

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The informal sector of Indian economy is quite substantial, and according to International Labour Organization (ILO 2019) estimates, in 2020 more than 90 percent of 500 million working people in India are part of this segment. It is estimated that around half of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is contributed by the informal sector. Informal sector is the backbone of an economy like India. It employs vast majority of the work force, and the formal sector depends for its services on informal sector to a very great extent. The Indian labour market is characterised by predominance of informal employment with more than 90 percent of India's informal workforce working as self-employed and casual workers (Srija and Shirke 2014).

The informal sector is part of the economy that operates beyond the rules and regulations that govern the formal sector (ILO 1972; Todaro et.al., 2005). The size of informal sector is astonishingly significant in most developing countries; however, the attention that it gets is limited. The informal sector helps in accommodating large number of unemployed labour and also provides employment to migrant workers. Further the informal sector employs a larger number of women than men throughout the developing nations (Chen et al., 2006). In India, a majority of them work as home-based producers on piece rate, contract workers in manufacturing, unpaid family workers, construction workers, petty vendors/ hawkers, domestic workers, or as casual workers.

In India, the terms “unorganised sector” and “informal sector” are being used interchangeably (Government of India, 2007 and 2008). According to Government of India Reports (2007, 2008 and 2009), the unorganized sector in Indian context is defined as: “Informal Sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis with less than ten workers which is characterized by a high Incidence of casual Labour mostly doing intermittent jobs at low wage rate and at low Investment rate”. The Government of India (2009) also complemented the definition of unorganized/ informal sector with a definition of informal employment in line with international definition as: “Informal workers consist of those working in the informal sector or households, excluding regular worker with social security benefits provided by the employers and the workers in the formal sector without any employment and social security benefits provided by the employers”.

Indrajit Bairagya (2010) stated that from the period 1976 to 2006 the informal sector showed signs of positive growth and have expanded in a size that is comparable to the formal sector in India. In India, employment is overwhelmingly informal and according to the Government of India (2017-18), out of total 461 million employed persons, 415 million were involved in informal employment. Nearly 81 percentages of all employed persons in India make a living by working in the informal sector, with only 6.5 percent in the formal sector and 0.8 percent in the household sector; according to a new ILO (International Labour Organisation) Report (2018).

In the past few decades, informal sector is the one field that has witnessed rise in the employment in almost all parts of the world. The activity in almost every corner of the world that is associated with informal sector being unprotected, unorganized and undocumented by public laws and authorities. International Labour Organisation (1993) defined informal – sector activities as those characterized by (a) ease of entry (b) reliance on indigenous resources; (c) family ownership of enterprises (d) small scale of operation (e) labour – intensive and adapted technology; (f) skills acquired outside the formal school system and (g) unregulated and competitive markets. The informal sector of an economy can thus be defined in terms of lack of governmental regulation or lack of institutions that provide job security and benefits. The informal sector has experienced rapid growth in developing countries and is generally believed that the rapid growth of the sector has been influenced by increasing unemployment in developing countries. One of the ILO types of research concludes that the size and contribution of the informal economy to trade is significant with a share of total trade employment as 96 percent in India, 93 percent Indonesia and 73 percent in the Philippines (Bhowmik 2005). The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services. It is the over-regulation of government and government bureaucracies which results to increased cost of operation forcing the micro-entrepreneurs in favour of its most rational response with minimization of cost by establishing informal arrangement of work (Hernando De Soto, 2000).

Many workers in developing countries are confined to the informal economy because of limited educational opportunities and rudimentary work skills. The International Labour Organisation has described this workforce as having low skill, low productivity and they earn low wage, and can start the business with low investment. The Indian economy is

characterized by the existence of a vast majority of informal or unorganized labour employment. The nation's quality of life hinges on things becoming better for the mass of informally employed people. Studies have shown that a notable portion of the work is carried out by lower class and lower caste women who are employed in informal sector. "Ignorance, tradition bound attitudes, illiteracy, lack of skills, seasonal nature of employment, heavy physical work of different types, long hours of work with limited payment, discrimination in wage structures of men and women, lack of guarantee of minimum wage, lack of job security, lack of comprehensive legislation, lack of facilities at the work-site, ill-treatment, migration and disintegration of families, bondage and alienation, are the permanent features of informal sector. It is also believed that as a sector of significant size in urban agglomerations, the informal sector can be very effective in the generation of rapid and equitable growth of income and employment (Sinclair 1978).

### **Women labour force**

Human resources undoubtedly include women who constitute about half the population of each country in the world and their contribution to economic development need to be underscored. The economic contribution of women has become a source of wealth to any economy and one cannot afford to think of an economy devoid of women as human capital. The increasing role of the women in economic activities has a great potential for the development of the economy.

The status of women in India has been subject to great changes over the past few millennia. With a decline in their status from the ancient to medieval times, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, their history has been eventful. Women's rights under the Constitution of India mainly include equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination. Women are treated as living things of the house following all the old cultures, traditions and restrictions of the society.

When a country is poor, women work out of necessity, mainly in subsistence agriculture or home-based production. As a country develops, economic activity shifts from agriculture to industry, which benefits men more than woman. At higher stages of economic development, education levels rise, fertility rates fall, and social stigmas weaken, enabling women to take advantage of new jobs emerging in the service sector that are more family – friendly and accessible. At a household level, these structural shifts can be described in the context of the neoclassical labour supply model: as a spouse's wage rises, there is a negative

income effect on the supply of women's labour. Once wages for women start to increase, however, the substitution effect will induce them to increase their labour supply.

The influx of women into the labour force both at the urban and rural had been tremendous in the recent past. It was basically the economic needs or to meet the family needs that majority of the women were forced to work outside their homes. Further the economic, social and political upliftment of the society in general and women in particular paved the way for the women to enter into several spheres of activity. Both educated and illiterate women started working in many sectors and the educated women had enormous opportunity to be absorbed into high paid jobs in leading sectors. However, the illiterate, the poor, the down trodden and marginalised found a place to work in places like shops, homes, street or in informal or unorganised sector. They work as domestic workers, construction workers, agricultural workers, waste pickers, street vendors or in such low paid jobs. They are employed in large numbers in many unorganised enterprises or small and family enterprises.

Women enter the informal economy mainly for earning their livelihood, not for making a career. Women labour in the unorganised sector is an important segment of the labour force. They do arduous work as wage earners, piece – rate workers, casual labour or unpaid family labour but the economic and social status of women workers remains poor. The unorganised women labourers are involved in various activities and they work hard to earn a living. Their working condition is very deplorable. They have to shoulder many responsibilities. They have to do all the household chores, take care of elders at home, and look after the children and all other work at home. A very common factor that is observed among families where women are working in unorganised sector is the lethargic attitude of men. They refuse to go for work and their argument is that when the lady of the home is working, he need not work or even if he works, he spends his income on himself mostly. Most of them are into drinking, smoking and other vices which takes away their incomes and they hardly contribute anything for the family. So in many cases it is the women who support the family and look after the needs of the family, children's education, health care and other expenses. The brutal part is when men demand money from their wives for drinking. If they do not give, it results in beating use of abusive language and domestic violence. This is a regular feature that is observed in many families and woman has no peace at home. Even in work place, being illiterates and unskilled, they are forced to work under harsh and deplorable working conditions. There are no fixed hours of work, and the working atmosphere is not very healthy. Despite constitutional provisions to safe guard the interest of women labourers a

large number of female labourers suffer from diverse problems and exploitation. The package of various labour laws has not benefited them in many crucial areas specially wages, health, maternity and social security. Government institutions and the empowerment machinery have failed to provide awareness of their political, legal and natural rights and hence they continue to live in a deplorable status.

More often than not, they are subjected to discrimination, inequitable pay and harassment, owing to their lack of education and technical skills. Existing labour laws have not offered protection to these women in areas such as social security maternity benefits, pay and working condition. Women from the low-income background in the informal sector are highly vulnerable. The reasons for their vulnerability are irregular work, low economic status, little or no bargaining power and lack of control over earnings and they need to balance paid work with care for children and house hold work, little or no access to institutional credit, training and information, and lack of assets (Mohapatra, 2012).

### **Street vending**

Street vending is a worldwide phenomenon. Street vendors are the most visible sections of the informal economy. Street vending as a profession has been in existence in India since time immemorial. Street vendors are an integral component of urban economies around the world since ancient times. In all civilizations, one reads accounts of travelling merchants who not only sold their goods in footpaths but also going from door to door in the nearby villages. The academic literature on street vending commonly treats street vendors broadly as those who offers goods for sale to the public at large without having a permanent built up structure from which to sell. Street vendors may be stationary in the sense that they occupy space on the pavements or other public/private spaces or, they may be mobile in the sense that move from place to place by carrying their wares on push carts or in baskets on their heads. A whopping proportion of people who works in informal or unorganised sector get their livelihood means by selling variety of products on the roads and public places. Street vendor is a person engaged in vending of many articles like food items, toys, flowers, vegetables, fruits and other products of everyday use to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, public-park or temples at a cheaper rate. In most countries, many people earn their livelihood wholly or partly by selling a wide range of goods and services on the streets, side – paths and other public spaces (Bhowmik, 2005).

Street vendors support the urban rich by providing daily requirements right at their doorsteps. Urban youth prefer to purchase clothes and accessories from street vendors, because the products that the vendors sell are cheaper than those found in formal retail outlets. People from lower income groups also benefit from the vendors, spending a substantial portion of their income on purchases from street vendors because their goods are cheap and affordable. Street vendors play a very dynamic role in the urban economy, providing necessary items, which are largely both durable and cost effective, to average income earning households at cheap and affordable rates. In addition, they help many small – scale industries to flourish by marketing the products that they manufacture (Bhowmik 2001, Tiwari 2000). Thus, they help to sustain the urban economy to a great extent in terms of generation of employment and income, and provision of services to others.

Street vending is an economic activity providing productive employment for many. Street Vending is a microenterprise providing employment across the world. The major advantage of the sector is its employment potential at low capital cost. Through their employment as street vendors, they contribute to sustaining themselves and their dependents. It is mainly opted due to lack of other employment opportunities, and lower fixed costs attached with it, as it takes advantage of public space which minimizes overhead costs of rent and utilities and practically no education /skill is required (Cross, 2000). Street Vendors Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending Act 2014 defined the Street Vendor as a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary build up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous term which may be local or region specific, and the words ‘street vending’ with their grammatical variations and cognate expressions, shall be construed accordingly, (GOI 2014).

The numbers of street vendors increase with the shrinking of jobs in the formal sectors and with lack of gainful employment in rural areas. The rural unemployed tend to move to the cities in search of employment. They usually possess low skills and have low levels of education. Both factors make it almost impossible for them to find regular jobs in the formal sector. Street vending is one of the few options they have for earning a living. Entry into this trade is easier because it does not require high skills and the capital involved is low. The common reasons behind adoption of street vending as a livelihood strategy are, while for

some of them this is a source of additional income for the family, for most however, this is the sole source of income for the household.

Life on the streets is not easy. Crimes like theft, eve-teasing, sexual harassment, women trafficking, etc., are very common. Further, hawkers are seen as a public nuisance – they are looked as ‘anti - social elements’ of the society, who encroaches public spaces and promote unsocial activities. Social security is a constant missing link that increases this sector’s struggle for survival as they are exposed to multiple shocks and risks. The police demand for money every tenth or twelfth day of the month when they make a visit to the vending site, if vendor fails to pay, they verbally and physically abuse the vendors. The police also consume juice and other eatables without paying anything. They constantly face the threat of eviction and harassment by policemen and local authorities. Street Vendors faces many troubles as they are vulnerable people. The street vendors all the time go through struggle with other street vendors because of instability in market prices and also crisis of market places. There is constant competition among the street vendors which, at times results in petty fights. Compared to the day time vendors, the frequency of harassment faced by those who carry out vending at night is more. Street vendors are often persecuted, live in uncertainty, and work in poor conditions with little access to infrastructure. They face problems of eviction, bribe payment, inability to avail social security and other similar hurdles.

Women workers in unorganized sector not only bear all the hazards of this sector, but also they are exploited within this sector as they are discriminated against men. They are made to work for long hours and wages paid to them are not in accordance with their work. Their contribution is not given due recognition. These women workers are living below the minimum accepted standard.

### **Women Street Vendors**

Women do not enjoy equal status as men in many societies. Religion and socio – cultural practices have denied opportunities of the growth of women. Therefore, they are the victims in the field of social status. Women are economically dependent on men and carry out household work which is strenuous and exhausting and make them agitated. The work that they do is mostly not recognized and women do not demand any payment for the enormous amount of work that they do. They serve their family without taking any leave, and manage everything without any complaint. A woman spends her whole life in bringing up their

family. Even though they are illiterate, they manage the house meticulously. They act as good economist of the household and their contribution is huge. Added to the domestic work many women are taking up extra or additional work in unorganised sector. This is to further support the family by providing an extra amount to the growing needs of the family. It is this which results in more women being employed in unorganised sector, as maids, construction workers, street vendors, Ayas or helpers, coolies, industrial workers or any such work. They are doing dual duties of working outside their house to earn money and carrying on house hold work in their own home.

Many women are fulfilling the economic needs of their family due to their husband's death, or in certain case when the head of the family is not working. The low cost of entry makes street hawking and vending an agreeable option for women who need to earn their living. The female participation in the informal sector is majorly due to economic compulsion rather than any change in the working ethos of society. According to the National Account Statistics (NAS 2019), almost 82 percentage of India's workforce is employed in the unorganized sector. The National Commission of women highlights that 94 percentage of the total female workforce is in the unorganised sector.

A good number of women are involved in street vending. The street vendors are illiterate but they know how to do a business. Roever (2014) is of the view that in many countries large number of street vendors is women. Women vendors form the lowest rungs among street vendors. In most cases they take to this trade because of poverty and because the male members in the family do not have the jobs (Bhowmik 2005). Women constitute a large number of street vendors in almost every city. Some studies estimate that street vendors constitute approximately 2 percentage of the population of a metropolis. The total number of street vendors in the country is estimated at around one Crore (Ministry of Urban Employment And Poverty Alleviation, Government of India 2004). The Women Hawkers sell more number of products like vegetable, fruits, flowers, cosmetics, clothes, hosiery, leather goods, moulded plastic goods and different kinds of goods necessary for household.

The tremendous increase of women street vendors in recent days is mainly to provide livelihood strategy. The reason behind the increase of women street vendors now – a – days may be seen as a means of survival and livelihood strategy, states Manickavasagam (2018) because they have large household to sustain, and increase in the cost of living, which does not permit to meet both ends and this force them to enter into street vending. Further jobs in

the formal sector are shrinking and the best alternative is to take up vending activity. These women have poor social protection and their working condition on the streets expose them to a variety of health and safety issues. According to a study done by International Labour Organization (2020) it is found that about 85 percentages of the street vendors have to face health hazards. These hazards include diseases like migraine, acidity problem, increased depression, high blood pressure, blood sugar and other issues. Apart from these health issues, women street vendors also have to face problems related to sanitation. They also complain about the inadequacy of space, threat of eviction and the lack of security.

Though they are exposed to many challenges in vending, women take an active role in the vending activities. In spite of different forms of harassment and lack of protection, female vendors contribute to overall urban economy in terms of employment and cheap availability of goods and services.

### **Problems faced by women street vendors**

The street vendors face several problems in India. The street vendor does not have easy access to any legal rights, they lack of social security, education, credit source, health security, and they face uncertainty in employment and income, lack of space, eviction, harassment and abasement by civic authorities and lack of infrastructural facilities. These are the common problems faced by women street vendors (De sot 1989, Begari 2017,).

The street vendors do not have basic sanitation facilities at their working places. Most of the vendors carry drinking water from their home and the rest purchase from shops. There are no toilet facilities. The women are experiencing this problem more acutely because they cannot use the open place. Even if it is urgent, the local people stop them. Other problems in their work place like economic instability, discrimination, poor implementation of government policies, amenities, weather fluctuations, barriers towards credit facility and health issues impinge their economic and social status. Bribe collection by the police and other corporation authorities are a regular feature. They face harassments and ill treatment from the public. The street vendors do not get space for vending and many times they keep shifting their produce to a far off place when the police arrive. Apart from low access to sanitation and water, these vendors are often exposed to extreme weather conditions. Since they are often forced to play three roles – housewife, mother and worker, the stress of it affects their well – being. Critical factors like these take a toll on their health, not only leading

to more expenses but loss of working days as well. The paucity of resources, irregular income, health issues, poor working and living conditions drag these women into deprivation, making poverty a vicious circle in their lives. Lack of schooling and opportunities for acquiring skill and a dearth of social capital in general tend to hold them back from making their way up in the mainstream society. They work for low wages and their conditions of work lack basic amenities.

Street vendors face problems relating to their public space utilization. They are deprived of their right to livelihood, right to use public places, right to safety, right to trade and their right to dignity. They work in very difficult and unfavourable conditions. They are deprived of legal spaces to carry on their activities. Indian cities are not planned in a way to accommodate street vendors on roads and pavements. All urban planners allot space for public use such as parks and gardens. But urban planners give least or no importance for allotment of space for street vending.

Weather fluctuations affect the street vendor in a strong way and this makes them vulnerable. Lack of proper shed and storage facilities forces them to carry on vending in carts or vehicles and selling on the roadside without space cause many problems due to weather fluctuation. They are exposed to rain and shine and this spoils their products specially fruits, vegetables and food stuffs. Studies by Walsh (2010), Rahul and Dhamotharan (2014), Karthikeyan and Magaleswaran (2017) and others also listed out similar problems faced by street vendors. The several policies and programmes embarked by the government have not reached these groups. Illiteracy coupled with poor social status and lack of awareness results in vulnerability. The benefit neither reaches them nor are they aware regarding their rights and even if they are aware, justice is denied in granting their privileges. Improving the conditions of work of street vendors and their economic, social and legal status is a huge challenge for the state (Pinki Kumari 2016). The several policies and programme embarked by the government have not reached these groups. Illiteracy coupled with poor social status and lack of awareness results in vulnerability. The benefit neither reaches them nor are they aware to demand their rights and justice is denied.

While examining the reasons for people choosing street hawking as their profession, other factors with respect to forming unions or any organisation to protect their rights need to be considered. Bhowmik Sharit (2007) made a clarion call to improve the existing status of street vendors. If unions are able to exercise their might they would be of great support to the

vendors when eviction is done in the public places. Though unions exist it has not been able to bring a radical change in the life of street vendors. They continue to suffer and bear the brunt of living in very miserable conditions. The Government is taking steps to help them and policies are framed to uplift their position. A brief account of the National policy on vendors is given below.

### **National policy on urban street vendors**

It has been noticed that India's development pattern during the last six decades did not bring adequate development opportunities for its rising labour force. In even, the surging economic growth rate of 8.2 percent per annum in India's national income (at 2004 – 05 prices) during the two decade (1999 – 2000 to 2009 – 2010) produced just 1.6 percent per annum growth in the employment opportunities (GOI, 2013). This slowdown in the employment growth along with declining share of organized sectors employment have led to the exclusion of large sections of society, especially the poor and marginalized people from the benefits of faster economic development. Still 30.9 percent of the rural population and 26.4 percent of the urban population in India was living below the poverty line in 2011 - 12 (GOI 2014). There is only a marginal decline in the percentage of population, who lives below poverty line, despite poverty eradication measures. To protect these marginalized sections of society, there is need to start an effective policy formulation, making of favourable legislations and rights based social protection programmes. It is on this ground the street vendors "protection (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 in India has been passed. This has become an important national level regulatory frame work on the street vending which has been left to the Indian states to adopt and implement in their respective jurisdictions (Abhigyan, 2012). Before this, the National Policy on Urban Street vending of 2004 was prepared by a National Task Force appointed by the Department of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation. This was revised in 2006 and in 2009 as the "National Policy on Urban Street Vendors", which was somewhat similar to its predecessor (Bhowmik, 2010).

In nutshell, the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors (2004, 2006 and 2009) aims to formalize and legalize street vendors, to protect them from harassment and exploitation through alicensing system, and to create a system of local management and self – government that provides opportunities for street vendors to redress violations of their rights (Primarily harassment and unjust expulsions from their vending sites). In the text of National Policy

(2009), it was stated that Articles 14, 19 (1) (g), 38 (a), 39 (b), and 41 of the Indian Constitution formed a legal framework and freedom to start street vending in India. Together, these provisions establish the right to equal protection before the law (subject to reasonable restrictions), the right to practice any business, the state's duty to minimize income inequalities, and the right to a livelihood (GOI, 2009). The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors also underlines the marked change in the official perception of, and attitude towards, street vending/hawking, (Sachin Kumar, 2016).

### **Constitution of Town Vending Committee**

The Section 22 (1) of act provides for the creation of a Town Vending Committee (TVC) in each local authority. This TVC is envisaged as the central authority implementing the provisions of the act. The TVC will be headed by Municipal Commissioner or Chief Executive Officer as Chairperson and it will have other members as decided by the state government, representing the local authority, medical officer, planning authority, traffic police, non – governmental organizations (NGOs), residents welfare associations, bank staffs, etc. along with the street vendors market associations. The number of members nominated to represent non – governmental organizations and the community-based organization shall not be less than 10 percent and at least 40 percent members will be members representing the street vendors, to be selected through election, of which one – third shall be women. The act makes provisions for due representation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Other Backward Classes and persons with disabilities among the members representing street vendors.

The street vendors Act of 2014, which came into existence after the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2009, aimed at creating a social and economic environment that is conducive to the pursuance of street vendors livelihood. However, the provisions of the National Policy as well as of the Act has been reviewed critically on the grounds that this legislative have ignored many pressing issues and the act has the potential to curtail the freedom of informality and flexibility vendors and hawkers had been enjoying so far. The Street Vendors Act 2014 aims to protect the livelihood of street vendors by providing them a conducive and scare – free atmosphere to carry on their business without fear of harassment, eviction or extortion from the police and municipal officials, and at the same time regulating the activity of street vending for the management of public spaces and traffic.

## **Need for the study**

Street vendors are often those who are unable to get regular jobs in the remunerative formal sector on account of their low level of education and skills. They try to solve their livelihoods problems through their own meagre financial resource. They sell large number of products at a cheap rate which we use daily. A street vendor faces many problems as they are vulnerable population and neither are they protected neither by government, NGOs, labour union nor by anylabour law. The street vendors are forced to pay bribe to local police and also are associated with encroachment of public spaces, causing traffic congestion and are considered illegal.

The street vendors are subject to numerous challenges in their day-to-day dealings, related to credit availability, infrastructure insufficiency, lack of appropriate space, annoyance by public and police officers, polluted environment, increasing competition etc. Though the vendors are main suppliers of variety of products their economic position and social status is at an inferior level. Street vendors are always ignored by the urban authorities-the municipality and the police- because more often than not vending is considered an illegal activity and hawkers are treated as criminals. This made the researcher to take up a systemic study on the living conditions of the street vendors and also to identify problems and challenges they face in their day-to-day activity.

This unorganized segment of street vendors are facing numerous challenges to sustain their livelihood and balancing quality of work life. Livelihood sustainability and quality of work is the biggest challenge to the street vendors. Hence, the researcher felt the necessity for a systematic study on their livelihood patterns and quality of work life of the street vendors in Coimbatore district, where there is predominance of women Street vendors. The result of the study will provide a better understanding and awareness to policy makers, to design an effective and efficient strategy for the improvement of the livelihood and the quality of work of the street vendors. The study will also serve as a stepping – stone and make the modest contribution for those who are interested to conduct research on street vending.

## **Scope of the Study**

Street vending, the informal sector, is a source of employment, income and survival for a large number of population; especially the middle and low – income earners. At the same time it should be noted that street vending survives not merely because it is an important source of employment but also because of the services it provides to the urban

population, for the urban poor, street vendors provide goods, including food, at low process. It means one section of the urban poor, namely, street vendor, subsidizes the existence of the other sections of the urban poor by providing them cheap goods and services, Middle – income groups to benefit from street vending because of the affordable prices offered.

Moreover, the increase of street vendors in present days is due to the increasing migration from rural areas. Many people have been rendered homeless and displaced by lack of means for livelihood. They are less educated and unskilled and do not get jobs in the formal sectors, and have to involve in the informal occupation. Studies show that in almost all the Asian countries, street vendors have no legal status to conduct their business and they are constantly harassed by the authorities. Furthermore, the role of informal sector has not been well perceived. It is rather regarded to be a non – profiting activity, as it does not contribute to the national economy in terms of tax. Improper or lack of policy support has made the sector to be unsecured, which adversely affects the livelihoods of the urban poor. Yet they provide the urban population with much needed services that neither the municipalities nor the larger retailing outlets can provide. Workers in the informal sector are unprotected, unorganized and undocumented by public laws and authorities. Street vending is an economic activity providing productive employment for many and women form a major proportion among street vendors. The street vendor does not have easy access to any legal rights, they lack of social security, credit source, health security, and they face uncertainty in employment and income. Lack of space, eviction and harassment by civil authorities, bribe to be paid to the police are regular problems faced by the women. Further, there is lack of infrastructural facilities. Though the women street vendors work for long hours without adequate food and leisure their economic and social status and living conditions are deplorable. In the light of this the study aims to examine the general living conditions of the women street vendors and also to identify the problems and challenges faced by them. The study offers scope for further research in scrutinizing the existing living conditions and to evolve suitable measures to improve the condition of women street vendors. Also, research could be taken up by women street vendors who operate on a wider scale in many products.

### **Research gap**

Street vending is an economic activity providing productive employment for both men and women who are unable to find jobs in other sectors. Among those working in informal sector, street vending is the most vital activity. Women had taken a major role as street

vendors and they help in providing many essential goods at a cheaper rate to the general public. These women are vulnerable population, who are neither protected by government, NGOs, labour union nor by any labour law. Though, they are exposed to many challenges in vending. Several earlier studies have attempted on various aspects with respect to street vendors in general. This research is intended to study the social and economic profile of women street vendors only. The study throws light on the challenges and problems faced by women street vendors in Coimbatore District. The findings of this study would be helpful for practical purposes like evolving measures to help women street vendors. The study can serve as a source of information for development practitioners and agents. The governmental bureaus like Ministry of Labour can use it as a source to take action to improve the socio – economic condition of women street vendors.

### **The objectives of the study are**

1. To understand the Socio-Economic conditions of select women street vendors in Coimbatore district and to identify the factors determining income of women vendors.
2. To study the working conditions of the selected sample and to identify the factors which discriminate the vendors into mobile and stationary vendors.
3. To assess the health status of women vendors and to identify the factors determining health problems, health expenditure or cost of treatment.
4. To study the job satisfaction of women vendors and constraints faced by the women in their business.

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was framed:

- There is relationship between income and socio economic variables.
- There is association between level of education and health status of the selected women street vendors.
- There is association between taking medicines and earnings received.
- Constraints are not associated with socio – economic problems.