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HEAD LOAD MARKET IN KERALA: CONCEPT AND FEATURES

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ABSTRACT

Head load worker is the one of the traditional workers in Kerala, who we can see in all road side, railway station and trading centre engaged in loading and unloading activities. In head load market workers classified in three categories, attached, non-attached and scattered workers. Head load market famous for its strong organisation and state intervention. Present makes an attempt to clarify concept and features head load market in Kerala.

KEY WORDS: *head load workers, attached, non-attached, scattered worker, entry restriction*

INTRODUCTION

During the last quarter of 20th and 21st century witnessed a drastic change in the labour market. A competitive world emerged after globalisation create labour market flexibility in the labour market. Labour market flexibility takes several forms, numerical flexibility where number of workers are adjusted to employer's need; external flexibility, means putting out part of work for sub-contracting; internal flexibility by adjusting working hours; functional flexibility which means modifying workers job and wage flexibility (Reddy, 2005). So the labour market brings forth the path of flexibility in place of rigidity in the market where there is no scope for the role of state and completely goes to the market net result a competitive world economy happened. Competing firms compete with reducing cost of production through cutting the wages of labour. In globalisation era informalisation is expanded with the labour flexibility. The forthcoming of labour market flexibility leads to growth of non regular, temporary and casual labourers. So cost reducing strategy in the name of competition shift the employment from formal to informal workplaces through relocation of industries in a deregulated market economy. So the labour market flexibility leads to the informalisation (Philip, 2007). In this context the Kerala labour market especially head load market special mention. Head load market is known for its organisation strength, state intervention and rigid labour laws.

Kerala is famous for its development model experiences. Kerala achieve high level of social development in the presents of low level of economic development. Kerala acquired the most developed social welfare system in India, has most extensive net-work of fair price shops and active state regulating market that restricting labour displacing technologies through protective labour legislation. In most of the developing societies unorganised workers come under low legal protection (Heller). But in Kerala the unorganised workers stands under the purview of law and welfare scheme of the state.

Who is head load worker?

Actually who is head load worker? The world meaning implies those who take load on head. In that sense most of the included in this category because people take physical load or psychological load on head their life time. But the Kerala head load worker Act (1978) very clearly defines head load worker is a person who engaged in loading and unloading any article or articles for wages on head or trolley through directly or contractors and act special mention person engaged by an individual for domestic purposes not include in this category. Head load workers are not a recent origin section, they have a long history to reveal and it is very close to the history of mankind. Their origin and development closely related to the development of trade and commerce in the society. With the development of trade and commerce the need for transportation of material articles from

one place to another and manual work force widely this activity. Head load workers are rapidly growing section of Kerala. Though there is no clear evidence, earlier studies indicate that the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a phenomenal increase in that numbers (Pillai, 1996). So head load workers are those informal workers who located at roadsides, traffic junction, market places and railway station and involving in loading and unloading activities.

Structure of the market:-

The head load market consist of head load workers and employers, employers are basically merchant, traders and business men (Pillai, 1996), who want to load and unload article or articles. Some time common men also demand their services. According to Vijay Shankar during the earlier period head load market employers were powerful to fix the wages and had strong bargaining power compared to head load workers. On subsequent years the power of employer declined and market biased to workers side. Most of the workers are male (human development report in Kerala, 2005) and physically able bodied person who invest their physical capital to the market (Waite, 2000). Workers constitute three categories attached, non-attached and scattered (Pillai, 1996 and Human development report in Kerala,2005).

Attached worker:-

Attached workers are those head load worker attached to the market, they have permanent employer –employee relation and locate specific places. They have fixed wage and they restricted entry of other head load workers in to the market. Attached section constitute minor portion of the head load workers in Kerala. According to pillai (1996) study attached workers constitute only five percent of the head load worker. Permanent workers employed by employer or contractor are not necessary to register in Kerala Head load Workers rules. But they must to keep the record of their permanent employers.

Non-attached workers:-

Non attached located in road side, shop side and railway station and they have no permanent employee- employer relation. They are work under more than two employer, they constitute 25 percent of total head load workers (pillai, 1996).

Scattered workers:-

Scattered workers having the characteristics of non-attached and their difference lies in their location, they have no specific place and scattered around Kerala. According to Pillai(1996) scattered workers constitute 70 percent of head workers in Kerala. Most of the scattered workers are self employed located at bus station, village area and forest area. So in this category female engaged in load and unload activities. Female and child head loader are mainly

engaged carrying woods from f forest area(Waite,2000).

FEATURES OF THE MARKET

Following are the important features of head load market in Kerala.

Entry restriction:-

Restriction of entry to the market is the main characteristics of head load market (Kannan, 2002). Head load market is the one of the manual works in Kerala, so full able bodied person enter to this market and restricted to the weak bodied person. Entry restriction is also known as closed shop strategy, that means entry restricted to new comers or non union member. After the unionisation entry restriction strategy is mostly adopted by trade union leaders for to charge higher wages from the employers. The insider- outsider problem prevailed in this market, the insider having trade union ship enjoy all the benefits in this market and outsiders, workers without membership excluded from it.

Nokkukooli:-

Nokkukooli is the unique feature of head load market in Kerala. Head load workers with strong trade union and political back up ask nokkukooli from people when they feel that they lost loading and unloading task. So they don't work and show muscle power to get kooli. Due to nokkukooli employer can not employ their own labour or other areas labour, in that situation an investor either agree to load or unload articles for giving exorbitant wage or closed that attempt. Kerala government passed an act Kerala loading and unloading (regulation of wages and restriction of unlawful practices) rules, 2002 in order to reduce this (nokkukoli) practices in the market. Thiruvananthapuram is the first nokkukoli in the state. However the state government banned this malpractice in this market nokkukooli issue reported in the state.

State intervention:-

State intervened the informal sector in order to avoid exploitation of workers and bring them into the main stream of the society. Kerala state government intervened in the head load market to avoid labour disputes after the unionification of the market through labour legislation. Kerala state passed primary head load workers act 1978, impediment to regulate the employment of head load workers and to make necessary legislation arrangement for their welfare and settlement of labour disputes. This act clearly defined the head load worker and made many implementations in this sector. The major implementations of this act are

- Appointment a conciliation officer for settlement disputes in the head load market. The act prohibited head worker to carry articles weight more than 75 kg on his head.

- Prohibited more than eight hours work of adult head load workers and prescribed no adolescent worker do not work more than 6 hours in a day.
- No head load worker shall work more than 3 hours continuously and he has taken half an hour rest.
- Prescribed an officer to keep register of head load workers in specific localities.

The act amended in 1994, 2008 and 2013 with changing circumstance. Kerala government enacted loading and unloading rules in 2002 in order to avoid unlawful practices (Nokkukooli and related issues in the market) that prevailed in the market and to wage fixation.

Segmented labour market:-

Head load labour market is the segmented labour market in the informal sector in Kerala. Other than other manual workers head load workers have different identities, abilities and different payments existed in the market, workers are different on the basis caste, age, gender and unions. Labour pool system prevailed in the market; workers are pooled on the basis of nature work, union membership or some other criteria. There where an 'altimetry' category workers who acquired high wage through malpractices (Waite, 2000).

Strong trade union:-

Head load market is famous for its strong trade unionism. In head load market the union membership is an essential for the entry of the market (Kannan, 1998). Most of the trade union in this market has political support. Unionisation of the market hastened the formalisation of this market. After 1950s Chumattu thozhilali union was formed in major cities in Kerala. Trade union helps to improve working condition of workers and increment of their wage.

Spot market :-

In head load market employment in spot in nature, workers and employer engaged in spot contract in order to load and unload the articles. In spot contract workers can choose employer and also strengthen their bargaining power. Spot contract has enlarged after unionisation.

Militant worker section: -

Militant section head load workers is the main feature head load worker in Kerala. Many studies (Kannan, Heller, pillai, Vijaysankar etc) point out the labour militancy in the loading and unloading sector. Among the states in India Kerala got the bad fame of labour problem country. The head load market play not lesser role to get that fame. Militancy of labour along with phobia among employer or investors is the main cause of industrial backwardness of Kerala (Thampy,1990). Labour militancy of head load market is the net result of unionisation of the market. Militant labour implies wage militancy , they charge and demand higher wages from employer and employer have no other option to substitute(technology or their owned labourers) because head load market enjoy

monopoly power through entry restriction and boycott of technology. So the employer agreed to pay the exorbitant amount asked by trade union and simply shift the burden to the ultimate consumer and net result is that the entire bear the burden. In mid 1980s urban head load workers were charged 75 percent higher than that of factory workers. As industrial growth and employment become stagnated, it is clear that labour militancy pay a higher price. By the 1980s labour militancy had declined. In spite of this decline the state has now lag behind the industrial activity due to former image of former labour problem state.

These features of head load market shows labour market rigidity than flexibility in globalising era. So it will be great interested to research in this area.

CONCLUSION

Head load market is the one of the traditional market in Kerala, rapidly growing market and known for its organisational strength and strong state intervention. This market constitute in informal market, however head load workers in enjoyed formal workers facilities in Kerala. It is very interesting to study this market due its features; we can see all type workers in this field such as permanent workers, self employed, part time workers etc. studies of head load workers in Kerala are very rare, so there is great scope in this field.

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