

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation looks at informal workers and their politics at two sites of work in post-1990s India: the hawker in the city and industrial workers at factories, using an ethnographic fieldwork methodology supported by secondary literature. It argues that there are three big shortcomings in literature pertaining to informal workers' politics: insufficient data due to lack of primary studies, a pro-union framing that exists by default within labour studies, and a limited understanding of an informal worker's agency. Aligning with a critique of the default pro-union framing, this dissertation argues that the form of organising is, arguably, not important in itself. Rather, it needs to be evaluated on the basis of whether its membership and intended membership believes that their needs are being adequately addressed in the short as well as the long term, and the impact that it creates on state and capital. Drawing from fieldwork, I argue that given the forms of precarity that mark hawking and factory work in the post-Fordist world of work, the union/association form, at this moment, has more to offer to hawkers, than factory workers. Further, drawing from the two case studies, this research contends that while over-arching self-contained narratives of informal workers' politics might be challenging or impossible to arrive at -given the huge diversity that exists in work structures and conditions-what is nonetheless indicated is a need to understand anew what we recognise as politics and/or legitimate forms of struggle, and the goals and motivations of resistance. The latter, I argue, draws from a worker's three-fold relationship with work, i.e., at the site of work, and with the social and selfhood aspects of work. The dissertation highlights the diverse ways in which agency is exercised by workers within this threefold relationship and the manner in which desire and discontent can be located across all three registers.