ABSTRACT

Workers in Informal Economy: A Sociological Study of Rickshaw Pullers in Patiala City

Workers in the informal economy are not different in any way than the other workers except that they perform their work in unregulated and unprotected conditions. This sector is very vital in form of its contribution in global economy along with the labour force participation. With urban growth there is a marked increase in the population in this sector consisting of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled persons representing the illiterate, traditionally oppressed, vulnerable, and economically poor and socially exploited migrating from rural areas to cities in search of comparatively better income opportunities and a chance to have better living conditions. The informal sector refers to economic activities, where individuals and small groups of people and families are engaged in the work largely unprotected by the welfare legislation. The occupations in this sector are marked by social and traditional compulsions, poverty, illiteracy, helplessness, deprivation and so on. The majority of rural and urban poor working in the informal sector does not have any social security and are exploited and denied opportunities to lead a creative life and enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity and self respect.

Cycle Rickshaw pulling activity is an important occupation of the informal sector, where a million of poor not only serve the transportation needs of the society but also try to meet out their own economic and employment needs. Rickshaws are a mode of human powered transport; a runner draws a two wheeled cart which seats one or two persons. The word Rickshaw comes from Asia where this was used as a means of transportation for the social elite. Now, a day’s man pulled rickshaws have been replaced by bicycle rickshaws. In India, Rickshaws was used in 1880 for the first time in Shimla and then 20 years later in Calcutta now Kolkata. Rickshaw since then is a mode of transportation and cheapest source of transport activities. Despite the economic importance of this industry to the low-income families and eco-friendly benefits of this occupation, the public attitudes towards the cycle rickshaws in India, by and large, are negative and their use is being phased out in many Indian cities. In all urban areas of the country, the socio-economic conditions of rickshaw pullers are miserable. No government plans have considered their contribution in terms of service and economy. There are no job security and welfare provisions for them. They are bound to work even late at night and at odd hours and in
inclement weather conditions without any protection or safety. There are virtually no medical facilities or rest shelters for them. They are subjected to social ignorance, apathy and injustice. All these people are being treated as outcaste and unwanted burden on the society.

With this backdrop, the researcher took up a study of informal sector workers specifically rickshaw pullers of Patiala city. The main objective of the present study is to know various aspects of the living and working conditions of rickshaws pullers in the city of Patiala. The specific objectives are to study the demographic profile of the Rickshaw pullers in relation to their name, caste, gender, religion and state. An attempt has been made to know the reasons for joining rickshaw pulling along with migration among the respondents. It is also to know their family life aspects of these rickshaw pullers in terms of their relationship with wife and children and also to know about their food habits and leisure time activities. This is also to study the working and living conditions of the rickshaw pullers and common health problems faced by the rickshaw pullers. Further it is to explore the social security and welfare provisions and facilities available to these workers and to highlight the scope of social work, intervention and the role of state and NGO's in improving their living standard.

The area of present study was Patiala city of Punjab. For the purpose of research, the list of total number of registered rickshaw pullers with Patiala Municipal Corporation was obtained. There were 4189 rickshaw pullers registered with Patiala Municipal Corporation in year 2006-2007. A sample of 405 rickshaw pullers would be drawn from the list of registered rickshaw pullers with the Patiala Municipal Corporation at the time of data collection. The present study in primarily descriptive, interpretive and evaluative in nature, for which data was collected through interview scheduled. Along with the primary sources of data collection, the researcher had also collected information and data from secondary sources. The tools for data collection were mainly structured interview schedule and on the spot observation from the selected sample of the study form the universe. For the purpose of data analysis, the frequencies of the responses of the respondent rickshaw pullers were counted and percentages were calculated. Further the findings of the study have been presented in a separate chapters followed by Bibliography and Annexures.