



## Reflections on the Lives and Livelihoods of Itinerary Lunch Vendors of Thiruvananthapuram City

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**CERTIFICATE** ;This is to certify that the dissertation work entitled **REFLECTIONS ON THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF ITINERARY LUNCH VENDORS OF THIRUVANANTHAPURAM CITY** is a bonafide record of research work done by **AMRITHA YADAV K, AARATHY G S, SRINGA M S, RADHIKA K R, VISHNU J V** submitted for the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Geography of the University of Kerala. During 2014-2017 under my guidance and supervision. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma. **HEMA S MENON**, Head of the Department, Department of Geography University college; Thiruvananthapuram, pin 695034. **Dr. RUBINA T A**, Assistant professor, Department of Geography, University college, Thiruvananthapuram kerala,

### I. THE INTRODUCTION

**THE CONTEXT** Lakhs of people congregate in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala daily. They come for various purposes and remain for varying durations. They come from near or from far away, may come regularly or sporadically. This mobile population also exerts a wide range of demands and pressure on the city. The different manner of responses to these demands by the state and by the people is interesting from a socio economic perspective as well as from a cultural geographical perspective. In the modern context, movements define geography wherein geography is often referred to as Connectography

**LIVELIHOODS FOR THE SURVIVAL** In any dynamic society especially those in which there is great economical survival pressures, people innovate or adopt very original and creative means to fill in the lacunae in the system. Simultaneously they attempt to assure their own survival means. more

and more women are in the front of such innovative entrepreneurship. In most instances such ventures are of great benefit to the society and are sustainable as well as respectable survival means. The socio-political dimensions to it include the fact that such efforts are taken by women who bear the brunt of supporting entire families. They have very little capital at hand to start with and no effective support systems. Hence the road side packet food servers especially the itinerary lunch vendors are truly a representation of such individual entrepreneurship. Hence it is an interesting topic for study for any social geography enthusiast. There is a need to study such marginalized group in order to highlight the adaptive flexibility of individuals especially women. It is essential to go deeper into such case studies to trace out their material resource and money flow circuit. Only such documentation and analysis, can serve as a backdrop for taking specific measures to help and strengthen them through public institutions. City Corporations Panchayaths, Government Departments and the banks can contribute substantially to such low key efforts. They can also be further motivated and roped in to help in social and environmental correction campaign such as plastic free city, organic agriculture, and popularization of traditional food items

**THE PROJECT THEME** The proposed study has a physical, regional, and socio economic angle to it. The location from where the vendors come, from where they collect their resource materials, the distance they travel, the mode of transportation are all part of a larger mosaic necessary for people oriented developmental planning. There is also an important socio cultural aspect to the study wherein the cultural, religious, and social background, community and family involvements are all critical. The most important economic aspects to this study is that apart from the total monetary inflow outflow circuit, the



ways in which they navigate through constantly fluctuating prices of raw materials abrupt disruptions by agitations like hartals and their fragile balancing acts to face these problems are interesting feedbacks. There are in addition other important but less obvious angles such as the health and hygiene dimensions and also injustices meted out to them by officials or local muscle men, which can also be unearthed.

**THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES;** This study is based on a limited number of case studies of itinerary lunch vendors in three locations frequented by people within and outside the city. There is considerable scope for expanding it. Data collection is done on the basis of questionnaire schedules and semi structured key informant interviews wherein the social awareness to the multiple realities of the world is well addressed. Hence the aim of the study is **To assess critically the life and livelihood of itinerary lunch vendors of Thiruvananthapuram city. The aim is achieved by satisfying the objectives which are to evaluate the socio economic conditions of the vendors to understand and reflect on the prospects and problems of the vendors**

**THE KEY TERMS I, Itinerary Lunch Vendors;** According to Cambridge dictionary a vendor is someone who is selling something. The term, Itinerary Lunch Vendor, as used in this study refers to packed lunches at key service and commercial locations during a particular time of the day and week. They are itinerary vendors since they work within a particular time frame and are available only during a particular time of the day. **Mostly the itinerary lunch vendors belong to the marginalized sections of the society, Livelihood ;** Livelihood simply implies the activity we do to support our life and family. That is the job or work we do to live a dignified human life which satisfies our daily requirements. A Livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life (IFRC). A livelihood is sustainable when it enables people to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses [such as natural disasters and economic or social upheavals] and enhance their well-being and that of future generations without undermining the natural environment or resource base. The food vendors about whom we have studied have opted the selling of packed meals (Pothichoru) as a means of living. As the livelihoods are formed within social economical political context, studying the vendors provides a cross section of the marginalized in the society. This is an informal sector, which is labour

intensive. Majority of them who have chosen this livelihood are women. **GENERAL PROFILE OF FLOW PATTERNS THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ;** In the case of Thiruvananthapuram city, a large number of people congregate at the Kerala Government Secretariat, the nerve centre of the State administration. There and a piece of the State administrative establishment. The Medical College Hospital and other health care institutions within the college campus is yet another location where a much larger population congregates. There is less orderly but more massive ebb and flow of people there. Outside the hospital compound, the immediate vicinity is less well managed but with more people moving through it. Another example is the Chalai East Fort Complex where a huge population of pilgrims and also people coming for commerce and shopping assemble. The floating population in these varied locations has some primary requirements, common in all locations. Food and other refreshments is one such priority need. The official establishment and conventional permanent institutions often fail to meet the various requirements of all the people at an affordable rate. To highlight one indicative factor, the Secretariat and its vicinities are fully built up and practically there is relatively no private or public land available is set up further service institutions. Even the main road around the Secretariat has severe limitations for multiple users. To a lesser extent this applies to the East Fort temple vicinity, where religious cultural factors also come into play. The surroundings of the Medical College are also built up to saturation. The footpaths and roads themselves are the only places of public access but regulations and restrictions are quite relaxed. These migrant populations exercise a constant demand for services especially the most basic of all needs - food. In the case of providing food, there are further complications which create hurdles for the total efficient satisfactory service to all the customers. To give an example, lunch --the heavy main meal of the day is eaten approximately between 12 noon and 2 pm. Even if there are a large number of hotels in the city, there are space limitations to seat all the customers. The time required to take the meal is also longer. In addition there are factors like high cost, cultural and religious factors which also influence the choice of eateries opted by the customers. This is an exploratory study undertaken to look into, the livelihood measures adapted by the fringe populations in the urban society, especially by women. The study also attempts to look at the requirements and compulsions inevitable as a consequence of rapid



urbanization: additional mobility and new requirements. Urban development in our country is essentially unplanned and unregulated. But inextricably the needs of the people have to be met. Naturally society responds originally by innovative ways.

**THE STUDY LOCATIONS** Our choice of study locations was based on two conditions. The study location must have a large commuting population who routinely comes and whose duration of stay requires food and beverages. The study location also must be fairly close to the college. There should be informal food vendors essentially women who have taken to this occupation without any institutional support or infrastructural facility. The locations selected were:-1. The Medical College and associated health care facilities. 2. The General Hospital. 3. The Secretariat. The details of the study sites are provided below.

**MEDICAL COLLEGE** It is located towards the north western part of the Thiruvananthapuram City and in a sprawling campus housing the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College and Hospital, the Regional Cancer Centre, the Sri Chithira Thirumal Medical Centre and other health care institutions. The Thiruvananthapuram Medical College is the most important referral hospital in Kerala. Hence patients from all over the State come here for expert treatment. Thousands of patients, accompanying people, hospital staff and others congregate every day in this place. From the heart of the city four roads come together in front of the campus. From the South West the road from Kannammoola and Kumarapuram touches the Medical College junction and extends towards Ulloor in the north. Slightly to its east another road passing via Pattom and Murinjapalam reach this junction. From due east a branch road from the Pattom Kesavadasapuram highway called the Chalakkuzhi road also reaches the Medical College Junction. Hence road accessibility is high for the campus. There is a main bus terminal close to the Junction. Various shopping centers and shops are distributed along the road sides for some distance all along these roads. Majority of the shops are medical shops and hotels and there is a smaller number selling various items of use for the patients and bystanders. Within the sprawling campus there is no exit point other than the main gate on the eastern side. There are no Commercial establishments selling food within the campus except canteens. To meet all the shopping requirements, all the people from the complex must come to the Medical College junction. The population within the campus is essentially the staff of the various institutions who are Regular commuters and a very large number of

patients and those who accompanying them who may stay for a short or long duration. For all of them there is the unavoidable requirement of food and beverages. The time available and the distance they have to travel for the meeting their requirements vary. There is also the cost fact: The socio economic and cultural factors are conditionalities applicable for the General Hospital crowd also.

**The General Hospital** This is the oldest government health care facility in the Thiruvananthapuram City. It is located close to the heart of the city roughly one kilometer to the South West of the Secretariat. For milder ailments and routine non specialized treatments, common people opt to come to the General Hospital. Roads from the North from Palayam and from the Statue junction reach the General Hospital Junction and intersect with the roads from the South East from Vanchiyoor and from Pattoor as well as a road from Kunnukuzhi. The Ophthalmology Hospital is also located in the same campus. The majority of the patients coming to GH are out patients and the facility itself is smaller than the Medical College. Here also, near the main entrance and along the main roads there are medical shops as well as hotels. There are also food vendors in front of the main gate.

**The Secretariat** Thiruvananthapuram being the State Capital, the Secretariat office complex is literally the hubs of the city. There are a large number of government officials working in the various hospitals who arrive in this location during all working days. There are also a very large number of visitors coming to meet the Ministers as well as the officials. Hence there is the demand for food and other requirements during the day time for a large population. There are canteens and other vending facilities within the Secretariat Complex. There are four gates along the four corners of the compound opening up to a ring road from which a number of roads radiate off in various directions. Unlike in the case of the two hospital, the main food demand in the Secretariat Complex is limited to lunch at noon as the officials vacate in the evening. Located in the heart of the city there is a much wider choice of eateries.

**The methodology ; The data** The study was carried out mainly using primary data. The tools used are; Structured schedules semi-structured informal Interviews. The Schedule is a set of questions which are asked and filled by the enumerator personally directly to them. Questions from the Performa were asked in the same order as listed and the replies were recorded in the space meant for the same. Schedules were used since the samples were surveyed during their working hours.

**Questionnaire Schedule in Research;** A schedule is a structure of



a set of questions on a given topic which are asked by the interviewer or investigator personally. The order of questions, the language of the questions and the arrangement of parts of the schedule are not changed. However, the investigator can explain the questions if the respondent faces any difficulty. It contains direct questions as well as questions in tabular form. The Schedule includes open-ended questions and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow the respondent considerable freedom in answering. However, questions are answered in details. Close-ended questions have to be answered by the respondent by choosing an answer from the set of answers given under a question just by ticking. The questionnaire used in the study is divided into three segments: the first segment covering personal details, the second covering questions relating to their livelihood and the third touching upon the problems faced by them.

**Semi-structured Interviews;** A semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where one person that is the interviewer attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewers prepare a list of pre-determined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore the issues which they feel are important.

**Characteristics of semi structured interviews;** The interviewer and the respondents engage in a formal interview. The interviewer develops and uses an interview guide. This is a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order the interviewer follows the guide, but is able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide when he or she feels this is appropriate.

**GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS;** The quantitative information collected as part of the study is represented graphically with the help of Microsoft Excel software. The graph obtained were analysed and results were gathered. The qualitative information that was collected as part of the schedule based survey and semi structured interviews are given down as first hand narratives and inferences made from each case is put down vividly in this report.

## II. A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Perdigon [1986] in his study 'Street Vendors Ready to Eat food as a source of Income and Food for Low Income Groups', gives a vivid portrayal of the socio economic status of food vendors from the profits earned to how they earn their livelihoods. Vashit P D (1990) in his article

Informal sector A Tool for Poverty Eradication, brings out the meaning, importance, and the problems of the informal sector. In a developing country like India, where the pressure of population is overall on the increase, the development of the informal sector can go long way in employment generation and consequent eradication of poverty. The Author puts forth a few suggestions for promoting this sector. The sector needs strong support from the government in terms of product promotion programmes, entrepreneurial development, subsidies and incentives. Friedman. Et al (1991) in their article 'The Informal Sector, Gender and Development' emphasizes that the conception of work (used in much research) has made it possible to overlook unpaid work done by women simply by considering it as a part of the household's repetitive tasks. Such gender bias based on the assumption that men alone are household bread winners, was also expressed in the use and equate methodology to collect information not capturing a multitude of smaller irregular ways in which women often contribute to domestic incomes. Not only the researchers but male and female informants also failed to recognise the importance of women's work and the significance of their contributions to the economy of the poor which have continually been underestimated. Saha (2011) in his work cited the concept of structural economic sociology developed by Granovetter and Swedberg in 2001. The concept is based on the following three common principles: Economic action is a form of social action. Economic action is socially embedded. Economic institutions are social constructions. This concept provides the significance of each and every small vending activity and their contribution to the informal economy and their role in providing social security by being a permanent livelihood.

**THE SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS, [The scope];** Primary data is collected on the basis of a questionnaire from the lunch vendors on the site of their trade. This gives an opportunity to remodulate data on the basis of personal relationships established with the food packet sellers. It may enable the students to understand a better comprehensive background image of these vendors. It also enables the researchers to observe the actual transactions which gives an insight into the customer server interactions. It also gives a better picture of the background reality of the location where the food vendors spend three or four hours.

**[THE LIMITATIONS];** The population size is small. The time spend available for the survey is limited to a few hours during the college working days. The lack of experience in conducting a field



survey on the basis of a questionnaire among the food vendors who are under time pressure while they are transacting their business is also a handicap. Only after establishing a personal rapport they will be free to open up and answer our questions in detail. The study locations are scattered in different parts of the city which requires commuting from the college to the study site which was time consuming. The sample size may be inadequate to find in depth conclusions to frame suggestions for constructive interventions. Absence of reference material is another limitation.

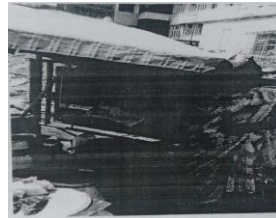
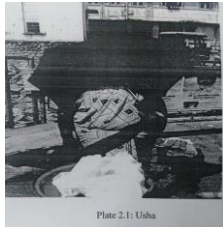
### III. THE RESULTS ; REFLECTIONS OF THE VENDORS

This chapter presents the case of select vendors who were approached as a part of the study. The chapter carries on the opinions of the vendors per se without reflections made by the research group. The opinions passed on to us as responses to open ended questions are brought in the first section and the other details are provided in the latter section...**VENDORS NEAR THE SECRETARIAT PREMISES** *"I HAVE TRAVELLED ACROSS KERALA AS A PART OF MY MARKETING JOB. BUT I FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO GET A HOMELY FOOD EVEN I PAID MORE. THIS MADE ME START THIS VENTURE SINCE THERE ARE HIDDEN PROSPECTS AS WELL AS A FEELING THAT I AM DOING SOMETHING GOOD FOR THE WAYFARER* These are the reflections of Mahesh, a thirty seven year old man who previously worked as a marketing executive and currently selling packed meals in the Punnem road, adjacent to the cantonment gate of the secretariat. He opted for this living with an aim to provide tasty, homely food at a reasonable rate. Along with his wife and one helper he manages well. He started selling packed food only five months ago. A part from selling packed meals he attends to small scale catering orders. He is a highly motivated individual as well and is basically happy and content with this profession. Unsold packets are given to an orphanage or used at home. Mahesh is satisfied giving good food. Sindhu who sells lunch near the secretariat premises, started this venture only 4 years ago. As she had to support her family. She is now 36 years old and has studied up to 10 standard. Before starting this venture she worked as a house maid. When the income was inadequate she stepped out of it her husband and her children help her to pack the food. She prepares 50-60 packets a day and sells the same at a rate of 50 rs per packet. She sells 40 packets per day on an average and is quite satisfied by the good response from the

customers. Even at the age of seventy, Rajamma wakes early in the morning to prepare the packed meals which she sells at the Cantonment gate of the Secretariat. For her it is a traditional livelihood as lunch vending was started by her mother, and now she continues the work she lives with her daughter, son-in-law and three grandchildren. There are not any supporting staffs; instead her daughter helps in preparation and packing of the meals. On an average 50 packets are made and sold at a cost of 40 rs each. "I do not have any major saving or enormous profit. But I am content doing this" says Rajamma who appears to be at ease without giving undue importance to her old age. "I did not have money even to buy curd for preparing curries which are given along with lunch packets. I had to get a loan from a local finance by mortgaging my ring" says Chandrika, who sells food at the Cantonment Gate at the Secretariat. She could not study had just completed first standard. She has a daughter and a son. Her daughter stopped studying and helps Chandrika in preparing packed meals. She was a maid but was not treated well. This made her to opt for this occupation. The 43 year old woman, who lives at Thirumala, is happy if all her packets are sold. She is happy with her customers. **VENDORS NEAR THE MEDICAL COLLEGE PREMISES**; Athira who sells packed meals in front of Medical college, is thirty years old and a college drop out. She was working in TechnoPark till a few years back. She met with an accident and lost her job. This made her to look for alternate livelihood options and prompted her to start this venture. Her family consists of her husband and 4 year old son. She manages this small enterprise with the help of a supporting staff. Athira was a little apprehensive which was evident from her words. "It is difficult to continue this venture as there is no considerable profit. I would like to switch on to some other job that does not require standing for long hours. I cannot stand for a long time after the accident." However she does not have any problems from customers in terms of their behaviour with her and according to her this might be because she gives a packet of meals at a reasonable rate. Usha S, 56 years old woman who sells packed meals in front of the medical college. She has studied till 6th standard and the money she gets out of this venture is barely enough to meet her household expenses. Though the climate along with human made interferences adversely affect her trade. Usha has decided to fight for her survival despite all difficulties of the moment. Previously she used to sell fooding containers at a roadside eatery for twenty years. The development and road expansion compelled street vendors like her to sell



packet meals since there was no space to accommodate and eatery.



Another lady also by the name Usha who lives in Uloor opted for the occupation of selling packed meals. Due to financial difficulties, as her only sons income could not meet the expenses of her entire family. She is 49 years old now and has studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard "I was born and brought up in this place. There are other vendors who come from different parts of the district from whom I have to face a tough competition in this place very next to where I reside. The locals should have more say on running business here." Usha gets depressed and annoyed standing in front of the Medical College for long hours. The demonetization has adversely affected her business. However, she is happy giving food and also expresses her concern for others which reaffirms her empathetic attitude. Mini, who comes from Vattappara worked in homes and teashops before she started this venture She is 38 years old and has studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard. She is abandoned by her husband. At home, she has her two children to look after. She started this venture years ago and sells packet lunch at a rate of 50 Rs. Sometimes a few packets that remain unsold are used at home or given to animals. According to her, she hardly earns 200 rupees a day. This to us seemed a little unbelievable. Harthals and adverse climate affects her business but she says these difficulties come on the way of survival. Sudha, who is 42 years old studied up to 6 standard. Her family includes two children, a son and a daughter. They live at Ambalathara. As a solution to her financial problems she started this venture 8 years ago. With the facilities available at home and without any supporting staff, she makes 50 packets a day. She earns 200 Rs per day and is satisfied with this venture. Indira, a 62 years old woman sells packed lunches near the main gate of the Medical College "I have been selling food for around 30 years. First I used to sell in large containers and later I shifted to packed ones. A lawyer who was admitted in Medical College Hospitals my

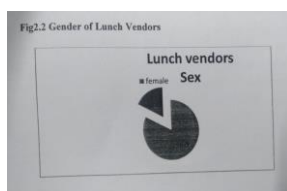
difficulties and gave me 300 rupees. It made me start this venture. Later I returned his money" This was how Indira started her venture. She could study only till 5 standard and lives in rented house at Uloor. She has an unmarried daughter and bedridden husband and she is the only bread winner. Excluding food, she manages to get Rs 150-200 per day. Distribution of free food by many organizations is a threat to their livelihood. Vijayakumari is a smiling lady who sells packed lunches at Medical College, who comes from Nedumangad where she lives with her two children. She has been in this job for 3 years and had worked as a mason before starting this venture. She prepares food all alone, brings it to the Medical College premises by hiring an auto for Rs 500. She is 38 years old and has completed 5<sup>th</sup> standard. Her two children, who are studying in 10 standard and TTC are her only hope in life. All her earnings are spent mainly for the education of her children. Omana, even at the age of 70, works hard to meet both ends meet. She could study only up to 5 standard. She has been doing his venture for 5 years. She had no other job and no other means of livelihood. She borrows money from others to meet her household activities. She is happy with this venture. Sreekandan, a 45 years old man was a driver before starting this venture. He studied up to 10 standard and lives with his wife and 3 children. He was sitting with a broken umbrella He was very busy selling his packed lunches and had very little time to spare for any other activities. Dineshan, a 46 years old man studied only up to 6<sup>th</sup> standard and lives in Sreekaryam. He is unable to do any other work due to bad health conditions and has no children to look after him. Hence he had to start this venture. He has been doing this job for 4 years and worked in a rock crushing unit before this job. His wife is running a small teashop and the income from both these ventures is enough for them to survive. Viji, a 29 year old young widow had to take up the burden of her family which includes her



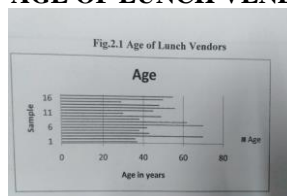
parents, sister and sister's children. She has been in this venture for 7 years and could study only up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard. She and her mother sells packed lunches in front of the Medical College gate. She says that it is very difficult to survive with this venture and other jobs do not provide her enough money to live. Hence she prefers to continue this work. **VENDORS NEAR GENERAL HOSPITAL;** Ambili, a 50 years old women lives with her paralyzed husband and two children She sells packed lunches in front of General hospital. Ambili is a middle woman selling lunch packets and the production unit is not owned by her She has been doing this job for 7 months now She didn't complete her 10 standard and is not trained for any other specific job. This is her only means of livelihood. Santha, sits along with her walking stick as her lifelong companion. She is 55 years old and is a disabled woman. She is a sales woman in a business run by her relative. She has been doing this job for 6 years and had worked in a teashop before taking up this job. She lives alone in a rented house and spends most of her income for medicines. She is a spirited woman even though life had been a series of uphill challenges and difficulties. She is happy about the people's good behavior and the support she gets from the hospital authorities. She is also content with her

**job.PROFILE OF THE VENDORS;** From the figure 2.1, considering the age of the vendors, majority of the people are in the age groups of 30-40 or 40-50 years. There are 6 people each in the 30-40 and 40-50 groups. There is only one vendor below 30 years. Three are above 60 years old. Thus we can conclude that middle aged men and women are engaged in this venture. **AGE OF LUNCH VENDORS ;** Out of the samples studied 18% of the vendors are male. 82% of the vendors are female. (fig.2.2). Since this occupation requires an expertise in cooking, women who have been doing their role as food makers in family find it easy to start this venture. They can cook homely food and can deal with the work relatively easier than men. Women also have more responsibility on their shoulders as they have to look after the household and family affairs and hence cannot stay away from home for a very long time. Hence this time-bound venture, that too during the day, is more convenient for women to take up. Daily investments are something which they can afford and roll out. This explains their greater participation in such home bound ventures. Future concerns are more a distressing reality for rural women. Hence they struggle with whatever limited personal, social, economic or skill capital they have

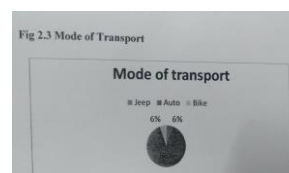
#### GENDER OF LUNCH VENDORS



#### AGE OF LUNCH VENDORS



#### MODE OF TRANSPORT



**MODE OF TRANSPORT ;** By analyzing the pie diagram (fig 2.3) we can say that most of the vendors choose auto- rickshaws as a mode of transportation, that is 88% of them. Others have opted for jeep and bike to transport the packed lunches to the selling place (6% each). As the packed lunches are heavy and not easy to transport, public transport vehicles like bus which are cheap, cannot be relied upon. The auto- rickshaws are more convenient for the vendors. As most of them are from relatively lower strata of the society, who cannot afford to buy a vehicle and maintain it, they choose auto-rickshaw as a mode of transportation. Also the majority of the women vendors who are unskilled prefer to use auto-rickshaws which are relatively cheap to hire. Those who have their own

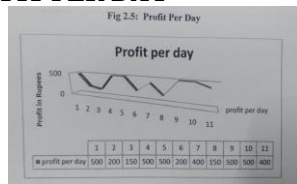
vehicle have more convenience as they can use their own vehicle with less expense. Naturally their profit margins also will be more than the women who eke out a subsistence living. But from our own perceptions we felt that in the long run it is the subsistence existence of frugal, hard working and enthusiastic women which is truly sustainable and viable. As their initial and daily investment is minimum, the vagaries of economics or food preferences of consumers affect them less adversely. Moreover, their compassionate, helpful and friendly behaviour endear them to many customers who naturally make it a point to buy from them regularly. **NUMBER OF LUNCH PACKETS MADE AND SOLD ;** From the figure 2.4, it is clear that majority of the vendors prepare



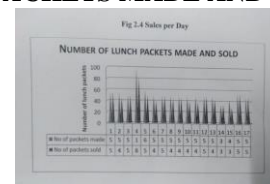
50 packets daily. This number is easy to prepare and can be sold easily. Even if there are some packets left unsold, it is easy to dispose them off and the loss is not too big. Except a few, most of the packets prepared are sold. This indicates that customers who taste their hygienic and delicious

food are satisfied and regularly buy from them. Hence obviously they are able to get enough profit for survival. Only one of the vendors makes 100 packets a day which is almost double than that made by all other vendors.

#### PROFIT PER DAY



#### NUMBER OF LUNCH PACKETS MADE AND SOLD



Though many were not ready to reveal their profit and many could not precisely tell their earnings, most of them have a profit of rupees 500 per day. There were people who earn 200 rupees per day and a few less than 200. While tallying the daily investment and profit there is a marginal profit for almost all these vendors which help them to survive. **Adverse effect of Climate:** The lunch vendors who sell their packets during noon have to suffer the sun's extreme heat. The high temperature during the day is a problem to almost all the vendors especially during the summer. During the rainy season the rain adversely affects the trade. Most of them do not have any facilities to protect themselves from rain and summer heat. Since there are not any infrastructural facilities at the place of selling and they are street vendors, they are exposed to the vagaries of elements which affect their daily lives. **DAILY TIMINGS** ;The study subjects are all lunch vendors hence their activity in the sales location are very regular. They arrive in the site and arrange their food packs by 11:30 sales are over usually by 2:30. On the rare occasions they may wait after 2:30 until all the packets are sold out.

**IV. THE DISCUSSIONS:**  
**AN OUTSIDER'S; REFLECTION ON THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF ITINERARY LUNCH VENDORS** ;The itinerant lunch vendors in the main centers of the district are mostly from the lower strata of the society who struggle for economic means of survival. Interacting with these people helped us to understand the ground realities of our society. Most of them have no supporting member in the family as a breadwinner. Mostly the vendors are women who struggle to sustain their life and physically and economically support and take care of their dependents. They work hard during hot burning noon hours, sell their packed

lunches at a very reasonable rate and also perform a socially relevant and meaningful service. The lunch packets are with enough quantities of clean and tasty food items with a good menu. The extraordinary goodness of ordinary common people, especially women could be seen in this effort. It is a tedious job to prepare food and most of them prepare without any supporting staffs. There aren't any one to share their burden. **THE NUANCES** ;For the project team, coming from fairly insulated households with better educational opportunities and a higher degree of social and economic security, this field survey was an eye-opener. The experience of interacting with these underprivileged women, struggling to gain an economically viable existence with very little skill, economic capital and social support was inspiring and enriching. Their tremendous courage and self confidence apart from their obvious trust in us was deeply moving and heart-warming. These women are carrying out an activity of real social and economic benefit for their customers also. This also added to enhance their stature in our eyes. Through interacting and recording their feedback, we also gained some insight into their personal and family background. These women are struggling against heavy odds to gain economic viability and survival means. Most of them have developed self-confidence and courage to fight for their basic rights and at the same time retain their ethical and moral stances in life. Many of them come from broken families or are the sole earning members of their families. Some of them are physically unwell or have to take care of aged and sick family members apart from this work. Even though it might appear that they are spending only a few hours selling their food packets in the city it became very clear that they have put in long hour of hard physical work to prepare the food, pack it and transport it. All of this effort is for a very small





profit which provides them with only basic sustenance. Some of the food sellers are already sick or tired of this monotonous and demanding work and are thinking of abandoning this trade. In the initial interviewing period, many had reservations and some showed impatience. But soon they opened up and were most forthcoming and friendly. In spite of the obvious poverty and social marginalization they were willing to share their anxieties and happiness with us. Even though their profit is minimal, one of them insisted on gifting us her food package. Another woman wanted to treat us with cool drinks during the hot noon. The generosity, warmth and acceptance of these simple women were in stark contrast with the extremely competitive world all of us are being pushed into.

**THE FLOW PATTERN;** The three study locations are in the centre of the city. The Secretariat and the general hospital are approximately a kilometer apart while the Medical College is about four kilometers to the north west. All the food packet vendors interviewed near the Secretariat come from the North eastern locations such as Thirumala and Maruthamkuzhi, about 4 to 5 Kilometers away. This is a relatively restricted market and hence only a limited number of vendors with their regular customers are met with. On the other hand the Medical College with its larger crowd of customers and more flexible quality of the product attracts a larger number of vendors coming from as far away as Nedumangad located more than 15 Kilometers away and some come from Ulloor hardly 1 Kilometer away. The General Hospital vendors are smaller in numbers and in reality are sales personnel who need not bear the transportation cost. Hence they can afford to come from a further of place like All Saint's College to General Hospital. This in turn reflects the general law of increased flow in areas providing restricted supply of resource at an affordable rate. The Medical College has got a wide zone of influence providing quality health services at reasonable rates to the poor and needy. Hence there is a constant flow of people to this locality and hence a demand for food is also constant. This explains why the lunch vendors move to this location more than the other service centres. The constant demand reduces the risk for loss and thereby ensures profit

**PROBLEMS FACED BY THE ITINERARY LAUNCH VENDORS.**[Personal Problems of the Vendors]; The physical effort needed to prepare more than 50 lunch packs early in the morning often without adequate manual help is too demanding. Obtaining all the required items for

preparing the food adequately in advance requires a lot of planning. Most of the vendors are middle aged women with their own health problems and family responsibilities demanding time, attention and effort.

**Problems Relating to Transporting the Food Packs ;**Transporting large number of food packs from their homes to the locations where they are sold is an added responsibility which these women have to manage single handedly. The material transported in auto-rikshaws and the empty containers transported back when the sales are over. The transportation cost is a heavy drain on their meager earnings and when their regular auto-rikshaws are not available, there is the additional burden of arranging transport.

**Problems at the Selling Site;** All the three sites studied are in the heart of the city in very crowded locations and they have to stand in the dusty, noisy roadsides for long hours both during rain and shine, Especially in the rainy season, keeping the food packs from getting wet is a big responsibility.

**Problems with the Customers ;**Most of the women have regular customers and there are no hassles. But otherwise keeping additional cash to be given as balance, complaints about the quality and quantity of food are all issues to be handled by these women on their own. They can't afford to displease any potential customer.

**Other Contextual Issues ;**There is competition between the different vendors. In addition in some locations, the recent arrival of Jail Chapattis and curries at a cheap rate from a vehicle has become a threat to their business. At times political parties and religious groups arrive on special days offering free food packages. Disruption in the regular rhythm in the city caused by hartals or other violence affects their movement and sales. Unsold packets sometime do pose a problem because their profit margin is so slender. Each package is a big investment for these people.

**PROSPECTS FOR ITINERARY LUNCH VENDORS ;** The roadside lunch pack vendors are a big boon for their regular customers because it provides clean homely food at a very reasonable price. Those who have a private space to consume their food find it a much better option than getting into a crowded hotel and consume food in an impersonal milieu. In these times when avenues for self-employment are very limited for marginally educated, unsophisticated grown up women, preparing and selling food packs is a socially beneficial, innovative and satisfying livelihood option. There is also the potential to provide additional employment in their homes for other family members without extra investment or cost if there is the possibility to sell an adequately



large number of food packs. Potentially it can even develop into a family venture with someone in the family owning an auto-rickshaw and increasing the movement range and time of sales beyond the present sites and times other than lunch time.

## V. THE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS [CONCLUSIONS] ;

In a rapidly changing high pressure urban milieu, individuals struggle to find a space and occupation for survival. Even in a medium size society such as that of Thiruvananthapuram, there is a whole host of such innovative occupational ventures .Most of them are male ventures.For a variety of cultural, physical and other pre-conditions, women's options are limited. Pack food sales is a fairly non-problematic avenue for women. All the women surveyed come from approximately the same socio-economic background and belong to the 30-60 age group. Most of them already are physically tired and suffering from various ailments, But they foresee no viable, practical alternative .At a time when the disintegration of the conventional family units is putting additional pressure on women in all walks of life, some rural women and the marginalized urban women find recourse to this venture to earn money. A far more exhaustive and detailed study must be carried out to assess the full scope and potential of this type of livelihood measure to make it more viable and beneficial especially through channelising societal and governmental support.Far more detailed data would be the first pre-condition for making available such institutional support.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ;**The following recommendations are based on the wisdom gained from the study 1) Kerala has a well established decentralized governance system with the Panchayats vested with a lot of power and resources. In addition there are institutions such as the Kudumbasree, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and other Self Help Groups to help the marginalized and weaker sections of the society. The roadside food packet vendors could be given a whole spectrum of support ranging from short-term monetary interest free loans for management and other skill training.2) A whole range of integrating circuits could be established between these individual women and existing institutions or programs in the field such as organic vegetable cultivation groups and social welfare bodies such as the Kerala Mahila Samakhya Society. It is also an issue of pride and self esteem

in these women which would help them safeguard their niche.3)Preparing specialized food packages needed by medically handicapped cosumers requiring for example, sugar free or salt free food must be thought of as another venture.4) Even their a casual friendly conversation with these women or a newspaper story about struggle would definitely enable them to realize that they are not just roadside vendors but important people doing a real service to the society.5) A whole range of small but meaningful infrastructural support would be a great boon for these women. It is literally a large list. A large beach umbrella which could be set up to shield them and their food packs from rain and sun will definitely make a big difference to them. Or in a place like the Medical College junction, a small part of the footpath set a side for them which is clean and easily accessible for the customers also could make their sojourn much better.6) Students or voluntary organizations could directly link up with these women and help them out in various ways such as providing them with a range of material such as paper bags, rubber bands, or other re usable material. If by chance, all the food packs are not sold out, by voluntary effort the surplus could be purchased and distributed elsewhere.

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