

UNDERSTANDING THE GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR: A STUDY OF WOMEN *ADDA COOLIES* IN INFORMAL SECTOR

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Abstract: The contribution of women in the formal and informal sector is always underestimated and neglected even in the academic circles. The informal economy consists of several activities which employs diverse workers. Although there is a wide misconception regarding the quantum of lives engaged in this informal economy (with special reference to third world countries), more than 90% of workers are involved here. Even in the realm of formal sector, majority of them are engaged in the informal activities, in fact the informal and formal sectors are intertwined and hard to segregate and study. This paper tries to examine the role and status of women in informal sector with special reference to *Adda coolies* (who are daily wage labourers seeking job by standing at the *Addas*, waiting to get picked up by the employer for the day) within Hyderabad region. Given the societal situations we are in, women have been not treated equally on par with men in any realm. Here, we try to examine the gendered division of labour by differentiating the nature of work performed by women and men *coolies* in the work place. Emphasis will also be laid with respect to the domestic activities women perform in their household. The paper has been written with the help of personal interviews through unstructured schedules. Time use recall questions were also incorporated.

Keywords: *Adda Coolies*, Gendered division of labour, Informal sector, Women.

Introduction: Studies in the Informal Sector are no new phenomenon. But studies on the daily wage workers or here, *adda coolies* are not advantaged to be one among the much focused studies. Informal sector is otherwise known as underground economy, shadow economy or the unofficial economy, one of main reason for existence of this sector is due to lack of proper opportunities for access to either education/skills or to employment in the formal sector [8]. Women in informal sector face several issues and challenges. Featured as unskilled and cheap labour, they are often considered to be flexible to exploit. Capitalism has been constantly successful in wearing out the labour power completely for its own demands. The success and profits by these companies are at the expense of the casual or daily wage labourers who work for long hours for their own survival. The whimsical demands of this capital had laid way for the easy entry to informal sector which is otherwise difficult to enter in case of formal sector.

Though the National Commission of Labour (1969) had banned the term '*coolie*' for the official use due to its derogatory meaning, we can say that the work and conditions of these workers are no less than its meaning. *Adda coolies* are those labourers who in search of daily wage employment wait in a specific *adda* every day where the employer or *mestri* come to pick them up for the day's work. These workers from different parts of the state/country come to the city to seek work in construction sector, film sector and other works such as maintenance of the already existing buildings and so on. The urban space always provides hope for the workers who sell their hard manual labour especially when the agrarian sector

fails to give them enough opportunity to survive in the rural area.

The objective behind the whole paper is to try and examine the 'gendered division of labour' by the women *adda coolies* in both work place and domestic sphere. *Adda* in Tolichowki area (Hyderabad) was selected for this study. For the current study, the data has been collected by carrying out fieldwork among the women *adda coolies*. The sample of 50 women workers were selected among the universe of 300-400 women workers who seek manual labour from this *adda*. The sample has been selected based on the judgmental sampling method, it has been adopted so that the sample represents different social categories in the society, comprising the workers who has migrated recently and also who has migrated very long time ago and moreover settled in the Hyderabad region. Time use recall questions were incorporated to understand how much time the women have been dedicating for both household realm and paid market work.

Study: Among the sample of fifty workers, majority reported that they follow Hindu religion (40), and others follow Christianity (9), Islam (1). Among the fifty women workers, 25 belong from SC, 12 from ST, 11 from OBC and only two are from OC. Majority of the workers are in between 20-30 years (26 women), 14 are around 31-40 years, 9 women are around 41-50 years and only one woman is of 18 years. 37 of these women are married and rest are separated (7) and widowed (5). Except two women (who had studied up to 1st and 4th class) none has ever entered school. Coming to their native place, majority of households migrated from Mahboobnagar (34). Others include Ranga Reddy (5), Medak (5), Karnataka (2),

Khammam (1), Kurnool (1), Nizamabad (1) and Hyderabad itself (1).

Forty percent of the workers informed that they possess a small amount of land in their village. When questioned about the reason for their migration, they have opined that agriculture has become more or less like a risky activity with nil or minimum returns due to lack of monsoons and technological presence. An average monthly income of their household may be around 8000-9000 per month. These workers perceive that due to the new state formation, there has been migration of capital and several opportunities and thus especially from past six months or so, they are able to secure a job for not more than 2-3 days a week. The rent of the houses or huts they stay will itself cost them around 1000 to 2500 rupees.

Conditions at Work Place: The women after attending to the domestic works in the home come to the *adda* around 8.00 AM and wait hoping for a work for the day. If they manage to find a work they carry on with the employer till evening 6 PM. For this manual labour, fixed number of working hours is unimaginable as it is quite uncertain so as when the work starts and ends, often the labourers were forced to stay longer hours by giving them the targets to be achieved per day which are usually time consuming [2]. But if they do not find one, they wait till 1.30 or 2.00 PM near the *adda* and head back to their home.

Women labourers who go to these sort of work mostly act as helpers to their male co-workers. The tasks they perform include cleaning and washing, lifting bricks and sand etc. Women are often branded as unskilled and always recruited by the employers for the role of helpers for their male co-workers who were considered as skilled for that job. So the latter often carry out the activities of brick maker, road worker and quarry men [2].

By the time I was conducting field work, recently workers noted an incident where a woman was taken for a work and murdered (some also opine that she was also raped). This has made the women be skeptic if a stranger comes offering work for a day. Only if the employer is stranger and seeking three or more number of workers, the women are happy to go for the work in the company of other women workers. Wage differentials have also been recorded between the male workers and the female workers. Female workers generally get 300-350 rupees per day whereas the male workers manage get 400-450 rupees. The difference of 100-150 rupees is very common phenomena. Here they perceive that women workers cannot work hard as men do and their work is considered to be unskilled. Just because she is a woman, even if the tasks are equally skilled, she might be labelled as 'unskilled' when compared to that of men's 'skilled' task [1].

Domestic Sphere: Women, in addition to the long hours of work they put in the work place, also bear the burdens of all other domestic chores, child rearing and cultural obligations. Given the sort of patriarchal society we live in and the structure of working class households, the 'power relations', stereotypes associated with the division of labour in the domestic sphere and 'authority structures' are against to women [6]. Around 3/4th of the married women have told that they hand over the wage to their husband right after the work. When questioned why, the women replied that, it is natural that a man should be the one who is supposed to handle the financial affairs. The wages, of the women were handed over to the male head of the family or were often 'swallowed up' for 'family provisioning' [7]. Handling both market and domestic sphere, women can be labeled to be as 'double burdened'. Often these women wake up around 5.00 AM for doing household chores such as cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, cooking and they then has obligation to go to *adda* for securing work for the day. Among the married women, only thirteen percent has noted their husbands share domestic chores that too just bringing the water and some minimum works.

After they find jobs they have to be working around eight to ten hours per day depending on the employer. After reaching home around 7.00 PM in the evening, again they have to indulge themselves in the domestic sphere such as cooking and cleaning activities. If men works up to 8 hours for paid wage, women are obligated to work for both paid (8 hours) and unpaid domestic work (4-5 hours).

When interviewed, fifty six percentage of women have said that their family blames them if they fail to secure work for the day. Only fourteen percent of women opined that their husbands also sometimes help them in purchasing vegetables and groceries required for household. Seventy six percent of these women workers told that they face abuse from husbands for not being able to devote time for domestic work or not attending the coolie work for a day. Within that, forty seven percent of women face physical abuse and rest face verbal ones. Half of the women interviewed had agreed to the fact that they face physical abuse for not giving money for liquor or other unnecessary expenses to their respective husbands. Amongst the married women, only eighteen percent say that their husband doesn't come home drunk and beat them up. On the whole, eighty two percentage of women feel that the paid work can add respect towards them in their household.

Several important decisions in the family matters such as migrating to other place, child's education and marriage related matters are taken by the male head. Fifty percent of the women agreed to this fact. When coming to the decisions pertaining to

household needs to be taken, women are often ignorant about it. It was usually male headed members who determine 'household strategies' and direct important choices related to migration, children's marriage etc., [7]. Only the expenses of household related matters are seen by them according to these women. The intra-household control mechanisms if focused can show us that the men often dictated their say on women.

Increases in women's income cannot necessarily imply as an increase the power they possess over domestic resources, budgets, decision-making and spending in spite of the fact that women's expenditure decisions are more likely to benefit the entire household [5]. Involvement of women for a certain amount of wage doesn't imply any sort of 'balance of power' in the realm of household. There might exist a little effect on the male head where he is no longer the sole earning member. Even if the time contributed by women is no less than him, she is rewarded very less. Hence the wage earned by her is given to husband or male head who adjudicate on terms of using the money earned [3]. If the magnitude of women's invisible paid work, particularly 'home-based remunerative work' is to be fully taken into consideration, then the share of women's work and also the share of informal sectors in the workforce would increase tremendously [4]. **Conclusion:** We can say that the *adda coolies* are at the bottom most layer in the whole arena of informal sector. With the lack of proper and secured employment, they have to depend on daily wage works. If they are unable to find work for a day then survival will be a question. In the whole paper, I tried to explore the lives of the women *adda coolies* by examining and focusing on realms of work place and domestic sphere. In their work place, women often treated as unskilled compared to men are given jobs as helper and does tasks such as brick lifting, cleaning

and washing, sweeping, carrying sand etc. Although the force they keep physically is no less than a man, she is often paid less and treated as unskilled. Lack of dignity for workers in the work place being one of the main characteristic of this informal sector, women are at the worse corners. In the domestic sphere, women should be handling all the household chores. Apart from carrying on with the day to day works in the domestic sphere, they are also blamed and abused by the male heads or husbands. Least or often no choice is given to the women in taking crucial decisions within the family.

Relating to the larger context, we can say that women in informal sector face similar challenges. The informal sector workers, perceiving them more as a normal citizen than that as a disadvantaged person, we can realize that they have equal right to be in a better off situation. Women also have equal rights like men to live, earn and enjoy through little things. But, those in formal sectors take advantage and secure profit at the expense of these lives in the informal sector. This vulnerable position they live day to day with can be said as a result of the greed of the emerging capitalism. As Karl Marx has aptly put it, "Capital is dead labor, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks." Hence the time is ripe to understand and realize the true colours of the ever growing profitable organizations, in whose hands the lives of informal sector workers are in.

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