seen as inimical to urban development. However, the range of goods and services they provide renders them useful to other sections of the urban poor and thus they form an important segment of the informal economy. Hence their struggle should be supported by society as well.

In this context it is important to analyze Gothoskar's (2000), regarding the distinction made in the formal and informal sector with respect to gender. Gothoskar argues that the vast majority of jobs

where women were not traditionally employed remained shut for women. Thus a reduction in the number of jobs open to women was inevitable. In fact in some plants and industries even in jobs which remained women were replaced by men who resulted in an even greater reduction in the number of women employed. An area of double discrimination which women face regarding employment pertains to “heavy work.” On the one hand according to ILO (Maximum Weight Recommendation, 1967, No, 128), states like Maharashtra and Madras have prescribed a maximum weight to be carried by women. Women are not allowed to be assigned to regular transport of loads. In principle legislation also prohibits the employment of women on load transport during pregnancy and for ten weeks following confinement. On the other hand women in the informal sector as well as in their household duties have been traditionally assigned the heaviest of works, which range from carrying of head loads of water for long distances, manual grinding of corn, carrying heavy loads in construction, mining and quarrying.

It can be argued that in all the cases the participation of women is low. In Ghatkopar women do not feature in the main products that are being sold. Although according to stereotypes the products which are being sold are food items, all of which are identified with women, yet women are not in the forefront to sell them. It is the men who are in the market. Even in cases where women do come out to work it is due to common problems like they are widows or their husbands are subject to drinking and they do not work for a living and hence the women are the source of income. The men who are working as hawkers and *ferriwalas* do not want their wives to come out and work. They believe in their wives taking care of their households and not stepping out to work until it is very necessary. The other problem is that though the women are aware that they have specific problems like lack of child care facilities, public toilet facilities yet

they do not fight for such issues. In fact they unite with men to fight against their eviction so that they can earn their livelihood. Women issues take a backseat because of this larger concern bothering every hawker irrespective of their gender.

Even in case of trade unions leadership in Azad Hawkers Union, among the leaders there were just two women representatives and the rest were all men. Even in the rallies and meeting organized by the union, out of three hundred people, only seven were women. The women who have come for the meetings and rallies are the sole earners of their families and hence their need to *dhanda* is extremely strong. Till the time their occupation is not legalized and uncertainty does not disappear neither the men nor the women have the time to reflect upon other issues. Their everyday life is a struggle with everyday some of them getting arrested or evicted or losing their goods. Individually women do complain of sexual harassment from male customers, BMC officials, police and their fellow hawkers as well. Even though there is a Women's Cell in their union, yet they do not have the time to cater to such needs separately. Women also do not show much concern to these issues as long as they are allowed to sit and sell their stuff legally and not harassed regularly. In fact they believe that such harassments as eve teasing or passing of comments are nothing compared to being evicted every day and going home with a meagre income.

Moreover most of the women hawkers have children and as analyzed by Ratnam and Jain, they do not have the time to attend meetings and also going back is a major problem at night and is an extra cost for them. Also attending meetings and rallies would mean loss of income for a day and hence women hesitate from taking up leadership roles in trade unions. They feel it would be an extra responsibility which may not yield any results. What comes across is that in all the areas

hawkers face common problems yet due to lack of unity and representation their demands are not granted. The major problem is that hawkers in different parts of Mumbai are not integrated because of their own interests and the corruption of the BMC officials. In such cases women face even more marginalization and oppression from their households as well as the police and the officials.

Women come out to work in extreme conditions, yet women can enter the informal sector easily because this sector does not require any particular skill as argued by Mitter. These conditions include, when the women are widows or are the main support systems of their families. In conditions where the husbands are able and can earn for the family, women are expected to look after the needs of the family.

Forming unions and focusing on their needs or to have representatives in the unions are not the concern of the women themselves. Issues like permanent employment, job security and eviction are much important for the women. Thus they are not part of the unions because they believe that they have their male counterparts fighting for these demands. Hence at the time of the union meetings, women themselves believe that it is not important to be a part of these meetings because a much more important role of performing household chores is necessary. For example to quote RadhaKawal, “in the informal sector, women need public toilets otherwise it becomes very difficult for women to work.” Although this issue is prevalent in the minds of every hawker yet there is no demand for this issue because this issue is not as major as the issue of licenses. In fact the term “women” becomes important only when they face lathi charge or are hit by the police or the BMC officials. “They did not leave our women also,” is the common voice of the union. But other than that there is no other focus on women issues.

Conclusion

In the informal sector however where women face sexual harassment on a high scale, yet there are more women hawkers than women workers at the factories. The informal sector allows the women to fight for their rights on an equal platform with men. If physical strength is required for the formal sectors and the belief is that women will not be able to fulfill that, then this criterion holds true for informal sector as well. As argued by Bhowmik (2003) street vendors across several Indian cities have generally been regarded as nuisance value, their presence seen as inimical to urban development. However, the range of goods and services they provide renders them useful to other sections of the urban poor and thus they form an important segment of the informal economy. Hence their struggle should be supported by society as well.

In this context it is important to analyze Gothoskar's (2000), regarding the distinction made in the formal and informal sector with respect to gender. Gothoskar argues that the vast majority of jobs where women were not traditionally employed remained shut for women. Thus a reduction in the number of jobs open to women was inevitable. In fact in some plants and industries even in jobs which remained women were replaced by men who resulted in an even greater reduction in the number of women employed. An area of double discrimination which women face regarding employment pertains to "heavy work." On the one hand according to ILO (Maximum Weight Recommendation, 1967, No, 128), states like Maharashtra and Madras have prescribed a maximum weight to be carried by women. Women are not allowed to be assigned to regular transport of loads. In principle legislation also prohibits the employment of women on load transport during pregnancy and for ten weeks following confinement. On the other hand women in the informal sector as well as in their household duties have been traditionally assigned the

heaviest of works, which range from carrying of head loads of water for long distances, manual grinding of corn, carrying heavy loads in construction, mining and quarrying.

As argued by Hensman although women may come forward to work in the informal sector as hawkers or street vendors yet unionizing them is a major issue. The primary reason being that women are so caught up with their familial pressures that for them not being evicted is the major issue. In fact women do not even realize the gravity of other problems, particularly sexual harassment which they face on an everyday basis. The women cell of the trade union till it has been formed has not got any case of sexual harassment as the women representatives are busy fighting with the men on the issue of eviction and uniting the other hawkers who feel getting involved in trade union activities is a waste of time. Till the time hawkers are segregated due to competition, lack of unity and with the belief that revolting will mean loss of income for a day, it will only help the government in not heeding up to the demands of the hawkers.

What also needs to be noted that as argued by Mitter, Chen and Banerjee is that women themselves succumb to the patriarchal order of Indian society. They are willing to accept lower wage rates, work from home, and accept any kind of employment even at times if they are more skilled than men. Even from the data analysis what can be gathered is that women come out and work at times when they are widows or in dire need of money in the informal sector. In both the sectors women are expected to perform the dual role of performing household duties as well as being efficient at the workplace. Moreover the unions do not consider of including them by shifting the timings of their meetings or by making it compulsory that some percentage of the union members should be women. Hence though it is argued that women have entered the

workforce and their demands are adhered to by trade unions, what is required are better policies be framed for giving priorities to women issues.

Women in the informal sector have their women representatives in the trade unions and attend meetings and rallies as and when time permits them. Although women issues are not discussed, yet their presence is considered necessary. Having women in the meetings or in the rallies is an advantage for the trade unions because they can garner sympathy easily if a woman is hit by the police or the BMC officials. But at least in the informal sector, women take this opportunity of letting their voices be heard on this public platform. In the informal sector, the issue of sexual harassment is highlighted among women, in times of rallies or to sign a petition.

The primary concern that women hawkers and street vendors are facing is “invisibility of work” Women themselves accept the fact that it is their bad fate that they have to work and earn a living. They themselves have succumbed to the patriarchal structure of society and do not view their work as work. More than being included in the trade unions, it is their mentality which needs to undergo changes in terms of their attitude towards their work. Until there is a change in the attitude of these women, they will continue to face sexual harassment from customers, fellow hawkers and policemen and yet be used as objects of sympathy in the meetings and rallies. This exploitation of women which is not visible to society needs to be highlighted to protect these women from their everyday struggles.

References

Arye, K. (1981). The Informal Sector: features. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 22(31), 26-40.

Bagchi, S. (1995). Women and Work. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(27), 19-30.

Banerjee, N. (1983). Women and Poverty: Report on a Workshop. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18(40), 1693-1698.

Banerjee, N. (1978). Women Workers and Development. *Social Scientist*, 6(8), 3-15.

Bhowmik, S. (2003). National policy for Street Vendors. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(16), 19-25.

Bhowmik, S. (2005). Street Vendors in Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(22), 2256-2264.

Bhowmik, S. (2003). Urban Responses to Street Trading: India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(7), 31-50.

Bhowmik, S. (2003). Globalization, Governance and Labor. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(21), 47-60.

Bremen, J. (2010). India's Social Question in a State of Denial. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 65(23), 42-47.

Bremen, J. (2001). An Informalised Labour System, End of Labour Market Dualism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(52), 4804-4821.

Bremen, J. (2011). The Informal Sector Economy as a Global Trend. Retrieved from <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Breman-Inf-Sector-Global-Trend.pdf> - See more at: <http://reffor.us/index.php#sthash.jx4liDv9.dpuf>

Bromley, R. (1978). Introduction - the urban informal sector: Why is it worth discussing?. *World Development*, 6(9), 1033-1039.

Chaudhuri, S. (1978). Recession in the skilled sector and implications for informal wage. *Elsevier*, 65(11), 158-163.

Marilyn Carr and Martha Chen (2004). *Globalization, social exclusion and work: with special reference to informal employment and gender*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/dwresources/docs/625/F1146925582/gender%20and%20globalisation.pdf>

Chhachhi, A. (1992). New Phase in Textile Unionism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17(8), 267-272.

Chhachhi, A. (1998). Women and Work in Indian Society. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(11), 76-91.

Chhachhi, A. (1999). *Gender, Flexibility, Skill, and Industrial Restructuring: The Electronics Industry in India*. Retrieved March 10, 2012, from <http://repub.eur.nl/res/pub/19041/wp296.pdf>

Eapon, M. (2001). Women in Informal Sector in Kerala: Need for Re-Examination. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(26), 2390-2392.

Eapon, M. (1996). Rural Non-Farm Employment: Some Reflections on Petty Production. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(26), 1673-1675.

Eaton, A., Kochan, A., & Rubenstein, S. (2008). Balancing Acts: Dynamics of a Union Coalition in a Labor Management Partnership. *Industrial Relations*, 47(1), 10-35.

Gandhi, N., & Chhachhi, A. (1994). Structural Adjustment, Feminisation of Labour Force and Organisational Strategies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(18), 39-48.

Ghosh, B. (2008). Economic Reforms and Trade Unionism in India-A Macro View. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 43(3), 355-384.

Gothoskar, S. (2000). *Struggles of Women at Work*. Bombay, India: Publishing House.

Gupta, M. R. (1991). Rural-urban migration, informal sector and development policies. A theoretical analysis. *Journal of Development Economics*, 41(5), 137-151.

Hazra, (1991). The Role of the Organized Sector. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 66(41), 99-101.

Hensman, R. (2004). Globalization, labor standards, and women's rights: dilemmas of collective (in) action in an interdependent world. *Feminist Economics*, 10(1), 3-35.

Hensman, R. (2000). World Trade and Workers' Rights: To Link or Not to Link?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(15), 8-14.

Hensman, R. (2003). Globalisation: A Perspective for Labour. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28(43), 25-31.

Hensman, R. (2004). Globalisation, Women and Work: What Are We Talking About?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(10), 1030-1034.

Hensman, R. (2009). Organizing Against the Odds: Women in India's Informal Sector. *The Socialist Register*, 37(21), 61-90.

Hensman, R. (2003). A case study of *Beedi* workers. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 57(4), 66-80.

Hensman, R. (2002). Trade Unions and Women's Autonomy: Organizational Strategies of Women Workers in India. *Making Feminist Politics: Transitional Alliances*

Hensman, R. (2001). Undermining Patriarchy, Empowering Women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(14), 6-12.

John, M. (2012). Workers Discontent and form of trade union politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 67(1), 19-22.

Kabeer, N. (2010). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender and Development*, 13(1), 13-24.

Kabeer, N. (1995). Targeting Women or Transforming Institutions?. *Taylor and Francis*, 5(2) 108-116.

Kalpagam, U. (1987). 'Women, Informal Sector and Perspectives on Struggles.' *Social Scientist*, 15(6), 33-44.

Karnik, V.B. (1978). *Indian Trade Unions*. Bombay, India: Popular Prakashan.

Khan, A. and Azam, K. (1992).The Impact of Recent Global Financial Crisis on the Financial Institutions in the Developing Countries – the need for Global Solutions. *Elsevier*, 22(7), 56-76.

Mazumdar, D. (1976). The Urban Informal Sector. *World Development*, 4(8), 655-679.

Mahmud, S., &Kabeer, N. (2003).Compliance versus Accountability: Struggles for Dignity and Daily Bread in the Bangladesh: Garment Industry. *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, 29(3), 22-49.

Martens, M. H., &Mitter, S. (1994). *Women in Trade Unions: Organizing the Unorganized*. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO publications.

Noronha, E. (1996). Liberalisation and Industrial Relations.*Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(8), 14-20.

Noronha, E. (2003). Indian Trade Unions: Today and Beyond Tomorrow. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*,39(1), 95-107.

Noronha, E., &D’Cruz, P. (2008).The Dynamics of Teleworking: Case Studies of Women Medical Transcriptionists from Bangalore, India. *Gender, Development and Technology*, 12(2), 157-183.

Papola, T.S. (1980). Informal Sector, Concept and Policy.*Economic and Political Weekly*, 15(18), 817-824.

Patel, S. (1998). Work and Workers in Mumbai, 1930s-90s: Changing Profile, Enduring Problems. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(46), 14-20.

Pratap, S., & JCB, A. (2012). Worker Voices in an Auto Production Chain. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 67(34), 50-58.

Ramaswamy, E.A. (1988). *Worker Consciousness and Trade Unions*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

Ratnam, C.S.V. (2007). Trade Unions and Wider Society. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 42(4), 620-651.

Sehgal, R. (2012). 'Maruti Workers Are the Villains': Truth or Prejudice?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 67(31), 12-16.

Shah, N. (2005). Changing Times for the Working Women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41(9), 76-91.

Shah, N., & Gandhi, N. (1998). Industrial Restructuring: Workers in Plastic Processing Industry. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(22), 12-20.

Sharma, R.N. (1996) Towards a theoretical framework of industries. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(6), 44-60.

Sheth, N.R. (1993). On Trade Unions. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28(6), 31-36.

Sheth, N.R. (1996). We the Trade Unions. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 32(1), 1-20.

Sheth, N.R. (1969). Workers' Participation in Trade Union Activity. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 4(3), 279-297.

Sheth, N.R. (1977). Towards Industrial Democracy. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12(22), 36-42.

- Singh, S.K. (1997). *Public Sectors in India*. New Delhi, India: Rawat Publications.
- Sinha, P.K. (2004). Trade Unions and its legislation. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 3(5), 55-75.
- Smith, P. (1990). The Use of Performance Indicators in the Public Sector. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 153(1), 53-72.
- Taher, N. (1999). Trade Unions-A history. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 7(2), 101-122.
- Taylor, P., Noronha, E., Scholarios, D., & D'cruz, P. (2008). Employee Voice and Collective Formation in Indian ITES-BPO Industry. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(22), 37-46.
- Teltumbde, A. (2012). The 'Maoists' of Manesar. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 67(34), 10-11.
- Thakur, C.P. (1976). Trade Unions and Social Science Research in India. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 12(1), 1-26.
- Verma, P. (1982). *Trade Unions in India*. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publications.

Online References

- Taher, N. (2000). *History of Women in Trade Unions*. Retrieved August 28, 2012, from ntui.org.in
- ILO (2006). *Decent Employment for Women*. Retrieved June 6, 2013, from [http://www.ilo.org/declaration/followup/tcprojects/eliminationofdiscrimination/WCMS_DECL_PR_4_EN/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/declaration/followup/tcprojects/eliminationofdiscrimination/WCMS_DECL_PR_4_EN/lang-en/index.htm)

ILO (n.d.).*Decent Work Agenda*. Retrieved June 8, 2013, from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--en/index.htm>

ILO (n.d.).*Social Protection*. Retrieved June 8, 2013, from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/social-protection/lang--en/index.htm>

ILO (n.d.).*Social Dialogue*. Retrieved June 8, 2013, from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/social-dialogue/lang--en/index.htm>

ILO (n.d.).*Guaranteeing Rights at Work*. Retrieved June 8, 2013, from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/rights-at-work/lang--en/index.htm>