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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### THEORISING GENDERED MOTIVATIONS TO STREET VENDING: A STUDY OF WOMEN VENDORS IN DELHI, INDIA

**Dr. Shweta Sharma**

Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Department of Natural and Built Environment, Sheffield S11WB UK.

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#### Abstract

The informal economy is characterised by severe 'decent work' deficits that disproportionately impact women (ILO, 2002a, 2013c). This research identifies multiple dimensions of gendered segmentation within the street vending sector in Delhi arising from an interplay of structural factors experienced differently by women across the life course. Analysis of 105 semi-structured interviews with vendors in Delhi highlights the role of patriarchal norms in public and private spheres in structuring women's entry into street vending. Key issues to access jobs in the formal sector include the patriarchal norms, stigmatisation and societal expectations that limit women's access to education, their ability to work and the type of work they engage in, thus creating segmentation in the labour market. This study concludes that the structural conditions lead to transitions, life events and turning points in women's lives, determining their access to employment in the formal or informal sector.

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#### Introduction:-

Street vendors are found in all the major cities of developing countries and are the most visible sub-division of the urban informal economy (Cross, 2000; Wongtada, 2014). In India, the National Policy on Urban Street Vendor defines a street vendor as an individual who sells merchandise or food items or offers services to the public on a footpath, street or any public or private area, either from a temporary built-up structure or by roaming from one place to another (Government of India, 2009). The importance of street vending in India can be gauged from the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors and the Protection of Livelihood and the Regulation of Street Vending Act (commonly referred to as the Street Vendors Act). India has more than ten million street vendors, with a considerable variation in the number of vendors, from 0.15 million to 0.20 million in metropolitan cities to 30,000 in smaller towns (Bhowmik and Saha, 2011). Street vending has been recognised as a critical source of employment for the urban poor (Government of India, 2004). The Indian government acknowledges that informal sector workers and informally employed workers are tremendously vulnerable to exclusion from decent work in the country (Mander, 2014). Among the informally employed, street vendors suffer from conspicuous decent work deficits (Saha, 2009). Thus, it is essential to understand the various motives forcing these women to commence street vending as opposed to other formal and informal work opportunities. This article focuses on women street vendors in India. Its main aim is to investigate the pathways that lead women to become street vendors and the factors that make it difficult for them to transition to other kinds of work. Extant accounts of workers' involvement in street vending have tended to pay insufficient attention to gender differences between men and women and, consequently, have neglected the extent to which women's pathways to participation in street vending are shaped by gender. This article, by contrast, highlights the importance of gender relations and their articulation with other social phenomena,

**Corresponding Author:- Dr. Shweta Sharma**

Address:- Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Department of Natural and Built Environment, Sheffield S11WB UK. E-mail: [s.sharma@shu.ac.uk](mailto:s.sharma@shu.ac.uk)

such as social and cultural norms, in influencing women's decisions to become street vendors. This study addresses two main research questions: first, what are the generative mechanisms responsible for women's participation in street vending? Second, how is the labour market segmented within street vending according to the women's exposure to identified generative mechanisms?

The paper begins with a discussion of the dominant theories of street entrepreneurship and the literature on the theoretical underpinnings of gender inequality in labour markets, examining, in particular, the relevance of the New Labour Market Segmentation (NLMS) approach. Section 3 describes the research design and methodology used for this research and explains the rationale for choosing a critical realist research philosophy. The findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with street vendors are presented in Section 4. The results address the vital question of women's motivations to commence vending in Indian society from the lens of the New Labour Market Segmentation approach. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of the findings for our understanding of why women participate in informal employment. In contrast to dominant perspectives that tend to underplay the importance of gender relations and specific cultural contexts, the paper demonstrates how the interaction of material and patriarchal influences influence the types of paid work that women can undertake and how these forces 'play out' in the specific cultural context of India. The conclusion also provides some reflections on the policy implications of the findings and possible directions for future research on street vending.

### **Literature Review:-**

The literature review is presented under two broad themes. The first theme discusses the existing theories on motivations to commence vending. The second theme concerns the New Labour Market Segmentation approach and its relevance to this research.

#### **Theories on Motivations to Commence Street Vending**

Four competing theories explain the reasons for the existence of an informal street vending sector: modernisation, structuralism, Neoliberalism, and Postmodernism (Williams and Gurtoo, 2012). Modernisation theory views street entrepreneurship as a remnant of the period before modern industrial capitalism (Geertz, 1963; Bairoch, 1973; Packard, 2007). The Structuralist theory recognises street entrepreneurship as a survival strategy adopted as a last option due to a lack of other means of livelihood. It identifies street vendors as part of what Marx called the 'reserve army of labour'. The neo-liberal perspective views street vending as a rational economic choice pursued by entrepreneurs who want to escape the state-imposed institutional constraints and work in the informal economy as it is easy to establish and requires low investment. Post-modernists also view street vending as a rational economic choice entrepreneurs pursue for the flexibility of work it offers. However, Williams and Gurtoo (2012) argue that none of the four dominant theories can be applied universally to all street vendors; instead, each theory applies to a specific segment of the vending workforce.

Although a growing body of literature discovers various crucial questions about gender and its impact on street vendors' everyday experiences and livelihood strategies (Peimani and Kamalipour, 2022), there has been no reference to motivations for the commencement of vending, specifically from a gendered perspective. This research argues that the four dominant theories are, to an extent, 'blind' to gendered explanations for the varied motives of women to commence vending. This is not to suggest that the literature on informal employment has completely overlooked the issue of gender inequality. For example, Chen et al. (2005) suggest that gender inequality in the informal economy has several dimensions. These dimensions include a concentration of women in more precarious work with lower average earnings; a persistent gender gap in informal wage employment as well as informal self-employment; and labour force segmentation in the informal economy where women are confined to own-account or home-based work due to an enormous burden of unpaid household work. Occupational segregation by gender deserves particular attention because it excludes women from most livelihood options and affects how women perceive themselves, affecting their income and status (Anker, 1997). For example, the gendered division of household responsibilities and the patriarchal ordering of society influence women to withdraw from the labour force prematurely or temporarily. There has been differing evidence of the role of cultural gender norms concerning women's position to commence street vending in public places. For example, Trupp & Sunanta (2017), in their study on Thailand, conclude that ethnic minority women vendor's migration and participation in tourism have recreated cultural norms and have advanced their economic status as primary income earners for their families.

Similarly, Fadaee & Schindler (2017) found that despite the authorities' destructive onslaughts and the social stigma associated with vending in Tehran, women vendors use urban spaces such as women-only metro carriages to earn

their livelihoods. On the other hand, Luthuli, Haskins, Rollins, & Horwood (2020) found that even though women earn an income in the informal economy, they struggle to find an equilibrium between the challenging demands of infant feeding and street vending to deal with financial strains. Similarly, Menon (2016), in her study on women engaged in street vending in Kerala, focuses on the idea of “bounded capability”, contending that women vendors’ freedom of mobility, in general, and transformational mobility, in particular, are constrained by socio-cultural or gender norms. This debate on gender and street vending can be summed up by the contention of Amankwaa (2017) in his study on street water vendors in Ghana that gender inequality does not disappear with men’s entry into traditionally female jobs or vice versa. Instead, it is simply ‘reconsidered’ and ‘attenuated’.

### **NLMS and Informal Economy**

Gender inequality is a distinct difference between men and women in participation levels, access to resources and achievement of development goals (UNICEF, 2017). In their report on informal employment, Chen et al. (2005) suggest that gender inequality in the informal economy has several dimensions. These dimensions include a concentration of women in more precarious work with lower average earnings; a persistent gender gap in informal wage employment as well as informal self-employment; and labour force segmentation in the informal economy where women are confined to own-account or home-based work due to an enormous burden of unpaid household work. These insights strongly imply that an analysis of gender inequality in the informal economy must consider multiple forces within households, firms, labour markets and broader society that shape women’s opportunities. One critical analytical approach that explicitly addresses the multi-dimensional character of gender inequality is the ‘new labour market segmentation’ approach, as proposed by Grimshaw et al. (2017). The New Labour Market Segmentation (NLMS) approach analyses the causes of labour market inequalities in the broader context of gender relations, regulatory systems and production structures (Grimshaw et al., 2017). The paper proposes a gendered explanation for women’s participation in street vending through the NLMS approach. NLMS is a multi-dimensional approach that combines insights from three theoretical traditions: the traditional labour segmentation approach, feminist socio-economic analysis and comparative institutional theory. The traditional labour segmentation approach was developed in the 1970s and early 1980s. It claims that labour markets are segmented by employers and broader economic conditions, which make it challenging for workers to shift between the segments of labour markets (Rubery, 1978; Ryan, 1981; Wilkinson, 1981; Craig et al., 1982). This approach argues that inequalities in the labour market are shaped both by employers and broader economic conditions. These inequalities range from differential access to work and training opportunities (Doeringer and Piore, 1970), minimal investment by employers in labour skills and technological up-gradation leading to low-wage-low-skill cycles (Wilkinson, 1983) and the use of ‘divide and rule’ strategies to counter potential and actual worker resistance to management control of the labour process (Reich, Gordon and Edwards, 1973). These practices reproduce inequalities in the labour market based on individual attributes such as gender, race, age, social class, etc. Therefore, labour market inequalities are promoted through society’s rules and conventions on the supply side and institutionalised policies and practices on the demand side (Grimshaw et al., 2017).

Feminist socioeconomics brings an explicit analytical focus on gender inequalities. This approach highlights that women’s opportunities are limited in the labour market. Their opportunities are shaped by gender discrimination, gender disparities in the division of household labour (where women are primarily responsible for taking care of their family members besides performing other household duties) and the interaction of domestic and workplace power relations (Folbre, 1994). The productive value of jobs performed primarily by women is usually underrated because women have traditionally been unsuccessful in establishing high status for those jobs (Walsh, 1990). Thus, feminised jobs are often ‘bad jobs’ not due to workers’ lower skills or commitment to perform them but because it is not difficult for employers to hire women to do these jobs for a relatively low wage (Craig, Garnsey and Rubery, 1985). Such gender-based labour segmentation is particularly relevant for India, where segmentation is accentuated by the culturally determined social reproduction responsibilities of women workers besides other intersectional socio-cultural factors such as social discrimination due to ethnicity and caste (Srivastava, 2019). Gender inequality in the labour market becomes more acute during different phases in a woman’s life. For example, working mothers bear the negative repercussions of childbirth at the workplace. This is because their employers use ‘society’s perception’ of the motherhood demands, such as maternity leave and childcare leave, as an instrument to offer these women lower wages and less challenging jobs (Self, 2005; Anxo et al., 2007). The third theoretical tradition, comparative institutionalism, also called ‘societal institutionalism’ (Djelic and Quack, 2002), emphasises how the impact of institutional arrangements of political, financial, educational, industrial relations and other systems at the societal level affect social stratification and equality. This approach highlights the complementarities between societal institutions within and across different institutional orders (Morgan et al., 2009) and their firm and society-

level outcomes (Casper and Whitley, 2002; Hall and Gingerich, 2009). For example, in India, gender inequalities are rooted in sociocultural norms and entrenched in policy and institutional frameworks, including labour institutions, shaping the employment opportunities of female workers and the development of the female labour force (Chaudhary and Verick, 2014). Papola and Rodgers (1992) and Rodgers (2020) argue that formal laws, trade unions, state agencies and informal norms and values are collectively responsible for the growth of informality and precarity in India (Harris-White and Gooptu, 2007; Dasgupta and Kar, 2018). The NLMS approach amalgamates the three traditions mentioned above. It is a multi-dimensional framework that can be used to better account for labour market segmentation. In countries like India, horizontal and vertical segmentation is evident in the labour markets. Moreover, India has a long history of social division along ethnicity, class, caste and gender (Breman, 1996, 2019; Srivastava, 2012, 2019; Harris-White and Gooptu, 2007; Dasgupta and Kar, 2018). This produces a complex hierarchical stratification system where upper-caste workers (male and female) oppress lower-caste workers of disadvantaged ethnicities and religions. The NLMS approach offers a holistic explanation for the horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market because it equally considers how the employers shape the inequalities on the one hand and the regulations, policies and institutions on the other. This approach is particularly relevant to my research because, through this approach, I attempt to look for deeper structural explanations for gender segregation in the labour market and women's access to work. The following section discusses the rationale for selecting the research philosophy that fits well with the theoretical lens of NLSM chosen by the researchers to analyse the gendered labour market segmentation in street vending based on motivating factors for women to commence this work.

### **Research Philosophy and Design**

Research philosophy, which comprises ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations, influences the choice of research design (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2012; Creswell and Creswell, 2014). Critical Realist (CR) ontology and epistemology were adopted to conduct the fieldwork, accepting that women's beliefs are produced, transient and fallible. Adopting a critical realist philosophy allowed the researcher to think and evaluate the unequal relations between men and women as a social structure with deep "generative mechanisms", thereby deciphering the 'real' domain of reality as proposed by Bhaskar (1978). 'The real' domain of work of these women was understood by looking at the structures of women's oppression in society and identifying the mechanisms which create barriers that prevent them from accessing formal jobs. Critical realist philosophy was also an appropriate choice according to the primary theoretical lens of the NLMS approach used to analyse the findings of this research. According to this theory, labour markets are embedded in institutions or social structures such as rules, conventions, resources, etc. One of the theoretical traditions the NLMS approach draws upon, namely feminist socioeconomics, emphasises that labour markets are strictly embedded in social structures (Fleetwood, 2006).

The semi-structured interview method was chosen because, as argued by Miles and Gilbert (2005) and (Porpora, 2016), it allowed the interviewer to request the respondents to corroborate their responses with additional details and encourage them to raise pressing issues somehow skipped by the interviewer. The participants used statements narrating their real-life experiences of exploitation and discrimination in the labour market while accessing formal jobs, such as 'I remember witnessing...', 'the sexual exploitation in domestic work compelled me to opt for street vending because...' and 'because of the corruption in recruitment practices of formal workplaces, I decided to...'. The semi-structured interviews were self-evolving and flexible, which allowed the women to raise new topics and partially determined the direction of the discussions.

Delhi was chosen for this research because of two primary reasons. Firstly, the city has the country's largest population of approximately 0.45 million street vendors. Secondly, Delhi is the only city in India that has an extensive range of vending markets, from the exclusive 'ladies market' where only the women vendors work to the 'natural/ regular markets' and weekly markets where both male and female vendors work together (Sankrit, 2015). The target population for this research was the stationary and mobile vendors<sup>1</sup> operating in the regular, weekly and ladies' markets<sup>2</sup>. The location of the markets from which participants were chosen for the study is shown in Figure 1.

<sup>1</sup> Stationary vendors regularly carry out vending activities from a specific location, and mobile vendors move from one place to another, either on foot or in a vehicle, to sell their products (Government of India, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Natural/ regular markets are markets where the sellers and buyers have conventionally assembled for the trade of merchandise or services. The weekly market vendors carry out street trading once a week on the street in a residential area. Night bazaar vendors work in a specified night bazaar during the period permitted by the municipal authorities (Government of India, 2014)

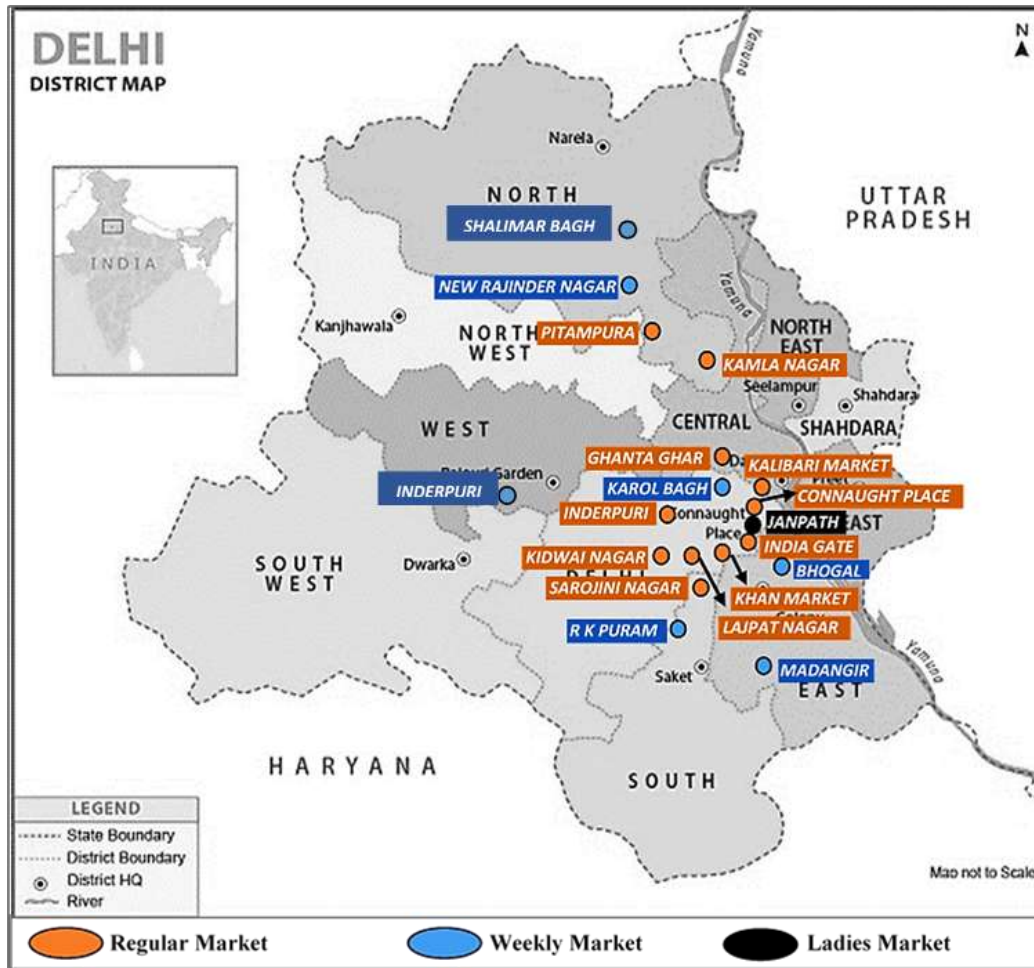


Figure 1:- Vending market locations of the interviewees.

The sampling frame for this research was drawn from the street vendors' list available with the most prominent street vendor association in Delhi, namely the National Hawker Federation (NHF), a 20-year-old national federation of street vendors with branches spread over 28 states of India. The federation does not directly offer membership to the vendors registered with it but gives membership to the unions registered with the federation. Within Delhi, there are 51 vendor unions associated with the NHF. The first three weeks of fieldwork, which spanned over four months from August to November 2018, were devoted to arranging meetings with the NHF officials to understand the street vending scenario in Delhi better and decide upon the research process without much intervention from the NHF. During these initial meetings, the NHF shared the list of vendors registered with the trade unions associated with the NHF. The interviewer chose participants from the registered vendor's list based on the maximum variation sampling. The criteria for drawing such a sample were geographical variation among the markets and demographic variation among the vendors. Interviewees were selected from the ladies' market situated at Janpath (in Connaught Place), eight weekly markets, and twelve regular markets spread all over the city to fulfil the criterion of geographical variation. The interviewees were identified based on three demographic parameters: age, literacy level and marital status. It was decided to have at least one interviewee fulfilling each demographic parameter. Seventy-three participants were chosen from the regular markets, followed by twenty-three vendors from weekly markets and nine from the ladies' market in Delhi. The distribution of the samples according to the life cycle parameters of vendors collected from various markets is summarised in Table 1. In this study, 105 vendors were interviewed.

**Table 1:-** Distribution of interviewees across various types of markets.

		Ladies Market (9 samples)	Weekly markets (25 samples)	Regular markets (71 samples)	Total samples
Literacy	Literate	3	15	23	41
	Illiterate	6	10	48	64
Age	20s & below	1	1	3	5
	30s	4	8	15	27
	40s	3	9	22	34
	50s	0	6	18	24
	60s & above	1	1	13	15
Marital status	Unmarried	1	1	3	5
	Married	7	16	43	66
	Divorced	0	3	2	5
	Widow	1	4	22	27
	Abandoned	0	1	1	2

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to collect data from the NHF officials, all of whom were vendors and had closely worked with the vendors in Delhi for the past twenty years in their capacity as NHF officials. These interviews gave profound insights into the understanding of the NHF officials concerning the working lives of vendors and the personal or structural barriers influencing their choice of occupation. All the respondents, the street vendors and NHF officials were interviewed for approximately one hour, and extensive notes were taken during the interviews. Interviews were conducted in the local language, Hindi. The researcher recorded and later transcribed them before being translated and transcribed into text verbatim from Hindi to English.

Critical realist ontology and epistemology determined the focus of the data analysis process. Thematic analysis was chosen because it enabled the interpretation of respondents' experiences and the context that gave rise to such incidents. Also, the thematic analysis allowed us to focus on patterns of meaning across data sets drawn from vendors working in different markets, in contrast to the vendors' individual experiences. This subsequently enabled the data analysis process to make generalisations about the 'reality' of the women belonging to different age groups and marital and education statuses. An approach to thematic analysis, known as Template Analysis (TA), was used to analyse the interviews. The main reason for using TA was the flexibility it offered to adapt to the needs of the study despite having a hierarchical coding structure. This study used a hybrid approach (Fereday et al., 2006) involving inductive-deductive TA, which was extremely useful for this research. An inductive approach was adopted to capture and find patterns within the data and explore the codes and themes emerging from and strongly linked to the data. On the other hand, the deductive process produced a set of codes from an extensive literature search. The interview data were coded for the main question, 'What are the motives for women to commence street vending?', and the data fit into a pre-existing coding frame. The data collection and analysis exercises were carried out simultaneously. The previous process steps were reviewed before further analysis to ensure that the emerging themes were grounded in the original data.

### Findings

This section draws from the interviews conducted with the female vendors to understand their motivations to commence vending. It discusses the significant findings of the research in three major subsections, viz the labour markets segmentation caused by broader economic conditions, interaction of domestic and workplace power relations leading to gender discrimination and disparities and societal institutionalism affecting social stratification and equality based on the three theoretical traditions of NLMS.

#### Labour markets segmentation caused by broader economic conditions

Lack of jobs in the formal sector is one of the most common reasons cited in the literature (Haan, 2006; Bhowmik and Saha, 2012; González, 2015; Haider, 2016; Mosammam, Ahmadi and Razavian, 2018) to explain why people work in the informal economy. However, in this research, only a few interviewees stated that long search times for formal jobs motivated commencing street vending. This group of vendors included those who had obtained a secondary education and were once employed in careers in the formal sector. Unfortunately, they lost their jobs and

could not be re-employed in the formal sector due to intense competition in the labour market, long search times for formal jobs, and their inability to pay bribes to secure such employment. This group of vendors was primarily composed of widows and abandoned women who were compelled to work either due to the death of their husbands or because their husbands deserted them. Despite being educated, these women could not get jobs in the formal sector due to structural constraints of intense economic competition among the migrant jobseekers and corruption in the labour market, which compelled them to be vendors against their preferred choice of work.

For example, Neela worked as a housekeeping staff member in various schools in Delhi from 1999 to 2019. She got married when she was fifteen. Neela was abandoned by her husband two years later when she was pregnant with a 7-month-old daughter. She could not return to her natal house as her parents were too poor to support her and her unborn child. However, Neela stopped getting such jobs in the formal sector from the beginning of 2019. She believed that excessive competition from migrants in the labour market was why she could not find a formal sector job. While Neela stopped getting formal job offers, Rajini stated that bribery was the primary reason for her inability to apply for jobs in the formal sector. Rajini, a 40-year-old widow, lost her husband at 28. After her husband's death, she was forced to apply for a paid job to feed her three daughters. Her in-laws stayed in the village, and her parents did not support her financially. Rajini, who had a housekeeping job for five years since she started working, explained the necessity for street vending as:

*'Initially, I worked in a government school as a housekeeping staff for five years after my husband's demise. Later on, when my contract with the school was over, I tried applying for a housekeeping job in Anganwadi (a childcarecentre) but did not get a job there. The officials in the Anganwadi used to ask for hefty bribes, which I could not afford to give. Since I had no money to pay as a bribe, I had no option but to work as a street vendor, where there was no bribe, to start this 'work'.*

(Rajini, literate, widow)

Another group of vendors were victims of employers' discriminatory policies, which forced them to look for self-employment options. This group of vendors was exclusively comprised of married women who switched from other informal jobs to street vending. These married women lived apart from their in-laws and were usually migrants to the city and their husbands. They had to leave their jobs due to their deteriorating health condition. For such women, illiteracy was a vital reason to vend over other informal work. For example, Rajkali, an elderly vendor, started working as a construction labourer during the day and sold water bottles at the India Gate (as a mobile vendor) when she was 20 years old. She had experience working as a construction labourer for twenty years and as a vendor for 40 years (since 1979). When asked why she quit her job, Rajkali stated, *'When I was 40 years old, I found it difficult to work as a construction worker...I was not strong enough to do this tiring job, so I became a full-time vendor'*. When asked whether she had left the construction work of her own free will, Rajkali revealed that *'my employer started considering me a "burden" as I was not able to work as much as I used to work when I joined this industry...so I left that job instead of being abused by him at work every day'*. The poor physical condition of these women due to continuous exposure to strenuous work conditions and repeated pregnancies further segmented the labour market. Due to poor physical and emotional states, these women were not hired for other informal jobs, such as domestic workers, which also required a lot of physical strength and lengthy working hours where they would have to stay away from their children. These women were, therefore, compelled to seek self-employment avenues within the informal economy where they could have flexible working hours and prioritise their domestic responsibilities over professional ones.

### **Interaction of Domestic and Workplace Power Relations Leading to Gender Discrimination and Disparities**

The interviewees' literacy level resulted from the unequal power relations between the daughters and their fathers at home, which translated into women's lack of access to education. Studies of motivations for the commencement of vending have found that illiterate or less educated people are compelled to be street vendors as they see it challenging to secure a job in the formal sector (Williams and Gurtoo, 2012; Husain, Yasmin and Islam, 2015). While India has made substantial progress in improving literacy over the years, it remains home to 313 million illiterate people; 59 per cent are women (Chandra, 2019). In this research, lack of literacy was a pull factor for sixty per cent of the respondents to commence vending, as street vending did not require them to be literate or skilled. The age at which they started vending was found to have a strong bearing on whether participants viewed illiteracy as a significant pull factor.



Besides the unmarried women who started vending during childhood, the women who commenced vending before the age of twenty were the married women who started vending soon after marriage due to the poor economic condition of their marital homes. Being illiterate, these women needed more information about jobs in the formal sector and were, therefore, drawn to informal employment. For example, Chand, a 50-year-old woman, started vending at twenty. Chand was born in a village in the least developed state of India, called Bihar (NITI Aayog, 2021), where the possibility of a married woman's role as an earning member of the family is fragile (Chitrakar, 2009). While Chand was never sent to school, her three brothers were sent to school due to the patriarchal mindset of her parents, who considered their sons' education an investment and a future source of income. Since the benefits of Chand's education would go to her marital home, her parents did not invest their scarce financial resources in her education, a phenomenon like what Herz (2006) found in her study of South Asian societies. When asked about her reason for choosing to vend over other livelihood options, Chand stated, *'I started vending to sustain my kids, as there was no need to be literate to do this work'*. Thus, illiteracy was a significant pull factor for illiterate married women who commenced vending at a young age because it did not require them to have any educational qualification.

Another group of women who were victims of discrimination due to unequal power relations in their homes were the ones who, despite being literate, had to take up vending as an occupation due to their husbands or in-laws forbidding them to apply for formal jobs. This group of vendors comprised women married into a typical traditional Indian family represented by patriarchal and collectivistic characteristics. In such collectivist Indian families, married couples sometimes live with their parents and extended family networks (Chadda and Deb, 2013). In traditional families, family unity is maintained at the expense of individuality and freedom of choice, especially for women (Mullatti, 1995). Thus, the women who married into such families were restricted in their choice of occupation by their marital family. These women were allowed to work only with their husbands. Their husbands did not allow them to independently (without their spouse) engage in paid work or apply for formal jobs where they had to work under a male supervisor. The agency of married women is reduced when they are forced to work only with their husbands due to the fear of the patriarch that their wives might be sexually harassed outside their homes if they work alone (Goswami, 2016).

In some instances, in-law restrictions even compelled married women to leave their jobs in the formal sector and accept work contrary to their preferences. An excellent example of such a woman struggling with the patriarchal restrictions on her choice of profession was Kira Garg, a middle-aged married woman who has been vending in various weekly markets in Delhi since 1994. Kira completed secondary school and even undertook a training course at the Indian Technical Institute (ITI). Kira taught in a school before her marriage, but her in-laws prevented her from working after her marriage. Her disappointment was reflected in the following narration of her reason for commencing vending, *'I was not allowed to teach in a school by my in-laws, so there was no point in fighting with them, in the interest of family harmony. I would have preferred the former option if I could choose between teaching in a school and sitting at the vending stall with my husband. But I know I would never be allowed to do that job, so I cannot do anything about it. I have to continue working as a street vendor'*.

In the Indian context, sociocultural factors push women to fit into the societal norms charted for them; for example, women are expected to follow the command of their fathers in childhood, their husbands during marriage and their sons after becoming widows (Haq, 2013). This was evident in the case of Ramya, who was not allowed to go to school by her parents. She conformed to the customs of Indian society, where women were supposed to stay at home and fulfil their domestic duties from childhood. She stated that she was *'never even asked about her desire to go to school by her parents and was forced to fulfil domestic duties since childhood'*. When Ramya was married at thirteen, her ability to seek work was conditioned by her parents' decisions in her childhood and constrained by her husband's restrictions after marriage. When asked about her becoming a vendor, Ramya recalled, *'My husband never wanted me to work in a factory or any job where I was required to work under male employees. Thus, I started selling things on the street so I did not have to work for anyone, which was acceptable to my husband'*. Thus, married women were found to be highly constrained in their choice of work. They were forced to be vendors due to the restrictions imposed on them by their marital families, which did not allow these women to work outside the home without their husbands.

Many explanations for the commencement of vending overlap or compound one another, such as sexual harassment and illiteracy. The nature of patriarchy is such that these multiple dimensions of gendered oppression tend to compound and reinforce one another. Unequal workplace power relations were another major factor for gender



discrimination and disparities. Interview participants suggested that fear of harassment was a significant push factor in choosing street vending over other informal jobs for married women who switched from other informal sector jobs to street vending. They had to leave their jobs due to the harassment at their workplace. When asked about their rationale for selecting street vending, these women often compared street vending with domestic work. For example, Lalita, a middle-aged woman, started vending in 2011. She was born in Delhi and was married at the age of eighteen. Due to mounting household expenditures, Lalita began to work five years after her marriage. Having been born and brought up in Delhi, she had a good social network in the city, through which she quickly got a job as a part-time domestic worker in six bungalows near her house. However, Lalita had a harrowing experience, so she decided to stop working as a domestic worker. Recalling her experience, Lalita explained,

*'Earlier, I was a domestic worker, but I left that job because twice or thrice some incidents happened where the men in these big bungalows molested me. Those incidents shook me. I was completely illiterate and was scared to apply for a job, formal or informal. I decided to do my business where I did not have to work for anyone; thus, there was no risk of harassment. That is how I landed up in this street vending work'.*  
(Lalita, illiterate, married)

A recent report published by Bajoria (2020) on behalf of Human Rights Watch concluded that women factory workers, domestic workers and construction workers are the most vulnerable in India as they are sexually harassed and assaulted frequently at their workplace. A married vendor, Kesar, did not yet experience any particular incident of harassment as a domestic worker. Yet, she never wanted to be one because of the stories shared by other women in her neighbourhood. The fear of harassment was based on the reality that Delhi remains very poor in guaranteeing women's security (Soni, 2016). The women with prior experience working in other informal jobs found them unsuitable from the perspective of 'women's safety'. These women were pushed to be street vendors due to fear or actual experiences of harassment in other informal or formal jobs and their perception of vending as a 'safe' occupation.

### **Societal Institutionalism Affecting Social Stratification and Equality**

The interviews revealed that a woman's marital status decided her social standing and access to livelihood options. It would not be wrong to say that marriage was a major social institution that led to discrimination and compelled women to continue vending against their wishes. For example, widowed and married women were forced to commence vending due to the death or illness of the vending license owner, who was usually their husband or some other male member of the family. The licensed family members' death or long-term illness compelled the widows to commence vending to retain their licensed spots in the market. While the widows took over their husbands' stalls after the death of their husbands, the married women had to turn to street vending to take care of the vending business of their ailing son/ husband or dead relatives (such as sister or father-in-law). The immediate need to work was a push factor for these vendors to commence vending from the vending units that belonged to their husbands. Most of these women considered working as domestic workers. Still, they ultimately opted to become vendors due to the flexible working schedule offered by this occupation, allowing them to prioritise their reproductive work over their productive work.

This research found that thirty-one per cent of interviewees chose to be vendors because vending was seen as more remunerative than alternative livelihoods, with low investment costs to set up the business. In addition, the flexible working hours offered by this occupation were another reason for women with children to opt for vending to prioritise their domestic duties over their work responsibilities. All such vendors who chose to be vendors rather than working out of necessity had experience working in the formal sector. They were widowed, divorced, or abandoned women who were the primary breadwinners for their families. Before becoming street vendors, they were previously engaged in other formal or informal jobs. For example, Deepa, a 35-year-old divorced woman, experienced severe indebtedness after her divorce and had to shut down her boutique as she did not earn enough. Recalling her motive to commence vending, Deepa stated,

*'I got divorced two years ago, in 2017. Due to the poor financial condition of my home, I started working soon after my marriage. I opened my boutique in proximity to my house. However, I came under severe debt due to my divorce proceedings and the increasing education expenses of my son divorce proceedings and increasing education expenses. Initially, I took up a surrogacy job along with running my boutique. Unfortunately, I had*

*a miscarriage because I could not earn anything for six months, and I was only paid half the amount that was agreed with the hospital. I did not even have the money to restart my boutique. Thus, I had to shut down my shop and start street vending to pay off my debts. Street vending is very remunerative work. I can repay my loans in three years if I continue working as a vendor. Once I pay off my loan, then I may re-open my boutique. But, at present, I am happy to have voluntarily chosen this 'work'.*  
(Deepa, literate, divorced)

The women who chose vending over other means of livelihood due to the flexible working life were mostly widows and divorcees who became breadwinners, besides being the primary carers after the death of their husbands or after their divorce. For example, Latika, an elderly widow, became a widow when she was 25. She was pregnant with her second daughter when her husband died. Due to her pregnancy, Latika found it challenging to do paid jobs outside her home and started taking tailoring assignments at her home. Recalling her journey to becoming a vendor, Latika explained, *'Even though I was a diploma holder, I could not do a job as all the jobs have time restrictions...I started taking stitching assignments at my home. That way, I could take care of my children and earn money. When my daughters were ten and five years old, I started vending...I wanted to be a vendor because this work was very flexible regarding working hours...it perfectly accommodated the schedule of my children, who had started going to school by 'then'....I like my work because it has given me a sense of self-dependence and the ability to stand on my feet with ample flexibility in my work schedule'.*

The flexibility of work was the primary motivation to commence vending for a majority of the widowed and abandoned women and a few married women, whose role shifted from being a homemaker to that of a breadwinner. Another married woman, Manu, a mother of three children, chose to vend over other livelihood options due to the physical disability of her daughter. Manu wanted her work schedule to accommodate her daughter's schedule and thus became a vendor. Although Manu was compelled to work due to the poor financial situation of her family, she chose to vend her own will. The divorced, abandoned, and widowed women had accentuated the dual responsibilities of being breadwinners and caring for their children due to the end of their marital contract and no family support. These circumstances compelled them to look for flexible work like street vending, where they could earn well and prioritise their reproductive activities over productive ones.

Ethnic background was another social institution which forced women belonging to specific ethnicities to be victims of intersectional discrimination; the uneducated women belonging to specific ethnic groups shared multiple explanations for commencing vending. For example, around eleven per cent of the interviewees stated that family tradition was the most important motivating factor for selecting street vending as their preferred occupation. Following the ancestral line of work helped these vendors benefit from their parents in learning selling tactics, acquiring the stock to sell, and adding value to the initial inventory. This group of vendors comprised unmarried and married women who started vending alongside their parents when they were very young. The unmarried women started vending as a part-time economic activity to supplement their parents' income. These women studied at college in the morning and sold goods in weekly markets in the evening. Working since their childhood along with their parents helped these young unmarried women to develop what Estrada (2016) calls 'economic empathy' towards their parents—working closely with their parents since childhood developed their understanding of the approaches needed to support their parents in navigating their precarious situation. Not only did this experience of participating in the family business enrich the unmarried women's experience, but this 'economic empathy' also led to a power shift favourable for these women. Another group of vendors who commenced vending as their ancestral line of work were married women. These women essentially belonged to communities specialising in some form of art, such as the Gadia Lohars (nomadic ironsmith community) or Prajapatis (earthenware makers) of Rajasthan or the handloom embroidery communities (such as the Kathi community Rabari community or Kanbi community) of Gujarat. For example, the Gadia Lohars prefer to continue their family manufacturing tradition and sell iron utensils rather than take up formal jobs. Vending tricks of the Gadia Lohar community are passed on from one generation of women to the next. This is because the vending women solely depend on their mother-in-law (who is already well-versed in vending this merchandise) or daughter (who is learning to sell the merchandise) to help them in their work and not on the male members of the family. Other communities that carried forward their family tradition were the handloom embroidery communities of Gujarat.

For example, Kirani migrated from Gujarat to Delhi after her marriage. She belonged to the Mochi community of the Kutch region in Gujarat, which specialises in Aribharat embroidery, a highly ornamental form of silk thread. For

example, Kirani started vending when she was eight years old. Kirani was trained in selling the handlooms from her grandmother and also learned the art of adding value to the Gujarati handlooms by doing Aribharat embroidery from her parents. Following the family tradition also helped Kirani obtain initial start-up resources (interest-free loans) from her family members to commence her business. However, no women in such communities were willing to pass on their ancestral work to their children. These women believed their work was not decent enough and were plagued with many hardships that should not be passed on to the next generation.

### **Discussion:-**

This paper has analysed why women became street vendors. The findings confirm that the four dominant theories of street entrepreneurship (Modernisation, Structuralist, Neo-liberal and post-modernist) do not comprehensively explain women's motives to commence street vending. Modernisation theory views street entrepreneurship as a remnant of the pre-modern period. Indeed, a subset of the vendors interviewed for the study continued with their inherited work passed on to them by their parents. These vendors belonged to specific nomadic (Gadia Lohars) or business (Gujarati) communities and commenced vending very young. Nevertheless, contrary to what modernisation theory suggests, they were neither parasitic nor survived on the fringes of modern society (Bromley, 2007). Instead, these vendors had their niche in the market and client base (primarily foreigners who bought hand-woven apparel from the Gujarati Street vendors at Janpath). They were unlikely to be absorbed by the modern formal sector, as proposed by the Modernisation theory.

The motives for street entrepreneurship of most vendors can be better explained by Structuralist theory, which recognises street entrepreneurship as a survival strategy adopted as a last option due to a lack of other means of livelihood. However, these 'survivalist' vendors did not commence vending only due to a lack of other livelihood options. Instead, patriarchal norms and fear of losing their licensed vending stalls pushed them into street vending. In my research, however, I found that patriarchy combined with Capitalism to shape the lives of women street vendors. The literate married women engaged in formal jobs before their marriage. However, they were 'forced' to choose more flexible informal employment (as proposed by the post-modernist theory), such as street vending, due to the expectations of their in-laws to prioritise their reproductive work over productive work. Thus, even though married women seemed to be 'choosing' vending over other occupations due to the flexibility it offers, contrary to the arguments of post-modernist theory, it was not a 'free choice' but a 'forced choice'. Another set of vendors emphasised that street vending was a rational economic choice they made, as neoliberal theory would suggest. They viewed street selling as the best option for making money because it was more remunerative than alternative livelihoods, was easy to establish and required low investment. Although these vendors seemed to exercise their agency in their choice of work, the underlying reason for this desire to look for higher-paying work, such as vending, was also an economic necessity. Thus, these vendors' actions did not 'fit' with the neoliberal account of motivation to work in the informal economy since the women were pushed into vending by economic necessity (Structuralist school) rather than having a particular desire to be entrepreneurs.

This research argues that the four dominant theories are, to some extent, 'blind' to gendered explanations for the varied motives of women to commence vending. This research instead proposes that the NLMS approach, an amalgamation of economic conditions, feminist socioeconomics (such as social reproduction theory) and institutional factors (such as marital status, societal norms and traditions and ethnicity), offers a better explanation for their motives than the four dominant theories of street entrepreneurship.

Three distinct segments of women worked as street vendors, depending on their exposure to economic conditions, the interaction of domestic and workplace power relations and social institutions leading to social stratification and inequality. The first segment represented women victims of unequal access to work and training opportunities. These included women who started vending because they needed more access to education and training opportunities. These women had to bear the burden of domestic responsibilities since childhood, were introduced to street vending at a young age and had low self-confidence to apply for formal jobs. Their families were primarily responsible for pushing them into street vending. This group of women can be bifurcated into two sub-groups: older married women who were deprived of their right to education by their parents and were married off at an early age, and younger women who were continuing their education while working as vendors with their parents. Their parents conditioned the former group of women to continue their ancestral line of work without questioning their parents' decisions and submitting to the decisions taken on their behalf by their fathers before marriage and husbands after marriage. However, the latter group challenged the patriarchal norms at home and entered a morphogenetic cycle. Unlike their mothers, they slowly transformed the patriarchal structures by accessing

education and deciding their mobility patterns. These included the women previously employed in the construction sector as casual labourers. Another group of women felt that they faced inequality in access to formal work due to the attitude of their employers. These women were previously employed in the construction sector as casual labourers and were forced to leave their jobs due to their ailing health. Their employers (in construction jobs) considered these women a burden if employed beyond forty. This was because the physical strength of the working mothers had reduced due to frequent pregnancies, and they found it challenging to do strenuous labour such as climbing the scaffolding with bricks on their heads or working as stonebreakers. Moreover, these women had to undergo the emotional strain of staying away from their newborn babies for extended hours. The employers considered it profitable to stop hiring these women beyond forty.

The second group of women were victims of double disadvantage, and their opportunities were shaped by gender discrimination and interaction of domestic and workplace power relations. This segment comprised women who were compelled to leave formal employment due to exposure to incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace or deteriorating health conditions. These women were victims of unequal power relations at their workplace, where their employers took advantage of their position and exploited them or discriminated against hiring them as they got older. These women primarily included married women, the secondary earners of their families. Their work was devalued in the house, and they were also subjected to exploitation and discrimination at their workplace. Thus, although married women seemed to be 'choosing' vending over other occupations due to its flexibility, it was not a 'free choice but a 'forced choice'. This was due to the gender disparities in the division of household labour, which reflected a more profound gender power imbalance.

The third segment of women were the victims of inequality and discrimination caused by social institutions such as marriage and ethnicity. This segment comprised women who commenced vending due to a transition in their marital status. These women included married and divorced, abandoned, and widowed women who had to take up flexible work such as street vending due to the expectations of society and their families to prioritise their reproductive responsibilities over paid work. Their husbands forced married women to supplement the family income by working outside the home. Still, they were not allowed by their in-laws and husbands to work in the formal or informal sector, where they had to work under the supervision of male members. This pushed these women to work independently or in association with their husbands at their vending sites. Similarly, the economic vacuum created by the death of a husband or the illness of a family member having a licensed stall in the market propelled the widows and married women with children to commence vending due to the fear of losing their vending space in the market. Divorced, abandoned, or widowed women were free from the marital contract, which essentially meant freedom from the patriarchal restrictions imposed by their affinal families on the choice of their occupation and mobility. However, the transition in their marital status also puts an extra burden on being the family's primary earners besides fulfilling their domestic responsibilities. The change in marital status was a turning point in these women's lives, who transformed from docile homemakers to confident income earners. However, their choice of occupation was still constrained by their dual responsibilities, and they were also stuck in a morphostatic cycle where the structures determined their choice of action.

A critical realist explanation of this group's choice of street vending in their 'actual' and 'empirical' domain was found in these women's 'real' work domain. The 'real' domain of these women's working lives revealed the robust operating mechanism of economic pressure to take over the business established by their family members, which created a barrier for them to access formal jobs. These findings reiterated that the patriarchal influences interacted with the economic necessity to shape these women's trajectories. This segment also included women of specific ethnic communities, such as the nomadic community of Gadia Lohars or business Gujarati communities, who were victims of intersectional discrimination. Their parents compelled them to carry forward their ancestral work in traditional crafts of making iron tools and selling hand-woven apparel. In addition to their gender, their membership in their ethnic communities further constrained their opportunities to be included in the mainstream due to the stigmatisation attached to their community. These women were stuck in a morphostatic cycle where they found it difficult to exercise their personal, proxy or collective agency to challenge the patriarchal and societal norms and submitted to the patriarchal and cultural norms and stereotypes associated with their gender and community.

### **Conclusion:-**

A significant theoretical contribution of this research is that it proposes that women have multiple and fluid motives for commencing vending, which, in many cases, change over time. The diversity and fluidity of the reasons for the commencement of vending reflected the transition in roles and statuses of women across their life course. This

understanding of women's actions as dynamic and related to other changes in their lives and social relationships contrasts strongly with the four dominant theories of street entrepreneurship, which view women's motives to commence vending as compartmentalised and exclusive of each other. Widowed, divorced, and abandoned women generally choose to be vendors because of the flexibility of work vending offers. Another motivation for these women to commence vending was to earn an income as soon as possible rather than wait for a formal job. The change in their marital status meant they were no longer supported financially by their spouse or his family. Similarly, married women who worked in formal employment before becoming mothers were compelled by their in-laws to look for flexible, informal work and prioritise reproductive work over productive work after having children. Thus, the women's motives to commence vending varied according to their exposure to the various structures they were exposed to throughout their lives.

This study concludes that labour market segmentation results from the generative mechanisms of patriarchal and socio-cultural norms and unequal power relations at the workplace that shape women workers' employment opportunities. These generative mechanisms not only push the women to choose self-employment opportunities such as street vending but also lead to labour market segmentation within street vending. This segmentation is visible in women with different educational backgrounds, age groups and marital statuses. Eliminating the inequalities of this segmentation will require women to exercise their personal, proxy (intergenerational support from mothers to daughters) and collective agency to challenge the meta structures of oppression and discrimination. Such an exercise of agency by women at multiple levels would gradually transform the oppressive structures, leading to more gender equality in the labour market.

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This manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere or has not already been published and will not be submitted for publication elsewhere without the agreement of the Managing Editor.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author has no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise, that might be perceived as influencing the author's objectivity.

### **Ethics approval**

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sheffield approved the study.

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