

Abstract

This is a dissertation on the institutionalisation of street hawking and the gendered and ethnic/racial production of space in the post-colonial urban context. It intends to offer a critique of trade unionism among the street hawkers by showing the terms through which inclusions and exclusions in the trade union space take place. As a means to the above end, the dissertation traces how the hawkers, and especially the woman hawkers, have struggled in a changing world, how they have experienced and negotiated that change, and how the histories of the market and the state are closely connected to the saga of their everyday lives. While scholarship in the fields of the informal economy, urban studies and labour studies have focussed extensively on street hawking and the politics of space-making, the gendered relationship involved in hawking and livelihood practices on the streets has not received much academic attention. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of selective amnesia, which is an important component of any process of institutionalisation, is quite rare.

In the historiography of street hawking, a missing link is the deeper conversation between micro-history related to urban geography and the trajectories of space and labour studies. The aim of this PhD project is to study the continuities and changes, considering the micro-geographies of a phenomenon and its macro-structural manifestations in street hawking. I have tried to connect the diverse urban economies, governance structures, and histories of street hawking present across different cities of India through different eras. The thesis portrays the transformation of Calcutta's cityscape, focussing on the historical understanding of space-making and the practice of hawking. Scholars working on informal economy, urban studies, and labour studies have contributed immensely to the literature on street-hawking and the politics of space. Nevertheless, there is a gap in knowledge on gendered relationships and livelihood practices on the streets. This dissertation studies street hawking through the lens of gender and offers a critique of trade unionism that thrived in this sector over the last four decades.